A THEORETICAL APPROACH ON EDUCATION, INEQUALITY, AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

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DEDICATION

This dedication goes to my husband for his unconditional support and my family who continue to grow with me along my educational journey. Love you all!
The possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react. --Gloria Anzaldua
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

A Theoretical Approach on Education, Inequality, and Critical Pedagogy
by
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Educational researchers constantly propose alternative paradigms to explain the educational crisis that exists within marginalized communities. Some research focuses on teaching and learning methods while others examine the community from which students come from. However, there is a lack of discussion regarding the expansion of curriculum and teaching methods centered on the idea of social justice. Therefore, my thesis takes a different perspective to expand on alternate modes of education. My thesis examines how implementing programs like the Center for Social Justice at Lincoln High School (CSJ) located in San Diego Unified School District can begin the process of building an egalitarian system of schooling. The focus is twofold: (1) to highlight the traditional views on the social function of public education in the United States and (2) provide a change in discourse and action regarding alternate modes of education that can replace the current understanding of schooling. By emphasizing what education should be about, when committed, one can provide an education and instructional practices that represent the values of democracy.
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INTRODUCTION: EDUCATION, THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Educational researchers constantly develop literature and propose alternative paradigms explaining the educational crisis within marginalized communities. Irrespective of the area of educational research, a common theme centers on providing equal education for all. In many school board meetings, educational reform proposals, demonstrations/rallies, and list of student demands discussion occurs on how past and current school structure, culture, and curriculum underestimate the potential and success of historically underrepresented students.

Although many people have proposed alternative ways of schooling, such as: integrated schooling, compensatory education, open enrollment, and the voucher system, most of these alternatives have not created an understanding on how the “proposals meet their ostensible objectives and promote a movement for the thoroughgoing transformation of the U.S. social and economic order” (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 246).

Indeed, if education is to transform students into citizens who actively participate in creating a democratic society, social justice has to be the center piece in designing an educational curriculum. But, it often has not enjoyed this status. The Center for Social Justice (CSJ) at Lincoln High School can serve as a model for those who are interested in instituting an educational system based on egalitarianism.

In this thesis I address how implementing programs like the CSJ can begin the process of building an egalitarian system of schooling. I do so after: (1) critically examining and highlighting the traditional views on the social function of public education in the United States and their implications for students such as myself and, (2) the solutions suggested for the problems created by traditional paradigms; my hope is to provide a change in discourse and action regarding alternate modes of education that can replace the current understanding of schooling.

In Chapter 1, I will discuss the foundations and conceptions of education. The goal is to review the manifest and latent functions of education and explain how critical pedagogy
can guide the philosophical and ideological direction of the reframing of education. Chapter 2 describes the process by which topics of review and analysis were chosen. Chapter 3 outlines an alternative view of education and its potential for appeal. Chapter 4 is a re-examination of my experience in the educational system and a response to the tensions presented in the 21st Century. The thesis will conclude with a discussion of why fostering creativity and imagination is so central to promoting social justice.
CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

The foundations of education are based on: (1) democratic values, providing the skills and (2) knowledge for economic success, and (3) building a uniform society in which assimilation is highly encouraged to develop personal and social skills vital to survival and success (Neubeck, Neubeck, & Glasberg, 2007). According to Neubeck et al., education was developed to perform two types of functions in education: manifest and latent functions of education. In this chapter, I will review these two functions of education.

There are three important points underscored in this chapter with respect to the development of schooling. The first is that schooling has focused on providing the tools for dealing with a rapidly growing industry, an energized economy, and capitalism. Second, the function of schooling was designed to provide new waves of immigrants’ language literacy, skills to contribute to society, and cultural capital that would assist them in adjusting into the dominant society. The last point highlights how democracy was the focal point in American education; the goal was to foster democratic and bureaucratic ideals in order to strengthen the political, economic, and social dynamics of this country.

THE WESTERN FRONTIER: ECONOMIC GROWTH AND EDUCATION

According to Neubeck et al. (2007), “manifest functions are those tasks an institution is specifically organized to accomplish” (p. 363). With respect to education, manifest functions are used to guide students in their personal and social development. The development of mass education was a reflection of all the demands of a growing country. Thus, one of the major reasons in introducing a structured education was economics. The idea of engaging schooling with economic principles promised to provide to students the skills and access to training in jobs that would increase their economic opportunities.
In addition, the curriculum and structured relationships in schooling reflect bureaucratic values, where the body of officials and administrators at a government institution or work site mirrored that of schools. That is, the hierarchal systems that exist in the government and the economy are similar to the one that exist in schooling. The development of bureaucratic schools was used as training grounds for students to establish a routine, a routine largely related to adherence to rules. Overall, the development of free education was aimed at supporting the growth of the economic system.

To be sure, the early developments of organized schooling coincided with the re-organizing and growth of the economy. What is more interesting is how these developments really brought a set of standards or expectations to the way public schools functioned for the future. The economy went from an industrialization period to strong capitalism. As the economy saw a shift “from an entrepreneurial capitalism to its modern corporate capitalism, [its ideals and values were] reflected in educational policy and theory” (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 63). Similar to Bowles and Gintis, Neubeck et al. (2007) explains that the development of “schools are said to promote attitudes and habits of behavior that are unique to a capitalist society” (p. 371). Schools emphasize the virtues of work and underscore how students can be prepared for the job market. Moreover, the different shifts in the work place influenced how education could prepare students for a new wage labor system. The connection between education and economics was enforced in order to contribute to the fulfillment of the “American Dream” and full democratic participation.

**DEMOCRATIC SCHOOLING: MERITOCRACY AND TENETS OF DEMOCRACY**

Society often sends a message to individuals that one can obtain the best opportunities solely through individual merit. According to McNamee and Miller (2004) “education identifies and selects intelligent, talented, and motivated individuals and provides educational training in direct proportion to individual merit” (p. 95).

Success, according to many scholars and political leaders, is a likely outcome if each individual follows the process of intellectual preparation and hard work. For this reason, education became an accessible institution that allowed “all children [to] compete on the basis of individual merit, rather than on family position” (Neubeck et al., 2007, p. 364).
Most define this opportunity as meritocracy; the idea that each member of U.S. society has access to an equal playing field in which everyone can compete equally for the “American Dream” by their effort and merit. Education is thought to provide each individual an opportunity to compete openly for economic and social privileges (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 21). The “educational system fosters and reinforces the belief that economic success depends essentially on the possession of technical and cognitive skills—skills which is organized to provide an efficient, equitable, and unbiased manner on the basis of meritocratic principle” (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 103).

**AMERICANIZATION: REACHING THE AMERICAN DREAM AND CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIETY THROUGH EDUCATION**

The idea of education was constructed and centered on certain survival needs that addressed how the transmission of information for the new members of society was delivered and how educational practices could enforce democratic ideals and meritocratic values (Neubeck et al., 2007, p. 364). Mass public education during the 19th century was seen as a fixture and improvement to the lives of people. As a result, organized schooling was expected and structured to “make new members of society literate and used as a tool for new members to assimilate and contribute to society” (Neubeck et al., 2007, p. 364). Strengthening the nation’s political and economic system was a goal of local and national educators. Education was expected to be a system that produced positive change and support to the existing reality.

As mentioned previously, the motivation for economic growth was one of the main reasons mass public education was introduced and quickly institutionalized. Along with economic growth came public discourse on the value of reaching the “American Dream.” The “American Dream” introduced the concept of property ownership, success, and democratic power. The perfect picture included the house with a white picket fence, married with two kids, owning a car, stable job, and a dog. Many people in the United States pursue this dream; groups of people across the world also buy into this idea of the “American Dream.” Indeed, they cross physical, emotional, and philosophical borders to reach the “American Dream.”
The belief that reaching the “American Dream” would eliminate all social ills was a popular illusion; according to Neubeck et al. (2007) moreover, mass public education “was an important part of the assimilation or ‘Americanization’ movement of the nineteenth century” (p. 366). The waves of migration to the U.S. came from many areas of the world. “One of the major goals of mass public education in the nineteenth century was to Americanize immigrants--to teach them to fit into the existing political and social order” (Neubeck et al., 2007, p. 366). The elite and politically influential people suggested that the educational system served as a structured process in which those who migrated to the U.S. become literate and positively contribute to American society. The assimilation process through education also provided a space to “maintain and transmit the values considered necessary to prevent political, social or economic upheaval” (Neubeck et al., 2007, p. 366). Overall, the development of mass publication within the immigration, assimilation, and Americanization context consisted of “a mechanism of social control that would protect the political and economic interest of governing class” (p. 366). Schooling in theory and in practice was supported by socially and economically privileged groups who believed that education would fix social ills.

Organized schooling since its inception triggered the idea that its structure served as an equalization effect for people, and in addition, “mass public education developed in order to democratize the U.S.” (Neubeck et al., 2007, p. 366). Democracy was the goal of the curriculum and instruction. The movement to institutionalize education came from educators that wanted to simulate bureaucratic values in the classroom. Education was designed to engage American citizens in the “democratic” political system and proposed to ameliorate all economic and social setbacks. Within this system people would be able to succeed with effort and merit. The organization, rules, and regulations of U.S. education in the perspective of many historians were constructed in order to encourage political participation and democratic ideals (Neubeck et al., 2007). Most importantly, “schools have sought to instill common political values in millions of members of our otherwise diverse populations” (Neubeck et al., 2007, p. 364). The attitudes and habits of behavior also supported the educational agenda of democratization for “only within educated citizenry could the United States function as a democracy” (p. 364). The function of education is to assist young people
and new members of society to adapt to democratic ideals and engage in the “American Dream.”

Some educators view “the formation of a democratically informed system of public education as one of America’s most monumental contributions” (Munoz, 2004, p. 3). Most conservative educators like E. D. Hirsch (1987) argue that the content knowledge for students in grades K-12 should reflect the American culture regardless of background.

PROGRESS AND CURRENT STATUS OF SCHOOLING IN THE U.S.

A lot has changed since the establishment of the public education system. There are different educational reforms created and proposed in order to create a more consistent and accessible form of schooling for everyone. The sections below reviews some of the systemic changes public education has undergone and how these changes impact discussions and reactions about educational inequalities.

Legal Basis: The Fight against Latent Functions of Education

Manifest functions of education established “tasks an institution is specifically organized to accomplish;” namely, the skills and tools designed to energize the economy, to meet meritocratic beliefs, and assist immigrants to fully assimilate into one culture to have an opportunity to contribute to society (Neubeck et al., 2007, p. 363). However, there have been multiple consequences of the manifest functions of education; Neubeck et al. (2007) refers to one as the latent functions of education. These consequences have negatively impacted the educational experiences of historically underrepresented students. The discussion of the legal documents outlines the setbacks and the struggle in establishing equal opportunity and access of organized schooling.

Discussions of the legal documents that outline educational equality is instrumental in demanding that institutions of education meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students and community. Ochoa (1995) developed a graph that measures the “value continuum towards equal educational opportunity” (p. 1). The information on the graph shows that educational opportunity is moving from a closed system to a more open one,
where the struggle to provide equal educational opportunity to all students is more of a possibility.

The 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution 1868 states:

all persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. (Ochoa, 1995, p. 7)

This amendment was used to challenge a racist and assimilation perspective which rejected people of color and the migrant population. In addition, by the end of the 19th century and early 20th century the different waves of immigration brought together linguistically diverse populations that threatened the identity of the “West.” This fear of losing power and control over wealth and politics fueled the assimilation perspective. Most policy-makers, politicians, and the public then developed the “melting pot” concept; this concept “introduced the idea of diverse immigrant elements being merged to make a new homogenized whole” (Baker, 2006, p. 401). This concept resulted in discrimination and devaluation of marginalized migrant communities and students. Many African Americans and Latinos were relegated to segregated schools and had no access to educational opportunities. In 1896 segregation based on race and ethnicity became official, the court case Plessey v. Ferguson “advanced the concept of equal opportunity as meaning ‘separate but equal’” (Ochoa, 1995, p. 7). This case gained access but still under terms that separated societies based on race, national origin, and language. However, there were other court decisions that challenged the “separate but equal” concept. These legal documents gained access to equal resources in education of historically marginalized students.

The Lemon Grove Incident and the Mendez v. Westminster School District challenged the segregation of Mexican students in U.S. schools. These cases pioneered the movement against educational segregation based on race, but the case that gained national attention was Brown v. Board of Education Topeka Kansas in 1954. The court case “decision (l) struck down the “separate but equal” doctrine; (2) declared the separation of Black and White students to be unconstitutional; (3) ordered desegregation of schools with “deliberate speed;” and (4) established the principle of equal educational opportunity” (Ochoa, 1995, p. 8). The
Brown v. Board of Education opened dialogue and action regarding policy that discriminated based on race or national origin, and as a result the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed which prohibited discrimination on the basis of color, race or national origin, and led to the establishment of the Office of Civil Rights.

**Equality and Power: Vulnerability or Protection**

Brown et al. (2003) concluded that education was constructed for some and not readily available for underrepresented groups of people. The educational system and its innumerable commissions have taken a step back in educational reforms. The system in place has not prescribed both equity and excellence. Instead, it has produced “something that resembles equity but never reaches it” (Kozol, 1991, p. 175). Many students who are not part of the White middle-class mainstream struggle with the lack of educational services and teachers who are unqualified or less motivated to teach underrepresented students. Many of the contemporary educational policies and practices reformed their structure in order to assist those who do not receive college preparatory classes or who cannot receive tutoring to receive better grades in core classes. However, many of these reforms are not consistent with the assistance they provide, leaving students at a disadvantage (Tatum, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). Chicano/Latinos, for example, have the lowest high school graduation and retention rates in the U.S.; they “are deprived of voice by institutional processes and exclusionary practices in academe” (Aguirre, 2005, p. 154). Political figures as well as educators who believe there is a need to diversify existing educational paradigms in relation to class, gender, and race have challenged institutions of education. One must also deconstruct the notion of merit in order to deconstruct contemporary educational policies affecting K-12 underrepresented students.

As mentioned above, education has long been constructed to meet the needs of those who are part of the White middle-class mainstream (Brown et al., 2003). In education, meritocracy does not exist. The idea of meritocracy only allows a few working class students to succeed, including a few ethnic minority students; the education system thus largely reproduces social and racial inequalities (Oakes, 2005; Pincus & Ehrlich, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999). Moreover, in the U.S. the existence of a racialized hierarchical system means that power relations, rewards, and interest are distributed differently between racial groups.
Educational mobility is difficult to obtain through individual merit because some students remain on the margins. Yosso (2002) explains that traditional educational settings use meritocracy to blind students of the realities of inequalities within education and our society. Many deny students the opportunity to improve their social status within society and to be active members of society. Because the production of inequalities exists within public education, educational systems relegate underrepresented students to remedial courses where expectations are low. Bustamante-Jones (1995) emphasized how institutions of education “still reflect its origins in the nineteenth century when mass compulsory schooling was devised to serve the purposes of industry, Americanization of immigrants, and socialization of the native-born poor” (p. 15). The work of academic researchers has refuted the idea that meritocracy works for everyone in education and explain that educational practices and policies only create race, class, and gender divides as opposed to creating an equal playing field (Oakes, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999).

**DUAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

Previously I reviewed and explained both manifest and latent functions of education in the U.S. The latter created and produced certain types of outcomes, such as racial and ethnic inequalities. In this chapter, I will be discussing the types of student produced when the educational system continues to adhere to the bureaucratic model of education. First, I will discuss the division between intellectual vs. technician view of education. Second, I will touch on the educational discourse surrounding the topic of self-esteem and isolation. Third, the thesis situates the development of institutions of education in relation to the self-fulfilling prophecy, which is the idea that education blames the victim for their own failures in society. Lastly, I will explain how there is a continued acceptance of racism, classism, and sexism that is reproduced within schooling. Overall, my goal is to contribute to the discourse and action on educational curriculum, theory, and instruction as it relates to transformational education. Each chapter unpacks layers of educational criticism about its foundations, evolution, and reform. The latter is an effort to create intellectual space for more suggestions and discussions about transformational education.

In this section there are three points that underscore the impact of latent functions of education. One, schooling is based on competition rather than co-participation or
cooperation. Two, the function of schooling was originally thought to provide equalizing effect for people; however, education turned into a place of social reproduction of inequality. The last point explains how schools teach most students to be passive and normative and accept the status quo.

**INTELLECTUAL VS. TECHNICIAN**

The development of education proposes a system that promises students the opportunity for higher level thinking. However, education in the U.S. fails students to develop critical thought. Scholars explain that the focus of education continues to shift towards the scientific realm; anything having to do with the development of science and technology is much more appreciated than teaching and learning about critical thought and collaborative relations.

The battle to keep the U.S. government from banning schools from teaching arts and humanity courses is an ongoing dilemma. Budget cuts and college fee increases continue to hinder student pockets and quality education. Every year there is at least a 10% fee increase. With California’s budget crisis and projected fee increases across the state, postgraduate education is becoming nothing but a dream. The majority affected by this crisis are students who are classified as low-income first generation students.

With the budget crisis another issue surfaces, which is the issue of cutting programs. Last year “Arizona Governor Jan Brewer signed HB 2281 into law. The law bans schools from teaching classes that are designed for students of a particular ethnic group or that promote resentment, ethnic solidarity, or overthrow of the U.S. government” (Okihiro, 2010, p. 1). The budget crisis appears to another strategy to eliminate courses that invest in critical thought. Currently, students at University of Berkeley commenced a hunger strike to save Ethnic Studies and prevent the university from downsizing faculty and staff. Ironically, the U.S. government still finds ways to fund school programs that focus on math and science. The justification is that “America can only be competitive in the world, if technical reason has priority over social reason” (Brown, 2011, p. 1). The result from a dysfunctional economy is “limited access for working class and students of color” (G. Perez, personal communication, April 23, 2011).
EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OUTCOME: THE ACT OF BEING SILENCED

What kinds of students are being produced? To what extent do the models of teaching and learning techniques influence the development of students? How do they impact students’ self-worth and self-esteem? This section will grapple briefly with these questions.

For many years, traditional schooling positioned some students to remain at the margins; not all students were able to access the necessary tools to continue their education. The Civil Rights Movement as well as other national movements against educational inequality was initiated in order to combat class, race, and gender inequalities. Although such movements have improved traditional educational practices and policies, inequalities continue to be reproduced (Tatum, 1997). The practice of tracking has existed for many years; tracking is the process in which students are grouped and sorted by perceived ability (Rubin, 2003). Detracking on the other hand is an effort to organize classrooms with a mixture of abilities; they eliminated the non-college track classrooms although still maintaining honors class, basically eliminated classrooms that separated those achieving high and low. However, when unpacking detracking, most educators believe that detracking system does exactly the same as tracking.

According to researchers, teachers, and other administrators, the detracking system place students at a disadvantage and do not meet the needs of the students. Yonezawa and Jones (2005) conducted a research on student perspectives about tracking and detracking systems; they found that students from the four high schools explained that not all teachers had equal expectations for all students. For example, one of the students interviewed said “my Calculus teacher, he’s got two calculus classes and three, like, he calls them failure algebra classes and it’s not about race but [laughs] the things he says are just really…it’s kinda sad that they are, I guess, degraded like that” (Yonezawa & Jones, 2005, p. 20). In another example, Oakes (2005) ask teachers to describe “what are the five most critical things [they] want students to learn this year” (p. 80). Below are four responses that exemplify how teachers expect less from students that are perceived as low-track:

interpreting and identifying, evaluation, investigating power-High-track Science-junior high; more mature behavior (less outspoken)-Low-track Science-junior high; the art of research-High-track English-senior high; understanding the basic
words to survive in a job. Being able to take care of their own finances--low-track English-senior high. (Oakes, 2005, pp. 80-83)

This example, along with other examples shown by Yonezawa and Jones (2005), suggests that teachers are not adequately meeting the needs of students and create an unequal distribution of knowledge. Most educators and community members believe that the standard curriculum and college preparatory resources are accessible to all students; however, current data suggest “these assumptions and beliefs to be unsubstantiated” (Oakes, 2005, p. 72).

Yonezawa, Wells, and Serna (2002) explain that through tracking those with cultural capital have a louder voice when demanding educational resources, better teachers and better educational programs than those of working class. These students during class are either silenced or face low expectations from teachers in their school. Pager and Shepherd (2008) indicate that many whites and neo-conservatives blame the victim for their oppression. As expressed for example, in claims. Such a comment reflects a culture deficit in which framework the culture of minority groups is the problem and if there is change it has to be through an assimilation process (Park, 1914).

**ISOLATION: PRODUCTION OF AN INDIVIDUALISTIC DRIVEN SOCIETY**

The result of unequal educational opportunities has damaged the image of self in students of color and created a state of solitude (hooks, 1992; Takaki, 1993; Tatum, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). The consequences continuing effect of residential segregation and racial discriminatory practices is that minority groups are isolated, crime increases as unemployment rate rises, and communities are disconnected from social and political networks for better education/job opportunities (Lipsitz, 1998; Massey & Denton, 1993; Oliver & Shapiro, 2006).

The end of school segregation was a positive step geared toward forming an inclusive educational system in accordance with national rhetoric and practice of giving all students equal access and a chance to succeed regardless of race and economic situation (DeVillar, 1994). However, many educational critics who analyze educational institutions argue that the system continues to send a monolithic and Eurocentric message in which students of a diverse background do not see themselves as present. This situation creates distance among
teacher-student relations and increases a feeling of isolation and “otherness” (Anzaldua, 2007; DeVillar, 1994; Munoz, 2007; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). Munoz (2004) argues “The prevailing opinion among teachers regarding the intellectual capacity of ethnically and linguistically diverse students continues to contribute to their persistent, pervasive, and disproportionately low academic achievement” (p. 5).

**REPRODUCTION OF RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER INEQUALITIES**

The isolation felt by many students is the result of a system of education that neglects the needs of socially and linguistically diverse student population. Many scholars explain that the result of less engaging teachers and curriculum only serves the reproduction of the three “isms.” These are: discrimination based on class, race, and gender.

The research on contemporary racial discrimination and dynamics introduces the readers to theories, concepts, and critiques which may enable a better understanding about race and racism. This scholarship challenge traditional notions of race, racism, prejudice, and stereotypes and suggest there are new forms of racial discrimination, racial prejudice, and racism that influence the equal distribution of services and opportunities. Racial discrimination is most commonly defined as “unequal treatment of persons or groups on the basis of their race or ethnicity...any key feature of any definition of discrimination is its focus on behavior” (Pager & Shepherd, 2008, p. 182). According to some scholars, discrimination can be defined in two ways: (1) “differential treatment--when individuals are treated unequally because of their race; and (2) disparate impact--when individuals are treated equally according to policy, but policies are structured to favor one group over another” (Pager & Shepherd, 2008, p. 182).

Some researchers believe that racism is something from the past because anti-discrimination and anti-racist laws were passed and that the playing field has been leveled for everyone overall. However, other scholars believe that race still matters; race scholars and activist argue that social and political processes continue to be organized along racial lines and despite the progress made after the Civil Rights Act there is persistent racial discrimination (Bonilla-Silva, 1996; Kozol, 1991; Oliver & Shapiro, 2006).
Race scholars who discuss racial differentials in wealth accumulation highlight that racialized state and local policies contribute to the reproduction of racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 1996; Oliver & Shapiro, 2006). In *American Apartheid*, Massey and Denton (1993) confirm that black Americans suffer from urban poverty and racial inequality because they are highly segregated, “thus one-third of all African Americans in the United States live under conditions of intense racial segregation” (p. 77). As Massey and Denton (1993) describe, much of black segregation “is maintained by ongoing institutional arrangements and contemporary individual actions” such as education (p. 1).

Bonilla-Silva (1996) and other scholars (Bobo & Fox, 2003; Lewis, 2004; Omi & Winant, 1994; Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Quillian, 2006) indicate that racial discrimination and racism has changed from being overt to covert. Quillian (2006) states:

> Before the Civil Rights era, prejudice and discrimination were openly espoused and legally enforced. Surveys suggest most whites supported racial discrimination and legalized segregation on principled grounds and held many derogative stereotype about nonwhites. In the Civil Rights era, most legally enforced discrimination ended, many blatant discriminatory practices were prohibited, and whites increasingly repudiated discrimination and overt forms of prejudice. Although overt expressions of prejudice and discrimination sharply declined, progress in reducing racial inequality was highly uneven, leaving especially large racial gaps in employment, housing, wealth, health, and criminal justice. The mixed progress toward greater racial equality has led many to question both the genuineness and depth of Civil Rights--era changes, with several scholars suggesting that prejudice and discrimination have taken on new and more subtle forms. (p. 299)

Color-blind racism is the new form of racism. According to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1996), color-blind racism was the result of anti-discriminatory/racism laws and a cultural shift. Based on this concept race does not matter, the playing field has been equalized, everyone “pulls themselves by their own boot straps,” and has access to education and job opportunities. This major shift required people to be politically correct about race and equality. According to Bonilla-Silva color-blind racism operates subtly. He explains that much of this racism has been and continues to be maintained through a color blind public policy (also supported by Oliver & Shapiro, 2006). Conceptualized as color blind racism by Bonilla-Silva; its consequences are continued racial oppression, segregation, and marginalization. It is a type of racism that protects whiteness and the interest of the dominant group within a racialized society (Bonilla-Silva, 1996; Lipsitz, 1998).
Contemporary educational policies are constructed to give validation to meritocracy. Ironically, meritocracy does not level the playing field and education “does not act as a vehicle of upward mobility” (McNamee & Miller, 2004, p. 100). The education system in place reinforces educational and academic inequalities; the educational policies constructed to assist students who lack resources are only forming divides between students who have educational access with those who receive a working class education. Policies frame these inequalities through the tracking system; the tracking practice in U.S. schools K-12 are the “sorting and grouping of students of students by perceived ability” (Rubin, 2003, p. 541). The sorting and grouping of students has been argued against and its critics have proven through qualitative research that it “resegregates integrated schools” (Rubin, 2003, p. 541). In addition, other researchers suggest “race-and-class linked inequalities [are] notable in our schools and in our society at large are reproduced” (Rubin, 2003, p. 541).

Yosso (2002) explains that traditional educational settings use meritocracy to blind students to the realities of inequalities within education and our society. Many students are denied the opportunity to improve their social status within society and to be active members of society because the production of inequalities is largely constructed within public education, and underrepresented students are relegated to remedial courses where expectations are low. Those who have graduated and become professionals state that the numbers of underrepresented groups in education and other professional positions are low; Chicano/Latinos who do obtain a higher education degree “re-count the stories of how Chicano scholarship is often ignored by Anglo academic, and as a result, is missing in the academic discourse” (Aguirre, 2005, p. 153). The work of academic researchers have refuted the idea that meritocracy works for everyone in education and explain that educational practices and policies only create race, class, and gender divides as opposed to creating an equal playing field.

Many of these students are group based on their performance on the yearly exams; some of the standardized testing includes the California State Testing (CST) and the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). According to some researchers, these exams do not accurately measure the intelligence and performance of all students (Ansalone, 2004; Oakes, 2005; Wheelock, 1992). However, institutions of education continue to use them for systems of tracking and funding.
Rubin (2003) explores the critiques of some scholars who agree that the tracking system works “as a mechanism for the reproduction of inequalities in schools” (p. 542). He argues that the grouping patterns in tracking regarding race and class show that many students who are working class and part of a “minority group” get placed in classrooms less challenging “delivered by the worst teachers, while students in higher tracks…take part in more challenging, college-bound curriculum taught by experienced and skilled teachers” (Rubin, 2003, p. 541). Oakes, Wells, and Jones (1997) report through qualitative and quantitative data the thoughts of the community regarding the meritocracy: only those students with cultural capital and the ideology that supports it deserve to be rewarded in the educational system. Yet because the political arguments put forth by these powerful parents sound so benign, so ‘American’ the cultural racism that guides their perspective is rarely exposed therefore racial segregation within the schools seems natural. (p. 497)

Although detracking is intended to eliminate the segregation by class, race, and gender, it often does the opposite by reiterating existing academic and social inequalities (Yonezawa & Jones, 2005). This “equity-minded reform” attempts to give access and equal opportunity to those students who achieve lower. However, the literature shows that tracking and detracking structures within schools place students in unfair situations and highlights their struggles in learning the material (Oakes et al., 1997).

According to some researchers racial tensions within a class are not the only divides that surfaces within academic classrooms; class divide is also prominent within the practice of detracking. Thus, according to Wheelock (1992) “few schools, even those grounded in the deepest commitment to democratic schooling, have untracked completely…Schools inhibit the real world with all its cultural norms and political realities, and a variety of ‘real world’ constraints may slow or inhibit reform” (p. 22).

Many culturally and linguistically diverse students are disempowered and forced into an assimilation perspective. Baker (2006) explains that “assimilation is the belief that cultural groups should give up their heritage cultures and take on the host society’s way of life” (p. 400). More often than not institutions of education in the United States operate under this ideology. Most of this ideology is reflected in the classroom and teaching practices.
Baker (2006) and Ochoa (1995) illustrate that language policy in the United States is based on monolingual instruction. Following this concept class materials and instruction operate only in English and students must find ways of surviving. This scenario is known as the “sink or swim” model in which students either rapidly adapt to English only instruction or fail academically. Many times, students placed in this situation suffer the consequences and eventually drop out of school (Baker, 2006). Dropping out is largely a result of the lack of structural and cultural support. There is limited access and integration of the students into the educational system and cultural identity is not valued, thus resulting in forced assimilation. Culturally, the student’s identity and heritage is tolerated but is still expected to assimilate. Despite strong efforts to develop English-only programs there are those who believe that minority students “should maintain their heritage cultures in combination with the host culture” (Baker, 2006, p. 400). Thus, teachers and institutions of education that utilize this type of bilingual program embrace different identities and view multiculturalism positively in both political and social contexts.

According to Romo and Falbo (1996) Chicano/Latino students demonstrate a higher drop-out rate due to school “use [of] norm referenced tests to track students” (p. 20). This “tracking practice reduces the likelihood that Hispanic students will acquire the skills they need to graduate from high school, succeed in college, or obtain a good job” (Romo & Falbo, 1996, p. 20). Drop-out rates and push-out rates of Chicano/Latino students are at times associated with the politics of a just curriculum. Valenzuela (1999) explains how the “No Spanish” rule although abolished, continues to subject Chicano/Latino youth “on a daily basis to subtle, negative messages that undermine the worth of their unique culture and history…on a more personal level, students’ cultural identities are systematically derogated and diminished” (pp. 172-173).

As DeVillar (1994) states:

Hispanic-Americans have traditionally been excluded from schooling contexts in which they would be on an equal educational footing with their European-American counterparts and have consistently had to challenge official school policy…In spite of this persistent conflict, the quality of their schooling has continued to generally reflect that of their African-American student peers, particularly in the form of predictably low academic outcomes and disproportionately low rates of school completion. (p. 35)
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION: SHARING CONTROL OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Chapter Three will capture the essence of what should be the basis of egalitarian education. My research and theoretical inquiry will borrow from a host of writers who view education through a critical pedagogy lens, concept(s) of new paradigms and local/national liberatory educational movements. Lastly, it will continue the discussion by introducing an example of transformative curriculum that exists today and the possibility for growth. I am not formulating a measured and rigid curriculum that will fit the needs of all students. It is impossible to create a one size fits all curriculum. Nor do I intend to say that by fixing educational disparity racism, classism, and sexism will be resolved. There is much work to do in deconstructing institutions of power; I am only contributing to the educational aspect in hopes that this will spiral into many threads of discussion and praxis.

In this research I examine how the integration of new curriculum like Lincoln High School Social Justice Program is inclusive and provides an equal core content knowledge to contest forms of oppression and negative representations of underrepresented students. Furthermore, the program’s curriculum sets guiding principles for other communities when developing their unique teaching and learning models.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: EN BUSCA DE SOLUCIONES THROUGH CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

Dialogue is the proposed concept within pedagogies of critical education because it “[stimulates] true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation” (Freire, 2007, p. 84). As Sandoval (2000) describes “when enacted in dialectic relation to one another and not as separate ideologies, each oppositional mode of consciousness, each ideology-praxis, is transformed into tactical weaponry for intervening in shifting currents of power” (pp. 57-58). Based on dialogue and reflection this current research invites the reader to form a new consciousness within education, like Anzaldua (2007) when she introduced la conciencia de la mestizo: This consciousness composed of critical thought that produces reflective counter discourses in light of equality within classrooms. A new consciousness within education is then the answer to the problem between white race and the colored, between males and
females, lies in healing the split that originates in every foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. (p. 102)

In addition to critical pedagogy this research draws from Chicana Feminisms; the reflections, theories, and values within Chicana Feminisms give space to dialogue about past, present, and future events within a particular context. Scholars such as, Chela Sandoval, Gloria Anzaldua, and Emma Perez all share similar tools and ideologies that are able to construct and deconstruct power structures within education. The relationship between the two ideologies uncovers the practice of the reproduction of inequality within institutions of education and theorizes on the negative implications these traditional power systems have on underrepresented students.

Chicana feminisms reflect quite well with what Gramsci (2006) and Mohanty (2006) express in their writing. They recommend that if one decides to represent the other, one must study and understand the subject and make connections across borders. Part of this process includes the recognition of cultural diversity. DeVillar (1994) expresses the significance of cultural diversity and its positive impact on underrepresented students. Recently, there has been growing interest in understanding whether teaching Chicana/o history to Chicano/Latino students changes their self identity and academic performance. Educators need to understand the standpoint of their students (Bustamante-Jones, Pang-Ooka, & Rodriguez, 2001). Exactly why is culture important? Culturally relevant teaching is an integration of socio-cultural theory based on Critical Race.

Tate (1995) argues that culturally relevant teaching can be used for Mathematics or any other subjects and should be embodied within course instruction. He argues that teaching from a culturally relevant standpoint should be used in order to “[encourage] students to use mathematics as an agent to change their out-of-school realities” (p. 169). Culture is important in that it challenges the institutions of education that reproduce Eurocentric and malecentric philosophy. Cultural relevant pedagogy then reflects three criteria “(a) Students must experience academic success; (b) Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160). Ultimately, the purpose of culturally relevant pedagogy is for students to seek change based on reflective analysis (Ladson-Billings, 1995).
In fact, Bustamante-Jones (1995) suggests that cultural therapy and critical pedagogy are vital to the development of strong identity among youth. Cultural therapy is a process in which the student becomes conscious of power relations in different contexts. Cultural pedagogy is essential in the re-conceptualization of the classroom and teacher-student relations. Both of these are mechanisms that lower the barriers produced by hegemonic powers that are affecting the learning process and achievement of underrepresented students (Bustamante-Jones, 1995; Hinchey, 2008).

bell hooks (1994) in *Teaching to Transgress* argues that “to educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn…who believe that [our] work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students” (p. 13). In another book, hooks theorizes on how identity empowerment is important in the development of youth. Like Stuart Hall, hooks (1992) believes that “we can properly understand the traumatic character of the colonial experience by recognizing the connection between domination and representation” (p. 3). Teaching as a form of liberation is powerful for students because when students are able to situate themselves within the practice of schooling, they begin to assert themselves as part of the world.

As Freire (2007) expresses in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, “I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensible component of the process of both learning and knowing” (p. 17). Freire (2007) and hooks (1994) agree education should take an active role in exploring reality and connecting it to people’s thinking in order to develop and transform students. According to Takaki (1993), the importance of studying and understanding everyone’s past to reflect on oneself and develop a perspective(s) of the world is essential in embracing and re-defining borders that keep us captive of the real. Anzaldua (2007) further supports the idea of positioning teaching in a mystical world and deconstructing one’s identity. Both authors propose a process for examining the social and cultural structures that are present within our own experience. The development of cultural identity is crucial if one wants to change the world; one needs to conceptualize self experience and understand ones multiple identities.
**Basis for Egalitarian Education**

Research indicates that it is “politically difficult and tracking often persists despite bold efforts [to eliminate it]. This is partly because detracking requires educators, parents, and students to rethink traditional, ubiquitous conceptions of intelligence and merit, as related to race and class” (Yonezawa et al., 2002, p. 41).

Therefore, the effort of detracking practices require more than simple structural changes. It needs to acknowledge the struggles within education with respect to race, class, and gender as well as value the strengths of students who are underrepresented.

The pedagogy and standard curriculum must change to foster the development of self-respect, self-empowerment, self-esteem and aspirations of students (Ansalone, 2004). It is important that one re-evaluate the tracking and detracking structures in order to fully understand the struggles students face within K-12 and to ultimately develop policies and practices that do embrace equality and a positive cultural identity.
CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

My thesis is a personal reflection on my education and I use this narrative in order to develop an analysis of public education in the United States. This recollection and review of my process of education guides the main goal of the thesis which suggest how implementing programs like the CSJ can begin the process of building an egalitarian system of schooling. My \textit{testimonio} is supported by literature that not only provides a review of the social functions of public education but also provides a change in discourse regarding alternate modes of education.

The theoretical framework was created after an extensive examination of the areas of critical pedagogy and bilingual and bicultural education. The process in deciding what aspects my thesis would focus was difficult because there are so many sub-topics and focal points that could bring an interesting discussion. I decided which aspects to highlight after I wrote my literature review and my personal narrative because it allowed me to make a comparison of the themes that repeatedly came up. After making a list of all the similar themes I based my decision on aspects that reflected strong examples underscoring my topic and a consideration of how much I could complete with my time frame. After understanding that I could not account for the analysis of all recurrent aspects I focused only on five. The aspects listed below are the conceptual constructs guiding the study and personal narrative.

\textbf{CONCEPTUAL CONSTRUCTS GUIDING THE STUDY}

Five constructs guide the study, namely:

1. Assimilation, Isolation, and Pluralism--The focus in this section is to describe and discuss how the process of assimilation and isolation is reflected in public education. It recognizes how curriculum, teacher-student relationship, administration, and academic counselors foster an environment focused on a monolingual culture, language, and society. Moreover, the idea behind these processes creates a distance from personal, familial, and social relationships resulting in isolation. The schooling system promotes individuality through the idea of meritocracy which sends a message that says that if you try your best you can accomplish anything. The reality is isolating you from the self, society, and family is a disservice to development of
personal and the social aspect. As a response to the assimilation process many educators have challenged their classroom by teaching to embrace and to practice cultural and linguistic collectivism. The concept of pluralism allows, to a certain extent, the historical acknowledgement of student’s lived experience. The student, family, and community become the foci in schooling. Overall, the student-teacher relationship begins to transform because they are no longer learning in a vacuum rather they are learning from each other and are making connections between any subject taught and experience.

2. Technical Learner and Competition--In schooling there is a continuous belief that if students are to be competitive in the job market they must focus on either a Math, Science, or Technology career. There is not much room to develop critical thought unless you are centralized in a career associated with the social sciences. However, even then most of the time students are conditioned to memorize information and be able to regurgitate it in order to get promoted to the next grade. Most if not all the time is spent describing, analyzing, and discussing is not part of class. The idea is that teachers should focus their lectures and activities on test-taking in order to make sure that students acquire the required academic standards.

3. Discrimination and Individualism--Although some people believe that race, class, and gender discrimination is something from the past others argue that it continues to be part of our society (Barlow, 2003). Forms of discrimination have changed, before they were overt and would physically, emotionally, and socially divide groups of people. However, the new forms of discrimination are covert and are masked under written legislation that promotes inequality. Contemporary, schooling is able to divide and filter students through extensive multiple choice test that then place and label them into low-achievement and high-achievement courses, thus, creating a common pattern that reflects how most students placed in remedial courses are first-generation and low-income students. Students placed in these courses most of the time do not receive additional academic guidance or tutoring and experience teachers that do not care or expect less from them. Through time the student in the educational system becomes isolated and internalizes the idea of blaming themselves for academic “failure.” They feel as though they have to improve on their own and feel as though attaining support labels them as weak because they were not able to “pull themselves by their own boot straps.”

4. Democratic Values--The teaching and practice of democracy is schooling is an important aspect to analyze because it allows us to search for ways in which students can truly be part of the idea of democracy. Theoretically, schooling does explain the meaning and practice of democracy as it relates to government decisions. However, in practice students rarely have an opportunity to engage in freedom of speech and thought. Moreover, students have limited engagement with activities that allow them to probe questions and solutions. Students’ development in critical thought becomes a practice if they have access to advanced placement courses or until they take college courses. The discussion about democratic valued is not a reality to all students yet which is why this analysis is so important.
5. Self-esteem and Respeto--The classroom becomes students’ second home because for most of the day this is the space where students spend the most of their time. Schooling then becomes an important routine and process. Teachers and administrators have a high influence on the identity, representation, and emotional status of students. Sometimes this influence becomes disempowering, specifically for students who are relegated to the margins either for being outspoken, having low-test-scores, family situations, and/or being misplaced in a particular course. Most educators believe that these conditions should not impact the productivity of classroom assignments and believe that students should do well regardless of what is going on. As a result students begin to feel alone and uncomfortable or unable to learn. In my analysis I discuss ways in which to eliminate this challenge. There is a combination of ways. However, in this section I focus on the idea of respect as an important element to empower students and their work.

The following questions were of concern in my analysis:

1. How does assimilation, isolation, and pluralism reflected in the public education curriculum, teaching practices, student-teacher relationships, and parent-school relationships?

2. Will the exposure and focus on Mathematics, Science, and Technology prepare students to engage in the process of critical analysis?

3. Are students cultural and linguistic identities respected and valued in public education?

4. Is the public education exposing students to the study and practice of the democratic ideals?

5. Will exposure to a democratic and egalitarian process of schooling improve discussion among community members, academic success, and community and family involvement?

6. Does public education influence students’ self-esteem? Will being exposed to positive reinforcement and understanding how a positive school relationship helps students’ intellectual abilities lead to academic success?

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

Using the ideological and philosophical direction of critical pedagogy, the study behind bilingual and bicultural education, and my personal narrative the thesis examined the social functions of public education and the changes in discourse regarding alternate modes of education, thus, suggesting how implementing programs like the CSJ can begin the process of building an egalitarian system of schooling.
SUBJECT AND SCHOOL SITE

The thesis is a combination of both a literary review of models of alternative education with the CSJ at Lincoln High School in mind and my personal narrative describing my educational experience in the U.S. public education. Both of these cases are different and provide unique data as it relates to my topic of interest. Although, both express different characteristics, both analyses allow me to develop a comprehensive perspective about the problem. Moreover, both cases are being analyzed equivalently and reflect an attempt at forming a continuous dialogue.

San Diego Unified School District

“All San Diego students will graduate with the skills, motivation, curiosity and resilience to succeed in their choice of college and career in order to lead and participate in the society of tomorrow” (Mission, San Diego Unified School District, 2010, para. 1).

Before introducing the Center for Social Justice at Lincoln High School I want to present quick facts about San Diego Unified School District. San Diego Unified School District is the second largest school district in California with a total of 131,541 students (San Diego Unified School District, 2010). The ethnic diversity make-up of the students is 45.7% Hispanic, 23.9% White, 11.8% African American, 8.0% Pacific Islander, and 6.0% Filipino (San Diego Unified School District, 2010).

Its facilities include 118 elementary schools, including K-8, 24 middle schools, 28 high schools, and 45 charter schools (San Diego Unified School District, 2010). In February 2010 the Board of Education revised their vision and approved a plan for student success. Dubbed “A 2020 Vision for Educational Excellence,” this initiative provides a guide to leadership, efficiency, and democratic engagement. The Board intends that “on the way and by the year 2020” the students, staff, administration, district, and community can be prepared to compete in academic and occupational fields (Community Based School Reform Model, San Diego Unified School District, 2010, para. 2). Under the plan district “is committed to a community-based school reform model to elevate all schools within the district to higher levels of student achievement” (Community Based School Reform Model, San Diego Unified School District, 2010, para. 2). This includes providing students with the opportunity to take challenging courses that will prepare them for college. Through this
initiative the Board proposes to go beyond teaching to the test by focusing on critical thinking. Both the 2020 vision and the community-based school model aims at making connections between community and academic success.

**Lincoln High School**

“The mission of Lincoln High School is to create a school community that inspires and supports academic excellence and exceptional character” (School Accountability Report Card, San Diego Unified School District, 2010, para. 3).

Lincoln High School has a total enrollment of 2,167 students in grades 9-12. Before they reopened in September 2007 the school was closed because of reconstruction plans. They reopened “as four small schools: the Center for Social Justice, the Center for the Arts, the Center for Science and Engineering, and the Center for Public Safety” (School Accountability Report Card, San Diego Unified School District, 2010, para. 1). The ethnic enrollment break down is 57.8% Hispanic, 32.2% African American, 4.3% Indo Chinese, and 1.4% Pacific Islander (San Diego Unified School District, 2010). The curriculum and instruction is geared at providing students with the opportunity to develop their academic abilities by providing various Advance Placement (AP) courses and relevant programs like Upward Bound or Avid (Achievement via Individual Determination) Program. Lincoln High School stresses the importance of parent involvement. Therefore, they make this available through the Parent Resource Center. The center offers many workshops and runs two book clubs in English and Spanish.

The CSJ at Lincoln High School was an important case to examine and write about for many reasons. The first is personal. Before I moved to San Diego, co-workers in Sacramento extensively discussed three particular programs focused on social justice. Two of them were located in Los Angeles County and the other one here in San Diego. The discussions centered on how these programs became introduced in the district. When I came to graduate school in San Diego I took the opportunity to ask questions and visit the program at Lincoln. Although, I was never directly involved, I valued the purpose of the program. It became a model that I wished to introduce to students in the future in Stockton, CA. As part of my doctoral research in the future I would like to engage in a more in-depth analysis where I meet the students and teachers going through the program and share their experience.
Second, the location is perfect for analysis due to discussions in San Diego about how we can incorporate a social justice perspective in K-12 public education can be incorporated. The decision to use CSJ as a case study benefits my thesis in that it provides an example of a model that transforms the classroom, teacher-student relationship, and dynamics of education. In addition, the discussion about the CSJ contributes to research about transformative education and the implementation of social justice in education. Moreover, the CSJ creates a strong dialogue between what they represent and offer and my testimonio.

**My Testimonio: In the Process of Healing**

My personal narrative is not only a testimony describing an experience about a particular object or process. It is a voice that reflects the challenge, pain, and success of student who is a product of the educational system in the United States. Reviewing who I am and how I came to the U.S. is an important piece to this theoretical project because it helps to frame the issues of educational policy and structure. I have no intention of using my personal story as a universal claim about public education. Nor is my personal story the focal point of this thesis. However, I do want to highlight that much of what I experienced was not purely unique in the sense that my experience was largely an outcome of a structured, institutionalized, and bureaucratized system of education.

**METHOD**

The method utilized was personal narrative. I describe and analyze my schooling experience as it relates to the topics of study. I made an effort to cover most of my K-12 schooling process. I believe in giving voice and power to students. I feel that education reflects the capacity to transform and create changes in society. As reflected in my past work I realized that I had done much of my writing on students at different sites. While this is important, I felt that the researcher often forgets to document their own experience. Therefore, in this study I wanted to share and analyze my experience and point out how some of what I lived is similar to the lived experiences of other students in public education.

In the process of analyses I was guided and committed to using the five conceptual constructs. The categories described and analyzed allowed me to highlight some of the most vivid examples of educational inequalities. Each concept enables me to make connections
between different events in my life. The creation and validation of these connections are represented at the end of Chapter 5 when I provide examples on how the educational system conditioned me to believe that I was not college material. In addition, my personal narrative and analysis expresses how despite many challenges I found strength and support from individuals and groups who allowed for me to deconstruct my identities. Moreover, my recollection about my educational experience transformed it from being unacknowledged to empowering. It is empowering for me and for the people who will come across my writing. The conceptual constructs gave the personal narrative an objective twist while at the same time allowing it to be subject of this study. This is a powerful tool of analysis that only values research but acknowledges the researcher as well.
CHAPTER 3

SOLUCIONES: THE “SEARCH FOR EQUITY”

In this section I will suggest possible solutions to the tracking and detracking practices. Many of the solutions are theoretical concepts moved to action from Freire (2007), Anzaldua (2007), Perez (1999), and Sandoval (2000). They all suggest that critical dialogue and analysis of the subject(s) will stimulate true reflections, thus creating real solutions for equality within any context. These solutions entail hard work and dedication to critical culturally relevant pedagogies; below is a list and rationales of “strategies and tools for reform” and transformation (Wheelock, 1992, p. xviii).

1. Engaging with Parents and the Community

The educational system needs to provide and develop workshops that extend knowledge on educational reform. Parents and community need to be included by providing a space for community members to represent their children and their educational needs. In order to fully gain parents’ and community support for educational reform, parents must be invited to the round-table for constant dialogue (Oakes, 2005; Wheelock, 1992). Community organizations pressure, often emphasizes equal education for all students and promotes equality; the educational system often resists changing, especially change that requires evaluating teaching style, classroom dynamics, and cultural competency within the school (e.g., staff, faculty, and administrators). Overall, “building a constituency for change through information gathering and education” can build alliances and strengthen communication between school staff, parents, and community to support the learning of all students (Wheelock, 1992, p. 84). There is discussion on how we must change the distribution of power, and change current assimilationist ideology/politics about education that is destructive to something truly democratic and empowering. One factor I would like to focus on is the development of school-parent partnerships. Such partnerships are a component of critical pedagogy. The partnerships along with other components are a strength that builds on the expectations and power of the students’ academic and language abilities. Baker (2006) explains that there are two ways the link between parents and school can be
strengthened. First, schools need to incorporate the home language and culture of linguistically diverse students into school curriculum (Baker, 2006). Second, schools need to develop strategies and activities that encourage the participation of historically marginalized parents in their children’s education (Baker, 2006).

A perfect illustration of the latter would be The Pajaro Valley Family Literacy Project in Watsonville, California. In this project, community members, educators, and parents come together once a month to “discuss chosen books, write, and discuss poems written by their children and themselves” (Baker, 2006, p. 416). This project is one example that illustrates how parents can be involved in the classroom. Parents and students are empowered and encouraged to participate in education. Parents contribute newspaper articles in Spanish or English, their experiences, and discussion to help build on the social and cognitive abilities of students in their First and Second languages. Literacy growth in both language one and language two (or more) is fostered within a supportive environment; “the community’s language, culture, and personal experiences are validated, celebrated, and empowered” (Baker, 2006, p. 416). These two strategies place institutions of education accountable for the integration and assistance of students who are linguistically and historically marginalized. It does not allow for educational systems to blame the student or their families for their poor academic status. More importantly it allows for structural and cultural support to happen within educational institutions, leading to a diverse set of perspectives.

2. Making High Expectations the Norm for All Students

Research shows that “students from whom more is expected produce more; students from whom less is expected produce less, even when this result is not intended” (Wheelock, 1992, p. 91). Teachers and school district justify this divide by tracking and untracking system; rarely does the educational system challenge the practice of having low expectations for students. The latter creates a division among students. Thus, these divisions are detrimental to the future of students education; teachers need to communicate high expectations to

build on and validate students’ prior knowledge and experience; help students construct their own knowledge; engage in dialogue that evokes more than one-word answers; require thinking skills such as comparing, contrasting, and
applying knowledge; [and] incorporate students’ own cultural backgrounds into learning. (Wheelock, 1992, p. 95)

In sum, establishing high expectations that are high for all students creates space for students to have opportunities for success and offers second chances. Teachers who are non-believers must be trained and enforced to raise expectations for all students; teachers, the curriculum, and instruction must be held accountable in raising students’ aspirations.

3. Assist in Developing a Space of Communication Between school Staff, Teachers, Parents, and Students

These strategies give voice to those students who are placed in the margins. However, one has to understand that these strategies are not the only strategies that deconstruct systems of tracking and detracking, there are two other strategies that need to be evaluated and presented in future research and they are: (1) the creation of a high-level curriculum for all students; and (2) the integration of Ethnic Studies or Social Justice component within high school curriculum. In the interest of time the research presented here only covered parent involvement and teacher expectations, but it is encouraged that for the future research more is done on curriculum and cultural relevant pedagogy.

It is important that schools develop these processes in order to create a space for dialogue and reflection where everyone in the community is involved. It is clear that new pedagogical practices and the way schools communicate with parents must be changed to effectively meet the needs of the current populations schools serve.

Suggested in the struggle of providing equal educational access and benefits to all students is the need for authentic, respectful, and engaging home-school collaboration and engagement. Also suggested is the need for political education of bilingual students. This sentiment is captured perfectly by Baker (2006): “schools sometimes tolerate but do not embrace linguistic diversity, and often refuse to acknowledge the politics that surrounds bilingual education. Therefore, it becomes important to educate bilingual students to understand the politics of bilingual education and the culture of power” (p. 419). The approach to traditional schooling incorporates ideas and practices that normally do not provide the space and time to develop critical thought and engage in reflective discussion. In the following section I will describe an educational model that reflects transformation and change in education.
LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL SOCIAL JUSTICE PROGRAM—A CASE STUDY: CENTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

The mission of the 9th Grade Center for Social Justice is to gain empowerment by advocating for equity through solidarity, responsibility and the support of a successful transition through High School. (Lincoln High School, 2011, para. 1)

In this section I begin to discuss how and why the CSJ and their approach on teaching and learning is more empowering for students than traditional forms of schooling and why it appeals to me as a model for transformative education.

The Center for Social Justice is designed to guide students successfully transition into high school. All 9th grade students enroll in a common curriculum offered through the Center for Social Justice. In 10-12 grades they either choose to stay in the Center for Social Justice or they transition to another school of their choice.

The center’s curriculum fulfills both History/Social Science and English/Language Arts components of the San Diego Unified School District’s general education program. In addition, the Center fully develops the concept of social justice by providing the historical background on its meaning and reflection. “What is Social Justice? the concept of a just society, where ‘justice’ refers to more than the legal system but based on the idea of a society which gives all individuals and groups fair treatment and a just share of the benefits of society” (Ochoa, 2010, p. 1).

The Center for Social Justice provides a space for students to gain an understanding of the meaning and practice of social justice. The Center intends that “students will research and analyze their personal and cultural history in order to strengthen their identity” and “gain the skills to view the world through a critical lens and take action” (Ochoa, 2010, p. 1). During their freshman year students begin to understand and question how their lived experiences connect to those in their classroom, school, community, and nation. The goal is to take the study and practice of social justice beyond the classroom so that they are able to develop projects that will “improve conditions for themselves, their families, their community, and the world in which they live in” (Ochoa, 2010, p. 1).

The Center for Social Justice is guided by nine essential concepts and ideas that teacher Eduardo Ochoa (2008) calls “Nine Essentials.” The nine concepts which guide the center and teaching pedagogy are:
1. Critical Pedagogy: The Ability to uncover truth through constant examination of one’s surroundings and experiences. The act of delving deep into issues of injustice, inequity, and oppression in order to create change through action (Praxis: theory and practice).

2. Cultural Collectivism: A strong grasp or understanding of one’s culture and an appreciation for the culture of the community. Learners should view society as a world filled with diverse experiences that everyone should embrace. These experiences should be shared and learned in order to enrich our knowledge and grow as a community.

3. Linguistic Collectivism: A learner who has mastered their native language and attempts to learn other languages in order to understand, value, and improve as a learner and a community.

4. Social Consciousness: Caring for the community (Environment, elderly, youth mentoring, sick, poverty stricken, under-privileged, special needs individuals, disabled, violence, gender, sexual orientation, diverse backgrounds, and...).

5. Family and Community Involvement: delegate leadership to families and the community. Involve families and the community in learning experiences in order for empowerment and activism.

6. History: A clear understanding of past injustices and social change that was created through activism and sacrifice. Learners should understand the impact revolutionary learners have had on their lives. Learners should define their role in history and what they can do to impact the lives of future generations.

7. Voice: Learners should advocate for themselves and others when action is necessary. Learners should pinpoint issues and problems that plague the community and work to find solutions. Silence or non-action is a form of self-oppression.

8. Higher Education: Learners should continue their studies in order to educate themselves and share their knowledge with their community. Higher education also creates access to privileged situations and changes the dynamic within that setting and can lead societal change.

9. Empowerment: Learners will empower themselves and the community through their education, experiences, and activism creating Social Justice. (pp. 31-32)

The “Nine Essentials” serve as a foundation for the curricular goals and make it possible for teachers to introduce and facilitate activities that will improve dialogue and reflection about social justice. Moreover, the Center’s courses are designed to promote the development of pride in their identities and enable students to make a connection between their experience and history. Like Freire (2007) the Center for Social Justice believes that true education and true liberation can only be attained if the following six key elements are attained:
1. Love “Dialogue cannot exist without profound love for the world and for the people.”

2. Faith “Faith in humankind, faith in the power to make and remake, to create and recreate, faith in their vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite but the birthright of all).”

3. Humility “How can I dialogue if I am closed to—even offended by the contributions of others?”

4. Critical Thinking “For the naïve thinker, the important thing is the accommodation of today. For the critic, the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality.”

5. Action “When a world is deprived of its dimension of action, the word is changed to idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienated and alienating blah.”

6. Reflection “If action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into activism-action for action’s sake negating true praxis and makes dialogue impossible.” (pp. 176-177)

The center understands that the implementation and action of this theoretical framework is difficult to perform because of current educational structure and academic standards. However, it constantly pursues to implement the theory and practice of a social justice perspective.

As mentioned previously the Introduction to Social Justice Course complies with California academic standards by covering California Historical and Social Science Analysis Skills and English/Language Arts Standards: Listening, Speaking, and Writing Strategies. The curriculum the course covers during the first year is broken into eight units. The units are listed as follows in the syllabus: Unit One--Building Community; Unit Two--The Definite Dozen; Unit Three--Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs; Unit Four--Elements of Our Identity; Unit Five--Ideas about and attacks against our Identity; Unit Six--Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Unit Seven--Social Movements and Historical Figures; Unit Eight--Creating Change and Contemporary Issues. The units cover extensive material, beginning with the definition and practice of building community and ending with discussion on how to create change within contemporary issues. Their activities and journals reflect on topics associated with the elements of identity, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Freire (2007) and “The Definite Dozen” by Jeff Duncan Andrade (2010). The integration of such content and theorists is intended to expose students to concepts and ideas that will help them articulate their lived experience and their process in education. Moreover, the teachers involved with the center believe in creating a classroom that facilitates discussion and the
flow of ideas, and fosters respect by teaching from a critical pedagogy perspective. This means that teachers move away from the banking system style of teaching, and instead create a space for students to create their own learning.

**PROCESS OF ANALYSIS: ASSIMILATION, ISOLATION, AND PLURALISM**

The use of the CSJ at Lincoln High School is a powerful tool in the quest to develop a strong foundation for the development of a more egalitarian system of schooling. In earlier chapters I reviewed the organization and purpose of schooling and suggested that there needs to be changes that reflect the diversity of students and their capacity to learn.

The process of analysis will introduce the five conceptual constructs mentioned in Chapter 2 and analyze in depth how and why the CSJ and their approach on teaching and learning is more empowering for students than traditional forms of schooling and why it appeals to me as a model for transformative education. I will begin with the concept of assimilation, isolation, and pluralism and progress down the list.

**Assimilation—A Social and Personal Process**

The schooling system has served as a catalyst in the process of assimilation. In Chapter 1, I explain how organized schooling was structured to assimilate new members of society, thus strengthening the U.S. political and economic system.

Attending class is one of the major ways of socialization in the U.S. the class structure and teaching methods invite students to come in, sit quietly at a desk, and listen to the repeated course of information. The repetition of information is a constant message that speaks directly about a monolithic, Eurocentric, and patriarchal society. At all levels students are encouraged to appreciate the latter with the idea that if we all think and look alike than we can progress politically and economically. Thus, “schooling assumes assimilation into society via academic achievement is an exclusive right and necessity for all citizens” (Hansen, 2008, p. 9). The institution of education develops legislative laws, teaching methods, curriculum, and educational programs that will assist new members of society to adapt and engage in the “American Dream” and prevent political, social, or economic upheaval (Neubeck et al., 2007). For the past few years the nation’s educational system has been guided by school reforms that devalue diversity as it applies to curriculum,
enrichment programs, and teaching methods focused on critical pedagogy which are all student centered.

One example is the changes occurring in Arizona, where programs like Ethnic Studies and bilingual immersion schools are being broken-down and eliminated. In Chapter 1, I mentioned that those who are advocating for the elimination of these types of programs fear that ethnic solidarity will potentially overthrow the U.S. government and economic power (Okihiro, 2010, p. 1). Another example is the course material and books assigned for K-12 education. The History, English, and Social Studies courses are an example of the assimilation project. The information printed on the books does not reflect the stories and historical challenges that were pivotal in the development of the U.S. Many times books will include a section on Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez, but none of it really allows for students to engage critically in how their actions impacted political, social, and economic dynamics.

The idea that programs like Ethnic Studies will encourage students to be critical about history and their identity is an idea that many conservative educators try to change or re-define. Assimilation then becomes a key element in schooling allowing control of over people’s identity and political power.

**Isolation--The Act of Being Silenced**

Valenzuela (1999) writes about the educational journey of students in the public education in Texas. She explains that the function of schooling has a created a space where underrepresented students are not allowed to grow. This limited opportunity, to learn and grow has guided students through a crossroads where they are unable to ask for help and encouraged to take the easy way out. The schools currently do not provide the space, teachers, or structure that will support student learning from a social justice perspective. When students get promoted to move on to the next grade level they are rarely prepared intellectually to analyze different topics.

This situation creates a distance from society, family, politics, and economic mobility. One can see this play out in the classroom. Students do not like to speak in the class. Most people classify it as being shy but reality is that it is a combination of being reserved and being conditioned to speak only when asked to speak. At home the student-
parent relationship is also limited, mostly because there is no connection between school and parents. Conversations about academics are almost non-existent not because of parental choice but due to a lack of information and support in many school districts. Parents just want their children to accomplish more than what they have accomplished. In addition, schools are not culturally and linguistically supportive therefore communication with parents is limited. Politically students rarely have a voice, and when they do it is held locally or within their school. The class does not provide an outlet for full participation regarding their educational future. In the economy, high school graduates are disconnected from social and political networks that could provide them opportunities for better education/job opportunities. The issue here is that the interactions between schools and students, characteristics of personal development, and relationships outside of school are built on an educational system that does not encourage dialogue and collaboration.

**Pluralism--The Attempt for Critical Action**

In the previous sections I explained how assimilation and isolation is represented within schooling and how underrepresented students continue to be relegated to the margins. It is difficult to create a solution of which would promote all the opposite of what it has created. However, the effort to develop diverse ways of teaching and learning are in discussion and action in places like the Center for Social Justice.

The center fosters a space where cultural and political pluralism is embraced. Their guiding principles allows for the discussion of various ideas and concepts. If one looks back to the Nine Essentials one can see that two concepts deal directly with the idea of embracing a multitude of ideas and combating the process of assimilation. Both Cultural Collectivism and Linguistic Collectivism emphasize that schooling should provide an understanding of one’s culture and language in order to improve as a student and community member. In order to put theory into practice the social justice course dedicates the first three weeks to building community and students have an opportunity to find who they are and from their build on their identity. For example, they conduct an activity called “two truths and one lie.” In this activity students write three statements and present them to the group; the group decides which of those three are lies and truth. In this case students are not only learning
from themselves but they are making connections with others in their class including the teacher.

The Center also has an introduction period in which students are invited to write their own corrido (narrative song). In this corrido students are encouraged to express what experiences make them who they are. Students begin to deeply make connections between who they are, their experiences, and where they want to go. The class functions under a pluralistic lens that allows for this to happen in contrast classes taught from an assimilation perspective. Each unit in the social justice course continues to build on the self and help students articulate their lived experiences in different contexts.

As a response to student isolation the center focuses on contributing to the lives of students and their community by fostering social consciousness through family and community involvement. Some activities include writing and reading about the elements of identity. In this process which the Center’s instructor invite parents and students to forums discussing culture, education, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and socio-economic status. During the first semester students discuss “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs” which focuses on the importance of self-actualization. I observe that this is done in order to build an understanding on why social consciousness is important and why and how having discussions issues of injustice, inequity, and oppression become pivotal in the development of the self. Most importantly through the discussions and activities once students engage in class they can begin to understand why “silence or non-action is a form of oppression” (Ochoa, 2008, p. 32). The power of having a program introducing these concepts to high school students is powerful and instrumental in giving them the space to voice who they are, what they think about the world, and introduce ideas to engage in critical pedagogy beyond the classroom.

**TECHNICAL LEARNER AND THE IDEA OF COMPETITION**

In schooling there is a continuous belief that if students are to be competitive in the job market they must focus on either a Math, Science, or Technology career. This section will discuss how the concept of conditioning students to learn from a technical perspective makes it difficult to develop their critical thinking skills. Moreover, the discussion provides examples of how schooling can allow both methods of learning to coexist.
Technical Learner-Technical Minds and Competition-
-Individual Progress

Learning is a process in which knowledge is shared, practiced, and discussed. However, rarely does learning involve the sharing of ideas inclusive of everyone in the classroom. Freire (2007) explains that the classroom operates from a “banking method” perspective. When teaching and learning from this perspective occur, there is less learning because teachers focus on depositing information and are less focused on how the students interpret the information. One example is the multitude of exams one must take in order to show competence in three main subjects which are math, English, and writing. Most testing comes from educational reforms that claim that teaching to the test will help fix the achievement gap amongst underrepresented students. The “banking method” is one of the most encouraged methods of teaching because it is said to help students pass the test.

At the national, state, and local level education represents the movement for the development of the technical learner. Most of the time schools explain that their contributions will help society grow. Reality is “technical programs in schools are rooted in economic rather than social soil. Adolescents and young adults are “trained” with workplace skill, enculturation, and human capital in mind,” Hansen (2008) explains how this pedagogy is described as “learning or choosing to labour” (p. 5). The schools, administration, and teachers condition students to keep capital in mind by having students adhere to rules and promote the benefits of good behavior. In class you must get the right answer, there are no alternates. If there is an alternative students must have details and explain. However, how often is that opportunity given? When one looks closely at the schools where first-generation college and low-income students attend one can see that most are filtered into choosing to labor versus choosing to be a critical learner. The schools’ message, in general, advocates having an education that will provide the “skills for the new economy” not one that critically questions and proposes new alternative ways of teaching and learning (Hansen, 2008, p. 8). The relationships in schooling reflect bureaucratic values, the structure and dynamics of schooling mirrored the work industry. Here competition is valued. Every activity, every lecture, and every relationship signifies competition. Who knows the answer? Who can listen and regurgitate what the instructor said? If you do not have the skill then you don’t get the job. Those who have control of the structure of education create a division between the
mind, body, and spirit. The process of schooling consumes the student into thinking they should not make a connection between the mind, body, and spirit.

**Critical Thinker--How it should Be**

The first of the “Nine Essentials” is critical pedagogy which is defined as “the ability to uncover truth through constant examination of one’s surroundings and experiences. The act of delving deep into issues if injustice, inequity, and oppression in order to create change through action (Praxis: Theory and practice)” (Ochoa, 2008, p. 31). The Center for Social Justice uses this as their key guiding principle because it encompasses the re-definition of learning. Learning is as a one way street; it is perceived as a two way in the sense that teacher-student relationships are connected because both teach and learn.

The technical learner is transformed into an intellectual through firm discussion and critical questioning. The role of teacher-student in interchangeable and it invites the classroom to challenge the norm by engaging in writing assignments like journaling to address the challenge and create multiple responses. It becomes as simple as re-structuring the set up in the classroom, making the room inviting and safe for students to share their most internal thoughts. The collaboration between teacher-student rejects the “banking method,” the social justice course expects a reflection of the information introduced versus the synopsis.

The concepts introduced during the year clearly reflect its connection to history. In each unit the center aims at providing how history impacts the future. It is important to historicize every subject so that the value does not only reflect competition and individual gain. For example, Mathematics can best be understood if students knew the influence of indigenous concepts and ideas. It also provides a sense of pride for those students who never learn much about how their ancestors contributed to knowledge or how they changed it.

**DISCRIMINATION AND INDIVIDUALISM**

Forms of discrimination have changed, before they were overt and would physically, emotionally, and socially divide groups of people. However, the new forms of discrimination are covert and are masked under written legislation that promotes inequality and individualism. The concept in this section will discuss how different forms of
discrimination are reflected in public education and how the curriculum used in CSJ can help form discussion and action around the issue of discrimination.

“Isms” Race, Class, and Gender

The reproduction of race, class, and gender inequalities continue to be present in education. However, the attitudes, ideas, and actions of discrimination have changed from being overt to covert. Before schools were segregated and marked divisions were visible in the neighborhood determining who was allowed to attend a school. Negative assumptions usually surfaced regarding your culture, gender, or sexuality. Legislation designed to eliminate forms of discrimination became important in the future of education. However, the system in place has not prescribed both equity and excellence instead it has produced “something that resembles equity but never reaches it” (Kozol, 1991, p. 175).

In Chapter 1, I spoke about the tracking and detracking system in public education. Both programs were designed to integrate all students; the purpose was to eliminate the possibility of creating divisions among students. These types of reforms were set to level the playing field and respond to the academic achievement gap in the Latino and African American student population. The tracking system offered more academic levels with the idea that it would cater to more students. The detracking system did the opposite. Eventually, educators realized that divisions were still being created among student learners and that tracking was widening the academic gap. The action became to eliminate all the different levels of comprehension of a particular subject and offer one class. In this class the teacher was in charge of preparing learning material that would meet the learning needs of all students in her class. Structurally this is impossible and culturally there is no support. The teachers are still creating divides and marginalizing those who are behind in class. As I mentioned previously, most of the students who are marginalized come from underrepresented communities. Students in these circumstances do not have the cultural and academic capital to obtain support in their studies. Without support students get misplaced in remedial courses and/or “pushed-out” of the educational system. The end result is poor access to higher education and good paying jobs.

So how can we combat the divisions? How do we eliminate the possibility for race, class, and gender discrimination within public education? My observation suggest that
difficult process and it will take many minds to develop different ideas that will integrate the perspective of all type of students. Although the process is long and challenging the Center for Social Justice proposes teaching strategies and concepts that will assist us through the process. Their main principle, critical pedagogy offers tools that can guide the philosophical and/or ideological direction of the re-framing of schooling.

We cannot deny the fact that there will be various methods for understanding a particular subject. That is why some educators believe that tracking works. However, there are other ways of teaching that do not result in academic isolation or grouping. The Center for example, designs their course material in a way in which the students will always be in discussion. Discussion allows for students from different levels to learn from each other without focusing on competition or ratings of who knows best. In addition, teachers provide an introduction and interpretation of how discrimination works in and out of school. Once students become critical of topics like discrimination, their flow of ideas and reflection can be better articulated.

**Individualism**

As a result of the reproduction of the “isms” within institutions of education and other actions the student becomes conditioned to think that their success is all up to them. The only people that can and should be held accountable are themselves. Social, economical, and political institutions advocate the idea of meritocracy. Images, attitudes, concepts, and ideas about schooling revolve around meritocracy. If you fail at something it must have been that you were weak and ill-prepared. You didn’t prepare yourself enough and you should have tried a harder. All these phrases are associated with the concept of “pulling yourself by your own boot straps.”

In the classroom students are constantly reminded that if you do well in school then there are rewards. Most of the time the meaning of rewards is the progress one could make economically. All activities are instructed to be worked on alone as opposed to working with someone. You are not allowed to help others because you might be suspected of cheating. From K-12 schooling is nothing more than an individual project, based on merit. Students are conditioned to care only for their progress and personal development. They do not
understand the function or concept of why working as a collective would benefit the personal development.

The Center at Lincoln High School does well in challenging students to work collectively and re-define the idea of personal development. I want to continue to highlight that most if not all course assignments are student centered. Each topic, discussion, and reflection comes from a sincere attempt to deconstruct the concept of individualism. Each unit addressed in the curriculum provide a space for forming an understanding of what student rights are and how building community can empower and reinforce who they are and promote their development in ways beyond academics. In addition, the activities are being facilitated so that at the same time that students become critical members of society they also learn history, english, and writing strategies.

The fact that the teachers and staff are guided by the idea and praxis of critical pedagogy is powerful. The dynamics between teacher-student change completely, to a more democratic and egalitarian dynamic. However, one must consider that this is the beginning of the stairwell. The “Nine Essentials” is a key for the advocating of collective work and dialogue.

**Democratic Values and Education**

Theoretically, schooling does explain the meaning and practice of democracy as it relates to government decisions. However, in practice students rarely have an opportunity to engage in freedom of speech and thought. The ideas deconstructed in this section give extended examples which reflect how schooling limits student engagement with activities that allow them to probe questions and solutions. Provided in the discussion are different ideas on how schooling can integrate and practice democracy.

**Liberty**

The idea of liberty is usually expressed in two ways thought and speech. Often students are told the importance of the freedom of thought and speech. Most teachers and administrators celebrate independence. When they are reviewing the history of independence they permit students to write about their own independence. The opportunity fills the hearts of students with pride and joy. Elementary schools, for example, create a school government
to mimic the current structure in the U.S. Usually one week is designated for students to learn how to campaign. They also provided the opportunity to give a speech about their critiques as it relates to their school and how they promise to change the current form. Those students who decide not to nominate themselves to a position learn about the process of voting and how much their vote “counts.” Such a process of schooling conditions students to believe that their thoughts and voice will be equally heard and validated across the nation when they reach the age of 18. As discussed in Chapter 1, the idea of meritocracy and democracy mask reality. Before and after students graduate from K-12 for most students the opportunity to express their thoughts and voice is measured and limited. In addition, it is important to understand that much of this is due to the intense focus education had on testing and tracking practices. Students who attend schools that are populated by underrepresented students and unprepared teachers are usually teaching to the test and standards. Those who attend affluent schools have the opportunity to go beyond test taking and focus on participatory activities that will elevate their understanding of democracy and liberty. So liberation becomes highly accessible to some and extremely limited for others. The divide is clear and those affected continue to be first-generation, low-income, culturally, and linguistically diverse.

The Center for Social Justice stresses the importance of fostering a classroom and community space that expands the opportunity for students to act and reflect on their thoughts and voice. Part of their Nine Essentials consists of using history, the power of voice and social consciousness in order to empower their role as members of their community. The course historicizes the importance of freedom of thought and speech. For example, they create activities that will build an understanding about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In this discussion students learn about ways in which human rights have been violated and how they translate into everyday life. The idea is that students who are part of the social justice course begin to reflect on the social movements that were a response to the violation of the expression of thought. They invite students to feel comfortable to state their standpoint on any topic. Theoretically it is clear the course sets a strong base for students to express their agreement, disagreement, or confusion about any particular situation. The structure of the class and program challenge the notion of limited freedom of thought and
speech, in that the Center proposes that these ideas and concepts should not be limited to
student government but instead exercised at every level beyond the classroom.

**Participation in Decision Making**

In the previous section I spoke about the mimicking of the presidential elections at the
elementary level. In this process if a student is running for candidacy they develop their
thoughts and then have the opportunity to share these thoughts with their audience. The
audience then practices their role as decision makers through voting. The teachers and
school administration explain the importance of voting and the importance of individual
choice. Students vote and their decision may or may not be considered. How do students
know? Normally they don’t. They learn that the voting process is anonymous and for the
most part the toll is tallied and those who with higher votes wins. Other ways students
practice decision making is when the teacher wants to know how many students want to do
one activity over the other. Other than that, it is rare to see the educational system dedicate
time and space for students to engage in true decision making. Most of the time students are
studying for one of many tests they take throughout the year. Students have to limitedly
engage in true decision making at their own time either during their civics class (if available),
their own time or through a club or organization at their school.

A student in the social justice program is exposed to decision making daily, because
their topics of discussion address it and because the program offers ways for students to
practice what they learn beyond one class period or a week of elections. The Center’s
teachers encourage students to attend or become involved with organizations such as
Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (M.E.Ch.A.) or Escuelita Aztlan. Both offer a
support system for students, their family, and community. M.E.Ch.A. is focused directly on
the educational rights of all students, while Escuelita Aztlan is an open invitation for students
to attend an Ethnic Studies class after school.

In addition, I feel that instruction the first six weeks of school enables students reflect
on who they are, how they have changed, and how that frames what they believe at the
cultural, political, and economic level. The introductory course explains how important it is
to understand the Definite Dozen which list responsibility, respect, honesty, loyalty, work-
ethic, study habits, character building, belief, self-improvement/self-reflection, dialogue,
problem solving, and resiliency as a key aspects of decision making at the social and personal level.

**Debates and Critical Thought**

The act of making decisions is attached to how well one can “break-down” a topic. By “break-down” I mean being critically examining a situation or topic. In English/Writing Strategies class there is a constant focus on reading about a topic, choosing a side, and developing the thesis on the chosen side. Many times teachers grade students on structure, grammar, writing applications, and clarity. In addition to those four aspects, the standards aim for students’ to attain their highest level of comprehension and judgment about a particular subject. Although, these are important aspects of writing, a lack of focus on critical analysis of a particular topic often appears to be missing. Often teachers will track students into different levels of English writing and comprehension. These levels range from low to high level if a student is labeled as low-performing then the school schedules them into an English and English support class. If you perform high then the students takes English at their highest level or are referred to AP English (if available). I explained in earlier chapters that the ratio of underrepresented students taking higher level subjects is low when compared to their White counterparts. The consequence is then that many students are robbed of the opportunity of not only attaining the development of written language but also the opportunity to engage in critical thought and analysis.

The Center for Social Justice understands that engaging in critical thought in form of discussion and debates is an important process if wants to create change. Thus, every assignment focuses on un-threading every aspect and characteristic of a topic. The teachers in the program are aware of the different levels of comprehension and writing necessary to compensate for this challenge. They rely on the ideological and philosophical underpinnings of critical pedagogy to guide them in every assignment. Every teaching strategy counts. The art of teaching is that one must teach from a multilingual and multicultural perspective in-order to meet students in the middle of their learning experience. In addition, the Center uses a combination of assignments that impact the learning of students, for example, journaling, presentations, community work and surveys, and reading.
SELF ESTEEM AND RESPETO (RESPECT)

I have discussed the ways in which the educational system continues to divide the students and their families. Teaching and other educational tools used to ameliorate the achievement gap amongst underrepresented students have negatively impacted the way in which students identify and represent themselves. Many times systems like tracking portray a Eurocentric and monolingual society that consequently robs students of the opportunity of understanding the importance of understanding and embracing diversity.

Self-esteem is gained through more than just deposits of information into the brain. The empowerment of the self has to make a strong relationship between the body, mind, and spirit (hooks, 1994). Schooling practices limit this relationship to build and transform. Countless classroom assignments focus on a monolithic language and do not cater to the various levels of learning. The curriculum and teaching practices teach from a “one size fits all” perspective. In theory educators and the school community are told by the bureaucratic system of schooling that there is flexibility in teaching as long as it meets the general standards. However, the flexibility is easily controlled by a limited daily schedule and organized testing (e.g., California State Testing). The schedule does not provide space or time for teachers to be critical of the students learning. Most students become passive regarding their learning. Their power is taken away. Subjects that were of interest to them become a challenge. The challenge is partially from the constant marginalization they experience in the classroom. Most underrepresented students who are tracked into remedial courses are re-grouped once they are in their class. In Chapter 1, I mentioned how teachers set certain expectations based on students’ academic performance. The consequence is that students begin to internalize these labels and the challenge becomes difficult to overcome affecting them beyond the class. As a result the needs of the students get lost. Students move further away from finding a supportive system that will encourage them to learn and grow.

There are no one answer solutions to the issue of low-self-esteem among underrepresented students. However, many scholars and programs engaged with critical pedagogy explain that creating and maintaining a space for students to understand and embrace their multiple-identities will help empower students. The Center for Social Justice integrates this perspective by first having students look within themselves and making
connections to how the body, mind, and spirit are intertwined. Two important aspects that are highlighted are both respect and love. They want to students to engage in dialogue and contribute to critical thought by expressing the importance of respect for themselves and others. From this respect grows the strong consideration for love. Like Freire (2007) the Center believes that “dialogue cannot exist without profound love for the world and for the people” (p. 176). With this in mind the curriculum and teaching practices must reflect this message, thus, empowering students and their community. The Center for Social Justice is a model built on a solid ground of love and respect that aims at combating the hunger for power and money, individualism, forced assimilation, race/class/gender inequalities, myth of meritocracy, and issues of low-self esteem.
Looking back on my life, I observe that I faced many conditions that placed me at risk of failing academically. These conditions relate to the nature of schooling and personal circumstances. However, I have academically succeeded. I represent the student population known as the academically invulnerable (Arellano & Padilla, 1996). Arellano and Padilla (1996) suggest that “students who ‘sustain high levels of achievement, despite conditions and events that place them at risk for academic failure are academically invulnerable’” (p. 487). Why was I able to succeed? I will through my testimonio and analysis attempt to answer the question.

I was born in Zacapu, Michoacan, Mexico and immigrated with my family to Stockton, CA when I was nine months. Although I crossed the border of Tijuana without having to run from la migra, my mother still had fears because I was crossing with the legal documents of another baby. I obviously don’t remember this, but often, I ponder how my mom must have felt. When I was five my parents decided to go back to Mexico. I was still considered indocumentada (undocumented). We stayed in Michoacan for about one year and then decided to return to the U.S. because money continued to flow in larger amounts en el otro lado (the other side: United States). My dad had tried to work in Michoacan but the economy and the government’s corruption made real advancement impossible. My dad, mom, and sister (who was born in the United States) obtained papeles (papers) through the Amnesty program created under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. However, my petition to get residency was still being processed when we left to Mexico. So when my family returned to California I had to cross the Nogales border illegally while my parents waited on the other side. It took a whole week before I could cross as I was placed with 15 other people who were trying to cross the border. I remember my parents dropped me off with a “coyote” (immigrant guide) who gave peanuts and orange juice to those who
were with him. Then he took us to an isolated place. Then I was left with the group in front of a white house located in desert like environment. Initially, I was afraid at first because a little girl next to me was crying for her mom, which made me think if I was ever going to see my mom again. However, a young woman quickly talked away my fears and let me play with Barbie dolls and fed me beans.

Besides the bus ride and the small meal the rest is a blur. I try to remember all the sequence of events, but I cannot. All I remember are disjoined flashes of running in a ditch, a lady and three men throwing me over a fence, and running across a highway during night time. Other than that I do not remember much. According to my mom, it took me a week to cross because I was initially apprehended by the Border Patrol.

Nevertheless going to school in Stockton was not bad. I thought it was the easiest thing to do. My parents did not obtain a college degree; my mother finished the 3rd grade; my father finished 11th grade in Mexico. Despite not meeting the “standard” education requirements, my parents always pushed for us to do our best in school. Most of the time they were working but they still expected us to go to school, listen to our teachers, follow the rules, and get good grades so that we could have financial success.

During Kindergarten, my teacher was my aunt, Mrs. Rosas. She taught me the ABC’s, helped me learn some English, since all I spoke was Spanish, and the Peanut Butter and Jelly song. It was fun. My memories of Kindergarten and First grade were always positive. Almost everybody I knew was Mexican. However, I remember my mom always telling me to spend time with my neighbor who was the same age as me. She was a white girl who did not attend my school but liked playing with me. My mother approved of my playing time with her because it would improve my English. Although I spent time with my neighbor, my English didn’t improve and I was still placed in English Language Development classes (ELD) during 2nd through 5th grade. When we did get together for literacy the teachers would just show us pictures and asked us to create our own plot and if we read something it was easy reading. In 5th grade, my best friend Mari and I complained to our ELD teacher about being forced to read 3rd grade level books and not chapter books like other 5th graders, who were reading *Old Yeller*. We were upset but we did not know how to address the teacher or contest it, so gradually we began to internalize our anger and frustrations and learned to be passive. However, students were not the only ones being
passive, teachers also did nothing much beyond following the structured lesson-plan and dictating rules and procedures. They did not make connections between academics and students’ lived experience, thus minimizing students’ abilities and intelligence!

In middle school I became passionate about writing despite my horrible grammar; I loved writing in my diary and journal. Before I graduated from middle school, my English teacher, Mr. Andrews, asked if I was interested in the program called International Baccalaureate (IB). I felt proud and smart that he had selected me from the class to enroll in what sounded like a prestigious program. But that reality changed as soon as I entered the program. This gifted program isolated me and marginalized me along with two African American and three other Mexican students. We did not score as high as our White and Asian counterparts, rarely was given help, and when we did ask for help we were given poor feedback. The white students and the four other Vietnamese students were encouraged to apply to colleges and for scholarships (clubs, organizations, community service and so on). The rest of us, on the other hand, were told to raise our hands, follow rules, do our work, don’t ask too many questions, and play sports. The director of the IB program informed me I could only be a part-time IB student, meaning I could not enroll in Math, Science, and Sociology classes. I was crushed because we lacked AP on our campus; the only way to get college credit was if we took IB. I was enrolled in IB English and always gave it my best and passed the class: not for having mastered the subject but because I followed order without protest. In my senior year, my Spanish teacher, Mr. Viramontes and a representative at the Migrant Education suggested that I should apply for college since I was a very bright student.

Conversely, at the same time, my counselor and my English teacher suggested that maybe I should consider community college because I would be able to get job training at a faster rate than if I attended a university. Obviously, my counselor and English teacher believed I did not have the talents to go to a four-year university. I remember one of our class assignments for IB English was to write a personal statement for University of California (U.C.) application. I had no idea what a U.C. was but I found out and wrote an essay. When the teacher returned my personal statement her feedback was simply that I was not a good writer. She discouraged me from submitting an application for U.C. Davis. I submitted my application anyway but was denied entrance not because of my writing, but
because I did not meet the A-G requirements. Subsequently, I ended up enrolled at Sacramento State.

Although I did not know this then, my personal experience is a classic reflection of the research findings regarding the racial achievement gap. As noted above, according to the findings students “from ethnically diverse or low socioeconomic backgrounds are often tracked into regular or remedial classrooms…consequently, these youths, mostly black and Latina/o, cannot move through the educational pipeline as compared to their White or Asian counterparts” (Munoz, 2010, p. 3). Furthermore, a lot of students like me do not have access and availability of Advance Placement (AP) courses. The lack of opportunity limits the possibility of successfully competing for admission into higher education.

Regrettably the situation has not improved. For example the San Diego School District reported in 2008-2009, 20,910 students enrolled in high school Grade 10-12 of this number only 5,852 students were enrolled in AP (Munoz, 2010). But this ratio becomes even starker when comparing Whites and Latinos. Both groups are the largest in the district. In the academic year for 2008-2009 in the San Diego School District of 40% total enrollment of Latino students only 8% were enrolled in AP courses (Munoz, 2010). Whites total enrollment is 26% and 10% were enrolled in AP courses (Munoz, 2010). When comparing both groups one can see that Whites have a higher percentage of AP enrollments.

**PROCESS OF ANALYSIS: ASSIMILATION, ISOLATION, AND PLURALISM**

My testimony explains the process and progress of my educational journey. In this section my testimony becomes the center of analysis and contributes to the knowledge about my academic invulnerability.

The focus in this first section is to describe and discuss how the process of assimilation and isolation is reflected in public education. It recognizes how curriculum, teacher-student relationship, administration, and academic counselors foster an environment focused on a monolingual culture, language, and society. Moreover, the idea behind these processes creates a distance from personal, familial, and social relationships resulting in isolation. Through my testimony I explain how these aspects transcend in my educational experience and how I negotiated these challenging situations.
Assimilation--A Social and Personal Process

There are many ways in which I was introduced to the assimilation process. Most notably in my experience was the moment in which my parents decided to migrate to the United States. From the moment we crossed the Nogales border our lives declared a political statement. This statement became a wish list. The wish list was a representation of the things we wanted to change in our lives and the future we want to create in the United States. In order for this to occur my parents understood there were inevitable sacrifices to be made and negotiate in our adopted homeland.

First, my parents had to detach themselves from everything they knew. Family, close friends, language, culture, and customs had to be left behind physically and through time emotionally. The painful and long process forced my family to re-define themselves completely, to establish themselves as individuals, parents, and members of their community. They had to lose something from themselves to gain the “American Dream.”

For me this painful process meant that I had to decide between the bits and pieces my parents shared about being Mexican and migrant and American culture. My schooling experience had a lot to do with the decision I made. However, I have to mention that it was not an either one or other situation. My decision is a mixture of both I am both it is just difficult to maintain a balance. The type of curriculum, programs, and teacher-student relationship made it impossible for me to create a balance. The language barrier was an important battle during the initial stage of my education. I was encouraged to spend time with my neighbor who was White and all of my books and assignments were 90% in English so I was forced to learn English as my primary language. Culturally, emotionally, socially, and academically the system promoted that being monolingual allowed you to progress. I was told that being monolingual suited you well because it is the universal language that opened doors of opportunity. In addition to language, I had to leave my identity at home. For example, rarely did my teachers ask me where I was born, or my journey in life. There was never a connection between what it meant to be Mexican in California and in the United States and academics. It would have been helpful to learn English grammar while writing about my life or topics that would represent the classrooms diversity. Although my struggle has decreased, the struggle to embrace both of the many identities I hold continues.
Isolation--The Act of Being Silenced

Going through the assimilation process at the beginning of my educational journey did not allow me to develop my skills and produce new knowledge for a long time. I was placed in ELD and assigned books to read that taught me to be content with previous learning. As a passive student, elementary and secondary school became a dull routine for me. Although I wanted to learn and in the future have a career I did not understand how I could accomplish those goals.

I was one of those students that were misplaced in an unfair track system. In high school the track was a disrupted for a small period when Mr. Andrews helped me turn in my application for the IB program. However, although I was accepted the tracking continued but this time at the micro level. Both tracking in the macro and micro level disabled me at many points of my education. First, I did not know how to establish a relationship with my teachers. I was afraid to ask for help and it was difficult to ask them to repeat helpful information for class. Second, during the rare times that my teachers asked for student participation, I dreaded the moment I was asked to answer a question or make a presentation. I remember during my tenth grade English class our final was to do a 20 minute presentation about the book *Grapes of Wrath* but since I had no experience before with presentations I was nervous and highly unorganized. It was a challenge. Comfort with speaking to teachers or staff (e.g., counselor) did not come until freshman year of college. Before that I preferred to work alone. As long I turned in my work and received credit nothing else mattered. For my parents and I as long as I sat quiet, behaved well, and turned in my work (whether correct or not) was all that mattered.

I did not need to know anything else except what the standards said I had to learn in order to be promoted to the next grade. For many students that is the received message. Most of the time it’s a hidden message, it is hidden behind the myth of meritocracy and the image of the “American Dream.”

Pluralism--The Attempt for Inclusion

My whole educational experience was not always negative. In fact, I want to explain that in the midst of this painful assimilation process there was always a combination of
concept, person, and/or program that allowed me make some important decisions in my life that otherwise wouldn’t of happened.

In elementary although, I was placed in ELD and relegated to taking remedial subjects I got involved with sports and our culture club at our school. Mr. Villapondo was my track coach; he entered us in the yearly Kennedy Games that represented the Olympic Games but for children. He always had a positive attitude. He also spoke about the importance of making connection between the body and the mind. A Native American, Mr. Villapando, always expressed his pride in being both Indigenous and American. He explained many times who he was and why he liked running. For our culture club he was involved too, however, the most involved teachers were the fourth, fifth, and sixth teachers. They had us do performances for Cinco de Mayo, we learned how to dance Ballet Folklorico and our parents were involved too. For one of the events our mothers sewed our dresses and made our flower pieces. It was the only time that I remember my parents being involved.

Being exposed to the way Mr. Villapondo and cultural club facilitated events prevented me from disconnecting completely from who I am at such a young age. My parents were also included in the development of these activities. They actually became participants of that specific teaching moment. The way the curriculum is structured could have made a clear division but thanks to educators understanding the importance of building relationships with students I was able to maintain at some level my language, culture, and sense of pride.

TECHNICAL LEARNER AND COMPETITION

Most of the time students are conditioned to memorize information and be able to regurgitate it in order to get promoted to the next grade. The idea is that teachers should focus their lectures and activities on test-taking in order to make sure that students acquire the required academic standards.

In this section I explain what kind of behavior and task I was encouraged to have in order to be academically successful. Moreover, I discuss how the behavior encouraged did not help me advance in my homework and develop academic skills that would prepare me for college. The analysis is critical about how despite encountering difficult situations I was able to continue my education.
Technical Learner-Technical Minds and Competition-
-Individual Progress

Since I can remember my father has always told me make sure that you do as you are
told and get good grades so that you can get a better job. In a sense we are conditioned to
believe that being a technical learner holds greater valued than being a critical thinker. This
message is heard beyond classroom walls. In the case of my dad it is not that he is being
conservative, instead his behavior reflects the result of a socialization process that places
high value on learning skills for work rather than skills for both work and critical thought.

Most educators underscore this mentality as well. Being an IB student granted me
access to information about college but it never gave me the guidance and tools to make me
eligible to attend a U.C. or private college. On the school roster it showed I was part of an
elite program but in reality my choices were limited. While some students were asked to
take advanced courses and apply to scholarships, others were encouraged to follow the rules,
minimize our questions, and apply to technical schools for faster job placement. It was
common for me to do the minimum because I knew if I did the minimum I would still get an
A. It was definitely a disservice because when I graduated and enrolled into college I had
one year to attain college level Mathematics and English.

I began college a year behind. I did not know what it meant to be a critical thinker. I
did not understand the concept of analysis or its structure. In high school my teachers
assigned many charts that had fill in the blank sections to help determine the main point and
two facts supporting the point. There was a rarely a space for reflection of the main point,
unless the teacher asked for a persuasive essay. English was mostly about grammar and
syntax of a phrase or word. Math functioned as a bank of information. Freire’s banking
concept applies in all subjects but mainly in Math. It consisted of memorizing formulas and
number lines. When we had word problems we had a small understanding of why “Peter”
had less marbles than “Pancho.” Most of the time the teacher asked the class to translates the
word problem into a formula. But the class never talked about it again. Writing was a
challenge and Math was a blur for me.
Critical Thinker--How it Should Be

In college although most of my general education classes were taught from the banking system, there were still a few classes that did things differently. College was my first invitation to critical thought because before that I was never asked to reflect. I was constantly asked to summarize that when I was asked to reflect I could not perform the task. There were two things that helped me develop my critical thinking and knowledge producing skills. The first factor was the Ethnic Studies course during my first semester of college. I was accepted to a program called Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) which is a program geared at academically and socially supporting first-generation college and low-income students in college. The program provides students with free tutoring, a scholarship, and academic counseling. Once admitted to the program the student enrolls in two required courses: an Ethnic Studies and a study skills class. My experience in the Ethnic Studies course was a great experience. My professor went through the history of colonization from a different perspective that began to highlight the discrepancies between the information given in my high school History class. The writing assignments asked me to create my own question after reading material. In most of my previous educational experience I do not create my own questions as part of the assignment. It was difficult at first to adjust myself to a new way of teaching and learning but eventually I began to understand why it was producing positive results.

In addition to being exposed to different teaching and learning styles, I became involved with M.E.Ch.A. I joined this student organization because it was a familiar name. In high school I was involved with M.E.Ch.A. and also because Mr. Viramontes talked about how the organization had helped students get involved with academics and the community. M.E.Ch.A. exposed me to controversial topics that I know talk and write about now. The organizations history and philosophy challenged me to speak and act from my standpoint and make analysis about myself, the community, and the world. M.E.Ch.A. brought in the discussion component of critical thinking. Without discussion critical thinking does not exist. Although, I was not writing the whole time in M.E.Ch.A. I understood that a critical thinker went beyond just writing to express a reflective analysis about a certain topic and/or situation. Going to conferences, town hall meetings, or cultural events didn’t have to be all about academics in order for me to learn the history of Math or Science. I remember going
to a conference in Oregon and that is where I learned the role of the Mayans in the development of Mathematical formulas. From that point on Math had value to me, because my *antepasados* (ancestors) had a huge part in current information learned. This was definitely not an easy process, the process actually continues. In an ideal democratic school system the initial exposure to critical thinking should be kindergarten and be fostered throughout. If I had learned what to do with all the information deposited in my brain, my intellectual contribution would be greater.

**DISCRIMINATION AND INDIVIDUALISM**

In earlier chapters I discuss how discrimination has changed from being overly overt to covert. It is sometimes difficult to describe and show how discrimination takes effect in different contexts. In this section I provide an analysis that underscores how discrimination and the idea of individualism are reflected in my schooling and provide examples of the function of covert discrimination.

**“Isms” Race, Class, and Gender**

As I reflect on my educational experience I become aware of certain situations that led me to believe that the “isms” still occurs within school. The IB program although a great opportunity became an isolated classroom space. Most if not all the time students who were White or Asian became the image of what a good student represented. They would get the extra feedback on essays and the opportunity to showcase their talents and abilities. During the summer the program would leave homework for the purpose of preparing you for the next school year. Although the whole class had homework assigned, only some would get the letter in the mail reminding them about tutoring during the week. The reason I know this was because one of the girls from IB was in my soccer team. I did not understand why I did not receive any of the summer mail for me it was a post-office mistake. The division was clear, students from a privileged background and who identified themselves as White benefited at a larger rate from the IB program versus those identified as African American and Mexican.

There was also a geographical division that represented the class and racial division. The IB program functions as an integration program because at least half of the students were
bussed in from Northern Stockton, California or Lodi (a city 10 miles outside if Stockton, California). These areas are residential areas that are predominately high income versus South East Stockton which is mostly low-income population. Their parents were highly involved in the IB Booster Club which is similar to a parent program. Most of the time students would drive their own cars and talk about their summer vacations in another state or country. The most notable difference in lifestyle comes when most of the seniors started to decide between which college they would accept for admissions. In my year two seniors went to Ivy League schools and the other six went to a U.C. The remaining joined the military, went to community college, and I was the only one that received an offer at Sacramento State. It would be interesting to measure if anything has changed and if tracking within IB has been eliminated.

In terms of gender, there were always a small number of women involved with academic work and/or participation. If you were not part of IB there were not many choices besides regular course work required to graduate from high school. I remember when I was a senior I had room for electives and one of my choices was home economics. For my friend who was a guy his option was construction course focused on welding. After reflecting on this situation I realized that the choices given are framed in the sense of technical learner instead of intellectual development. Many students including myself took these courses because it would be easier and fun. However, there were no other options so it’s not like there was a choice.

**Individualism**

The choices given were not always conducive to providing students with career opportunities and neither have they focused on collaborative learning for personal development. One of the major concepts that I remember and that is reflected in my testimony is the idea of meritocracy. My parents and I believed it all the way until I went through college. I was always encouraged to try my best and have perfect attendance at school. Both of my parents and school officials always mentioned how working hard can help you reach success. Along with that came the idea that being independent gave power and liberty because you no longer depended on anyone. This is the mentality in the job sector and in school as well. I was instructed to listen to my teachers and sit quietly in order
to take good notes. Learning in this way would teach me how to better service the public. I had to take care of myself first and then if there was time I could think of how I could contribute to the present of other individuals. There was no time to learn from a collaborative setting. The setting was tied to rules and individual work. When I did get into groups it was difficult to work because for so long we were instructed to work alone. The sharing of information was considered to be associated with plagiarism. Therefore, it became easier to work alone then to deal with the issues that arise when working as a group.

There was nothing in my K-12 experience that encouraged or introduced me to collaborative working. In college such learning was rare unless I was taking an Ethnic Studies course or a Sociology course. The issue here is that teaching and learning practices continue to promote the suppose benefits of individualism.

**DEMOCRATIC VALUES**

The teaching and practice of democracy is schooling is an important aspect to analyze because it allows us to search for ways in which students can truly be part of the idea of democracy. In this section of my analysis I describe the moments I began to engage in the meaning and practice of democracy. In addition, I offer a deep articulation on why I believe this opportunity for engagement should happen earlier in their educational journey for students.

**Liberty**

When I was in ELD in elementary school I thought it was interesting the way tutors used to take me and a few other students to take English assessments. They would always show us pictures and we would create our own stories about what we saw. Sometime they would assign us books. The books however, held no meaning after reading it a few times. For example, in third grade we read *The Ugly Duckling* about four times and drew pictures about our view of the moral of the story. In fifth grade I was not allowed to read *Old Yeller* because I was in ELD. I understand that the school system was trying to help me get to the appropriate level of comprehension for my age; however, I did not agree that they had to dumb down the material in order for me to learn. After limiting my opportunity to challenge
myself I was still left with the same low-level English standards ELD did not help me at all become knowledgeable about English.

Gradually, I began to internalize my anger and frustrations and learned to be passive. Schooling didn’t provide a safe place to express my thoughts therefore my voice was silenced. I can’t think of a classroom assignment or classroom space that allowed me to give feedback on my learning. I feel that my needs were measured through testing, which are commonly inaccurate. My test scores showed that I was not learning but it didn’t show why and it didn’t show what I needed in order to learn.

**Participation in Decision Making**

In addition to freedom of speech and thought I had a difficult time making decisions of my own. My teachers and counselors were gatekeepers of my future. I did not have flexible options like the White and Asian students in my IB English class. Instead my options had to do with whether I chose a path that prepared me for a job or one that taught me the traditional roles a woman should undertake. In addition, I was structurally challenged when I realized that I couldn’t take courses that prepared me for college. The decision was made for me long ago when the school system tracked me based on the neighborhood I resided in, the income of my family, and the race/ethnicity marked on my student record.

I had few instances when the choice made was challenged by a supportive program or individual. In my case, my Spanish teacher and the Migrant Education Program shared with me information that would help contradict everything everyone else had conditioned me to believe. They shared their passion for embracing inequality and fostering an accessible education to all. Mr. Viramontes was the adviser for M.E.Ch.A. and he was a college graduate. He would take students to conferences and takes us on college campus tours. He was working on his Masters degree at Sacramento State. That is the reason so many of us knew Sacramento State. About 50% of the students involved with M.E.Ch.A. during the time I was in high school were admitted into Sacramento State. The exposure that I received through his guidance and support allowed me to see myself at a college campus. The Migrant Education Program was also a strong influence in my decision to attend college. I had the opportunity to travel to Washington D.C. during my sophomore year in high school. I was there for a week and there is where I learned about Cesar Chavez and the UFW for the
first time. That is also the trip that introduced me to the concept of voting and the judicial system. Although I didn’t fully understand it, I knew there was an organized process that theoretically encouraged people to be involved with decision making regarding the country’s well being. Both of these support systems shifted the path that systemically was destined for me. The support systems continue to grow but they are still scarce.

**Debates and Critical Thought**

The notion of democracy includes the ability to develop critical thought that inhibit respectful and elaborate critical debates. As I mentioned before critical thought was rare during my K-12 educational experience. Writing a persuasive essay is as closest I have come to articulating my thoughts and ideas. However, I never shared my ideas and I rarely practiced discussing my ideas with anyone else unless my close friend was part of class.

I was able to develop my critical skills when I went to college because I had to do it. My written and oral expression was unclear and difficult to understand. The first year in college I had to take remedial courses to prepare me for college level courses. During that first year I learned so much and I wanted more. At first I experienced shock because I was getting feedback and everything that needed improvement was marked. I also felt incapable of learning because I felt as though I knew nothing. My essays had so many red markings signaling my wrong use of syntax and grammar errors. For the first time I was given feedback and for the first time I had to make corrections for improvement.

As I went through college and took courses in Sociology and Ethnic Studies I began to understand the power of critical thought. I became comfortable with forming groups and having discussions. In college one of my favorite courses was titled La Mujer Chicana and in that class the professor challenged every traditional form of learning. The structure of our seating arrangement was changed to where all students were able to see each other. The professor explained why she did it and why when teaching a class should consider the formation of the classroom to be an important factor in learning. In this class I first learned about critical pedagogy and feminisms. The college experience was definitely exposing me to a lot of things that I had never seen, heard, or learned about. Although still challenging, the educational experience is different because in K-12 I couldn’t articulate the basis of inequality and now I can deconstruct inequality and offer my thoughts.
**SELF ESTEEM AND RESPETO (RESPECT)**

Although a strong woman I still second guess my decisions, my answers to questions, and my ability to learn. Many times I knew I could accomplish my most challenging goal but I would take long before I decided to take on the challenge. I associated these feelings to low self-esteem and lack of respect. In elementary and in high school most of my teachers expected less from me. They did not have to tell me that they had lowered their expectations for me but their attitude and teaching strategy reflected it. I was placed in ELD, I was told I my personal statement for college was not well written, I had no access to college-preparatory classes, and I was unable to engage in critical discussion. These types of experiences opened windows of doubt rather than opportunities. It became quite clear to me that maybe I should think about getting a job rather than applying to college. At the moment I didn't know how articulate this situation therefore I couldn’t act or speak against it. As a result my academic development suffered.

Despite the lack of support in showcasing who I was and my abilities to learn there were instances that helped me take on different challenges. Positive reinforcement was not the only thing that empowered me to challenge myself but actually was a combination of things. For example, Mr. Viramontes, the Migrant Education Program, and my experience in college have some things in common: embracing my culture and language; collaborative learning and sharing of experiences; strong relationship between student-teacher; and opportunity to explore possibilities beyond classroom walls. Although some of these activities came later rather than sooner, my educational experience has flourished because of this. I would have hoped to have had this daily but unfortunately the structural system of education doesn’t allow for this to be the learning experience of all students.

As I continue to reflect and analyze my experience in education I realize I begin to answer the question posed at the beginning of the chapter: why was I able to succeed academically, despite facing conditions that placed me at risk of failing academically? In my review there are four factors that explain why I was able to achieve academically.

These were:

1. the opportunity to meet and build a strong relationship with some of my teachers. These relationships enabled me to solidify my goals and aspirations. Moreover, their passion for teaching transcended beyond the classroom allowing me to connect with my identity and the self.
2. exposure to a challenging curriculum. Although, this exposure to real learning took place after my K-12 education, I still am thankful that through the dedication of teachers and others who believed in me I was able to achieve academically.

3. continuous family support. Although my family did not understand the process of schooling in the United States, they constantly offered their help and support in whatever they could.

4. the support received in M.E.Ch.A. and EOP. Both had an impact in the way I developed academically, socially, politically, and culturally.

Overall, my testimonio is a narrative that highlights that there is a dire need to continue the development and support for the reframing of education. Moreover, it underscores how traditional views on social function of public education in the United States hinders the opportunity for students to gain confidence, develop critical thought, and engage in critical pedagogy. But, it also shows that students such as myself can become academically invulnerable.
CONCLUSION

In this thesis I examined and highlighted the traditional theoretical views on schooling and public education and their implications, and the solutions suggested for the problems arising from traditional conceptions. I also considered an alternative model of education and its theoretical foundation and the reasons why it promises to be an approach more conducive to the empowerment of students and why it appeals to me and others who have undergone schooling experiences based on traditional theories. I used my examination of my schooling experience to reflect on and illustrate how schooling based on traditional theories was reflected in my personal education experience. Lastly, I conceptualized myself using the concept of “academically invulnerable student” and through the use of a testimonio sought to describe my schooling experience and to account for my academic invulnerability.

I argue that the current structure does not support the inclusion of democracy and social justice ideals. The structure of education is not designed to provide space for critical discussion on power and practice of true democracy. The existing educational system needs to be reframed and the purpose redefined. First, the integration of a social justice perspective needs not to be implemented until high school but instead incorporated in K-12th grade education. It is a difficult task to undertake because the educational is structured in order to prevent this kind of environment. Moreover, students are conditioned to function in the technical sense rather than be exposed to critical thought and practice. In this sense I suggest that the reframing occur at the community level. What I mean by this is that those who experienced the opportunity to pursue higher education must make connections with the community. Moreover, additional resources must be provided. In addition to youth conferences and community projects, we need to multiply the amount of community and art centers in our area. It can be as simple as having a small building or utilizing a space within a community center already established. I am aware that this is occurring but sometimes it happens only in the confined circles of a special group. In my experience the intellectual world is rarely in connection to the community. Second, we need to continue to share the power of knowledge. Using theories like critical pedagogy allow us to break down physical
and imaginary borders. Critical pedagogy can change the definition and purpose of education if we allow it to be discussed across disciplines. As a community we need to continue to develop ways in which critical pedagogy can reflect the historical, physical, emotional, and social aspects of learning Math, Science, and Technology. And third, we need to make a democracy a real process and practice within the classroom and make a connection to how it connects beyond classroom walls. Democratic values need to be taught from an active point of view rather than a passive standpoint. Democratic ideals can guide the development of teacher preparation and the socio-political consciousness of youth. However, my vision of democratic schooling cannot be implemented until the following happens:

1. A social revolution happens (which includes the revolting of all oppressive ideas and actions).
2. Capitalism is eradicated.
3. Solidarity across multiple groups of people while maintaining our identities.
4. The spiritual is connected to the mind and body.
5. When fear of challenging the other and being challenged is replaced with respect and love.
6. When society learns and understands the question answering “who am I” is reflected upon (historical, political, and emotional self).
7. When we all hit our lowest point of tolerance.

Therefore, I suggest either a whole restructuring of education or the inclusion of curriculum focused on social justice. If schools continue to fail teaching from a vision of equity, democracy, and social justice, schools will continue to fail in raising the educational achievement for all children.

Education should be about providing a classroom and instructional practices that represent the values of democracy. Schools in the United States currently do not promote democratic ideals. According to Apple and Beane (2007) democracy is the inclusion of the following ideas and situations:

(1) the open flow of ideas, regardless of their popularity, that enables people to be as fully informed as possible, (2) faith in the individual and collective capacity of people to create possibilities for resolving problems, (3) the use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems, and policies, (4) concern for the welfare of others and “the common good,” (5) concern for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities, (6) an understanding that democracy is not so
much an “ideal” to be pursued as an “idealized” set of values that we must live and that must guide our life as a people, (7) the organization of social institutions to promote and extend the democratic way of life. (p. 7)

The above could be practiced if we had democratic educational institutions and if the preceding were to come into existence. Otherwise, until then this conception of education is only an ideal. However, I want to mention that the current work and practice of many conscious educators and activists have kept the momentum going. They remain committed to taking part in transformational ideas and practices. I respect and embrace them. Nevertheless, I believe that part of continuing the work of transformation one must continue to engage in critical discussion and offer constructive criticism that will diversify theoretical paradigms.

My academic development and the opportunity to meet great people in education has empowered and enabled my growth. Moreover, these opportunities have guided and shaped my goals personal, social, and academic goals. My future research and/or projects are not about me and what I can do, instead they are a reflection of what I can share and learn. In the future I would like to be one of those individuals that empowered my mind, body, and soul.

Therefore, one way for this topic to be further analyzed is to collect and evaluate the many educational journeys of students. What exactly do students want and what do they need from teachers, administrators, parents, and community? Future research should explore this through the educational testimonios (testimonials) of students and their parent and connect them to the concept of academic invulnerability. Moreover, it would be helpful to introduce these testimonios into discussion with important stakeholders in education, for example, teachers and administrators in order to enable them to understand the need for a transformation in the theoretical foundations of and practices in public education.
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