LINGUISTICALLY DISENFRANCHISED STUDENTS:
SYSTEMIC SILENCING WITHIN THE ACADEMIC WORLD AND
COUNTERNARRATIVES OF POSSIBILITIES

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of San Diego State University
and Claremont Graduate University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Philosophy of Doctorate

by
Mae S. Chaplin
B.A., University of Redlands, 1997
M.A., California State University, San Marcos, 2008

San Diego State University and Claremont Graduate University
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APPROVAL OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Mae S. Chaplin as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Philosophy of Doctorate.

Dr. Karen Cadiero-Kaplan, co-Chair
San Diego State University

Dr. Linda Perkins, co-Chair
Claremont Graduate University

Dr. Alberto Ochoa, Committee Member
San Diego State University

Dr. Gilda Ochoa, Committee Member
Claremont Graduate University
Abstract

Linguistically Disenfranchised Students:
Systemic Silencing Within the Academic World and Counternarratives of Possibilities

by

Mae S. Chaplin

San Diego State University and Claremont Graduate University: 2013

Bringing issues of social justice and equity into the current discourse regarding public education continues to face many challenges, particularly in Southern California (Callahan, 2005; Olsen, 2010; Valenzuela, Prieto, & Hamilton, 2007). For example, Latino students whose native language is not English are forced to struggle through an education system designed to assimilate them into the English-only meritocracy, often at the expense of their native tongue and heritage (Cross, 2007; Fine, Jaffe-Walter, Pedraza, Futch, & Stoudt, 2008; Valenzuela et al., 2007). Furthermore, the existing focus on standardized testing results, as well as traditional, quantitative research methods to explain such results, leaves little space for counternarratives against the status quo to emerge. Without such counternarratives, systemic change and empowerment for linguistically marginalized students cannot be obtained on the widespread level necessary for social transformation (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2007; Wink, 2005).

The scope of this project was to employ nontraditional research methods, including participatory action research and practices grounded in critical pedagogy, for the express purpose of examining how linguistically marginalized students contextualize their identities and educational journeys. By creating spaces for the three focus groups consisting of linguistically disenfranchised students at the middle school, high school, and college levels to dialogue regarding their educational experiences and concepts of individual and group identity, it was
possible to gather a rich collection of data. Furthermore, a sense of mutual respect and confianza developed between the researcher and participants and additionally allowed for the emergence of personal stories and insights that simply would not have been possible via a survey or less personal research approach.

The findings that emerged during the course of this project indicated a narrow set of educational options currently available to Latino and Latina students whose first language is not English. Specifically, the existing educational pathways available to students from linguistically disenfranchised groups were found to be extremely limiting and thereby pushed students toward assimilation into the status quo of the dominant society. However, the process of critical pedagogy and problem posing used during this project additionally gave rise to counternarratives and spaces for hope.

Key Words: Critical pedagogy, participatory action research, Latino and Latina students, California public education, deficit theory, language policy
To my parents,

Dhea A. Chaplin and Robert J. Chaplin,

They knew this work was possible when I did not.
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I cannot write about social justice and equity without acknowledging my mentors, colleagues, and friends with the College of Education at California State University, San Marcos. Annette Daoud, taking 20 seventh and eighth graders on the Sprinter to attend the Social Justice and Equity Symposium is a memory that I will carry with me always. Thank you for your leadership in organizing the SJE Symposium as well as your ongoing work to better the educational experiences of “English Learners” in North County. Laurie Stowell, it was both a pleasure and an honor to be able to teach with you last year, and I look forward to our next project, whatever it may entail. Janet McDaniel, thank you for welcoming me as a Distinguished Teacher in Residence and for the work you continue to do for the College of Education and its students. Working alongside such a group of dedicated educators has inspired me to keep pushing ahead to the next step in my own professional and personal journeys. Thank you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The current focus on academic achievement, as defined by high-stakes exams, as well as the continued reliance on deficit theories to determine the educational paths of students presents many barriers to college access for students from marginalized populations (Collatos, Morrell, Nuno, & Lara, 2004; Reid & Moore, 2008; Yamamura, Martinez, & Saenz, 2010). Furthermore, the use of English-only policies and a student’s so-called English proficiency as indicators of future success in secondary education can cause individual language and identity loss while simultaneously denying access to advanced placement (AP) and college preparatory (CP) courses (Collatos et al., 2004; Reid & Moore, 2008; Yamamura et al., 2010). Students from linguistically diverse populations are seldom given value or voice within such a system. If a powerful voice and counternarrative does not emerge in response to the current punitive and inhumane educational systems, then the continuance of the status quo is ensured at the direct expense of students within the public school system.

Statement of the Problem

As previously noted, the continued reliance by educators on deficit-based theories to determine the class placement and intervention programs for students from linguistically marginalized populations causes numerous negative consequences (Cross, 2007; Fine, Jaffe-Walter, Pedraza, Futch, & Stoudt, 2008; Valenzuela, Prieto, & Hamilton, 2007). For example, students labeled as English Language Learners (ELLs) are often “tracked” into extra language support classes; placed in remedial math, science, and social studies courses; and denied access to courses designed to promote college readiness and the development of critical thinking (Callahan, 2005; Cross, 2007; Olsen, 2010; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela et al., 2007). In a recent study on Long-Term English Language Learners (LTELLs), Olsen (2010) found that the overuse...
of intervention programs for LTELL students caused them to fall further behind their non-ELL peers due to the fact that many of their “support” classes placed too much of a focus on developing low-level literacy skills instead of challenging students to achieve. Furthermore, Olsen found that intervention teachers were not given relevant curriculum or assessments to measure the learning of their LTELLs. Such materials were additionally discovered to be “light” and unable to develop the necessary academic language, written proficiency, and oral fluency necessary for academic success (Olsen, 2010, p. 30). Given that placement into language intervention or support classes was mandatory, LTELL students faced the additional challenge of losing their engagement with school on the whole (Olsen, 2010).

Another barrier that prevents students categorized as ELLs and LTELLs from accessing a meaningful and rigorous academic program comes as a consequence of students being placed into support classes (Olsen, 2010). Because support classes are usually in addition to a student’s daily schedule, they often take the place of electives or other academic classes (Olsen, 2010). Furthermore, many of the support classes fail to meet the requirements for A-G credit and therefore cause students to fall further behind their non-ELL peers in terms of earning the credits needed to apply to a 4-year college or university after high school graduation (Olsen, 2010). The fact that students from linguistically disenfranchised populations currently possess little or no voice in the creation of their class schedule illustrates just one facet of their systemic silencing within the academic world. Indeed, students may desire to attend college and even be surrounded by discussions of college and higher education in their respective high schools, but their status as ELLs pushes them to the social fringes of their school environment. Such alienation leads one to wonder if the existing system of American education was truly created to provide a meaningful and challenging education to all students. If the United States is to uphold
the basic concepts of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, then a critical examination and analysis of its educational structures as well as their influence on educational access for linguistically alienated students must be completed.

The lack of access to higher education faced by ELL and Latino students was additionally documented by the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC, 2010) in a recent report. Using a best-case scenario, the CPEC developed a “pipeline” to determine the pathways of college-bound Latinos. Figure 1 depicts the CPEC’s California Latino Higher Education Pipeline.

![Figure 1. The California Latino higher education pipeline. From “Report on Latinos in Higher Education,” by California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2010, in Project CORE, symposium conducted at San Diego State University, San Diego, CA.](image-url)
As indicated in Figure 1, of 276 hypothetical ninth-grade Latino students, 214 go on to become high school graduates. Of these graduates, 100 enroll in college, with nine attending a University of California (UC) institution, 22 attending a California State University (CSU) institution, and 69 attending a California Community College (CCC). Eventually, 10 of the CCC students will transfer, with eight going to a CSU institution and two attending a UC school. Out of the original 100 “first-time freshmen,” only 14 will graduate from a CSU school and a mere nine will earn a degree from a UC institution. It should also be noted that the graduation timeframe for students at both CSU and UC institutions is 6 years instead of the traditional 4.

The fact that Figure 1 represents a best-case scenario alludes to the barriers faced by Latino students as they attempt to access the realm of higher education. Furthermore, that less than half of the original ninth-grade Latino class enrolls as first-time freshmen 4 years later indicates the consequences of tracking students according to their so-called English proficiency as well as the results of excluding these same students from courses designed to foster college readiness and meet A-G requirements (Callahan, 2005; Cross, 2007; Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997). Again, one must question whether or not the existing public education structures in California are really made for the benefit of all students or if they instead promote the future success of only a select few.

The disparity between graduation rates for students from various racial backgrounds was additionally discussed in the CPEC (2010) report of school districts in San Diego County for the 2009-2010 academic year. This report followed a 2004 report by WestEd that used multiple measures to assess the graduation rates in California. WestEd (2004) discovered that California had an “unacceptably low graduation rate overall, with a problem of crisis proportions for Latino
and African American students” (p. 7). Table 1 presents a summary of the WestEd (2004) findings, and Table 2 represents the findings of the CPEC (2010) report.

Table 1

**Ranked California 2001 Overall Graduation Rates by Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>49.7%a</td>
<td>82.0%</td>
<td>57.0%</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
<td>68.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>76.8%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
<td>74.9%</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California rank b</td>
<td>(of 34)</td>
<td>(of 34)</td>
<td>(of 34)</td>
<td>(of 40)</td>
<td>(of 43)</td>
<td>(of 51)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data from *California’s Graduation Rate: The Hidden Crisis*, by WestEd, 2004, retrieved from http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/cde.gradrateII.pdf. aModerate coverage (i.e., rate covers between 50% and 75% of student population). bNo comparison could be made across all 50 states for any subgroup.

Table 2

**Latino Dropout Rates by District for 2009-2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Grades 9-12 Latino enrollment</th>
<th>Number of dropouts</th>
<th>Grades 9-12 derived dropout rate (4 years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District 1</td>
<td>18,131</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District 2</td>
<td>22,328</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District 3</td>
<td>7,688</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District 4a</td>
<td>5,306</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District 5</td>
<td>3,469</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District 6</td>
<td>2,414</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District 7</td>
<td>5,019</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD County totals</td>
<td>73,703</td>
<td>2,504</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California (Latinos)</td>
<td>958,278</td>
<td>40,470</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California (Total)</td>
<td>1,999,884</td>
<td>67,594</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data from “Report on Latinos in Higher Education,” by California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2010, in *Project CORE*, symposium conducted at San Diego State University, San Diego, CA. aDistrict 4 represents the high school district where this study occurred.

According to Table 1, only 57.0% of Latinos managed to graduate from California high schools at the time of the WestEd (2004) report. When compared to the fact that 75.7% of White
students successfully graduated from California high schools during the same time period, the problem becomes glaringly obvious. In other words, to be a Latino student in California’s K-12 schools comes with the very real chance of not completing high school (WestED, 2004). Furthermore, the fact that California had a total dropout rate of 17.4% yet a Latino dropout rate of 21.6%, as shown in Table 2, indicates the racial disparity in terms of which students currently receive educational opportunities (CPEC, 2010). Such numbers possess even more meaning when compared to the dropout rates for 2009 as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2011). According to the NCES (2011), Latino students dropped out of high schools across the nation at a rate of 17.6%, while White students had a 5.2% dropout rate. Again, the 21.6% dropout rate for Latino students across the state of California in 2009-2010 was higher than the national average of 17.6% for Latinos and well above the relatively small 5.2% dropout rate for White students during the same time period. Clearly, California has a problem when it comes to providing equal access and educational experiences to its students. For a state that prides itself on being one of the more “progressive” states in the nation, this disparity is ironic and must be addressed if California is to become a leader in the efforts to transform American public education.

Areas of Inquiry and Research Questions

As indicated by the previous discussion, California’s public schools do not adequately prepare all groups of their students for college or even high school graduation (Collatos et al., 2004; Reid & Moore, 2008; Yamamura et al., 2010). For students who carry the ELL and LTELL labels, such lack of preparation comes in many forms and generally includes ability-level tracking, lack of access to academically rigorous and relevant courses, low expectations, and watered-down curriculum (Callahan, 2005; Cross, 2007; Olsen, 2010; Valencia, 1997;
Valenzuela et al., 2007). Furthermore, students may possess the desire to attend college but may not know what they need to accomplish in order to enroll in a 4-year college or university should they manage to graduate from high school (Fine et al., 2008; Olsen, 2010). To determine the extent of existing systemic restraints placed on linguistically marginalized students, the following questions were considered:

1. How do middle school, high school, and college students from linguistically disenfranchised populations conceptualize their individual academic identities?
   a. What do the terms college readiness and academic proficiency entail for students from populations outside of the White, monolingual status quo?

2. How do students from linguistically disenfranchised populations navigate through existing school structures?
   a. Do the pathways that marginalized students use to navigate through the school system reaffirm the status quo or provide access of opportunities?

3. What school structures and practices give voice to counternarratives that work either against or for empowerment and systemic transformation regarding linguistically disenfranchised students?

As students from socially alienated groups travel through the public school system in California, they are certain to encounter various obstacles that prevent them from obtaining a high school diploma and college enrollment (Callahan, 2005; Cross, 2007; Olsen, 2010; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela et al., 2007). To consider how students respond to such barriers, it was additionally important to examine and engage in critical dialogues concerning a variety of themes. Specifically, this study included the following themes for inquiry as they pertain to linguistically marginalized students:
1. Identity
2. College readiness and academic proficiency
3. Systemic navigation
4. Student awareness and empowerment

The above themes were derived from the literature review (Chapter 2) as dominant constructs in the schooling journeys of linguistically disenfranchised youth. Each of these constructs is further detailed during this dissertation’s analysis of current literature and research related to the educational experiences of disenfranchised student populations. Through a critical examination and the resulting dialogue, it was possible to identify preliminary methods of allowing systemically alienated students to bring their stories and counternarratives into the wider discussion regarding public education.

**Background: Researcher and Setting Overview**

A preliminary community scan of the city of Divisionville (pseudonym) led to the portrayal of a community and its schools that aligned with the ideologies and policies of structural functionalism (Bartolomeo, 2008; Chaplin, 2012; Neary, 2006; A. Ochoa, 2003). Furthermore, both the K-8 and high school districts in Divisionville were found to “track” students into various academic courses along linguistic lines. The schools themselves were highly segregated along ethnic and linguistic lines, and a clear division between White, monolingual and non-White, multilingual students was evident both within individual schools and across the city on the whole (Chaplin, 2012). Based on previous research, Divisionville presented the image of a community where White, English-speaking, and middle class members used a system of educational and social policies designed to maintain their own social dominance despite current demographic trends (Chaplin, 2012; A. Ochoa, 2003). While overall
demographic trends indicated a shift from a large number of White residents to an increase in the Latino population (Chaplin, 2012), Divisionville’s structures of power remained overwhelmingly White and English only.

Due to the demographic trends of the past 30 years, the polarization of Divisionville into various ethnic and linguistic groups continued to worsen as the city council and school boards enacted several deficit-based and discriminatory policies designed to “clean up” the city and “improve” the public school system (Chaplin, 2012). Such actions included a proposed rental ban for landlords who rented their properties to undocumented residents, gang injunctions specifically targeting Latinos, partnerships between the city’s police department and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, and numerous police and ICE checkpoints held under the guise of “driver safety” in predominantly Latino neighborhoods (Bartolomeo, 2008; Breton, 1987; Guidi, 2010). Furthermore, instead of looking at the larger sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts to explain why certain populations of students continued to disengage from school, many of the city’s educators, administrators, and officials blamed the students and their families for any academic “failures.” For this reason, schools in the city continue to be highly segregated along ethnic lines, thus mirroring the overall divisions and tensions of the larger community (Chaplin, 2012). Divisionville’s divisive history, especially during the past decade, made it an ideal setting for the inclusion of systemically marginalized students in the process of dialogue and analysis of their sociopolitical and sociocultural realities.

The researcher involved with this study additionally possessed strong insight into and personal history in the setting. As the daughter of a public school teacher who spent more than 30 years working in Divisionville, the researcher understood how the language policies and educational practices used in this district impact linguistically diverse students. Furthermore, her
mother was a kindergarten teacher in a school that had a large population of Spanish-speaking Latino students during the tumultuous political climate in California created by both Proposition 187 and Proposition 227 in the late 1990s. Instead of encouraging her daughter to pursue her Bilingual, Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development (BCLAD) certification, this kindergarten teacher was so distraught by the passage of Proposition 227 that she recommended against earning a BCLAD to become what she referred to as a “glorified translator.” Despite the fact that the researcher involved with this study did not complete her BCLAD certification, she spent the past 9 years of her career working with linguistically diverse students and training preservice teachers in multilingual methods courses at a nearby CSU institution. Finally, the researcher was herself a product of the Divisionville school system and understood its history regarding students from diverse backgrounds on a deeper level than possible for outside observers. This strong personal connection further provided her with an additional tool to analyze the numerous forms of data gathered throughout the course of this study and allowed her to connect with the participants on a more personal level.

**Conceptual Frameworks**

The work of Gilbert Gonzalez (1990) served as a method of providing a historical context to the existing realities of Latino students in the Divisionville area. According to Gonzalez, the 20th century educational experiences of Latino education can be divided into four periods: (a) de jure segregation, (b) assimilation into the “American” culture, (c) the militant and reformist era, and (d) the return to capitalism and American individualism. Figure 2 illustrates how the four periods described by Gonzalez provide a framework to contextualize modern experiences of Latino students.
As indicated in Figure 2, the dominant ideology of the U.S. empire and capitalism drives the forces that serve to keep Latino communities and students in a state of oppression (Gonzalez, 1990). To maintain the social hierarchy, educational and social theorists used the concepts of social Darwinism and intelligence testing to justify the continuance of segregated schooling experiences for Latino students (Gonzalez, 1990). According to Gonzalez (1990),

IQ theory placed the Mexican community at a particular disadvantage in that it barred its educational advancement, justified its segregation, legitimized its political domination by boards of education, and contributed in no small measure to an education that stressed preparation for semiskilled and unskilled labor. (p. 66)
Just as advocates for social functionalism (A. Ochoa, 2003) stressed that the purpose of the education system is to create various levels of workers for society, the policymakers who used the idea of social Darwinism as a guide believed that certain groups were inferior and therefore did not need the same academic preparation as more “gifted” students (Gonzalez, 1990).

Further means of rationalizing the supposed need for ethnically and linguistically segregated schools, as well as the perpetuation of social functionalism, were found in the concepts of assimilation and Americanization (Gonzalez, 1990). Beyond using the English language as a method of assimilating Mexican immigrants, Americanization focused on the creation of workers to meet the needs of American capitalism (Gonzalez, 1990). Educators and administrators who worked with Mexican and Latino students used English instruction that “aimed at making Mexicans more efficient and reliable workers and seldom concerned itself with changing their socioeconomic status” (Gonzalez, 1990, p. 60). Because social change was not a goal of advocates of assimilation and Americanization, the existing social order of the American empire and capitalism was allowed to continue and further define the educational experiences of Mexican and Latino students throughout the 20th century. Such domination is currently evident in the modern educational practices of within-school segregation and high-stakes testing, as indicated in Figure 2 (Gonzalez, 1990; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997).

Furthermore, the prevalence of deficit theory and the notion of meritocracy in modern education clearly echo the fourth period of 20th-century education earlier defined by Gonzalez (1990). For example, the modern use of standardized testing to determine the individual achievement, language, and proficiency levels of students indicates an education system that was designed to allow a true choice in opportunities and experiences to a select group of students. What such a system means for students from traditionally marginalized populations is a question that should
be explored by those desiring true social change and educational equity in the arena of public education.

The preceding discussion described how the dominant American empire and capitalistic society were previously able to control and subjugate Latinos using the school system as a means of suppression (Gonzalez, 1990). Such realities continue for Latino students today, as indicated by the inherent nature of deficit theory and meritocracy within the modern American school system (Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997). Due to constricting views used by deficit theorists (Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997) to conceptualize students and present evidence of academic achievement, the current discussion of college readiness and access for all students must be expanded to consider the sociopolitical, sociocultural, and systemic realities of public schooling. Figure 3 represents a conceptual framework for the beginnings of such a dialogue.

According to Figure 3, students from systemically disenfranchised populations are influenced by numerous factors during their experiences in California’s public schools. The top half of Figure 3 indicates the systemic constraints placed on students as they navigate from middle school to college. In particular, the systemic realities of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTT) mandates that yield one-size-fits-all academic interventions result in deficit-based labeling of students, which, along with ability-level tracking, severely influences the individual identities and self-concepts of linguistically marginalized students (Cashman, 2006; Cline, Necochea, & Rios, 2004; Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001). Such structures further uphold the status quo of White, middle class values and leave little room for open dialogue and transformation. Students must either conform or risk being left behind.
The bottom portion of Figure 3 illustrates the potential space for disenfranchised and systemically voiceless students to develop narratives counter to those of the status quo. However, the pressures and tensions caused by the structural definitions of one’s identity make the emergence of such counternarratives problematic (Gorski, 2005; Mitchie, 2009; Morrell, 2004; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997). Educators concerned with combating the status quo and hegemony inherent in today’s public school system must therefore look to methods of expanding the curriculum, building respectful relationships with students, and helping students become adept at engaging in critical pedagogy and action research (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2007; Mitchie, 2009; Morrell, 2004). Furthermore, linguistically marginalized students
who actively engage in the process of critical pedagogy and problem posing can develop
counternarratives to combat the hegemony that exists in education today. In Figure 3, this
possibility is represented by the arrow that leads from the counternarratives of the participants as
it influences their sense of identity and various interactions with the education system. If
students learn to examine modern society in a critical manner, then it is possible that they will be
able to not only navigate through the existing school system but transform it as well.

**Preview of Literature**

To determine how linguistically marginalized students can move beyond structural
navigation for the express purpose of social transformation, a theoretical framework for
contextualizing the sociocultural and historical experiences of linguistically disenfranchised
students in the United States was developed. This framework is presented in Chapter 2 of this
work and includes several interconnected themes. These themes of inquiry entailed the
following:

1. The sociocultural and historical realities of linguistically marginalized youth (Frederickson, 2002; Gonzalez, 1990; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997);

2. Systemic navigational pathways undertaken by such students (CPEC, 2010; Gonzalez, 1990; Olsen, 2010);

3. The influence of Americanization and assimilation as well as the dominant ideologies of
capitalism and meritocracy on such navigational pathways (Frederickson, 2002; Gonzalez, 1990; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997);

4. Methods of challenging the hegemony inherent in current educational systems (Freire, 2007; Nieto, 2000; Olsen, 1997; Sleeter, 2005);
5. How multicultural curricular reforms, ethnic studies, and critical pedagogies can lead to possible transformation (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2007; Hinchey, 2008; Stringer, 2007; Wink, 2005); and


The discussion of the above themes was an essential first step for this particular action research study in that it provided a framework designed to promote social transformation instead of assimilation and individual identity loss that occurs when one simply navigates through existing systems. These themes are explored in more detail in Chapter 2 of this report.

**Preview of Methodology**

Due to the fact that this study was grounded in critical pedagogy (Freire, 2007; Wink, 2005) and action research (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Hinchey, 2008; Morrell, 2004), data were gathered throughout a series of dialogues and reflections from three focus groups of participants \((N = 41)\). The three focus groups that participated in this study represented students from the larger Divisionville area and included students from (a) middle school, (b) high school, and (c) postsecondary levels. This location was selected due to its proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border and its large population of immigrant and Spanish-speaking residents. For this reason, the themes and patterns that emerged throughout the course of this study were representative of a large population of students in what can be described as a “border city.” Furthermore, the inclusion of students from middle school, high school, and postsecondary institutions allowed for the development of a broad picture to represent the various pathways and identities employed by the individual participants. In this manner, it was possible to determine how linguistically
marginalized students from the same K-12 background undertook the process of navigating through the system of higher education. More detailed information about the methodology that was employed during the course of this project is presented in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

The qualitative nature of this study additionally led to the following assumptions:

1. Trust and confianza among the participants and the researcher
2. Open disclosures by the participants regarding their feelings, perceptions, and personal events
3. The maintenance of respect for the participants throughout the entire course of this study

These assumptions are further detailed in the reporting of the methodology as well as the findings and discussion of this work.

**Definitions of Relevant Terms**

As presented in the previous discussion, this project focused on the education realities and pathways of linguistically marginalized students, as seen through their own eyes, in the same geographic location. Furthermore, this project entailed a detailed discussion of the formation of student identity as well as forces working either toward systemic transformation and empowerment or the perpetuation of the status quo. Terms that were essential in the development of this project, including the data analysis and discussion, are explained below.

**Assimilation.** As linguistically marginalized students journey through the education system in California, they risk changing by integrating their identity into the dominant structures and belief system that caused their initial social alienation (Freire, 2007). Such a process inevitably upholds the hegemony within modern society and leads to the assimilation of the other (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2007).
Conforming, reforming, and transforming. As described by Freire (2007), conforming behaviors include those when individuals from outside of the status quo respond, often unconsciously, to fit the needs and beliefs of the larger society. Reforming individuals recognize their marginalized status but do not seek to change the system; rather, they reform their own behaviors to assimilate into the status quo (Freire, 2007). Finally, transforming actions occur when oppressed groups engage in praxis and the process of critical pedagogy to work toward true empowerment and systemic transformation (Freire, 2007).

Crossroad events. Crossroad events are those that force students from traditionally oppressed groups to name examples of racism and discrimination in open terms (Torres, 2003; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Once a crossroad is encountered, the individual involved can either work to move around the crossroad event and reform his or her perception of the world in more transformative terms, or instead conform his or her behavior to fit into the status quo. The idea of encountering a crossroad event and the resulting actions played an integral role in the analysis and discussion of the data that emerged during the course of this project.

English Language Learners (ELLs) and Long-Term English Language Learners (LTTELLs). Due to the focus on imposed identity during this study, both the definitions of ELL and LTTELL students are based on the State of California guidelines. A student with the ELL label is one who is defined as having limited proficiency in English and whose home language is not English (California Department of Education, 2012c). Additionally, ELL students are those students in Grades K-12 who must take the annual CELDT exam until they receive the status of Reclassified Fluent English Proficient, or RFEP (California Department of Education, 2012c). It is important to note that students achieve the RFEP classification based on the standardized CST and CELDT scores, as well as teacher recommendations and individual writing samples, and it is
possible for some students to spend their entire educational careers with the ELL label. LTELL students represent such individuals. According to Olsen (2010), an LTELL student is one who has been in school in the United States for more than 6 years without meeting the necessary criteria for reclassification. Olsen additionally found that school districts across California do not have a unified definition for LTELL students. Therefore, this study used the term LTELL to include those student who have been in schools in the United States for more than 6 years and who still carry the ELL label.

**Imposed identity.** The concept of individual identity generally includes one’s sense of self in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, sexual orientation, and other social categories (Tatum, 1997). However, this study examined how educational mandates and policies impose a sense of identity on groups of students. For example, students may be defined academically as far below basic, below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced according to their scores on the standardized California Standards Test (CST; California Department of Education, 2012a). Furthermore, students labeled as ELLs may be described by educators and administrators in terms of their individual performance on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT; California Department of Education, 2012c). How such labels and forced identities influence individual students and their sense of self-concept was a major area of inquiry throughout this study.

**Linguistically marginalized and linguistically disenfranchised.** These two terms were used to identify students with the ELL and LTELL labels as well as those students who do not speak what is considered “standard” English (Daoud & Quiocio, 2005; Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997). Furthermore, these terms relate to students who are placed outside of the status quo and considered as “other” due to their linguistic identities.
Systemic navigation. The process by which students journey from middle school through high school and into a community college or 4-year university includes their ability to find their way through various structures and systems (Callahan, 2005; Cross, 2007; Olsen, 2010; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela et al., 2007). The concept of navigation was used to define the various pathways that individual students take through such a process.

Summary

The overall scope of this project spanned from the K-12 public schools to a 4-year state institution of higher learning in the same geographic location. Given the current lack of voice provided to students from linguistically marginalized populations, the researcher took extra care to establish trust and a sense of confianza with the participants throughout the course of this study. This effort led to the emergence of well-defined educational pathways that linguistically disenfranchised groups followed from middle school through high school and into college. The experiences and personal stories shared by the focus group participants are detailed in the remainder of this report and indicate the existence of an education system the can cause great harm to students on the outside of the dominant social groups, despite the existence of areas of hope for educational access of opportunities.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

When asked to describe the first day of school, an image that easily comes to mind is that of a young child wearing an oversized, brightly colored backpack while clutching her parent’s hand as a cheery kindergarten teacher opens the classroom door in an act of smiling welcome. Once inside, this child’s inquisitive nature will be allowed to flourish, and she will not only discover the wonders of learning but also come to believe that she is capable of achieving anything. This young student will progress through elementary school hindered only by the usual mishaps of childhood—a few scraped knees, trivial arguments with best friends, a forgotten homework assignment now and then, and other such minor obstacles. Middle school will be a time of heightened emotions and identity formation, with increasing importance given to thinking about the future. Despite the turmoil of adolescence, this student will still believe in her potential and self-worth. Why should she feel any differently? Her teachers in elementary school fostered this self-belief by providing her with challenging curriculum, stimulating classroom activities, and an endless amount of encouragement when she stumbled. Because of the path that this student followed from elementary school to middle school, she implicitly knows that she will be able to complete her A-G requirements, be successful in advanced placement (AP) and college preparatory (CP) classes, pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), and earn solid scores on the SAT and other similar exams that serve as gatekeepers to the realm of higher education. Indeed, anyone watching the educational pathway for this student unfold would be hard-pressed to believe otherwise.

As idealistic as the above K-8 schooling “journey” may sound, it is still true for some of California’s students—provided that these students are White, at least in the middle class.
financially, and speak English as their first language. Consider the following data regarding the 408,861 California high school graduates in 2011:

- 129,580 of these graduates were White, with 58,034 (44.8%) of them earning the credits necessary for acceptance into a University of California (UC) or California State University (CSU) institution;
- 2,981 Native Americans graduated, with only 800 (27.4%) of them earning the necessary UC and CSU credits;
- 41,284 graduates were of Asian descent, with 26,561 (64.3%) able to apply to a UC or CSU institution;
- 2,585 were Pacific Islander graduates, with 879 (34.0%) UC and CSU credit ready;
- 12,641 Filipino students graduated, with 6,756 (53.4%) earning the UC and CSU credits necessary to apply;
- 183,781 Latino students graduated, with a mere 58,876 (32.0%) acquiring the credits necessary for acceptance to UC or CSU institutions; and
- 27,682 of the state’s African Americans graduated, with only 9,102 (32.9%) of such students being able to apply for UC or CSU acceptance (California Department of Education, 2012d).

Despite the fact that a high percentage of Asian high school graduates in 2011 earned the necessary credits for acceptance consideration by either a CSU or UC institution, the fact that every other demographic group, aside from White students, had a lower number of CSU and UC credit-ready students indicates the glaring educational disparity between White students and a majority of their non-White peers. Furthermore, the data concerning ninth- through 12th-grade students in California who dropped out of school during the 2010-2011 year include the following:
• 85,737 total dropouts;
• 14,223 White dropouts;
• 953 Native American dropouts;
• 2,859 Asian dropouts;
• 610 Pacific Islander dropouts;
• 906 Filipino dropouts;
• 51,814 Latino dropouts; and
• 11,451 African American dropouts (California Department of Education, 2012b).

That 51,814 (60.4%) of the total dropouts were of Latino descent compared to the 14,223 (16.6%) White students who left high school during the same time period clearly indicates the racial inequities that continue to persist in California’s schools even during the time of the Obama administration. Clearly, to be Latino in the modern educational pipeline of California is to run the risk of not graduating with the credits necessary to apply for entrance into a UC or CSU institution, or even worse, of not graduating at all.

The existing realities and structural inequities present in California’s school systems stem from a history of policies and sociocultural factors that continue to marginalize and devalue students from diverse populations. Furthermore, the systemic inequities that exist for students from linguistically disenfranchised populations permeate into every aspect of their schooling experiences in California, including the formation of their personal identities and educational pathways. A review of literature pertaining to the plight of such students indicated a multifaceted reality that can be conceptualized by the framework represented in Figure 4.
The sociocultural context that shapes student identity is highly influenced by the interactions between the systemic realities for linguistically marginalized students in California and the methods they employ for systemic navigation. Such students must travel an educational pathway that includes confronting the meritocracy and capitalism inherent in American education as well as the push to assimilate or “Americanize” students into this system (Frederickson, 2002; Gonzalez, 1990; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997). This journey can be represented by a “pipeline,” as indicated in Figure 3 (in Chapter 1), from which they can only begin to escape the influences of hegemony and oppression via multicultural curriculum reform and ethnic studies (Nieto, 2000; Olsen, 1997; Sleeter, 2005). Furthermore, the line dividing the
The top half of Figure 3 from the bottom was added to indicate the potential the multicultural curriculum reform and ethnic studies programs possess to break from a sociocultural reality shaped by oppression and identity loss. The processes of critical pedagogy and nontraditional research methods additionally inspire student empowerment and serve to give rise to counternarratives that can actively challenge the hegemony inherent in American educational structures and systems (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2007; Hinchey, 2008; Stringer, 2007; Wink, 2005). If educational equity is to become a true reality for all students in California, countermethods must be named, described, and ultimately put into active use. Naming such issues and problems was the scope of this work.

**Systemic Realities**

The major role that existing systemic realities play in determining the educational and life outcomes for California students cannot be understated or left unnamed by any comprehensive review of literature in this area. Indeed, research shows that students in today’s schools experience an education filled with benchmarks and annual exams designed to measure their academic proficiency through standardized assessments and multiple-choice questions (Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004; Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001). Such practices were heightened during the past decade with the implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTT) educational mandates (Cline et al., 2004; Olsen, 2010; Sloan, 2007). Although frustrated educators continuously expressed concerns that the overemphasis on student “proficiency,” especially in the areas of mathematics and language arts, left little room for other subjects, such as social science and science, education policymakers continued to rely on a testing barrage that included such exams as the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), the California Standards Test (CST), and the
CAHSEE to measure the academic value of students (Morrell, 2004; Olsen, 2010; Sleeter, 2005; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997). The themes associated with the current systemic realities for linguistically marginalized students in California during an extensive review of the existing body of literature included the following: (a) the use of deficit theory to guide educational policies and practices, (b) the creation of racist and inhumane language policies, and (c) ability-level tracking and within-school segregation. It should be noted that the following discussion presents a relatively brief portrait of current educational inequities; the depth and breadth of such injustices is impossible to cover in any single body of work.

**Deficit Theories and Education**

The rise of deficit thinking in America can be viewed as an evolution of the methods through which social scientists have sought to describe, explain, predict, and modify human behavior (Valencia, 1997). Valencia (1997) explained this evolution with his conclusions that deficit theorists first describe a behavior in deviant or “dysfunctional” ways, attempt to explain said behavior in terms of “endogenous” factors, predict what will occur to said individual if such “deficits” remain unchecked, and finally, modify behavior to remediate any shortcomings and limitations (p. 7). The linear process of describing, explaining, predicting, and modifying human behavior was indeed an aim of the first eugenicists and indicated the extent of the methods used by dominant social groups to legitimatize their place at the top of the social hierarchy (Frederickson, 2002; Gonzalez, 1990). Specifically, the concept of “racial Darwinism” was developed to provide a rationale based on scientific evidence for the continued social disparities between Whites and non-Whites in a postcolonial setting (Frederickson, 2002, pp. 108-109). White elites went so far as to employ elements of racial Darwinism to advocate for the rise of IQ testing as evidence of the so-called “genetic superiority” of Whites over non-Whites and to call
for the continued separation of the races even after the end of slavery in the United States (Frederickson, 2002). The harsh realities of the Jim Crow South, the segregated American military, and separate but equal schooling provided just a few examples of the emergence of deficit theory as a powerful force in 20th-century America (Frederickson, 2002; Valencia, 1997). The impact these theories had on students from ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds was especially damming and doomed them to an educational existence that remained highly segregated and inequitable well after the victories of antissegregation cases such as Méndez v. Westminster, Brown v. Board of Education, and Lau v. Nichols (Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004; Gonzalez, 1990).

Latino students living in the American Southwest during the first half of the 20th century were subjected to isolated schooling realities that relied on the creation of remedial and support programs to justify the numerous programs designed to keep Latino children out of White classrooms despite the legal end of segregation (Gonzalez, 1990; Valencia, 1997). Gonzalez (1990) described the realities of IQ testing as “placing the Mexican community at a particular disadvantage in that it barred educational advancement, justified segregation, and contributed in no small measure to an education that stressed preparation for unskilled labor” (p. 66). The manifestations of deficit theory, as defined by Valencia (1997), were evident in the earlier work of Gonzalez (1990) in terms of the following:

- Describing—Mexican children were defined as “intellectually inferior” by the American school system;
- Explaining—The poor performance of Mexican children on IQ tests and their “inability” to speak English further rationalized their inferior status in the school system;
• Predicting—If such “deficits” were left unchecked and Mexican students were integrated with White American students, they would eventually become a societal burden; and
• Modifying—Mexican students were placed into segregated schools focused on Americanization and the teaching of manual labor skills as a means of remediating their supposed deficiencies.

Despite the fact that the segregation of Mexican American students was legally struck down with the 1946 Méndez v. Westminster ruling as well as the increased societal awareness of educational discrepancies between White and Latino students created by the Chicano movement and Los Angeles Blowouts in 1968, Latino students were never liberated from the structures of oppression as they pertained to education (Gonzalez, 1990; Valencia, 1997). Unfortunately, modern literature is rife with current examples of the continued subjugation and vilification of Latino students in American schools (Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004; Daoud & Quiocho, 2005; Olsen, 1997, 2010; Valdés, 2001).

The work of Valdés (2001) was particularly notable in terms of naming and defining the extent of deficit theory during the last decade of the 20th century in California. Valdés spent 2 years shadowing four Northern California students labeled as English Learners (ELs) by both their school district and state. Because these students were described as being academically deficient as explained by their EL status, it was assumed or predicted that they needed remedial programs to modify their dysfunctions (Valdés, 2001). For example, the academic interventions for the students observed by Valdés when they attended middle school were divided into four levels: “Non-English Proficient,” “Limited-English Proficient,” “Advanced Limited-English Proficient,” and “Sheltered English” (p. 35). The use of negative terminology such as non, limited, and sheltered vividly indicated the deficit theories present in the school district where
the Valdés study occurred. Furthermore, students could not exit the English as a Second Language (ESL) program until they obtained a certain score on an Idea Oral Proficiency Test (IOPT), and “placement [in mainstream English classes] was primarily determined by the teacher’s judgment of a student’s general performance on classroom tests” (Valdés, 2001, p. 39). In other words, students remained trapped in ESL courses due to both their standardized test scores and teacher’s discretion.

Valdés (2001) went on to describe a middle school where EL-labeled students rarely progressed to the so-called “advanced” level of ESL courses and hardly ever exited the ESL program (p. 45). English proficiency was employed as a primary means of keeping students in linguistically segregated classrooms, which additionally illustrated the fact that academic procedures based on deficit theory existed at the end of the 20th century and certainly carried over to the 21st century as well. This carryover was alluded to by Valdés when she realized that the EL-labeled students she shadowed were taught neither the social context nor discourse patterns of power necessary to become truly proficient in a second language. Valdés further concluded that any resulting “problems [were] seen as residing in the students, not in the text materials or in the decisions made by the teacher to focus on rehearsing correct forms as opposed to generating new meaning and sharing information, opinions, and experiences” (pp. 156-157).

That Valdés’s (2001) students were segregated from their more English “proficient” peers due to their supposed inability to comprehend English clearly depicted a schooling experience eerily similar to those described by Gonzalez (1990) in his work detailing the education of Chicano students in a segregated system. Indeed, if one were to remove the middle school depicted by Valdés (2001) from modern context, it would seem to align more with a segregated school where Latino students were Americanized, taught basic English skills, and
relegated to performing tasks designed to prepare them for eventual entry into the lowest level of the American workforce. Consider that the ESL teachers, as described by Valdés, did not believe that their students could do much more than color pictures, repeat simple sentences, or participate in such American activities as dressing up in Halloween costumes and the connections between the earlier work of Gonzalez (1990) and Valdés (2001) become even more glaring. To be Latino and not speak English as one’s first language indeed provided a rationale for the continued oppression of countless numbers of students from the beginnings of racial Darwinism and eugenics at the start of the 20th century to the use of remedial ESL programs and within-school segregation as America entered the 21st century.

Given that deficit theory evolved during the previous 100 years, modern deficit theories were found to expand on the process of describing, explaining, predicting, and modifying the deviant behaviors of subordinate social groups (Valencia, 1997). According to Valencia and Solórzano (1997), modern deficit thinking was found to entail the three areas of genetic pathology, culture of poverty, and cultural and environmental deficits. The rise of the eugenics movement in the 20th century and its resurgence in popularity after the publication of Herrnstein and Murray’s *The Bell Curve* in 1994 additionally illustrated the social pervasiveness of deficit models (Fraser, 1995; Valencia, 1997). For example, the fact that Herrnstein and Murray (1994) not only discussed their belief in the genetic “superiority” of Whites over others and had the audacity to call for the creation of a “custodial state” (p. 522) for social deviants but were additionally able to capture the attention of Americans both inside and outside of the realm of public education uncovered the undercurrents of racism and classism still prevalent in today’s world (Fraser, 1995; Gorski, 2005; Valencia, 1997). Furthermore, the notion of “colorblind” racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2010) provided educators and policymakers with even more methods of
blaming the students and their families for their so-called academic “failures” instead of looking at the larger sociopolitical structures that serve as barriers to equitable access to educational opportunities. For example, a review of relevant literature discovered that the labeling of schools and their students as “failing,” advocated for by NCLB and recent RTT legislation, clearly highlighted the continued use of the so-called deficits of individual students and communities to explain the crisis state of American public education (Morrell, 2004; Olsen, 2010; Sleeter, 2005; Valdés, 2001). Clearly, the unwillingness or inabilities of educators and policymakers to examine critically the systems that prevent disenfranchised groups from obtaining true academic achievement alluded to the deep foundations of modern deficit theory and colorblind racism in American society (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Cline et al., 2004; Fraser, 1995; Gutiérrez et al., 2002).

If educators continue to describe certain groups of students as deficient, uphold the use of standardized exams to explain such shortcomings, predict that these same students need so-called “interventions,” and attempt to modify behavior via the resulting creation of segregated and remedial schooling experiences for disenfranchised youth, then the American education system will continue to devalue and oppress students well into the next decade. How much longer must socially dominated students suffer under a system that professes to set high expectations for all students without critically examining the true impact of such expectations? The time for action against such hegemonic practices is long past—American public schools have failed in the sense that they do not provide socially just and equitable curriculum, programs, experiences, and outcomes across student groups.

Perhaps one of the most interesting portrayals of the ramifications that deficit models were found to have for American education was uncovered by an examination of Ruby Payne’s (2003) working regarding poverty. While Payne asserted that her book, A Framework for
Understanding Poverty, was written to provide “tools” to help educators allow for the achievement of students living in poverty, she did not offer more than a superficial view of socioeconomically disadvantaged communities (as cited in Gorski, 2005). Specifically, Payne (2003) sought to advance educational policies designed to promote the deficit beliefs inherent in NCLB mandates and policies (as cited in Gorski, 2005). In the words of Gorski (2005),

The illusion is that Bush’s policy [NCLB], like Payne’s book, is a tool, a step towards equity. The reality is that Bush’s policy, like Payne’s book, supports a conservative educational agenda by never addressing the root causes of poverty or the socioeconomic achievement gap. (p. 4)

Just as colorblind racists and supporters of deficit theory (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Valencia, 1997) in education failed to examine critically the sociopolitical and systemic factors that prevent equitable access to educational opportunities, Payne (2003) did little or nothing to transform the education system despite her assertion that her work was designed to help students. Instead, her framework advanced the hegemony of status quo education, particularly in terms of working with students from lower socioeconomic groups, and was never designed to allow more than a few token students from disenfranchised populations to access academic success. After all, why change the system when the system is not viewed as being at fault for the lack of achievement or academic engagement of such students?

The preceding discussion calls for a reexamination of the middle school student presented at the start of this chapter. Would she still be eagerly awaiting her high school journey if she were Latina, labeled as an EL, viewed as being both socially and economically poor by her teachers, and seen by the system as needing interventions upon arrival to her high school?

According to the process of educational deficit theory, as defined by Valencia (1997), this Latina would be described as socially and academically deficient. Her supposed inadequacies would be explained by her status as an EL and lack of financial capital. She would then be predicted to
fail in mainstream high school classes, and her counselors and teachers would undoubtedly attempt to modify her dysfunctions through remediation and academic interventions. A review of language policy additionally led to a deeper understanding of how such interventions evolved as well as the impact they had on disenfranchised students and communities.

**Language Policy**

Another example that depicted the negative impact that deficit theory had on American public education emerged from a review of 20th-century language policy. For example, the decisions made by federal and state policymakers have often carried far-reaching implications for educators and their students (Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004; Valdés, 2001). Nowhere does this statement carry more weight than in the area of language policy and the education of multilingual students. Table 3 depicts pivotal federal and California state language policies and ballot initiatives from 1968 to the present.

Table 3

*United States and California Language Policy Timeline*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Policy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Bilingual Education Act (Federal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td><em>Lau v. Nichols</em> (Federal) and Equal Educational Opportunities Act (Federal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Proposition 63 (California) and Proposition 187 (California)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Proposition 227 (California)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>No Child Left Behind (Federal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Race to the Top (Federal)</td>
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By looking first at the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) of 1968, it is possible to notice a trend of “good intentions” in the formation of language policy as it specifically relates to the teaching of linguistically diverse students. Despite the good intentions of this act, it foreshadowed the creation of segregated, remedial classrooms to address the supposed “deficits”
of English Language Learner (ELL) students. Furthermore, the BEA did not take into account the fact that most teachers at the time were White, monolingual, and did not have cultural awareness of many of their students (Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004; Petrzela, 2010).

The same can be said about the 1974 *Lau v. Nichols* Supreme Court decision. Specifically, more dual-immersion bilingual settings began to appear in schools after the *Lau v. Nichols* decision. However, the misconception that linguistically disenfranchised students were “deficient” for not speaking English was not challenged by *Lau v. Nichols* and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (M. P. López & López, 2010). Multilingual students were given more access to curriculum in the forms of bilingual textbooks and immersion programs, yet the overall focus was on English proficiency, not bilingualism (Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004; M. P. López & López, 2010; Petrzela, 2010). However, the *Lau v. Nichols* decision caused educators to consider methods for meeting the needs of their linguistically diverse students in terms of both academic and language development, and its overall impact on public education is generally viewed as positive (Cashman, 2006; Valdés, 2001).

Both Proposition 63 and Proposition 187 in California represented the growing fear and intolerance directed at the immigrant community during the mid-1980s. Proposition 63 made English the official language of California, while Proposition 187 made it illegal for undocumented students to attend public school. Specifically, these propositions were viewed as an attack on Latino immigrants and Spanish speakers in particular (Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004; M. P. López & López, 2010; Petrzela, 2010). Due to the English-only nature of Proposition 63 and the scrutiny of public school students called for by Proposition 187, segregated classrooms that focused on “basic skills” instead of true language acquisition became more widespread (Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004; M. P. López & López, 2010; Petrzela,
2010). Such classrooms ultimately increased the use of ability-level tracking as well as the
deficit-based notions that students who did not speak English as their first language were
somehow “deficient” or “lacking” (Cline et al., 2004; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997). With the
passage of Proposition 63, schools were pressured to increase students’ English proficiency, and
the focus on linguistically diverse students was centered mainly on their ability to learn English,
often at the expense of their own language and identity.

A decade later, California voters passed Proposition 227, or the “English for the
Children” initiative. Essentially, Proposition 227 severely curtailed bilingual programs and
forced students with the ELL label to be placed into classrooms that promoted transitional
bilingual programs designed to increase English proficiency and prepare them for future English-
only instruction. Furthermore, only schools and districts that successfully completed a waiver
process could maintain dual-immersion programs (Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004; M. P.
López & López, 2010). Despite the fact that Proposition 227 was viewed by some as a victory
for California students, it legally validated the deficit theories and attitudes attached to
linguistically marginalized populations. For example, California politicians were able to play on
the xenophobia and fear of immigrants to sell Proposition 227 to the California public (Cline et
al., 2004). Additionally, politicians such as Ron Unz cited evidence that Mexican Americans
and students who did not speak English as their home language were intellectually inferior and,
therefore, that their poor performance on standardized tests was not the result of segregated or
remedial programs (Cline et al., 2004; Flores & Murillo, 2001). Whether or not the students
possessed the same cultural knowledge and capital necessary to achieve well on standardized
measures was not evaluated by the proponents of California’s Proposition 227, nor were the
stages of language acquisition and language transfer between one’s native and second languages
(Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004; Flores & Murillo, 2001). Clearly, public schools in California under Proposition 227 stipulations were not welcoming places for the linguistically disenfranchised.

Unfortunately for such marginalized populations, the deficit-based educational philosophies of Proposition 227 were heightened with the federal NCLB legislation. According to NCLB guidelines, all students in American schools were expected to be “proficient” in math and language arts by the end of 2014. Additionally, NCLB created “subgroups” of students to include students labeled as ELL, special needs, and socioeconomically disadvantaged. The focus on “accountability” and “proficiency” for all put ELL students, as well as other subgroups, under intense scrutiny. Advocates for accountability maintained that NCLB ensured that all students will become successful, while its opponents believed that its goals were unrealistic and that high-stakes tests do not represent the true proficiency levels of knowledge of students, especially those from linguistically diverse backgrounds (Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Sloan, 2007; Valenzuela et al., 2007). Such increased focus on test scores also caused educators to include more basic skills drills and practice in their classrooms as well as to further segregate students according to academic “need.”

The measurement of students’ abilities via high-stakes tests was continued with the 2008 creation of President Obama’s RTT initiative. While the overall impact of RTT is still being determined, new “Common Core” standards and value-added assessments of teacher performance are increasingly being used in districts throughout the United States. What is clear is that RTT perpetuates the deficit-based educational pedagogies inherent in previous English-only policies and initiatives (Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Sloan, 2007; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela et al., 2007). What happens to the self-identity and academic engagement of students from
linguistically diverse populations when education policymakers continue with their laser-like focus on “proficiency” as it is measured through standardized tests? Furthermore, how do such policies influence the course placement and academic journeys of linguistically diverse students?

**Ability-Level Tracking and Within-School Segregation**

As linguistically marginalized students become further subjected to the deficit theory cycle of being described as deficient and having such shortcomings explained either by their “poor” academic performance or “poor” social status, they become increasingly removed from the rest of the school population. Again, the use of deficit theory suggests that many teachers, counselors, and administrators will then predict that students viewed as having deficits will “fail” in mainstream classrooms and therefore need remediation or academic interventions. Thus, ability-level tracking and within-school segregation are not only justified but allowed to remain unchecked in the modern-day California school system.

Previous research and literature indicated that both language policies and high-stakes achievement testing were used to determine the academic course placements of students (Cross, 2007; Daoud & Quirocho, 2005; Olsen, 2010; Sloan, 2007; Valdés, 2001; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). For example, students who failed to meet state and federal guidelines describing English proficiency were often placed into segregated academic programs that were found to provide them with little or no chance of accessing a more rigorous or meaningful curriculum (Daoud & Quirocho, 2005; G. L. Ochoa, 2007; Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001). Additionally, literature showed that students with the stigmatized ELL label often became trapped within the ELL track of academic programs and possessed few viable options for exiting such a track (Daoud & Quirocho, 2005; G. L. Ochoa, 2007; Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001). The following provides a short
discussion of some of the most notable examples of the influence of ability-level tracking and within-school segregation that emerged from the existing body of literature.

Kozol (2005) detailed the widespread existence of segregated schooling across the United States in his work *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*. While much of his work focused on inner-city schools and did not necessarily center on the plight of linguistically disenfranchised youth, Kozol did uncover some interesting details regarding Southern California schools. For example, in addition to presenting a vivid portrayal of the shabby conditions of the inner-city schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District, Kozol gathered information from teachers and students concerning their electives as well as the academic choices available to them. During a lunch discussion with several high school students, all of whom wished to attend college, Kozol discovered that instead of enrolling in AP or CP courses, these students were placed into such unacademic classes as “sewing” and “hairdressing” (p. 179). Even more alarming was the realization that one student had been required to take hairdressing twice. When pressed to explain the administrative reasons behind such dismal course offerings, one teacher admitted that student placement often depended on what the school had “available” for students (Kozol, 2005, p. 179). This admission implied that the administrators and district officials in charge of providing electives and academic programs to Los Angeles high schools did not believe that the students attending the school Kozol visited were in need of more challenging or academic courses. In other words, they predicted that these students needed skills in hairdressing and sewing to become successful after graduation. Clearly, the cycle of deficit theory and its consequences for subordinate groups were evident in this small example from Kozol’s work.
The use of standardized test scores to segregate groups of students from their peers has been well documented in literature pertaining to the state of education in the United States (Cline et al., 2004; Cross, 2007; Fine et al., 2008; Flores & Murillo, 2001; Olsen, 2010). This segregation has been referred to as “apartheid education” (Cross, 2007), a means of “border control” (Cline et al., 2004, p. 69), evidence of the ability of “nativism to hold local democracies hostage” (Fine et al., 2008, p. 79), and the result of the “merging of racism and politics” (Cline et al., 2004, p. 69), among other similar outcries (Flores & Murillo, 2001). In particular, Fine et al. (2008) depicted a world of within-school segregation, largely created by high-stakes testing results, that doomed students with the EL label to an academic world of remedial classes that produced “alienated bodies likely to drop out as if that were a natural condition of immigration; narrowing access to gated communities of higher education, as if that were accountability” (pp. 79-80). By connecting the images of higher education and immigration, Fine et al. illustrated how high-stakes testing not only created isolated pockets of student groups within individual schools but perpetuated a socially segregated society as well. That such a society was dominated by monolingual Whites was not explicitly stated; however, its existence was clearly implied (Fine et al., 2008).

An additional byproduct of high-stakes testing as the only indicator of student proficiency and individual merit was evident in McNeil’s (2005) work analyzing standardized testing results in the state of Texas. Not only did Texas administrators remove Latino students from school testing reports in an attempt to boost their overall scores, but such policies undeniably caused administrators and teachers to create policies and make decisions about students solely based on the single indicator of individual test scores (McNeil, 2005). To illustrate her point that single-indicator systems of evaluation lead to widespread systemic failures, McNeil reviewed the well-
known Enron crash. Because Enron relied on a single-indicator system that used its stock prices to indicate success and a separate set of ledgers to account for its debts and losses, it was able to hide its debt from the general public (McNeil, 2005). Just as Enron seemed to be making profits and doing relatively well due to its single-indicator-of-success model, Texas schools were able to report increasing test scores by removing students and schools that did not perform well from the indicator of achievement they presented to the general public (McNeil, 2005). In other words, while overall student proficiency in Texas seemed to be on the upswing, large numbers of students were showing up to college academically unready to meet the demands of college coursework, while countless others were dropping out of school altogether (McNeil, 2005). It seemed that not all was rosy in the state of Texas. Furthermore, how would other states across the nation measure up if their number of dropouts was accurately recorded? More importantly, what would be the implications for students such as the one presented at the start of this chapter? Would single-indicator measures of academic success place her in academically relevant and challenging courses, or would she be identified as needing remediation and tracked into support classes or placed into electives such as sewing and hairdressing because that was all that was available to her? Put simply, if she were Latina and EL labeled, she would most likely either drop out of high school or graduate with little or no chance of college acceptance.

The plight of linguistically marginalized students in a world of high-stakes testing and single indicators of success was detailed by Valdés (2001). In her work, *Learning and Not Learning English: Latino Students in American Schools*, Valdés explained how ELL students found themselves in an “ESL ghetto” even after enrolling in college courses (p. 145). Due to the fact that their language teachers did not recognize their desire or potential to achieve academically, students were consistently recommended for ESL or remedial language courses
from middle school through high school (Valdés, 2001). Even though some students were able to graduate from high school and enter a college or community college as first-year students, they discovered that their ELL label in high school meant that they needed to continue with ESL language courses as college students (Valdés, 2001). Furthermore, their ESL track of learning in high school denied them access to honors or AP courses and made it more likely for them to be required to take entry-level or remedial classes once they enrolled in postsecondary institutions (Valdés, 2001). Yet again, the deficit theory process (Valencia, 1997) of describing students as somehow lacking, as explained by teacher recommendations and standardized test scores, was evident. Because their teachers predicted that the students followed by Valdés (2001) would need more English courses, they were denied entrance into “regular” classes even as college students—presumably to modify their dysfunctions. In this manner, the status quo of monolingual White dominance of the social hierarchy was kept in place and allowed to continue unchallenged.

Similar examples of remedial and segregated educational experiences for linguistically diverse students were additionally unearthed in literature detailing the impact that educational policies such as California’s Proposition 227, NCLB, and RTT have on non-English-only students (Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004; Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Sloan, 2007). To determine how the impact of federal mandates such as NCLB influenced teachers in highly segregated classrooms and schools, Sloan (2007) conducted an ethnographic study of elementary teachers working in a diverse Texas school district. Despite the fact that one of the teachers observed by Sloan during a 3-year period began to provide her students with a more challenging curriculum as a result of high-stakes testing and accountability, other teachers were found to decrease the academic stimulation and relevance in their lessons. For example, one teacher disregarded the
curriculum so widely that Sloan found that his “idiosyncratic teaching filled with fantastical exhibitions and entertaining demonstrations seemed to privilege the few Anglo children and work against the greater number of English-language learners” (p. 33). In this description of an individual teacher, the EL students were placed at a double disadvantage to their English-only peers. Not only were they attending school in a segregated and remedial setting and being subjected to the “idiosyncratic” whims of a teacher, but they were clearly not learning anything of value that would help them prepare for college (Sloan, 2007). Once again, the desire of American education policymakers and teachers to promote success for all students was called into question through their actions. Specifically, the continued employment of deficit-based policies designed to segregate and track students according to their linguistic identities and so-called “abilities” became all the more glaring as EL-labeled students perpetually were placed into inequitable schools and classroom settings.

Interviews with teachers provided further examples of the widespread use of ability-level tracking and deficit theory in modern American schools. For example, when asked about the various programs at their high schools, Latino/a teachers repeatedly indicated that non-college-preparatory tracks often began in middle school and continued throughout high school (G. L. Ochoa, 2007). Furthermore, several teachers interviewed by G. L. Ochoa (2007) expressed their discontent with the International Baccalaureate (IB) program at their high school. Despite the admirable intention of the IB program to develop critical thinking and provide students with a more comprehensive educational experience, the teachers who worked with G. L. Ochoa expressed a strong belief that the IB program reinforced racial and ethnic stereotypes and served as an example of yet another “advanced” or “honors” program that ELL-labeled students were denied (p. 162). Just as programs such as Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID)
and CP and AP courses were seen as creating “schools within schools,” IB courses offered another method for White, English-only students to escape being placed into courses with their Latino/a or ELL peers (Daoud & Quirocho, 2005; G. L. Ochoa, 2007; Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001). The harsh reality faced by students with the EL label, as indicated by a review of literature, included one of remedial course placement, lack of access to college preparatory classes, and an overall schooling experience that was viewed as devoid of critical thinking or empowering topics. While such a system may be seen as admirable to those who wish to advance the status quo, including meritocracy and capitalism, it represents a national tragedy to those who believe otherwise.

**Structural Navigation**

Just as the evolution of deficit theory and the continued reliance on single indicators of student achievement negatively shape the identity of EL-labeled students, how these students navigate the school system was also found to play an integral role in the formation of individual identity (Ferguson, 2001; Flores & Murillo, 2001; N. Lopez, 2003; Olsen, 1997). Consider the initial image of the young female student presented at the start of this chapter. If this student were White, English only, and a least in the middle socioeconomic class, she could be seen as a representation of American hegemony in education. Specifically, she upholds the American ideals of meritocracy and capitalism in the sense that she “earned” the standardized test scores necessary to enroll in more academically challenging classes. She also embodies the xenophobic and anti-immigrant notions of English-only mandates and assimilation into the American culture—she can choose to take whatever courses she wishes due to her position of societal privilege as a White female who happens to speak English as her first, and most likely only, language. For students who do not share her background, the academic pipeline is very different.
As indicated by the conceptual framework used to introduce this body of literature, the systemic realities for linguistically marginalized students were found to impact how they navigated the school system (Ferguson, 2001; Flores & Murillo, 2001; N. Lopez, 2003; Olsen, 1997). Furthermore, the pipeline for Latino/a students could be viewed as a direct manifestation of hegemony and the continuance of meritocracy and capitalism as well as assimilation and Americanization (Carlson, 2008; Gonzalez, 1990). For the purpose of this review of literature, it was important to examine the following areas: (a) methods of preserving meritocracy and capitalism in American schools, (b) American education as a tool for cultural assimilation, (c) the congruence of these factors to create a specific educational pipeline for Latino/a students, and (d) the shaping of student identities as they travel through this pipeline.

**Meritocracy and Capitalism in American Education**

To see the impact of meritocracy and capitalism in American education one does not need to look much further than the current standardized testing system that either rewards or sanctions K-12 schools based on the performance of their students on so-called “high-stakes” exams (Cline et al., 2004; Fine et al., 2008; Flores & Murillo, 2001; Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Ravitch, 2010). This system is so entrenched in the existing academic culture of the United States that even Diane Ravitch, one of the biggest supporters of NCLB, has begun to question its impact on American students. According to Ravitch (2010), the 2014 “goal of 100 percent proficiency has placed thousands of public schools at risk of being privatized, turned into charters, or closed” (para. 5). Ravitch went on to state that the closure of schools based on their performance records was not causing the positive changes that NCLB mandates were created to provide. Furthermore, schools were so obsessed with increasing their mathematics and language arts scores that they began to shorten, or even omit, such subjects as social studies, science, and
the arts (Ravitch, 2010). Publishers also responded to this fixation on test scores by releasing countless numbers of test-prep materials and textbooks aligned to state academic standards, thus inspiring the rise of programs such as Reading First, Accelerated Reader, Accelerated Math, High Point, and other similar prepackaged curriculums designed to boost student proficiency, especially in populations considered to be at risk of failure (Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001). However, such programs did not produce their proposed results—in many cases student performance has decreased, and the so-called “achievement gap” has continued to expand mainly across linguistic, racial, and socioeconomic lines (Cross, 2007; WestEd, 2006). Despite the fact that much of the current discourse surrounding the evaluation of students and teachers through standardized tests has focused on the legislation and resulting labeling of schools as “failing,” the recognition that such a system upholds capitalism and meritocracy has yet to become widespread (Ravitch, 2010). To understand the larger ramifications of NCLB and RTT mandates, the discussion must also include a critical analysis of how the worth and merit of individual students, their teachers, and schools are evaluated.

The concepts of meritocracy and moving up in society based on individual merit are not new ideals in Western society. For example, referring to the 19th-century writings of Dostoyevski, Carlson (2008) wrote that the pursuit of progress or achievement leads to the development of the vision of a “crystal palace” that would be obtainable to those individuals who worked hard enough (p. 3). Carlson expanded on Dostoyevsky’s metaphor of being forced to live in a “chicken coop” until progress was obtained to include the state of modern American public schools. He explained,

We are told again and again by education officials in the state and by their corporate “partners” in school reform that progress is being made in raising standards, narrowing achievement gaps, in making teachers, principals, and school districts more accountable
By using the guise of “success for all,” school districts were able to create a school model that pushed ideals of accountability and achievement while simultaneously allowing for very few “crystal palaces” and for a great deal of “chicken coops” in American education (Carlson, 2008, p. 4). Indeed, the utilization of programs designed to remedy so-called social “disadvantages,” including ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic differences, was an essential component in upholding the hegemonic discourse regarding education and the use of quantifiable measures to track student achievement and progress (Carlson, 2008).

Such accountability measures further indicated yet another example of deficit theory and educational policies in the United States. For example, consider the proficiency levels on California’s CST. After each yearly multiple-choice exam, students are placed into the following categories according to their performance: advanced, proficient, basic, below basic, and far below basic (California Department of Education, 2012a). The notion of using hard work to progress from a level of far below basic to proficient or advanced clearly connects to the earlier reference of the chicken coop and crystal palace: Students and teachers in urban schools performing at low levels on the CST may come to believe that if they work and study hard enough, they will be able to obtain the vaunted status of “proficient” or “distinguished” in the future. Furthermore, Carlson (2008) detailed how such concepts of progress and development provided a rationale for the incorporation of business models in schools that were deemed as failing due to their performance on standardized testing measures. Such a shift was seen as moving back toward the days when education was viewed as a means of preparing workers for factory jobs while upholding the existing social hierarchy as well (Carlson, 2008). Carlson additionally warned that such measures may contribute to a rise in the test scores of some
students but not in educational equity and opportunity for all populations of students. Again, it was possible for education officials to call one’s individual merit, or lack thereof, into question. In other words, if a certain student’s scores did not increase enough to grant him or her access to higher education after high school, then it was most likely due to the fact that he or she did not work hard enough to overcome his or her academic and social deficiencies, and thus the cycle of testing and proving or disproving individual effort was able to continue.

Additional examples of the use of capitalistic models focused on individual merit emerged when reviewing literature that examined programs designed to prepare students from so-called “underrepresented” populations for entrance into college (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Yamamura et al., 2010). The most common example of such a program was found in the AVID program. According to the AVID (2012) website, AVID “accelerates student learning, uses research based methods of effective instruction, provides meaningful and motivational professional learning, and acts as a catalyst for systemic reform and change” (para. 1). However, a closer look at the same website also indicated that AVID is not for all students and that it was instead designed to help students caught in the “middle” academically (AVID, 2012). By the act of excluding students outside of the middle realm, AVID called into question its role as a “catalyst for systemic reform and change” (AVID, 2012, para. 1). For example, if such a program were to become truly transformational, would it not be more revolutionary to find ways of transforming the current system to allow a much broader group of students access to higher education than the token few advanced via the AVID program? Indeed, discussions regarding AVID indicated that both students and teachers viewed it as a worthy program yet one that was closed to many of the students who would benefit from it (Cross, 2007; G. L. Ochoa, 2007;
Evidently, concerned educators and reformists need to move beyond the AVID model should they truly wish for widespread and lasting systemic change.

The concept of college readiness further unearthed the capitalistic foundations of public education in the United States (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Reid & Moore, 2008). College readiness was defined by Byrd and MacDonald (2005) as a multifaceted process of predicting how new college students would fare in their new setting based on their previous grades, test scores, study habits, and knowledge about college life. While Byrd and MacDonald disagreed with the idea that test scores could be successful indicators of college success, they failed to indicate how the definition of college readiness could be expanded beyond its current state—specifically, the idea that one’s grades and study habits alluded to the notion that hard work and individual effort would make it possible to access the realm of higher education. Just like the students attending school in a “chicken coop” were led to believe that they could earn a “crystal palace” via individual determination and merit, the successful college students in the work done by Byrd and MacDonald were found to possess certain characteristics, including skills and abilities and previous life experiences, that served to predict their achievement. However, the hegemony in using characteristics such as skills and life experiences was not discussed in this particular study. Instead, it was taken for granted that college readiness was something that students and their teachers could foster if they adhered to the American and capitalistic notion that hard work will be rewarded—in this case with college acceptance and success (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005).

The widespread use of capitalism as a foundation for educational success also emerged in the work of Reid and Moore (2008). While Reid and Moore were interested in the factors that enabled first-generation urban students to obtain college success and wrote about educational
equity, they did not move the discussion beyond traditional ideas of what college readiness actually entails. In particular, the themes uncovered by Reid and Moore included both the preparation of first-generation college students and the skills such students were seen as lacking when they entered college. Specifically, the students themselves identified the fact that they did not take AP classes or were enrolled in English Language Development (ELD) classes as weaknesses that inhibited their ability to achieve as college students (Reid & Moore, 2008). The researchers of this study did not question the larger implications of the statements made by their participants and instead concluded that the “gaps” in their high school education implied that the students would need additional “support and guidance” in college (Reid & Moore, 2008, p. 259). Such a prediction was reminiscent of not only the deficit-theory practice of predicting which students needed behavioral modification but also the idea that individual students must engage in hard work to overcome their deficiencies (Carlson, 2008; Valencia, 1997). Just as AVID students are encouraged to achieve via individual determination, the students in the study done by Reid and Moore (2008) also bought into the capitalistic notion that they needed to work extra hard to counteract the skills they saw themselves as lacking.

Further studies concerned with college readiness additionally illustrated how meritocracy and capitalism were supported by the education system (Collatos et al., 2004; Yamamura et al., 2010). Even work where researchers made a concentrated effort to discuss the vicious cycle of low college-going rates for traditionally marginalized student populations could not make a complete escape from the capitalism currently rampant in American education (Collatos et al., 2004; Yamamura et al., 2010). Consider the finding that college readiness should be expanded beyond individual effort to include a more community-based approach to building skills (Yamamura et al., 2010). Despite the fact that such a move could begin to break down the
meritocracy that currently calls for individual determination and self-worth, it could also be viewed as supporting the philosophy that certain communities and populations are somehow lacking and need to build their own capital. That the word capital was used by researchers (Yamamura et al., 2010) to describe something that communities needed to build before they could access educational equity implied that capitalism continued to drive even work grounded in social justice and equity. Indeed, what would happen if educational structures and systems designed to maintain the existing social classes and order were actively held accountable for the lack of access to higher education experienced by socially disenfranchised groups? Such a process would most certainly entail the existing discourse pertaining to the various methods within the American school system used to assimilate or Americanize youth.

The American Dream and Assimilationist Education

Education has long been used as a means of creating a homogenous American culture out of the often cited “melting pot” of American society (Child, 2000; Gonzalez, 1990; Olsen, 1997). The Americanization of the other stretches from the boarding schools for Native Americans (Child, 2000), to the use of segregated schools for Mexican American students designed to introduce students to the American dream and the English language (Gonzalez, 1990), to the current use of ESL tracks of students designed to transition them from non-English speakers to “fluent-proficient” children able to participate in so-called “traditional” English classes (Valdés, 2001). Under the guise of providing vocational training, the Native American boarding schools were built to separate Native American children from their parents and break their ties to their history, culture, language, and identity (Child, 2000). While the colonization of the youth subjected to the regimented and militaristic life at the boarding schools served the purpose of “killing the Indian,” the introduction to labor skills also provided a supply of cheap workers for
the American workforce (Child, 2000, p. 90). In this manner, assimilation into the “American”
way of life also meant taking one’s place at the bottom of the capitalistic social hierarchy.

The assimilation of Mexican American youth during the first part of the 20th century also
entailed a combination of the desires of the ruling class to Americanize students and to produce
low-level workers to keep up with the demands of expanding agricultural and industrial fields
(Gonzalez, 1990). Furthermore, classroom teachers in segregated schools played on the negative
stereotypes regarding the Mexican people and culture to hasten the assimilation process
(Gonzalez, 1990). Teachers in California schools were encouraged to modify the behavior of
their students by ridiculing students who came to school “dirty” and by providing Mexican
American students with “worthy” American behaviors and models to imitate (Gonzalez, 1990,
p. 39). At this time, the policymakers in the California Department of Education believed that
Mexican children possessed the innate ability to “imitate” others and that teachers should
capitalize on this facet of “Mexican nature” to Americanize students (Gonzalez, 1990, p. 39).
Such a belief implied that Mexican students, and by default their families, were incapable of
developing their own ideas and expressing their own thoughts. Not only were students to
become more “American” through the imitation of others, but they were taught to do so only
because their supposed “deficits” warranted modification as well. Ironically, many teachers
during this time period made some attempt to highlight aspects of so-called “Mexican” culture
through the teaching of dance, music, art, holidays, and other superficial components of culture
(Gonzalez, 1990). This inclusion of certain topics from a culture outside that of the United
States served as a precursor to methods of teaching about multiple peoples and cultures during
later decades of the 20th century and further indicated evidence of the American concept of
cultural superiority and dominance over others.
Despite the fact that schools in California were no longer legally segregated by the end of the 20th century and start of the 21st century, education policymakers and politicians still found ways to call for the assimilation of Latino students; this time the English language itself was used as a tool for Americanization (Gonzalez, 1990; Valdés, 2001). One has to look no further than the additions made to the California Education Code shortly after the 1998 passage of Proposition 227, or the English for the Children initiative, to find examples of such assimilation tactics. For example, the opening words of Section 300 of the California Education Code read as follows:

Whereas, The English language is the national public language of the United States of America and of the State of California, is spoken by the vast majority of California residents, and is also the leading world language for science, technology, and international business, thereby being the language of economic opportunity. (California Education Code, n.d., sec. 300[a])

According to this statement, English was clearly viewed as the language of power and societal mobility not only in California but the international world as well. Such dominance additionally implied that any other language was subordinate and that its speakers must be pushed to master English as quickly as possible. Further evidence of the cultural and social value given to the English language over others additionally surfaced in the next portion of Section 300 of the California Education Code. This portion reads as follows:

Whereas, Immigrant parents are eager to have their children acquire a good knowledge of English, thereby allowing them to fully participate in the American Dream of economic and social advancement. (California Education Code, n.d., sec. 300[b])

Again, the emphasis on English as a language of power was glaringly evident. Furthermore, the beliefs expressed in the above statement illustrated the practice of using a group’s supposed desires for their children to provide rationale for creating educational programs and policies. That immigrant parents were seen as “eager to have their children acquire” English and “fully
participate in the American Dream” assumed that *all* immigrants entered California and the United States because of America’s supposed economic and social superiority over other nations. With this viewpoint, it was possible to omit the myriad of other reasons that served to push emigrants out of their homelands, including wars, political persecution, drought, and any other factors that influence human migration patterns. That such patterns of movement were often the direct result of American foreign policy and intervention could be conveniently ignored by using the idea of the “American dream” as the only reason for immigration into the United States. In this manner, it was possible to call for the teaching of English to all children in California, especially immigrants, “as rapidly and effectively as possible” (California Education Code, n.d., sec. 300[f]).

Section 305 of the California Education Code (n.d.) reiterated that “all children in California public schools shall be taught English by being taught in English.” The consequences for such a method of teaching English were documented as being particularly damaging for immigrant students in California (Fine et al., 2008; Flores & Murillo, 2001; Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001). Flores and Murillo (2001) chronicled the loss of linguistic identity and the impact of English-only instruction and assimilation after the passage of Proposition 227 in California. As young students became more “American,” they often lost their ability to communicate in their native language and were unable to connect with members of their own families (Flores & Murillo, 2001). The Americanization of students also fostered a belief that Spanish was not to be valued and that it was instead something that was “devalued” and “derided” (Flores & Murillo, 2001, p. 184). Furthermore, Flores and Murillo discovered that Spanish was associated with recent immigrants and that other children would attempt to distance themselves by dressing and acting more American than the “other” students. In this manner, the
students themselves became the agents of their assimilation into the American school system by taking precautions, through their dress and speaking of English, to appear less “foreign” than the children of recently arrived immigrants.

Both Olsen (1997, 2010) and Valdés (2001) illustrated the dynamics that influenced immigrant students as they underwent the assimilation process in different California public schools. When Olsen (1997) asked one student if she felt American, the student replied, “Of course not! If you do not speak English right, you cannot be American” (p. 93). Clearly, this student had already internalized the implicit rule that mastery of “correct” English was the most important method of becoming American. The students interviewed and shadowed by Olsen often expressed the desire to lose their “accent,” speak English “more correctly,” and master American “slang” (p. 93). Even though the proponents of English-only instruction and assimilationist curriculum could use the sentiments of these students as further arguments to transition students to English instruction with all due haste and to expose them to a barrage of written and spoken English, the matter was not viewed as that simple according to Olsen. Specifically, one student described the process of learning English in such a setting: “I’d get so tired, my head would hurt. All day I sit in classes and hear English, English, English, and try so hard to understand, but I do not understand. I was afraid the teacher would call on me” (p. 93). There was no question that this student was exposed to English; however, whether or not this student was actually acquiring English was highly doubtful.

The work of Valdés (2001) provided further examples of the damage caused by deficit theory, assimilation, and English-only instruction in a California middle school during the first years of the 21st century. While shadowing four EL-identified students, Valdés was shocked to find that these students were given multiple chances to color, sit silently, and participate in
disconnected English grammar lessons during their time in their ESL class. It was additionally
discovered that these middle school students were given an abundance of time to color due to the
fact that their teachers believed they did not color as children in their homelands (Valdés, 2001).
Such a belief mirrored the ideology of the teachers of Mexican students in the first part of the
20th century (Gonzalez, 1990) in the sense that preconceived and negative beliefs about
immigrant students were used as justification for curricular and instructional choices.
Additionally, students in the class that Valdés (2001) observed were made to sit silently and
listen to English because their teacher either lacked the classroom management skills to run her
class differently, believed that the children would not behave if given a chance to speak, or
wanted them to hear as much English as possible during the course of the day. Whatever the
reasoning behind her silent classroom, it was evident that the students did not benefit from this
method and were made to feel that they had done something wrong or incorrect. Just as the
student who expressed shame and frustration at not being able to understand English (Olsen,
1997) had begun to doubt her self-worth, the middle school students also suffered from a sense
of identity loss (Valdés, 2001). Finally, the abstract grammar lessons and endless worksheets
designed to foster English “proficiency” (Valdés, 2001) vividly indicated the “learn English
through being taught in English only” philosophy of the backers of California’s Proposition 227
as well as those of the authors of Sections 300 and 305 of the California Education Code (n.d.).
As late as the 21st century, California’s education policymakers and individual teachers were
still running an assimilationist ship.

As indicated by the previous discussion, the most common experience for immigrant or
non-English-speaking students in California entailed a highly segregated and tracked high school
experience consisting of placement in remedial or ELD courses (Cross, 2007; G. L. Ochoa, 2007;
Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001). For example, students alienated to the “ESL ghetto” (Valdés, 2001, p. 145) could expect to be denied entrance into CP, honors, AP, IB, and other similar programs designed to promote college readiness (Cross, 2007; Morrell, 2004; G. L. Ochoa, 2007; Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001). Furthermore, in her work detailing the plight of Long-Term English Language Learners (LTELLs), Olsen (2010) discovered that LTELL students possessed a strong desire to attend college after high school but did not have the credits necessary to graduate, did not understand the college application process, or had not taken the courses needed for acceptance into a 4-year academic institution upon graduation. Such findings illustrated the impact that ability-level tracking and deficit-based programs had, and continue to have, on students who carry the ELL label; they highly value education yet cannot carry out their hopes due to the systemic restraints preventing them from accessing an equitable education.

An additional example of the assimilation inherent in American education surfaced in another study conducted in California’s modern and highly segregated schools (Cuero, Worthy, & Rodríguez-Galindo, 2008). When given the choice between attending a magnet middle school or the neighborhood school, fifth-grade Latino students knew they were making a decision that transcended which middle school to attend (Cuero et al., 2008). Specifically, the students followed by Cuero et al. (2008) expressed their frustration at having to choose between their families and identities as Latinos and their educational futures. These students clearly understood that the magnet school would give them a better chance at becoming successful in middle school and high school, yet they also knew that they would essentially become outsiders in their own neighborhood and community should they elect to attend the magnet school (Cuero et al., 2008). The fact that young students were forced to make such a difficult decision when they were in fifth grade vividly depicted the harsh reality still faced by many Latino and
linguistically alienated students. The existence of such a reality leads one to question whether or not White students, such as the one introduced at the beginning of this chapter, face similar choices and how society would react if they did.

**Upholding Hegemony: The Educational Pipeline**

As clearly outlined in the preceding examples, the educational experiences of disenfranchised and immigrant populations stemmed from a combination of deficit theory, meritocracy and capitalism, and assimilation into the “American dream” (Gonzalez, 1990; Valenzuela, 2009). Such a toxic mixture created the current pipeline of hegemony that Latino/a students and their other non-American counterparts must traverse should they wish to access social mobility.

Curriculum, educational policies, and instructional practices have all played major roles in the perpetuation of hegemony in American education (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 2009; Thornton, 2009; Valenzuela, 2009). According to the American Association of University Women (AAUW, 2009), “Ideally, the curriculum provides each student with both windows out onto the experiences of others and mirrors of her or his own reality and validity. But for most students, the present curriculum provides many windows and few mirrors” (p. 216). In other words, to counter hegemony and the upholding of the status quo, curriculum should grant students access to multiple perspectives while simultaneously providing them with methods of validating their own identities and experiences (AAUW, 2009). However, a report completed by the AAUW regarding the implicit messages connected to gender roles that were present in sexual education curriculum found the exact opposite. In particular, when teachers could have used the taboo topic of the sexual identities of young women as a liberating experience, they instead sent their female students the hidden message that such discourse was
not proper for young women by glossing over the subject, skipping sections of the curriculum, or omitting it altogether (AAUW, 2009). In this fashion, female students learned that if they were anything other than chaste and otherwise “moral,” they were somehow less valued than their peers. Furthermore, the students in this report were prevented from learning important information regarding their sexual health, birth control, and sexually transmitted diseases and were thereby kept in a state of subjugation by the dominant male and Christian society (AAUW, 2009).

Queer students have also experienced the impact of hegemony in modern education in the United States (Thornton, 2009). Thornton (2009) expanded the idea of Americanization and assimilation to include heteronormativity. Thornton described the role that “hidden curriculum” plays in American schools and asserted that “although unmentioned in the publicly announced curriculum, all young people learn that sex role deviance, actual or perceived, exacts a heavy price” (p. 364). Thornton additionally explained how “all teachers are curricular-instructional gatekeepers—they largely decide the day-to-day curriculum and activities students experience” (p. 365). While it could be argued that teachers do not have autonomy to make wide-sweeping curricular decisions, it could also be argued that teachers do have the ability to determine which social messages they send to their students. In this manner, the hidden curriculum implied within teacher-to-student interaction and discourse prevented queer students from developing a positive sense of identity and promoted one of social deviance instead (Thornton, 2009).

Such practices of omission and repression were also evident in the concept of subtractive schooling, as coined by Valenzuela (2009). According to Valenzuela, the antibilingual and English-only climate of schools in the Southwest forced Mexican youth to be “subjected on a daily basis, to subtle, negative messages that undermine the worth of their unique culture and
history” (p. 340). Just as female students and queer students were made to feel deviant or inferior due to their real or perceived divergence from accepted social norms, Spanish-speaking students were pushed to subtract their individual language and culture from their identity (Valenzuela, 2009). Furthermore, as linguistically diverse students underwent the process of being labeled according to their various levels of English “proficiency,” they were also “systemically derogated and diminished” (Valenzuela, 2009, p. 340). Similar to the students who worked with both Olsen (1997, 2010) and Valdés (2001), the youth being discussed in this example were again made to feel less valued, deviant, and worthless when compared to their English-speaking or English-fluent peers (Valenzuela, 2009). The stripping of one’s personal identity and positive self-concept was seen as one of the main foundations for hegemony and the continuance of Anglo norms and Christian social beliefs (AAUW, 2009; Thornton, 2009; Valenzuela, 2009). Such dominance and subjugation built the groundwork for existing conditions of educational repression and control in modern American public schools.

The current pipeline for linguistically deviant students could further be expanded to include Foucault’s (1995) ideas of discipline and punishment. Specifically, Foucault’s portrayal of 19th-century French penal institutions included elements of discipline found in current California education and language policies. According to Foucault, the following conclusions could be made concerning the Western prison system in the 19th century:

1. These prisons did not diminish the crime rate and instead caused crime to increase in some cases;
2. Being imprisoned was a direct cause of recidivism;
3. The prison system fostered the creation of social delinquents;
4. Delinquents were more likely to form organized groups when imprisoned;
5. Increased surveillance perpetuated the cycle of recidivism and incarceration; and
6. The inmate’s family was also made to suffer due to individual imprisonment.

As previously stated, such conclusions about 19th-century institutions of incarceration illustrate the plight of current immigrant and EL-labeled students. Consider the following examples:

**The crime rate.** Literature indicated that subjecting students to endless amounts of support classes, forcing them into segregated ELD classes, and labeling them as academically and socially deficient did little or nothing to increase their educational access or achievement, regardless of how that achievement was measured (Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001). The fact that California had 51,814 Latino dropouts, compared to just 14,223 White dropouts, in 2010-2011 indicated just one method that could be used to illustrate the failure of the current education system in California. Just as the 19th-century prisons studied by Foucault (1995) did not decrease the crime rate, the barrage of programs targeting linguistically disenfranchised populations can be viewed in a similar manner—they are not working.

**Recidivism.** When Valdés (2001) employed the term ESL ghetto to describe the track that EL-labeled students had to follow throughout their educational career, she may as well have been discussing linguistic recidivism. For example, American public schools have long been used to prevent and modify individual behaviors viewed as deficient by those in mainstream society (Child, 2000; Gonzalez, 1990). Such modifications or remediation were also goals of the prison system depicted by Foucault (1995). However, the fact that inmates returned after being released indicated that individual behavior was not modified and that former prisoners were almost certain to be incarcerated again (Foucault, 1995). Students trapped in the ESL ghetto, as defined by Valdés (2001), underwent the same cycle of release and recidivism; as soon as they escaped one ELD program, they were almost immediately placed into another classroom.
designed to “support” English development. Again, neither the 19th-century French prisons nor the modern California classrooms could be viewed as social institutions that inspired positive change.

**Creation of delinquents.** Marginalized students have been shown to engage in self-fulfilling prophecies of behavior once they begin to internalize the deviant identity imposed on them by the hidden curriculum (Ferguson, 2001; N. Lopez, 2003). Researchers such as Ferguson (2001) and N. Lopez (2003) have chronicled how students who experience deficit-based schooling come to believe that they will not succeed academically and that they have no other choice but to fail both socially and academically. The tracking of Latino boys and young men into low-level classes was seen as evidence of the raced and gendered ways school politics and teacher perceptions worked to create “problem” students (N. Lopez, 2003). For example, male students in a Southern California school who were viewed as problems were sent to isolated settings dubbed the “punishing room” and the “jailhouse” to receive their consequence for breaking a school rule or speaking out against a teacher or other authority figure (Ferguson, 2001, p. 34). Needless to say, Ferguson (2001) noted that such punishment did not resolve the issue and that students continued to return to the punishing room, often because they believed that they had no other options while at school.

**The formation of organized groups.** The “bad boys” that Ferguson (2001) observed were able to form connections with each other given their extended time in the punishing room or the jailhouse. This further solidified their reputation as bad boys and called for additional isolation from their elementary school peers (Ferguson, 2001). This group of boys fit into the overall school hierarchy much in the way that the immigrant students in Olsen’s (1997) work were forced to form their own segregated social group that resided at the bottom of the school’s
social ladder. The need for prisoners to discover methods of survival upon incarceration (Foucault, 1995) mirrored the desire immigrant and other “deviant” youth had to foster social connections as a method of enduring their schooling experience. When such groups, such as Ferguson’s (2001) “bad boys,” were additionally labeled as problems, they further segregated themselves from the “normal” society of their schools.

**Increased surveillance.** During her work in the urban setting of a New York City public high school, N. Lopez (2003) noticed that “male security guards were allowed to chase, manhandle, and apprehend male students” despite the official position that they were on campus to “protect all students” (p. 74). N. Lopez quickly realized that most of the students being monitored were male and that many of the school’s staff harbored biases against the male Dominican students in their school. Just as Foucault (1995) maintained that released prisoners were more likely to be incarcerated due to the heightened surveillance used upon their initial release from prison, the harassed students in N. Lopez’s (2003) observations could not fail to be apprehended by the security guards for one minor transgression or another. In this manner, they became a part of the cycle of deviance and oppression present in the educational experiences of other marginalized populations (N. Lopez, 2003; Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001).

**Family suffering.** Deficit theorists and segregationists often advocated for the assimilation and transformation of the other (Olsen, 1997; Valdés, 2001). As immigrant students were forced to remove or subtract their language and culture from their identities, they undoubtedly harmed their sense of family cohesion as well (Valenzuela, 2009). Furthermore, the economic hardships suffered by the families depicted in Foucault’s (1995) work could also connect to the lack of academic and social access granted to immigrant and EL-labeled students (Olsen, 1997; Valdés, 2001). Because students with the EL stigma were denied access into a
college-bound track, they were forced to endure academic segregation while decreasing their chances of future economic ability (Gonzalez, 1990). Again, the existing social hierarchy was able to remain unbroken and unchallenged.

As indicated by the above discussion, students whose experiences were situated outside of the ideals of meritocracy and capitalism often faced a schooling journey fraught with assimilation into the American dream and a curriculum or academic program ruled by hegemony (Child, 2000; Cline et al., 2004; Fine et al., 2008; Flores & Murillo, 2001; Gonzalez, 1990; Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Olsen, 1997; Ravitch, 2010). Such experiences vividly expanded on earlier deficit theory and language policy to build an educational pipeline that closely mirrored the process of incarceration, formation of social deviance, release, and recidivism depicted by Foucault (1995). The impact of such a pipeline on the formation of the identities and self-concepts of linguistically marginalized students further emerged as a strong theme within relevant literature.

**Within the Pipeline: Student Pathways**

The formation of identity is a nuanced and multifaceted process that cannot be separated from the sociocultural factors that surround individual lives and experiences (Anzaldúa, 1999; Olsen, 1997; Tatum, 1997). According to Tatum (1997), one’s identity depends largely on how that individual believes that others perceive him or her. When considering the identity formation of her college students, Tatum discovered that the part of individual identity that was seen as different from the dominant identity often created a sense of “otherness” (p. 21). For example, when one’s sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, religion, or other aspect of identity was not the same as that of the dominant social group, the individual who possessed the deviant character trait was often viewed as an outsider (Tatum, 1997). Similar to deficit theory (Valencia, 1997),
one’s identity as a subordinate or other called for that person to be “labeled as defective or substandard in significant ways” (Tatum, 1997, p. 23). Such a condition of being labeled as a “defective other,” according to Tatum (1997), further enabled the dominant group to “target” subordinate groups and assign societal roles based on their devalued status (p. 23). The concept of role assignment based on social position provided yet another example of the use of deficit theory (Valencia, 1997) and deviance (Foucault, 1995) to ensure that those groups in power held onto their position atop the social hierarchy as evident through the use of racially segregated schools, ability-level tracking, incarceration, and other such measures designed under the guise of behavioral modification.

American students within devalued and disenfranchised social groups additionally experienced a complex process of identity formation and reformation (Olsen, 1997). During her work at a large California public high school, Olsen (1997) came to realize that the immigrant youth at this school underwent a complicated process that “slotted” them into their “proper” position in both the school and city hierarchy (p. 39). Similar to Tatum’s (1997) position that members of dominant social groups took their membership in such groups for granted, Olsen (1997) discovered that the “American” and “English-speaking” students held an inherent belief that their school belonged to them, and therefore, they did not notice their socially inferior peers (p. 39). This separation was evident during a project undertaken in a world history course observed by Olsen. This project called for students to create a map of their high school to indicate where different social groups stayed during lunch and other breaks. Not only were the maps completed by the White and English-speaking students in the “regular” world history class different from those made by the students in the “newcomer” class, but they were so different that one White student commented, “Jeez, you’d think we were going to a whole different
school” when viewing a map completed by the “newcomers” (Olsen, 1997, p. 38). In a sense, Olsen professed, the students did attend a separate school—one for White and English-dominant students, and one for the societal “other.”

A similar experience was documented by Daoud and Quiocio (2005) when they found that Latino students did not interact with the White and native English speakers who shared their high school campus at another site in California. This lack of interaction was not caused by unwillingness on the part of the Latino students but rather from the inability of the White students to even notice the Latinos on campus (Daoud & Quiocio, 2005). Furthermore, when Latino students were enrolled in AP and honors courses, they felt as if they did not belong and that the White students resented their presence (Daoud & Quiocio, 2005). Such sentiments were mirrored in other studies chronicling the interaction between linguistically stigmatized students and their mostly monolingual peers (Morrell, 2004; Valdés, 2001). For example, Latino students frequently expressed frustration that teachers and Anglo students did not see them as academically capable, offer them advice about the college application process, value their presence in higher level academic courses, or even notice that they were part of the campus community (Morrell, 2004). Even students with strong resiliency would be hard-pressed to remain optimistic about their academic futures in such settings, and it is possible to see how students would start the process of disengaging from school. Evidently, these schools were for White and monolingual students; anyone else was left behind to hope for the best.

The above examples provided two tangible and easily observable aspects of the identity formation of immigrant youth in California high schools (Daoud & Quiocio, 2005; Olsen, 1997). While immigrants from Mexico and Central America were eager to learn English and integrate with their American peers (Olsen, 1997), Chicano and Latino students at Madison High
(pseudonym) saw their native language as a sense of pride and identity. In particular, the Latino students were upset due to the English-only policy enacted by the high school’s teachers and administrators and called for a walkout to protest the fact that they were often told not to speak in Spanish and to use only English while at school (Olsen, 1997). For the newcomer students, this presented a complicated dilemma. Despite the fact that they desired to integrate into campus life, they did not want to further separate themselves from other non-English speakers by either not participating in the walkout or by speaking primarily in English during school (Olsen, 1997). Furthermore, Olsen (1997) uncovered the fact that even when immigrants were able to acquire enough English to “cross the threshold” of becoming viewed as “English speakers,” they were still denied access to the complete academic system (p. 105). Again, the use of sheltered classes, placement in noncollege tracks in high school, and lack of knowledge about the college admission process all were factors that barred such students from full academic participation and achievement (Olsen, 1997). Ironically, the very structures that were in place to assimilate immigrant youth into American society, mainly through the learning of English, also prevented them from obtaining the same opportunities as their White, American, and English-only peers (Olsen, 1997).

Writing before the 1998 passage of California’s infamous Proposition 227, Olsen (1997) clearly detailed how the xenophobic political climate of the late 1990s in California impacted the individual academic and social experiences of immigrant youth. Olsen labeled this process the “Americanization Project of Schools” (p. 240). She additionally defined three ways that such a project was able to assimilate new students into their “proper” place in American society. These methods included the academic and social exclusion of immigrant youth from their peers, pressure to give up native languages and identities, and finding one’s place in the racial hierarchy.
to the United States (Olsen, 1997). Just as American educational institutions in the first half of the 20th century were used as places of assimilation for Mexican students (Gonzalez, 1990), California schools at the end of the same century were still put to the same task (Olsen, 1997). The educational pipeline for linguistically and racially marginalized groups therefore included themes of segregation, language and identity loss, and a sense of searching for one’s “correct” group or place.

The concept of living trapped among various worlds and searching for one’s home was explored by Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) in her work on the borderlands. According to Anzaldúa, a Chicana woman could not feel “safe” within her own culture, was criticized by White culture, and was further “hunted as prey” by males (p. 42). This feeling of fear or insecurity led to an inability to act or respond to oppression and to being “caught between los intersticios, the spaces between different worlds she inhabits” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 42). Anzaldúa additionally explained how women living in the borderlands of identity could find security by carrying their identity, or “home,” within themselves just as a turtle takes its “home” on its back (p. 43). By carrying one’s culture within, it was possible to analyze and reject the aspects of personal cultures that caused personal injury (Anzaldúa, 1999). In other words, Anzaldúa professed the following regarding her reclaiming of identity:

> What I want is an accounting with all three cultures—white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carry and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture—una cultura mestiza—with my own lumber, my own brick and mortar and my own feminist architecture. (p. 44)

By refusing to use the constraints and labels placed on her identity by the dominant culture, Anzaldúa was able to embrace aspects of all three of her cultures that allowed her to move beyond the pain inflicted on her by negative portions of her cultures and histories. Her statement
that she wanted to use her own building blocks for the creation of her *cultura mestiza* further illustrated the power that individuals can find when they not only reject oppressive systems of identity but use their own experiences and knowledge to lay the foundation for a new identity as well (Anzaldúa, 1999).

The ability to reject cultural dominance implied that one was able and willing to recognize the act of being oppressed (Anzaldúa, 1999). To describe the action of such recognition, Anzaldúa (1999) used the concept of *la facultad*. *La facultad*, as defined by Anzaldúa, is an ability to perceive beyond the surface level and sense when one is being oppressed or placed in a situation that might cause personal harm or injury. For example, Anzaldúa expressed her belief that “when we have all sorts of oppressions coming at us, we are forced to develop this faculty so that we know when the next person is going to slap us or lock us away” (pp. 60-61). *La facultad* additionally develops and becomes more powerful the more one experiences fear and isolation, and “confronting anything that tears the fabric of our everyday mode of consciousness and that thrusts us into a less literal and more psychic sense of reality increases awareness and *la facultad*” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 61). Developing this sense of psychic awareness was seen as an essential component in not only surviving the borderlands but also reclaiming and rebuilding one’s identity from a state of oppression (Anzaldúa, 1999).

How students living in the borderlands might develop *la facultad* was not explored by Anzaldúa (1999). However, it was used in later work regarding marginalized students and their process of identity formation and systemic navigation (Taylor, 2008; Torres, 2003; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Using the data collected during a mixed-methods longitudinal study of Latino/a college students, Torres and Hernandez (2007) found that young adults from traditionally marginalized populations went through four stages of identity
formation as they navigated through the systemic constraints placed on them by the dominant culture. These stages included (a) following external formulas, (b) standing at the crossroads, (c) becoming the author of one’s life, and (d) building an internal foundation (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Figure 5 was adapted to illustrate the process of cultural identity development for Latino/a students, according to Torres and Hernandez.


As illustrated in Figure 5, the process of identity formation for culturally marginalized groups begins with the internalization of the labels and associated identities set for them by dominant groups and authority figures (Taylor, 2008; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Similar to the ways through which the 19th-century prison system created a population of delinquents (Foucault, 1995) and the oversupervision of Latino and Black male students inspired the foundations for teachers to believe that they had problem populations (Ferguson, 2001;
N. Lopez, 2003), the Americanization of immigrant youth provided the external authority necessary to cause linguistically diverse students to internalize their status as deficient or incapable of academic achievements (Gonzalez, 1990; Olsen, 1997; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997). According to Torres and Hernandez (2007), individuals who were following external factors did not engage in activities that pushed them outside of their comfort zone, had little or no support to try new experiences, and held a dichotomous view of culture that could be seen in terms of “Anglo” and “Latino” (p. 569). Because individuals externally defined their identities, they experienced a sense of discomfort when attempting to navigate Anglo-dominated colleges and saw their peers as either Latino or Anglo (Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Such a polarized vision made it virtually impossible for such students to integrate fully into campus life and further hampered their own identity development. They had yet to reject the labels defined for them by the dominant group (Anzaldúa, 1999; Tatum, 1997).

Socially marginalized groups were destined to continue their acceptance of the authority figure’s perception of their identity unless an event occurred that made them aware of the racism inherent in American society and institutions (Taylor, 2008; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Taylor (2008) named this experience “the fault line,” as shown in Figure 5. The ability to recognize racist thoughts and actions was viewed as an essential part of entering the crossroads (Taylor, 2008; Torres, 2009). Working with young adults during a longitudinal study of 29 Latino/a college students led Torres (2009) to conclude that unless students could specifically name the actions and beliefs of others as racist, they were more likely to internalize and believe the negative stereotypes about themselves. For example, students expressed their belief that they were somehow lacking when compared to others depending on their accent when they spoke
English or on their cultural backgrounds. During one interview, a student told Torres that her community could be seen as follows:

It’s common in us, Latinos, to come out pregnant early because a majority of us do come out pregnant early. A majority of us are not educated enough to think, well let me go to school and get my education. (p. 512)

The fact that this student mentioned the commonality of Latina students getting pregnant and leaving college clearly indicated that she had internalized the ethnic stereotypes regarding Latinas and that she was not yet able to recognize racist thoughts and proceed to the crossroads of her individual identity development. Two years after her initial interview, the same student was attending a different college where she was forced into situations outside of her comfort zone (Torres, 2009). This led her to develop an ability to understand how stereotypes enable racist thoughts and perceptions to become so pervasive in American society and, more importantly, that she did not have to accept such thoughts herself (Torres, 2009). This Latina student was beginning to develop what Anzaldúa (1999) referred to as *la facultad* and could then use that sense to make meaning of her identity through different lenses than those of the dominant culture. She had arrived at the crossroads (Torres, 2009).

Individuals at the crossroads of identity development generally arrive there after encountering a negative and racially charged event that forces them to name some aspect of racism in their environment (Taylor, 2008; Torres, 2009; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Additionally, this event or realization was found to cause the student in question to experience feelings of cultural dissonance (Torres, 2003). According to Torres (2003), “The behaviors that are expressed within this condition [cultural dissonance] refer to the experience of dissonance or conflict between one’s own sense of culture and what others expect” (p. 540). The dissonance caused by the recognition of racism was further used to explain how students began to make
deliberate choices about their own identity (Taylor, 2008; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Students at the crossroads of identity authorship who were able to cope with their sense of cultural dissonance developed a solid sense of self that they could use when making future choices about their identity; those who could not either stagnated in their development of self or regressed back to relying on outside authority figures from the dominant culture to form their identities (Taylor, 2008; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Despite the fact that some studies indicated that too much cultural dissonance could lead marginalized students to feel unwelcome, especially in predominantly White institutions (Museus & Quaye, 2009; Schwartz, Donovan, & Guido-DiBrito, 2009), cultural dissonance was viewed as a positive factor in moving Latino/a students beyond the crossroads of identity formation (Taylor, 2008; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). How can one develop *la facultad* necessary to navigate through a racist society without first being exposed to racism and the resulting sense of dissonance (Anzaldúa, 1999)?

Young adults who successfully navigated the sense of cultural dissonance associated with standing at the crossroads were found to be more capable of using self-authorship to define their identities and make positive choices about their lives (Taylor, 2008; Torres, 2003; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Specifically, Torres and Hernandez (2007) discovered that the abilities needed for Latino young adults to become adept at self-authorship included the following:

1. A recognition of individual cultural reality and the creation of one’s own principles;
2. Creating an “informed” Latino/a identity;
3. Advocating for Latinos; and
4. Renegotiate and reform relationships to be more consistent with a Latino/a perspective. (p. 569)

Just as Anzaldúa (1999) advocated for creating her own identity out of her own lumber and bricks, the Latino/a students followed by Torres and Hernandez (2007) who were able to navigate a White society successfully were additionally able to use their own internal perspective
to form and reform their identity and relationships with others. The finding that identity formation and relationships moved forward after individuals experienced cultural dissonance was additionally discussed by Torres and Baxter Magolda (2004), who determined that “ethnic identity reconstruction was intricately interwoven with cognitive and relationship reconstruction” (p. 345). In other words, one could not move forward to confront internalized racism and negative stereotypes without first experiencing dissonance and then possessing the internal and external resources necessary for social and personal reconstruction (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004).

The final stage of identity construction for socially subordinate groups moved past self-authorship to allow individuals to rely on strong internal foundations regarding issues of culture and race (Taylor, 2008; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Taylor (2008) described the internal beliefs that Latino/a students possessed at this stage as including the following thoughts: “I know because . . . but I also accept ambiguity. I am . . . even when environmental forces pressure me to change. I want relationships that . . . but negotiate to meet both my needs and others’ needs” (p. 219). Given the previous discussion concerning the multitude of negative factors such as hegemony and decades of pervasive racism and linguicism (Cline et al., 2004; Gonzalez, 1990; Olsen, 1997; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997), linguistically diverse Latino/a college students studying at modern American institutions of higher learning needed to develop a sharp set of internal resources and skills to navigate through such a system without conforming to the status quo or leaving college due to a sense of hopelessness or frustration (Taylor, 2008; Torres, 2003; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Furthermore, students in similar situations were described as facing three challenges, which included the concepts that knowledge is complex and socially constructed, self is central to knowledge construction, and authority and expertise is shared in
joint knowledge construction (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). Moving students and educators toward such fluid and potentially transformative methods of identity construction was and continues to be a challenge for those who seek to break the hegemony and upset the status quo of a racist education system. How this process may begin in a widespread fashion was another central theme that emerged during this particular review of literature.

**Countering the Status Quo: Curriculum Reform and Critical Processes**

As clearly indicated in the previous discussion, marginalized student groups travel an educational pathway designed on principles of capitalism and meritocracy (Cline et al., 2004; Fine et al., 2008; Flores & Murillo, 2001; Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Ravitch, 2010) as well as Americanization and cultural assimilation (Child, 2000; Gonzalez, 1990; Olsen, 1997). The hegemony inherent in the existing public school system in the United States (AAUW, 2009; Gonzalez, 1990; Thornton, 2009; Valenzuela, 2009) forces students through an educational pipeline that calls on them to constantly evaluate and reevaluate their experiences in terms of race and cultural dissonance, which then gives rise to the formation of internalized identity and beliefs (Daoud & Quirocho, 2005; Olsen, 1997; Taylor, 2008; Torres, 2003; Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). While such a process has led to the creation of empowered Latino/a students in some instances, a truly widespread movement for such liberation has yet to begin in this country, and the sociocultural and systemic realities for linguistically disenfranchised youth continue to perpetuate deficit-based and inhumane philosophies and educational practices (Anzaldúa, 1999; Cross, 2007; Olsen, 2010; Tatum, 1997; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997).

According to the framework presented at the start of this chapter, hegemony can be challenged through the emergence of counternarratives. Specifically, such a movement begins
with multicultural curriculum reform as a general foundation and expands to include practices grounded in critical pedagogy and praxis. For the purpose of examining how these concepts overlap and inform the movements to break the cycle of oppression and dominance for linguistically marginalized populations, the following themes were explored: (a) the use of multicultural curriculum reform as a foundation for educational transformation, (b) critical pedagogy as a doorway to border pedagogy and other empowering practices, and (c) the need for nontraditional and less positivistic research methods.

**Multicultural Curriculum Reform: The Building Blocks for Change**

Curriculum reformists have long advocated for the inclusion of multicultural and varied perspectives in modern classroom settings (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Morrell, 2004; Olsen, 2010; Sleeter, 2005; Valdés, 2001). Expanding the curriculum beyond traditionally biased textbooks can allow educators to combat deficit models of schools and can help students engage with school as well (Chaplin, 2008; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Morrell, 2004). For example, marginalized students working with Morrell (2004) at a large California high school not only learned how to examine their textbooks and course materials in a critical manner but became active participants in selecting new curriculum to be used in their language arts programs. Instead of relying on literary analysis and narratives of White dominant culture, these students included hip hop and popular movies as a way of bringing their culture into the classroom in a highly rigorous and academic manner (Morrell, 2004). Furthermore, the academic success experienced by the students working with Morrell gave them confidence to challenge the status quo at their school and demand more access to AP and honors courses. As the students became seasoned community researchers, they additionally developed the voice necessary to share their counternarratives with the outside community and actively advocate for
themselves. Imagine the possibilities if such educational opportunities were given to students across the United States. For this reason, it is imperative that the current discussion of educational policies and practices move beyond deficit theory and examinations of what students and their families “lack.”

The use of multicultural curriculum to reform a school system bent on conforming students to the status quo was explored by Nieto (2000) in her work *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education*. According to Nieto,

Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. (p. 305)

When defined in this context, multicultural education can serve as the foundation for ethnic studies, nontraditional teaching methods, and expanded curriculum that was used to start a movement against the hegemony present in modern American education (Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 2005; Sleeter & Stillman, 2009). For example, the multicultural curriculum reform movement that emerged from the Civil Rights Movement focused on reforming schools to include issues of social justice and equity by providing access to quality curriculum, textbook revisions, relevance of curriculum to marginalized populations, and methods of promoting eventual transformation (Sleeter, 2005). By using such a broad basis for the initial beginnings of curriculum reform along multicultural lines, it was possible for educators to bring the experiences and backgrounds of their students into the classroom, and in doing so, start the process of rewriting curriculum in a more inclusive and equitable manner (Muñoz, 2002; Nieto, 2000; Shor, 1992; Sleeter, 2005).

When education is rewritten or reconsidered in a more pervasive and inclusive manner, it additionally provides students and teachers a method of rethinking school reform (Nieto, 2000).
Specifically, the initial Chicano studies movement encouraged students and their teachers to consider the Chicano plight in terms of being colonized by Anglo ideologies and values (Muñoz, 2002). While this movement led to the development of a different discourse, especially in terms of social studies, it did not move students beyond the overly dominant paradigm of Americanization and meritocracy present in American education (Muñoz, 2002). Specifically, it became necessary to find methods of moving students beyond the passive nature of the banking model of education to engage with curriculum and discourse in a more critical manner (Shor, 1992; Sleeter, 2005). Shor (1992) called for teachers to be particularly cognizant of the fact that education and learning are “participatory, involving humor, hope, and curiosity” (p. 26). Once students were provided access to a curriculum and pedagogy that was participatory and critical in nature, Shor believed that they would also become more open to seeing their own ideas and experiences as having value—worth that would benefit marginalized student populations in particular. However, such empowerment faced barriers within the school system in the form of so-called “multicultural curriculum” that focused on exposing students to what Nieto (2000) referred to as the heroes, holidays, and food approach. Just as Chicano educators and activists struggled to disentangle themselves from the dominant paradigms and discourse in their respective fields (Muñoz, 2002), modern multicultural curriculum reformists continue to work against those who see their curriculum as nothing more than an addition to the existing curriculum (Chaplin, 2008; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter & Stillman, 2009). Due to this overly simplistic view of multicultural curriculum and its ability to fit nicely within the confines of the existing educational paradigm, educational activists who sought to transform the system and truly empower disenfranchised populations turned to the concepts of critical pedagogy and praxis as
methods of pushing the boundaries of reform and transformation (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2007; hooks; 2003; Morrell, 2004).

As indicated in the previous discussion, including multicultural and empowering curriculum in public classrooms presented educators and reformists with the basic foundations of making traditional subjects more accessible and relevant to socially disenfranchised populations (Chaplin, 2008; Nieto, 2000; Shor, 1992; Sleeter, 2005; Sleeter & Stillman, 2009). For example, work that included curricular reform, such as that done by Chaplin (2008), Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008), and Mitchie (2009), illustrated the benefits that moving beyond the existing academic standards and textbooks possessed for marginalized student groups. When working with 56 eighth-grade students labeled as being “at risk” of academic failure by their district, Chaplin (2008) discovered that her students had a special aversion to their social studies curriculum and that they did not feel confident of their abilities in this academic content area. However, when these same students were encouraged to analyze their existing American history textbook to consider whose voices were missing and use that information to research multiple perspectives that could be brought into their social studies class, they reported both an increase in confidence and engagement with their studies (Chaplin, 2008). Despite the fact that students became active participants in this individual classroom, their voices were not shared with a larger audience, and their activities thereby failed to transform the current system of hegemony and oppression (Chaplin, 2008).

Even the work of educational activists such as Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) and Morrell (2004) illustrated the difficulties in pushing for educational transformation instead of merely relying on reformative measures. Specifically, the Pacific Beach Project undertaken by Morrell called for students to become critical researchers and vocalize their findings related to
ability-level tracking and lack of equitable educational access at their high school to the larger community and school officials. Even though such a process went beyond the walls of individual classrooms and challenged students to use their acquired academic skills to conduct critical research within their community, they still faced barriers to true transformation (Morrell, 2004). Of particular interest was the fact that Morrell’s students detailed the lack of access to AP classes for students from marginalized groups at their high school, presented their findings and data to school officials, and actively advocated for change. As liberating and validating as such a process was for these students, Morrell was forced to conclude that there was “little change in who had access to the most rigorous courses (and, hence, access to college) at the high school” (p. 140). Furthermore, Morrell expressed his belief that

there is little hope for change in the future in the absence of a large-scale political movement in which students, parents, and critical educators mobilize to pressure power brokers (or become power brokers themselves) to radically alter the status quo. (p. 140)

Therefore, according to Morrell, students and critical educators must expand their work beyond individual schools and classrooms if the system is to transform beyond the inclusion of multicultural curricular reforms and movements.

At the bare minimum, multicultural curriculum reform provided teachers with methods of framing and analyzing their curriculum and pedagogies in terms of equity and the representation of differing perspectives and voices (Sleeter, 2005; Sleeter & Stillman, 2009). Sleeter (2005) advocated for the use of multicultural education as a lens to view which groups benefited from a given curriculum, what such a curriculum was designed to teach, how student achievement was measured, and other questions essential to education. Through such an analysis, Sleeter believed, it would be possible to discover the gaps in existing curricula and programs as well as discover methods of expanding educational discourse. However, Sleeter and Stillman (2009)
later discussed the constricting nature of current academic standards for students from traditionally marginalized groups. Additionally, Sleeter and Stillman illustrated how the very language of the standards themselves forced students into positions of subservience and oppression. Specifically, they found that the California English Language Arts (ELA) standards referred to “non-White, non-English speaking students as ‘these students’ and not as one of ‘us’” (Sleeter & Stillman, 2009, p. 315). Such implied exclusion further indicated the presence of hegemony and oppression of the “other” within the education system itself. The possibilities of multicultural discourses in education could do little more than reform an inequitable and oppressive system in such an environment; structural transformation would come from other sources and movements.

**Critical Pedagogy: A Bridge to Empowerment**

Despite the power and positive sentiments generated by earlier ethnic studies movements and curriculum reform (Muñoz, 2002; Nieto, 2000; Shor, 1992; Sleeter, 2005), a broader discourse was needed to begin the shift toward empowerment and true systemic transformation. This discourse began in the form of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2007). In the opening paragraph of his much-cited work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2007) stated that “concern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization. . . . And as an individual perceives the extent of dehumanization, he or she may ask if humanization is a viable possibility” (p. 43). For this reason, educators who have failed to recognize the decades of harm caused to subjugated student populations and communities by educational pedagogies and philosophies rooted in deficit theory (Valencia, 1997) and assimilation (Gonzalez, 1990) will rarely come to understand the dehumanization of their students (Freire, 2007). Without such understanding, social transformation cannot occur, and even reform movements, such as ethnic
studies and multicultural curriculum, will be doomed to remain trapped in a cycle of societal oppression and subordination (Freire, 2007). Furthermore, Freire (2007) asserted that “a mere perception of reality not followed by this critical intervention [praxis and reflection] will not lead to a transformation of the objective reality—precisely because it is not a true perception” (p. 52). In other words, it was not enough for the oppressed agricultural communities in Freire’s Brazil to recognize that they were being dehumanized; they had to engage actively in reflection and action to break the cycle. If not, they would become the oppressors themselves and would not enjoy true freedom or empowerment (Freire, 2007). Just as educators from marginalized backgrounds can sometimes become so entrenched in the education system that they perpetuate its inequities and injustices instead of serving as transformative educators (G. L. Ochoa, 2007; Thompson, 2010; Thompson & Louque, 2005; Valdés, 2001), Freire’s (2007) communities fell victim to the same process until they began to engage actively in critical pedagogy.

The process of critical pedagogy, as developed by Freire (2007), is cyclical and calls for its participants to dialogue and name problems that impact their communities, reflect on the nature of these issues, develop a plan of action, follow through on that action plan, reflect and consider future steps, and continue with such processes until social transformation and empowerment is obtained. According to Freire, oppressed groups must be their own role models in this cycle, and their participation is an essential component in their future liberation. When so-called “reforming” systems such as NCLB and RTT were put into place devoid of such participation, they were doomed to failure from the start. Indeed, the 2010-2011 dropout numbers in California, especially the 60.4% rate for Latino students (California Department of Education, 2012b), can be viewed as a clear indication that the “reforms” of NCLB and RTT continue to fail large numbers of disenfranchised students—apparently, little was reformed, let
alone transformed, in the realm of public education after such mandates. To prevent such failures, Freire (2007) advocated for more than mere inclusion of oppressed groups in the process of praxis and believed that “to achieve this praxis, it is necessary to trust in the oppressed and their ability to reason” (p. 66). This statement implied that oppressed groups had not been trusted to “reason” before and that others viewed them as incapable of such thought processes and the resulting dialogue. Similar to the implied disbelief in the ability to reason and the resulting dehumanization caused by tracking students with the EL label into classes designed to remediate their so-called language “deficiencies,” oppressed communities in Brazil were not viewed as capable or trustworthy of defining their own identities (Freire, 2007; Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001). How often do reform movements in education focus on solving a perceived problem in a certain group of students? How often are such students given the chance to voice their own beliefs and sentiments about such educational mandates? How often are students encouraged to reflect critically and engage in productive dialogue about the state of their own communities? Such questions have continued to plague critical educators from the first publication of Pedagogy of the Oppressed to current times (Anzaldúa, 1999; Freire, 2007; hooks, 2003; Wink, 2005).

In terms of applying the practice of critical pedagogy in classrooms and teaching practices, both Wink (2005) and hooks (2003) adapted Freire’s (2007) ideas to fit within their own educational experiences. Specifically, Wink (2005) developed a process of learning about critical pedagogy and praxis to assist in the relearning of how educators think about students and learning, and thereby unlearning negative assumptions and stereotypes about the capabilities and experiences of disenfranchised student groups. According to Wink, teaching was also learning; that act of learning meant discovering news ways of approaching students and engaging them
with a certain curriculum or schooling experience. Wink found the process of critical pedagogy extremely powerful as she was able to complete the following cycle with a group of her colleagues:

1. *To name*—The problems found by Wink and her coworkers included an overabundance of mandated exams, the media portrayal of teachers and students, lack of unity between school districts, and the extreme value placed on monolingualism in their high school district.

2. *To reflect critically*—By reflecting about the above-named problems, Wink and her fellow educators called for mentoring activities, partnerships between school districts, and the funding of a bookmobile for multilingual communities.

3. *To act*—Wink believed that putting ideas into action was an essential component of critical pedagogy and eventual empowerment. Because of this, she encouraged her peers to make a written commitment to undertaking one or more of the proposed actions to counter their previously named problems.

The above cycle used by Wink (2005) provided a solid foundation and rationalization for the use of critical pedagogy for teachers working in oppressive environments. However, Wink did not explain how such a process would look if the students were included in the cycle of problem posing and reflection. Despite this limitation, her work (Wink, 2005) built a strong case for the potential of critical pedagogy in modern educational settings.

Another example of the transformative nature of critical pedagogy in the realm of education emerged in the writings of bell hooks (2003). In her work *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, hooks indicated how teachers committed to democratic education could move beyond the dehumanizing and demoralizing climate so pervasive in American education. When writing about the need to see beyond the objectification of knowledge, hooks stated that
she noticed that the “professors who valued objectivism highly were individuals who lacked basic communication skills. Often pathologically narcissistic, they simply could not connect” (p. 128). In other words, when educators become so entrenched with the idea of knowledge as an objective and predefined concept, they lose the ability to communicate with others in a real, and thereby powerful, manner. That the United States continues to rely highly on the measuring of such an objective education through high-stakes, standardized tests illustrates just one example of hooks’s views on the objectification of knowledge—in this case, it is the system that is the narcissist.

To return an element of humanity and democracy into the modern classroom, hooks (2003) advocated for teachers to bring love back into the teaching environment. According to hooks, “There can be no love without justice,” and educators should not fear its inclusion in their classrooms should they truly wish to incorporate more democratic and caring pedagogies in their teachings and overall interactions with students and families (p. 137). Additionally, hooks asserted that “love in the classroom prepares teachers and students to open our minds and hearts. It is the foundation on which every learning community can be created” (p. 137). For students from oppressed and disenfranchised groups, such practices could be very powerful indeed. One needs to look no further than the alienated immigrant students in Olsen’s (1997) work or the EL-labeled and forgotten students shadowed by Valdés (2001) to discover so-called “learning environments” that were devoid of love, compassion, and basic care for one’s fellow human beings. That such examples of inhumane education come from modern American public schools should serve as the equivalent of what Department of Homeland Security agents would view as a “severe” or “red” terror alert for all concerned. Clearly, American education can be viewed as being in a state of crisis when considering the current plight of marginalized social groups.
Just as the concept of critical pedagogy began to appear in scattered classrooms and teaching practices in the United States, the idea of border pedagogy simultaneously emerged from Freire’s (2007) work. Border pedagogy drew on the work of Anzaldúa (1999) to include the experiences and realities of individuals living in the borderlands among different communities (Anzaldúa, 1999; Cline, Reyes, & Necochea, 2005; Cook, 2000; Romo, 2005). According to Cline et al. (2005), border pedagogy could be viewed as a combination of “multifaceted, complex, and interactive factors; educational policies, curriculum; educational practices; and knowledge base that educators need to consider to increase the academic achievement of diverse students in the borderlands” (p. 149). Similar to Anzaldúa’s (1999) crossings of multiple borders of identity, students living in the borderlands additionally “cross” between social, cultural, and linguistic systems (Cline et al., 2005). These crossings thereby become part of the sociocultural and sociopolitical realities of the students that Cline et al. (2005) called on educators to become cognizant of when working with students in the borderlands. When such awareness additionally contained the processes of praxis and critical pedagogy, borderland students and their teachers could begin to transform the systems of oppression and stigmatization typically associated with the border regions of the American Southwest (Cline et al., 2005; Cook, 2000; Romo, 2005). Specifically, Romo (2005) advocated for developing an awareness of the “dynamics of the –isms” for educators concerned with achieving educational equity for disenfranchised students in the borderlands (p. 208). Romo further believed that border pedagogy educators should be able to “bridge the cultural capital expected in mainstream institutions and the experiences of being underprepared for social or academic rites of passage that many students bring” (p. 208). By serving as a “bridge” for students to cross, educators in this setting could theoretically include Latino students in mainstream American classrooms.
Whether or not the students or the education systems themselves were transformed through such a bridging act was not explored by Romo, and one was left to wonder if building students’ social capital was a conforming, reforming, or transforming act.

Despite the fact that the concept of social capital could be used to explain certain “deficits” in marginalized populations, the idea that educators needed to decenter themselves from the daily practices in their classrooms proved to be a powerful combination of elements from both critical and border pedagogies (Cook, 2000). For example, Cook (2000) had his college students engage in a process of journal writing to explore the concept of border pedagogy and the politics of difference from a modern British lens. Initially, Cook found himself writing journal prompts and discussion points that were from his own perspective or included too much of his thoughts about which direction the class should take throughout the course of a semester. Once Cook was able to decentralize his role as a teacher and became more of a facilitator, his students were able to come to terms with the “messiness of border pedagogical practices” and bring their own voices to the front of the discussion (p. 20). In this manner, Cook illustrated just one way border pedagogy can be used to give voice to the thoughts and complexities of identities present for students and communities in the borderlands. Despite the fact that Cook was working with middle-class university students at a British institution, his work holds value for other educators who seek to use more humanistic practices in the existing American education system; by decentralizing the role of the teacher and giving the students themselves autonomy and voice in classroom discourse, it is possible to engage in praxis and transformative pedagogies. In the words of one of Cook’s students, writing from a border pedagogy perspective “lets everyone have their say, and use their own experiences to follow/find their own path to knowledge and understanding. . . . Nothing can ever be a case of ‘them’ and ‘us’ again” (p. 21). Finding one’s
path, it seems, is an essential part of learning as well as creating self-authorship and serves as yet another illustration of the identity-forming processes and recognition of racist thoughts proposed by Anzaldúa (1999) and Torres (2003). Before educators can serve as true facilitators, they therefore must undertake critical methods and use racialized lenses when considering the systems and structures of oppression that impact their students. Critical race theory (CRT) provides such a method of inquiry and problem posing.

The emergence of counternarratives as well as a focus on social transformation play important roles in the current discussion regarding CRT (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004). CRT was initially used in legal studies and was expanded to include the area of education (Solórzano et al., 2000). Additionally, models of CRT were described as including the following five elements: (a) bringing race and racism to the front of research, (b) challenging dominant ideology and discourse, (c) committing to social justice, (d) centralizing experiential knowledge, and (e) utilizing a transdisciplinary perspective (Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). Specifically, CRT can be used to examine how race and racism continue their pervasive existence within modern educational structures despite the implementation of affirmative action and so-called “diversity” programs (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004; Yosso et al., 2004).

When CRT was used to analyze the placement of Latino and African American students into AP public school courses, the discussion included systemic inequities most likely ignored through more traditional discourse (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). For example, Solórzano and Ornelas (2004) determined that using AP enrollment as an indicator of college readiness did not always consider the fact that many students of color lack access to AP courses and other more rigorous secondary school opportunities. Furthermore, Solórzano and Ornelas argued that denial
of AP courses to Latino and African American students should be used as a “window” into additional racial disparities within the American education system (p. 25). In this fashion, using CRT to open up a discussion of the many ways through which students of color are excluded from relevant and challenging educational experiences alludes to the potential for more counternarratives against the dominant discourse.

Additional counternarratives in education that grew from CRT studies indicated the ability of CRT scholars to move away from decentralized and colorblind discussions of race and racism (Yosso et al., 2004). Furthermore, CRT discourse was used to uncover three legal rationales used in existing dialogue of affirmative action: colorblind, diversity, and remedial (Yosso et al., 2004). According to Yosso et al. (2004), the colorblind rationale calls for “race-neutral” college admissions policies and instead a focus on individual merits to promote what its proponents view as “fair access” to educational opportunities (p. 6). Such meritocratic and restrictive viewpoints echo the use of individualism and self-worth, as defined by Gonzalez (1990), to drive the segregated educational experience of Latinos in the latter part of the 20th century. CRT not only challenges the current colorblind ideology but also that of the more liberal belief of diversity (Yosso et al., 2004). While liberals may advocate for the use of affirmative action to increase various forms of diversity on college campuses, they do so for the benefit of students from the dominant social groups (Yosso et al., 2004). Yosso et al. (2004) argued,

[The] unquestioned majoritarian story within this [the diversity] rationale is that students of color are admitted so that they can help White students become more racially tolerant, liven up class dialogue and prepare White students for getting a job in multicultural, global economy. (p. 8)

If one were to follow this line of reasoning, then it would appear that the only reason for students of color to attend traditionally White institutions of higher learning is to provide service to their
White counterparts. Such a narrow and elite system hardly accounts for the historical realities and contexts for students of color and does not provide them with a means of forming true counternarratives.

However, the remedial and community service rationale for affirmative action, as illustrated by Yosso et al. (2004), indicated a shift away from existing academic hegemony. For example, when affirmative action is used as a “remedy to compensate” for racial discrimination in education, it is possible to provide access and empowerment to traditionally marginalized populations (Yosso et al., 2004, p. 8). Additionally, the resulting political representation and emergence of leaders of color within the United States would certainly possess the potential for lasting and truly equitable social change (Yosso et al., 2004). Given the current educational climate of standardized testing and curriculum, the development of such counterstories will inevitably entail a combination of research, grassroots efforts, and educational activism to become widespread and powerful. Curriculum reform provides one window of opportunity for this activism to emerge within individual schools and educational communities.

As clearly indicated by the preceding discussion, public education in America continues to uphold the status quo of deficit theory, meritocracy, and assimilation (Cline et al., 2004; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Morrell, 2004; Olsen, 2010). For students who live with the EL stigma, this system can be especially harsh, causing many of them to lose hope and disengage from their schools before the end of high school (Chaplin, 2008; Cross, 2007; Olsen, 2010). However, finding space for dialogue and change in such a constricting environment can be a daunting task and will take the dedication and perseverance of both students and educators if such a movement is to become truly widespread and transformational. Infusing both critical
literacy and curriculum reform along multicultural and critical pedagogy lines present just two areas where such change may begin within the system.

Just as linguistically disenfranchised students suffer from the loss of their linguistic identities and lack of meaningful contexts with which to apply the academic concepts from their textbooks, they do not often have the chance to consider the world and society around them in a critical manner (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Mitchie, 2009; Morrell, 2004; Peterson, 2009; Shor, 2009; Sleeter, 2005). Critical literacy stems from Freire’s (2007) concept of critical pedagogy and praxis, with additional connections to the use of participatory action research in educational settings as advanced by Morrell (2004) and Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008). Due to the sociopolitical nature of this field of educational practice, it continuously evolves to reflect the ever-changing social situations and marginalization of oppressed groups (Freire, 2007; Wink, 2005). Specifically, educators who believe in critical pedagogy and praxis as a means of systemic transformation stress empowerment of the socially disenfranchised and eventual social empowerment (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2007; hooks, 2003; Shor, 2009; Wink, 2005). Given that emancipatory education and empowerment can lead to the liberation of oppressed groups, its potential benefits for linguistically disenfranchised student populations should continue to be examined, specifically in terms of its use in K-12 classrooms.

Both Shor (2009) and Peterson (2009) detailed the nuances of critical literacy by illustrating how students and teachers engaged in critical pedagogy became conscious of their own experience in historical and social terms and thereby learned about various power hierarchies and structures in society. Furthermore, a critical literacy curriculum gave their students the skills necessary to read the various forms of media, propaganda, and other means that the groups at the top of the social hierarchy have used as methods of continued social
dominance. Critical literacy as a process connects to that of critical pedagogy as it can be employed as a means of social liberation and emancipation. For example, Freire (2007), Wink (2005), and Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) have advocated for requiring students to undergo a cycle of problem posing and naming, developing action plans and steps for action, following those steps, reflecting, and starting the cycle again as a means of eventual social transformation and liberation. This cyclical process inherently involves critical literacy in that evaluating the world and society in a critical and involved manner is essential in moving democratic schooling forward as a society (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2007; hooks, 2003; Peterson, 2009; Shor, 2009). Furthermore, the stakeholders themselves play an integral role in the critical literacy work, and their ideas and viewpoints are paramount to the process as a whole. Such involvement includes components of participatory action research and is a direct shift away from more positivistic and researcher- or teacher-centered work in the field and classroom. However, the widespread use of critical pedagogy and the development of critical literacy in linguistically diverse student populations have suffered due to the strict focus on standardized tests as measures of student proficiency (Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Pérez, 2004; Sleeter, 2005; Valdés, 2001). For socially conscious educators, there is no time to develop critical literacy or push for systemic change when they are consumed by test preparation and the production of endless grammar packets.

Despite the fact that learning how to read the world critically and engaging in student-centered processes of critical pedagogy does not feature in the current educational policies and mandates driven by advocates for NCLB and RTT, educators continue to find ways of engaging their students with such work (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Mitchie, 2009; Peterson, 2009). Perhaps one of the clearest examples of the powerful influence critical pedagogy and the
resulting critical literacy can have for socially disenfranchised students emerged from the work of Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008). Working in an urban high school English class in Oakland, California, these two educators discovered ways of combining critical pedagogy to connect students to their academics on a deep level (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Instead of relying solely on activities designed to increase academic literacy and rhetoric in their classroom, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell believed that “it was only within a pedagogy of freedom and social change that we were able to motivate students to develop sophisticated academic literacies” (p. 51). In other words, emancipatory education and the development of critical literacy proved useful when attempting to connect students to their academic growth. By examining issues that were relevant to their students, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell found that as their students desired to share the work undertaken inside of their classroom with the outside community, they simultaneously wished to increase their academic language to present their views to others. While it is unclear whether or not the students in this particular classroom were linguistically marginalized, the potential benefits of using emancipatory education and critical literacy as a vehicle for increased academic engagement and efficacy cannot be ignored.

Nontraditional Research Methods: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression

Recall the image of the young child presented at the start of this chapter. A discussion of relevant literature revealed that she would undoubtedly fare poorly in American schools should she come from a non-Anglo or non-English-speaking background (Gonzalez, 1990; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997). Not only would she be expected to assimilate into the existing system of meritocracy, but she would be destined to remain voiceless, both literally and figuratively, through her placement in remedial “support” classes designed under the best intentions of boosting her academic and linguistic “proficiency” (Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001). The continued
use of traditional and quantifiable research methods to explore current issues in education only serves to perpetuate the pervasiveness of deficit theory and the resulting labeling of students and schools as failures (Olsen, 2010). For this reason, it was imperative to include a brief discussion of nontraditional research methods and their potential to transform inequitable structures in this particular discourse.

Traditional and positivistic research methods grew from the birth of the Scientific Revolution and the following development of a scientific belief system that problems could be solved through objective observation by an outside researcher (Hinchey, 2008). According to Hinchey (2008), the positivist believes that “knowledge consists of discovered truths about the world. Knowledge is fixed, sure, stable; verified; universal; something that exists independently of the researcher” (p. 21). While this may seem like an impartial, and thereby equitable, method of examining the pressing issues in the American education system, a strict positivistic lens fails to consider the sociocultural and sociohistorical influences present within the system. For example, positivistic studies build on previous theories and the presumed reliability of facts (Hinchey, 2008) to explain and create new theories or paradigms. Such research assumes that a set of given facts is reliable and can provide valid interpretations of the world. Using this type of research paradigm, a researcher interested in discovering methods of increasing student achievement could design a study to examine whether or not enrollment in support classes would increase proficiency on state exams. Such a study might include a control group of students who were placed into mainstream classes and an experimental group who would receive the “treatment” of support classes. To test the effectiveness of the treatment, the researcher could compare the mean scores of students in both groups using post- and preassessment measures (Huck, 2008; Mertens, 2010). While it is true that such a study would be able to determine
which group performed better on the postassessment and thus make a conclusion about the effectiveness of the support class “treatment,” it is also true that the researcher would need to make several key assumptions to make his or her conclusions (Huck, 2008). First, the researcher must assume that the assessment measures in this study were reliable and valid and that they accurately measured student “proficiency.” Due to the use of quantifiable measures by high-stakes exam publishers to test the reliability of their assessments in a statistical manner, the researcher in this example would not encounter too much difficulty in making the assumption that the exams used in his or her study were reliable and valid—this would have already been done by companies such as Educational Testing Services (ETS) and McGraw Hill. Furthermore, such an assumption would not be challenged by education policymakers and administrators who believe that proficiency can be measured through standardized means grounded in deficit theory (Valencia, 1997).

Should the support class in the above example indeed yield positive results, as measured by student achievement on a standardized assessment, the researcher could then make the suggestion that other schools follow the same procedure and use the same “treatment” (Hinchey, 2008). Such process-product research is what gave rise to the popularity of scripted programs such as Reading First and High Point and additionally indicated the intermarriage between empirical and quantitative research methods and the development of educational policies and procedures (Hinchey, 2008; Valencia, 1997). The very reliance on quantifiable and positivistic methods to design and account for the effectiveness of new programs has created a cycle of high-stakes exams that make it possible to view students as numbers and scripted intervention programs designed to remedy student deficits (Valencia, 1997). Due to the focus on identifying deficiencies, predicting how such deficiencies might be “cured,” and modifying behavior
through “treatment” from outside researchers, the connection between positivism and modern research methods in education becomes apparent (Hinchey, 2008; Valencia, 1997). Researchers and activists concerned with breaking this cycle must therefore turn to alternative methods of inquiry into educational issues and systemic problems.

Action research provides a method for viewing problems through an interpretive lens (Hinchey, 2008; Stringer, 2007). According to Hinchey (2008), an interpretivist researcher views knowledge as socially constructed and believes that no single truth about a given issue exists. Furthermore, this perspective seeks to understand rather than prove and therefore makes it possible to bring more perspectives and realities into research than possible through more positivistic methods (Hinchey, 2008). Action research additionally provides a doorway to more qualitative and emancipatory research designs where the participant becomes a valued part of the research process instead of being the subject for objective study by an etic observer (Hinchey, 2008; Stringer, 2007). Stringer (2007) further added to the understanding of action research processes to include an examination of the methods through which stakeholders perceived the events being investigated. Such procedures, as defined by Stringer, incorporate a “collaborative approach to inquiry that seeks to build positive working relationships and productive communication styles . . . to work harmoniously and productively achieve a set of goals” (p. 20). Such a process of trust and harmony among the researcher and various stakeholders inherently differs from the objective and highly linear methods found in quantitative and positivistic research methods. However, action research methods contain their own set of problems and traps that the researcher may fall into if he or she fails to recognize certain obstacles that may emerge throughout the research process (Schmuck, 2006; Stringer, 2007).
In his work *Practical Action Research for Change*, Schmuck (2006) discussed methods for building trust and cooperation. The need for collaboration was essential for Schmuck due to his belief that “effective action research is democracy in action, especially as the action research fosters group reflection, joint inquiry, shared debriefing, and cooperative action planning” (p. 31). Without trust, such actions would be all but impossible, and the action research facilitator would run the risk of turning into a version of the traditional outside observer or researcher (Hinchey, 2008; Schmuck, 2006; Stringer, 2007). Being aware of the complexities in a certain situation as well as understanding the backgrounds and experiences of the focus group of stakeholders was viewed as one method of overcoming the particular challenges faced by action research facilitators (Hinchey, 2008; Schmuck, 2006; Stringer, 2007). Despite the potential challenges associated with action research, it was seen as a departure from more positivistic methods; this departure further provided a means of adding critical pedagogy, praxis, and perspectives of “the other” into the existing body of research surrounding schools and society in general (Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Elenes, 1997; Morrell, 2004; Téllez, 2005).

Additional examples of nontraditional research methods were evident in research focused on the borderlands and defining new lenses for viewing the intricacies of such lands and their residents in more equitable and complex ways than possible through more objective and scientific studies (Bernal et al., 2012; Elenes, 1997; Téllez, 2005). When writing about her own experiences as a Chicana resident of the borderlands, Téllez (2005) drew on activism and Chicana feminist discourse to challenge the positivistic notions present in traditional ethnographies. Specifically, Téllez included Chicana feminist theories to speak of issues typically ignored by White feminists, including race/ethnicity and class. As she came to define
herself as *una nueva mestiza* through her journey as an activist researcher in her home community, Téllez realized that the tension she experienced in the borderlands and applying that tension to her research was “liberatory” and provided a model for other researchers and students who were in the process of questioning their own experiences and histories (p. 66). The questioning of one’s experiences, as done by the individual living that particular set of events, was seen as powerful and liberating in the sense that the discovered knowledge was not drawn from a set of Anglo, male, and Western ideologies and further indicated the empowerment possible via nontraditional research methods and lenses (Téllez, 2005).

Elenes (1997) discussed the application of Chicana feminist research perspectives as a means of naming counternarratives and counterhistories for the purpose of emancipation of the oppressed. According to Elenes, critical dialogue and problem posing was essential in defining cultural identity and reconstructing one’s identity. Furthermore, she advocated that “it [was] through such cultural productions that Chicana/os [were] ‘saying themselves,’ filling in the blanks before someone else does it . . . these reconstructions and rearticulations are vehicles against cultural dominance” (Elenes, 1997, p. 375). This concept of self-authorship provided another example of the methods that subordinate groups employ to move past the crossroads and oppressive situations through the reforming of their own identities and naming them in their own terms (Anzaldúa, 1999; Torres, 2003). The use of *testimonio* offered yet another lens to conceptualize the experience of the other (Bernal et al., 2012). For example, “*testimonios* focus on collective experiences of conditions that have contributed to oppression, as well as agency of those who suffer under these conditions” (Bernal et al., 2012, p. 367). The “collective experiences” described by Bernal et al. (2012) include the histories and voices of groups of stakeholders that would be discounted or viewed as somehow lacking by more traditional
researchers—if the point is to study and name the other based on a Western and deficit-based paradigm, then why include the narratives of those individuals being studied? Actively seeking out and applying such testimonios to new research and critical examinations of existing social systems, such as modern public schools, becomes the ethical obligation of those who continue to fight for social transformation and liberation. Without such methods, combining research and educational activism all but remains impossible.

**Implications**

As indicated by the preceding discussion of literature, linguistically marginalized students continue to suffer from oppressive and inhumane treatment in the current American school system (Kozol, 2005; Olsen, 1997, 2010; Valdés, 2001). That such subjugation possesses such a deep and socially powerful history in the United States (Gonzalez, 1990; Valencia, 1997) indicates the magnitude of the obstacles facing educational activists and advocates for the societal other. The sociocultural realities that encompass linguistically disenfranchised student populations push them through an educational pipeline bent on assimilating them into the English-only meritocracy, as defined by dominant Western social values and norms (Cline et al., 2004; Gonzalez, 1990; Valencia, 1997). Furthermore, the journey through such a racist and classist educational pipeline has been shown to influence the development of individual student indemnity and hamper their ability to achieve a state of self-authorship or liberation (Anzaldúa, 1999; Torres, 2003, 2009).

Despite the evidence that the multicultural curriculum and ethnic studies reform movements as well as the incorporation of critical pedagogy and CRT into classroom and school environments can assist in the process of naming and empowerment, a widespread use of such methods has not emerged in modern America. For this reason, traditionally disenfranchised
students will continue to be denied the educational access and experiences that their whiter and monolingual peers enjoy. Advocates for educational equity and social justice should consider the following implications that emerged from this discussion of literature: (a) actively name and call out inhumane and deficit-based educational policies and procedures, (b) actively challenge racist environments in schools and society, (c) actively implement and advocate for the use of teaching methods grounded in critical pedagogy and CRT, and (d) actively seek widespread approaches of implementing nontraditional research methods for the specific aim of giving tangible power to the counternarratives and voices of the oppressed. The work represented in this project depicts the journey of one critical educator as she attempted to act on the above implications.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

As indicated in the previous discussion of literature, a pressing need for critical and emancipatory educators to challenge the existing systems and structures of inequities currently exists. Furthermore, if a clear and powerful voice is not given to oppressed students and their communities, true liberation and social transformation will not be obtained. Due to the fact that this study was conducted in an attempt to counter the hegemony and deficit theories present in modern American educational institutions, traditional research methods grounded in positivistic ideologies were not employed. Rather, this study followed a more emancipatory and empowering path, including the participants in the process of action research and critical pedagogy. Specifically, the process addressed the following research questions as they were examined by students from linguistically marginalized populations:

1. How do middle school, high school, and college students from linguistically disenfranchised populations conceptualize their individual academic identities?
   a. What do the terms college readiness and academic proficiency entail for students from populations outside of the White, monolingual status quo?

2. How do students from linguistically disenfranchised populations navigate through existing school structures?
   a. Do the pathways that marginalized students use to navigate through the school system reaffirm the status quo or provide access of opportunities?

3. What school structures and practices give voice to counternarratives that work either against or for empowerment and systemic transformation regarding linguistically disenfranchised students?
Throughout the course of this study, the participants took an active role, which provided a less constrictive means of answering the above questions than would have been possible with more traditional and restrictive research methods. For example, the behaviorist notion that universal principles exist and that one true method of teaching and learning can therefore be discovered by educational researchers (Hinchey, 2008) cannot be challenged with the continued reliance on empirical and quantitative research methods. Similar to the use of intelligence tests and other such standardized measures to quantify learning and justify the creation of academic programs designed for remediation (Gonzalez, 1990; Valencia, 1997), the reliance on the perspective of an outside researcher does little to create space for dialogue and systemic transformation (Hinchey, 2008). Furthermore, unless the oppressed are given the opportunity to analyze their situation and engage in dialogue, they will be more likely to conform to fit within the dominant ideologies than work to transform society and their position (Freire, 2007). This study represents one attempt at moving beyond the positivistic research methods with the express purpose of fostering true dialogue among stakeholders to seek methods of societal transformation.

**Research Design and Approach**

As previously noted, this study employed an action research and critical pedagogy approach. The elements of action research and critical pedagogy used by Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008), Freire (2007), Hinchey (2008), Morrell (2004), and Wink (2005) were found to be particularly insightful when designing the specific procedures followed during the course of this study.
**Research Design**

According to Hinchey (2008), action research involves a cyclical process of inquiry that is conducted by insiders of a particular community. Because action research does not rely on the outside interpretations of “experts,” it facilitates the process of social emancipation, empowerment, and systemic transformation. Such methods additionally connect to Freire’s (2007) concept of critical pedagogy and liberation of the oppressed. By working through a continuous cycle of problem posing, development of an action plan, implementation, and reflection for the development of future actions, populations who engage in critical pedagogy are more open to discovering areas of tension and conflict where the foundations for more widespread and systemic change may occur (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Morrell, 2004; Peterson, 2009). Due to the fact that this study focused on the educational pathways used by linguistically marginalized student populations, it was essential to follow a research plan grounded by the basic principles of action research and critical pedagogy instead of relying on more positivistic and deficit-based methods. Such methods are widely prevalent in the current discourse surrounding student “achievement” and “proficiency” and must be countered by the voices of the students themselves (Hinchey, 2008; Morrell, 2004; Wink, 2005). Specifically, the silencing of stakeholder voices via the reliance on an etic interpretation of their actions and discourse can serve to uphold the status quo of dominant ideologies. While such interpretations may bring social tensions to light, they do not have the ability, or even the intention, of expanding the conflict between dominant and subordinate groups to promote systemic change. To do so requires deviant research methodologies and processes.

Because action research does not seek to define a study based on a set of quantifiable and precise measurements, it instead focuses on determining how things occur on a more localized
level (Stringer, 2007). Furthermore, the stakeholders who engage in an action research process should not be alienated via the use of more traditional or positivistic methods (Stringer, 2007). How the stakeholders perceive the issues or social problems being studied must be an integral part of the data-gathering and analysis process if those involved in the study wish to uncover a more nuanced understanding of society than possible through more sterile research methods. Such an organic and inclusive process additionally creates space for the emergence of counternarratives so essential for the process of systemic transformation and the achievement of educational opportunity and equity for the structurally disenfranchised (Freire, 2007; Morrell, 2004; Peterson, 2009; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). Finally, even the most basic action research cycle of looking at and defining issues, examining and analyzing such issues, and taking action against problems allows individual stakeholders and communities to bring their own voices into discourse concerning their social realities, thus gaining empowerment (Freire, 2007; Stringer, 2007). By following a cyclical process of problem posing, dialogue, and reflection, this study was able to begin the journey from conforming to more transforming research methods. The involvement of the stakeholder-participants in the design and flow of this study further allowed for the emergence of results grounded in the sociopolitical and sociocultural realities of the stakeholders themselves. These realities must be brought into the current discourse surrounding the schooling experiences of linguistically disenfranchised populations if true access of educational opportunities is to be obtained.

**Research Approach: A Rationale for Critical Pedagogy**

To counter the “researcher as expert” ideology, the primary researcher served as a facilitator and process guide throughout the course of this study. The process of inquiry that emerged during the course of the focus group session therefore centered on the fact that the voice
of the stakeholders was able to remain at the forefront of the uncovered problems and analyses. Additionally, the participants actively determined the course of the research process as well as potential lines of questioning as each cycle of problem posing occurred during individual focus group sessions. Table 4 represents how using a critical pedagogy and participatory action research approach served to bring the voices of the stakeholders to the forefront of the discussion throughout this study.

The cyclical nature of critical pedagogy was further enhanced by the participatory action research process used throughout the course of this study. For example, the topics and questions posed by the focus group of middle school students were used to guide focus group sessions with both the high school and college students, and vice versa. Furthermore, the participants in each of the three educational levels of focus groups were able to examine and analyze the ideas discussed outside of their own focus group, thereby allowing them to create a broader picture of the educational pathways currently available to them. As the student participants dialogued about each of the four themes of exploration, they additionally engaged in the problem-posing process of naming, examining, developing action plans, implementing designed actions, reflecting, and determining future actions (Freire, 2007; Wink, 2005). Such a process had the intention to lead to active problem posing and action plans for the future steps that extended beyond the course of this study for the student participants. Finally, such a process called for the emergence of counternarrative and counterhegemonic methods necessary to promote social change and equitable educational outcomes for marginalized students.

**Participants**

The participants for this study were selected based on the following general criteria: (a) status as a nonnative English speaker, (b) enrollment in an English Language Development
Table 4

Research Components of Critical Pedagogy and Participatory Action Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research component</th>
<th>Critical pedagogy and participatory action research</th>
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| Research questions | **Question 1** called for the participants to define their own identities and concepts of *college readiness* and *academic proficiency*. By addressing this question through active involvement of the participants, it was possible to do the following during this study:  
  - Problem pose during focus group sessions;  
  - Dialogue about the sociocultural and sociopolitical issues that frame participant identity; and  
  - Consider a more holistic and nuanced version of student identity and academic achievement.  |
|                    | **Question 2** focused on the act of navigating through the school system and sought to determine the impact such navigation had on linguistically disenfranchised youth. Specifically, the PAR and critical pedagogy approach allowed for the emergence of themes along conforming, reforming, or transforming lines in ways that would not have been possible without stakeholder dialogue and praxis.  |
|                    | **Question 3** probed into the concept of systemic transformation and the naming of societal tensions. Because this is a focus of critical pedagogy and relies on active participation from oppressed groups, the PAR approach was used to enhance the findings and center them from the stakeholders’ point of view.  |

Focus group participants (*N* = 41)

**Middle school students**
- 7th grade (*n* = 4)
- 8th grade (*n* = 10)
- Total (*n* = 14)

**High school**
- 9th grade (*n* = 1)
- 10th grade (*n* = 1)
- 11th grade (*n* = 1)
- 12th grade (*n* = 12)
- Total (*n* = 15)

**College**
- Undergraduate (*n* = 12)

(continued)
Table 4 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research component</th>
<th>Critical pedagogy and participatory action research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Identity</td>
<td>• The main constructs used throughout the course of this study were explored through the process of critical pedagogy and PAR for the express purpose of: o Allowing stakeholders to conceptualize and define their own visions of identity, college readiness, and academic proficiency instead of relying on others to determine their meanings for them; o Discovering what structural navigation means for marginalized groups; and o Determining where student awareness and empowerment were evident as indicators of academic access of opportunity, tension, and societal transformation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. College readiness and academic proficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Structural navigation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Student awareness and empowerment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data sources and collection approaches

| 1. Focus group sessions             | • Due to the fact that the voices of the stakeholders played an integral part to this study, the data sources were chosen specifically to highlight participant ideas and opinions. Furthermore, the focus group sessions allowed for the processes of critical pedagogy and PAR to be applied to this study throughout its duration. |
| 2. Recordings of dialogues         |                                                   |
| 3. Open-ended and semistructured questions |                                                   |
| 4. Participant-generated questions |                                                   |
| 5. Researcher notes                |                                                   |
| 6. Student journals and reflections|                                                   |

... (ELD) class or participation in a Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) chapter, and (c) their time of 3 or more years in the California school system. Middle school and high school participants were also selected from the same large city in North San Diego County, while the college participants were chosen from a local California State University campus in the same geographical area. In this way, it was possible to get a snapshot of the pathways that linguistically marginalized students from a relatively small geographical location follow while journeying from middle school to high school and college. Finally, the decision to recruit potential high school and college participants from MEChA organizations was made due to the organization’s history of social activism and awareness. According to the national website for MEChA (2013), the organization began in 1969 after a meeting of over 100 Chicana and Chicano activists at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). This meeting resulted
in the creation of a plan for higher education and Chicano activism, or *El Plan de Santa Barbara* (MEChA, 2013). Since its birth in 1969, MEChA has been considered an activist group dedicated to promoting the educational rights of Chicanos and Chicanas. Currently, MEChA chapters are places for such students to network and find support as they navigate through the school system. Because MEChA has a history of social awareness and activism by its members, it was specifically selected as a place to recruit potential participants for this study.

As previously noted, middle school participants were selected primarily based on their enrollment in an ELD class. To meet with potential participants and discuss the purpose of this study, the primary researcher visited three ELD class sessions at Central Middle School in Divisionville, California. During this visit, the primary researcher introduced the study to the students and handed out an interest questionnaire and demographic sheet for students to complete. From the initial pool of 95 students, 31 responded that they were interested in participating in this study. Out of these 31 students, 25 met the criteria of being nonnative English speakers who had lived in California for 3 or more years. After parental consent was obtained and meeting dates were arranged, the final middle school focus group consisted of the following participants:

- Four seventh-grade students—one female and three males
- Ten eighth-grade students—five females and five males

One middle school participant had spent 3 years in California schools, two had spent 7 years, three had a total of 8 years in California schools, six were in the California school system for 9 years, and two reported that they had been in California schools for a total of 10 years. All middle school participants self-identified as native Spanish speakers and reported that they spoke
Spanish with their friends and families. No students reported speaking Spanish with their teachers or other staff at Central Middle School.

The high school student participants were recruited from the neighboring Divisionville High School. To meet with prospective participants, the primary researcher contacted the MEChA club advisors at Divisionville High and provided background on the study. She then set up a time to visit a MEChA chapter meeting and was able to share information regarding the California Latino Higher Education Pipeline, as defined by the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC, 2010), during this meeting. The high school students completed the same interest questionnaire and demographic sheet as the middle school students. From the pool of 42 students in Grades 9-12 who attended the MEChA meeting, 15 students expressed interest in the study, with all 15 meeting the selection criteria. The 15 students who participated in this study included the following:

- One ninth-grade student—female
- One 10th-grade student—female
- One 11th-grade student—male
- Twelve 12th-grade students—four males and eight females

Regarding their time in California schools, participants indicated the following: two had been in California schools for 3 years, one had spent 8 years in this school system, two had 10 years of California school experience, two had been in California for 11 years, four reported 12 years of California schooling, and four had 14 years of experience in the California school system.

Similar to the middle school participants, the Divisionville High focus group consisted solely of native Spanish speakers. Participants also reported that they spoke Spanish with their families and friends as well as some of their teachers—mainly the Advanced Placement (AP) Spanish for
Spanish Speakers teacher and their MEChA advisor, who also was a physical education teacher and track and field coach at Divisionville High.

To recruit college-age participants, the primary researcher contacted a colleague at a local California State University campus who referred her to the university’s MEChA club. The MEChA representatives wanted a brief overview of the study, its questions, and overall purpose to share with their fellow Mechistas. Once the Mechistas discussed the study at a chapter meeting, the committee voted to invite the primary researcher to one of their weekly meetings. At this time, the college students completed the same interest questionnaire and demographic sheet as the middle school and high school students. Furthermore, they asked the researcher for a more detailed overview of her study as well as a short presentation of her earlier ethnographic work in the city of Divisionville. Of the 35 potential participants, 16 indicated that they were interested in participating in this project. Of these 16 potential participants, 12 met the criteria of having a language other than English as their native tongue and having spent 3 or more years in the California school system. The additional demographic breakdown of the participants was as follows:

- Three male students—two were 20 years old and in their second year of college, and one was an 18-year-old in his first year of college.
- Nine female students—one was 21 years old and in her second year of college, two were 20-year-olds in their second year of college, two were 19-year-olds both in their first year of college, and four were 18-year-olds all in their first year of college.

The participants all identified as native Spanish speakers and had been in the California school system anywhere from 13-16 years, with seven of the participants reporting 13 years in this system, two with 14 years’ worth of experience, two with 15 years, and one participant who had
been in the school system for 16 years. Additionally, students self-identified as Mechistas and as either Chicano or Chicana. Students reported that they spoke Spanish with their friends and families and occasionally with some of their California State University professors. This marked a difference among them and the middle school focus group participants, who only reported speaking Spanish with their friends and families. (Note: The Institutional Review Board [IRB] documentation and approval forms used for this selection process and for obtaining participant and parental assent and consent to participate are included in the appendix of this document.)

**Setting**

The city of Divisionville and surrounding area was chosen specifically for this study due to its reputation as a highly divided community along racial and socioeconomic lines. At the time of this study, the city of Divisionville presented a compelling image of a community struggling to reconcile its previous image as an affluent, White, and English-only town with its current reality as a city deeply divided along racial, linguistic, and socioeconomic lines. Divisionville is currently referred to as a city that used to be predominantly White, English-speaking, and middle class in nature. However, recent demographic trends indicate that this description of the city may be misleading. Table 5 illustrates the shift in Divisionville’s demographics from 1970-2010.

The numbers presented in Table 5 display the steady decline of the White Divisionville population along with the simultaneous increase of the city’s Latino residents. For example, the fact that the city went from being 97.5% White in 1970 to 44.0% White in 2010 clearly demonstrated just one of the demographic trends present in Divisionville. The fact that the U.S.
Table 5

Divisionville Demographics, 1970-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Asian and Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Hispanic origin</th>
<th>White not of Hispanic origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>36,792</td>
<td>97.5%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>64,355</td>
<td>89.7%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>108,635</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>71.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>133,559</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>147,514</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>&lt; 1.0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>&lt; 3.0%</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data from 2010 represent both San Diego Association of Governments and U.S. Census Bureau figures.

Census Bureau\(^1\) counted Mexican residents in the “other” racial category in 1970 and that such individuals made up 1.3% of the population at that time vividly indicates the White-dominant nature of Divisionville in 1970. However, the 1980 U.S. Census results for Divisionville showed that 89.7% of the city was classified as White, with 14.6% falling in the Hispanic trend. This jump in the Hispanic population may be accounted for by the inclusion of “Hispanic” as a separate category, and therefore it is difficult to determine the exact nature of Divisionville’s demographics at that time.

In 1990 the Hispanic population had the largest growth from 14.6% in 1980 to 23.4% in 1990, while the White population decreased by almost 5%. Such numbers again demonstrated the 30-year evolution of Divisionville from a White-dominant community to one that was more ethnically diverse. Additionally, according to the 2000 U.S. Census results, the White population in Divisionville dropped over 30 percentage points to include just 51.9% of the city’s total population. Such a shift undoubtedly elicited a response from White Divisionville, as is discussed later in this report. However, the city of Divisionville itself differed from the U.S.

\(^1\) A reference was not provided for the U.S. Census Bureau figures in order to protect the anonymity of the city where this study took place.
Census Bureau by classifying “Hispanic” residents in the 2000 U.S. Census as “Latino,” as it currently reads on the city’s official website. Such choice of terminology may indicate that some city officials were aware of the demographic changes occurring in their city and were additionally making some attempt at being more inclusive in their use of ethnic descriptors. Finally, 2010 numbers clearly showed a White minority of 44.0% compared to a population of 46.0% from Latino origins. This indicated the first time in the previous 30 years of Divisionville’s history when the Latino population was larger than that of White residents and further heightened the greater Divisionville area’s potential as a location for this particular study.

Additionally, at the time of this inquiry, Divisionville was nationally known for its “tough” stance on immigration and the specific targeting of undocumented Latino immigrants. In 2010, the city’s sole Latina voice on the city council, Josefina Rios (pseudonym), proposed that Divisionville take an official position against the immigration laws enacted in the state of Arizona, not only to distance itself from the xenophobic and inhumane Arizona policy but to rewrite its own racist history and image as well. Unfortunately for Rios and others who shared her opinion, the rest of the city did not take such an enlightened viewpoint, and her request was denied. Due to the fact that this is just one of many examples of the mistrust and fear that the members of White Divisionville harbor toward many of their city’s non-White residents, Divisionville provided an ideal location for an inquiry into the lives and experiences of oppressed and disenfranchised student populations.

Another reason behind the choice of Divisionville as the location for this study was the researcher’s strong personal connection and history with the city. Her family moved to Divisionville when she was 6 years old, and she spent her entire K-12 school years in

\[\text{Data are from the San Diego Association of Governments. A reference was not provided for this source in order to protect the anonymity of the city where this study took place.}\]
Divisionville’s public schools. The researcher’s mother also taught kindergarten for 32 years for the Divisionville Union School District (DUSD) and was able to share great personal insight and concerns about the city’s public schools and their students before the researcher began her own teaching career with the district in 2002. Both her mother and she chose to work with students that DUSD labeled as being at risk, English Language Learners (ELLs), and otherwise “deficient” in some manner. While both her mother and the researcher are functionally bilingual and speak Spanish, neither of them decided to work toward bilingual certification. The researcher made this choice out of frustration after the passage of Proposition 227 in California and the virtual end of bilingual education. In short, she did not wish to become what many in the DUSD community at the time referred to as a “glorified translator.” As a White woman who not only speaks Spanish but who works in one of the city’s six middle schools, the researcher is well aware of the many hidden boundaries and power structures within Divisionville. These borders must be openly named and discussed in a critical manner by Divisionville’s educators and community members if they truly wish to create school climates that welcome and honestly serve the city’s youth. As noted, this study was designed for such a purpose.

Central Middle School

Central Middle School is located in the center of Divisionville on an extremely busy road that serves as a main artery through the city. The school is surrounded by several different apartment complexes that have been the subject of debate in the city in the sense that they were the main reasons behind the Divisionville City Council’s decision to move forward with the ordinance against renting to undocumented tenants in 2006. The school itself was built in 1954 and included 19 buildings. Due to budget cuts and a shift of district attention to newer middle schools, Central Middle School has not been renovated since the early 1990s when relocatable
classrooms were added to accommodate the growing population. Currently, the school is in a state of extreme disrepair. Students cannot use the multipurpose room due to recent construction to remove lead paint from the walls and asbestos from the ceiling. Asbestos floor tiles also exist in the front office, including the health office, and problems with rats and mice infesting the school’s buildings are frequently reported. At the time of this study, the school’s overhangs had become so rotted that they had to be supported by large wooden beams bolted to the concrete walkways between buildings. Staff and students were informed that these supports were temporary; however, they were placed on the campus in December of 2012, and plans to remove them had not yet been made. Finally, several large holes in the fence surrounding the school’s track and athletic fields were evident, thus creating security issues. Frequent reports of individuals crossing the fields throughout the school day were a regular occurrence at Central Middle School. How the students felt about their school’s dismal physical appearance is recorded later in this discussion.

In terms of academics, Central’s performance could be said to match that of its physical appearance. For example, the school’s test scores had been in a steady decline since the 1990s, and the school had a reputation in the district as being a place where teachers were “forced” to transfer. The academic year when this study took place was Central’s 12th year in program improvement (PI). Additionally, the school was restructured, complete with a name change, in 2006. Because of Central’s status as a PI school, several outside consultants continued to work with the principal and staff on an extremely frequent basis. However, the high turnover rate of the school’s administration made it difficult to judge the effectiveness of such programs and services. Central’s divisive history and less than favorable reputation in the Divisionville
district, and the city in general, made it a logical choice for the middle school location related to this study.

**Divisionville High School**

Divisionville High School is located 5 minutes from Central Middle School, and approximately 75% of Central students articulate to Divisionville High as ninth-grade students. Unlike Central, Divisionville High has the reputation of being a California Distinguished School and has strong athletics and AP programs. However, this school was also known for moments of extreme racial tension during the 2011-2012 school year. The lasting ramifications of this tension became evident during the focus group sessions at Divisionville High and are detailed later in this report. The original Divisionville High opened in 1894 and moved to a new location in 1929. In 1954, the school’s current location opened, and it recently had its athletic fields and facilities renovated. The school currently is situated on a large space of land and has a very pleasant appearance. Several grassy areas and terraces are available for students to congregate during their break, and the campus is very open and welcoming. How the outside spaces are claimed by the school’s various student groups is further described in the findings portion of this dissertation. In general, Divisionville High presents students with both a mental and physical transition as they progress from middle school to high school.

**California State University**

The university where this study occurred was founded in 1989 and is currently known as a “commuter school.” This university expanded rapidly during the 1990s and was known for its college of education and college of business. Current student enrollment has declined somewhat due to budget cuts and enrollment caps on transfer students, and existing enrollment includes
approximately 10,000 students\textsuperscript{3}. The school obtained status as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and appears to make an effort to attract students from diverse backgrounds. However, this status also attracted negative attention in the form of protests by Minutemen and other anti-immigrant groups in the mid-2000s, and it was not uncommon for professors to gather to “escort” students to class in an effort to avoid the protestors. Like the surrounding community, California State University embodies many of the social tensions and hierarchies that influence the educational journeys and experiences of students from linguistically marginalized populations.

**Demographic Overview**

The demographics of the various school-site locations for this study were also varied in nature and further illustrate the complex nature of the greater Divisionville area. Table 6 presents these demographics.

As indicated in Table 6, Central Middle School had the highest percentage of students who carried the label of English Learners (ELs) as well as students whose families qualified for the federal Free-and-Reduced Lunch program. Additionally, Central had the lowest number of White students, which served to illustrate both its physical location and social status in Divisionville. While Divisionville High School had a lower percentage of Latino students than Central Middle School, its relatively high percentage of students in the Free-and-Reduced Lunch program (59\%) hinted at the social division within the school. Such divisions were frequently discussed during the focus group sessions and are detailed further in the findings portion of this report.

\textsuperscript{3} This figure is based on data from the university’s website, which was not included in the references in order to protect the university’s anonymity.
### Table 6

**School Site Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School site</th>
<th>Total enrollment</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>American Indian</th>
<th>Native Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Filipino</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Two or more races</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Not specified</th>
<th>Free-and-reduced lunch</th>
<th>Receiving financial aid</th>
<th>English learner</th>
<th>Reclassified as fluent proficient</th>
<th>Migrant education</th>
<th>First in family to seek a 4-year degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Middle School</td>
<td>999</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>94.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>93.0%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>53.0%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divisionville High School</td>
<td>1,977</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>33.0%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California State University</td>
<td>10,169a</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>9.7%b</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a* Undergraduate: 9,439; graduate: 730.  
*b* Classified as Asian/Pacific Islander.
Finally, California State University’s numbers illustrated a 4-year university that students from disenfranchised groups were able to access. For example, that 60% of students were receiving financial aid and 27% were the first in their family to seek a 4-year degree alluded to the background and previous experiences of California State University students. Furthermore, the school’s status as an HSI also indicated that its students would have varied and diverse stories to share about their personal educational journeys and experiences. For this reason, it was a natural choice for the location of this study in the sense that it served as a means of continuing the stories that emerged from the work with both the middle school and high school focus groups. What developed from these discussions is detailed later in this report.

Research Procedures

Given the integral role that stakeholders play in participatory action research (Hinchey, 2008; Stringer, 2007) and critical pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2007), it was important for the primary researcher to establish a sense of trust and mutual respect with the various groups of participants. The following actions were taken to provide a foundation throughout the duration of this study:

Middle School

Make connections with individual students. The primary researcher worked as a literacy and English language development coach at Central Middle School during the course of this study. For this reason, some students viewed her as an authority figure on campus and might have been hesitant to share their experiences regarding school with her unless trust was established. During the initial classroom visits, the primary researcher shared some of her experiences growing up in Divisionville, her experiences working as a teacher in Divisionville, and her current studies in a doctoral program. Students were able to ask questions, and several
even expressed surprise that adults wanted to know their thoughts about school. After the visit to the individual classrooms, many students approached the primary researcher in the hallways or at the lunch tables to ask when the study was going to begin and repeatedly expressed interest.

**Establish parental support.** The fact that the primary researcher already worked closely with many of the Central Middle School parents and surrounding community through her involvement with the English Language Advisory Council (ELAC) was another factor that helped establish support for this study. For example, ELAC parents frequently contacted the primary researcher in her role as a literacy coach to ask questions about high school articulation, course enrollment, state testing, and other concerns. Because of this previous communication, they were quick to contact her with questions and concerns related to this study, as well as provide support and consent for their students to participate in this work.

**Create engaging focus group sessions.** Due to the fact that all focus group sessions took place after normal school hours, it was imperative for the primary researcher to design activities that the student participants would find engaging and enjoyable. To this end, art projects, discussions about the latest entertainment and sports news, informal question-and-answer sessions, and “icebreaker” activities were specifically planned for each focus group session. The relative success of these activities was highly evident to the primary researcher as she was often approached by the student participants wanting to know when the next session was going to occur. Furthermore, the participants expressed a strong desire to keep meeting as a group after this study ended, and they continued to meet once a week after school.

**Promote participant honesty.** The final component that was considered when creating the activities for the middle school focus group was the concept of participant honesty. Because many of the questions involved naming issues and problems at Central Middle School, it was
necessary to remind participants that their ideas would not be used to create tension between students and individual teachers or administrators. Specifically, participants were instructed to share both positive and negative ideas about teachers and their campus with as many details as possible. However, when discussing teachers and staff members, they were told to focus on how the actions that the staff and teachers engaged in were either positive or negative. No mention of the teachers’ or staff members’ names was made in reporting these actions; thus, student participants were extremely honest in sharing their ideas. These discussions are reported further in the findings of this study.

High School

Establish connections with high school staff. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of working with the high school participants was gaining access to the students. Before meeting with potential participants, the primary researcher met with Divisionville High School’s principal twice to discuss the purpose, background, and scope of this study. She was then given the contact information for the school’s MEChA advisor. After a series of e-mail and phone communications, the MEChA advisor invited the primary researcher to attend a MEChA meeting at Divisionville High. During this meeting, the primary researcher shared her background and personal stories about Divisionville with the students and also provided background into the study. It should be noted that the coordination of the following focus group meetings and dissemination of information to the high school participants would not have been possible without the support from the Divisionville teachers and staff.

Flexibility. Due to the busy schedules of the high school participants, several meetings had to be rescheduled or restructured to meet the needs of the high school participants and ensure their continued participation in this study. Additionally, it was necessary to hold two sections of
focus group sessions to accommodate everyone’s schedule. Because one of the goals of this study was to create a space for the voices of the stakeholders to be heard, the decision to include more participants was made. By allowing more students to participate, it was possible to obtain a more complete picture of their schooling experiences and journeys than would have been possible through meeting with a single focus group of participants.

**College**

**Building on past relationships.** As with the middle school and high school participants, it was necessary to build a relationship with the college participants before this study could begin. Central Middle School students had taken several field trips to California State University the previous year and were able to hear the experiences of MEChA members during a panel discussion. Several of the MEChA members were still involved with the club and remembered the Central students from the year before. Because they wanted to promote college and student activism, these members were extremely helpful in promoting this study to their fellow Mechistas. They also expressed a desire to continue working with middle school students through campus trips after the course of this study concluded.

**Various focus group settings.** Not all of the focus group meetings were able to take place as face-to-face sessions due to the logistics involved in getting all 17 college participants in the same place at the same time. However, the college participants were able to share their ideas and discuss their experiences via e-mail. These short conversations were used to set the groundwork for the focus group sessions that took place in person and further added to the depth of the data that were gathered during this study.
Focus Group Sessions

While not all of the sessions took place at the various school sites, they shared a common procedure:

1. Opening sharing of news items and “icebreaker” activity;
2. Open-ended and semistructured questions related to session’s overall topic (identity, college readiness and academic proficiency, structural navigation, student awareness and empowerment);
3. Development of questions to ask other focus groups;
4. Answering questions from other focus groups; and
5. Final journaling and reflection of process and topic.

The fact that participants were able to ask questions of focus groups from outside of their individual school sites served to engage them in the process of dialogue and action research. Furthermore, individual participants at all educational levels expressed sentiments that this section of the focus group meetings was a time that they enjoyed, and they looked forward to hearing what their colleagues at other school sites expressed.

Each focus group session was designed to elicit data regarding the four constructs of identity, college readiness and academic proficiency, structural navigation, and student awareness and empowerment. Additionally, the focus group sessions followed a timeline that allowed for each group to build on the ideas of the others, thereby highlighting the critical pedagogy and participatory action research approach used in this study. This timeline was as follows:
1. Central Middle School students discussed identity, college readiness, and academic proficiency, and developed questions for Divisionville High School and California State University students.

2. Divisionville High School students dialogued regarding their experiences related to identity, college readiness, and academic proficiency, and answered questions from the Central students. Participants also developed questions for the California State University students.

3. California State University students discussed their thoughts regarding identity, college readiness, and academic proficiency, and answered the questions from both the middle school and high school students. They also developed questions to pose to their fellow students at the other educational levels.

4. The above process was repeated to discuss the constructs of structural navigation and student awareness and empowerment.

Finally, it must be noted that these groups continued to meet informally after the course of this study to strengthen the partnerships among the various schools and build a network of support for students. What this continuation means for linguistically marginalized students in the greater Divisionville area is further discussed in the findings and analysis section of this write-up.

Data Collection

In addition to the demographic data collected from the U.S. Census Bureau, the California Department of Education, and the individual student questionnaires and interest sheets, this study complied data from the various focus group sessions. Specifically, the data gathered during the course of this study included notes, e-mails, and audio recordings from the individual focus group sessions, as well as student reflections regarding each session and
individual constructs that were discussed. Furthermore, participant journaling and artwork was also included in the documentation.

The documentation and methods of data collection that were employed for this study also included the following:

1. How do middle school, high school, and college students from linguistically disenfranchised populations conceptualize their individual academic identities?
   a. What do the terms college readiness and academic proficiency entail for students from populations outside of the White, monolingual status quo?

   The first line of inquiry for this study was detailed through the use of focus groups, individual reflections, and student participant journals. Through this process, it was possible to determine how the students’ sense of identity either upheld or created tension with the identities developed for them by the school system on the whole.

2. How do students from linguistically disenfranchised populations navigate through existing school structures?
   a. Do the pathways that marginalized students use to navigate through the school system reaffirm the status quo or provide access of opportunities?

   The second line of inquiry for this study was documented by the discussions and questions that emerged during focus group sessions. Additionally, the participants’ responses to both research questions were documented through mini art projects and individual reflective journaling.

3. What school structures and practices give voice to counternarratives that work either against or for empowerment and systemic transformation regarding linguistically disenfranchised students?
The third line of inquiry during this study was illustrated via documentation of the school procedures and course placement policies as they impacted the individual participants. During focus group sessions, the participants had the opportunity to chart their educational journeys and navigational pathways. The resulting dialogue about the systemic journeys of the participants made it possible to consider when counternarratives were evident and how these narratives had the potential to create the structural tension necessary for widespread systemic transformation.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this study was completed through a variety of steps. The overall process utilized during this portion of the study was as follows:

1. As the first step, student journal entries, researcher notes from the focus group sessions, demographic data, artwork, and transcripts from the audio recordings were compiled and reviewed to create three narratives to represent the Central Middle School, Divisionville High School, and California State University participants, respectively. These narratives were used to detail the general descriptions in terms of the four constructs of identity, college readiness and academic proficiency, structural navigation, and student awareness and empowerment. Additionally, these narratives were used to create a picture of the sociopolitical and sociocultural influences on students in the greater Divisionville area as they journeyed through the various educational levels of middle school, high school, and college.

2. The second step in the data analysis process included the creation of an “educational pathways and journeys” timeline to represent each of the three focus groups (presented in Chapter 4). This flowchart was built using the patterns that emerged from the focus group narratives and was expanded to include areas where participants displayed characteristics of
conforming, reforming, or transforming in response to the sociocultural factors present in their environment (Freire, 2007). As developed by Freire (2007), oppressed individuals who conform to their environment uphold the definition that the status quo maintains for their identity and do not seek change, individuals who reform do so in terms of assimilation and changing their identities to meet the needs of the dominant society, and members who transform engage in the process of critical pedagogy and work toward societal transformation and liberation of the oppressed. Events and experiences when participants were seen to conform, reform, or transform were noted on the timeline, as were “crossroads” events. Such events were identified using the concepts of cultural dissonance and crossroads as defined by Torres (2003) and Torres and Hernandez (2007). Crossroads events included, but were not limited to, experiences connected to institutionalized racism, teacher expectations, and discrimination along linguistic and ethnic lines. Further details of these experiences are noted in Chapter 4 of this work.

3. After the educational pathways and journeys timeline was completed, individual student participant experiences were plotted using a scatter-gram to determine the positions of student participants within the larger group. Table 7 indicates how this scatter-gram was developed.

As previously noted, the scatter-gram was created to determine how the patterns and experiences of the participants in this study added to the overall focus group narratives and educational timeline. More details are presented in Chapter 4 of this report.

**Summary**

As indicated at the start of this chapter, a main purpose of this study was to give voice to students from traditionally disenfranchised populations. To that end, elements of critical
**Table 7**

**Participant Scatter-Gram Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Conforming</th>
<th>Reforming</th>
<th>Transforming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Did participants view individual identity in terms of the status quo?</td>
<td>Did participants seek to negotiate their identity to accommodate what they thought was expected from the dominant society? Was there evidence of assimilation?</td>
<td>Did participants maintain their own sense of identity without conforming or reforming to fit within the status quo? Did they promote their identity as a means of social transformation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College readiness &amp; academic proficiency</td>
<td>How did participants define college readiness and academic proficiency? Did their views conform to match those of the status quo?</td>
<td>Were participants aware of what they needed to be college readiness or academic proficiency? Did they attempt to negotiate their experiences to accommodate this awareness?</td>
<td>Could participants name and define the ways through which the status quo used college readiness and academic proficiency to continue the oppression of marginalized groups? Were they able to use their own concepts of college readiness and academic proficiency to promote their social development and change?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural navigation</td>
<td>What pathways did participants use or envision for their educational journeys? Were such pathways based on dominant culture and traditional in nature?</td>
<td>How did participants use strategic ways to navigate the system? Did such journeys alter the participant in terms of assimilating into the status quo?</td>
<td>Did participants seek to negotiate effectively through the educational systems and structures during their educational journeys? Were they able to use such journeys to name social problems, tensions, and seek transformative change?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student awareness &amp; empowerment</td>
<td>Were participants aware of their position in the larger society? Did they express sentiments of disempowerment and did they accept their sense of powerless and hopeless?</td>
<td>Did participants exhibit awareness and ability to traverse the social hierarchy in context of their schooling experiences? Did such awareness lead to empowerment or did it lead to individual assimilation into the norm?</td>
<td>Throughout their schooling experiences, did participants become aware of their situations and status? Did such awareness lead to empowerment and actions to undo unjust and limiting access conditions?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2007) and participatory action research (Hinchey, 2008; Stringer, 2007) were used throughout the research process of this work. The process of dialogue and the discussions that occurred during the focus group sessions yielded a
wealth of data that were analyzed and complied to create a holistic description of the experiences of linguistically marginalized students in the greater Divisionville area. Chapter 4 presents the detailed findings from this research journey.
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

Using the methodology described in Chapter 3 of this study, the data that were gathered for this study resulted from a series of face-to-face focus group sessions that occurred over a 3-month period in 2012-2013. The result was a collection of data that included the following: notes and audio recordings from focus group sessions, participant journals, and participant posters and collages related to the ideas and concepts discussed during the focus group sessions. Additional demographic data were compiled from participant interest and demographic questionnaires, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the California Department of Education. What follows is the analysis and evaluation of these data.

Focus Group Narratives

Once the data were gathered, the initial step in analysis led to the creation of three different “narratives” to describe the various focus groups. Each of these narratives relates the general discussions and ideas that emerged during the focus group sessions and was used to consider the overall characteristics of the three levels of schools: Central Middle School, Divisionville High School, and California State University. Furthermore, these illustrations provided valuable insight into the current sociopolitical and sociocultural realities faced by students from linguistically marginalized populations in the greater Divisionville area.

Central Middle School: A Complex School

As previously noted, Central Middle School is the oldest of the five traditional public middle schools in the city of Divisionville and had an enrollment of 999 students at the time of this study. The middle school students (n = 14) who participated in the four focus group sessions held at Central Middle School consisted of the following participants:

- Four seventh-grade students—one female and three males
Ten eighth-grade students—five females and five males

All participants were native Spanish speakers and had spent at least 3 years in the California school system. With the exception of one male eighth-grade participant, all of the middle school students had spent their entire middle school experience at Central. The student who was the exception to this fact had completed sixth grade in a neighboring school district and seventh grade at another Divisionville middle school.

The following narrative was created using notes from the focus group sessions and was designed to provide an overview of the situation and learning environment at Central as it directly influenced linguistically marginalized students. It should also be noted that the themes in this narrative arose from the student discussions and journals and were not predefined before this analysis. The content analysis yielded four themes that are detailed in this section.

A “broken” school. The first theme that emerged was that of the school’s overall state of dilapidation and disrepair. The lackluster physical state of the school was a discussion point that repeatedly came to the forefront of the focus group sessions with the Central Middle School participants. Specifically, students had several questions about the purpose of wooden “posts” that appeared on campus after winter break. That these posts, or beams, were being used to hold up the school’s rotted and broken overhangs was not previously known to the students before the first focus group session. In fact, this knowledge had been kept from them by the school’s teachers and administrators. The participants in this study frequently complained that the wooden beams were “ugly,” “dangerous,” and that they made the school seem “old.” When asked what else they disliked about their school, the following discussion took place:

Researcher: What are some of the things you dislike about this school?

Student A: The wooden things. You know. Those posts in the hallways.
Student B: Yeah, the wooden posts. They are ugly and I don’t really like them. Why are they even there?

Researcher: Wooden posts?

Student C: Those things holding the ceiling up outside the classrooms. You know—the posts. They have splinters and are unsafe.

Researcher: Why do you say that they are “unsafe”?

Student C: Kids walk into them and can hurt themselves. They also make the school look ugly and old.

The above discussion continued and expanded to include other aspects of the school’s physical appearance. For example, participants engaged in the following exchange:

Student C: I don’t like that this school looks old.

Student A: Why don’t they fix it?

Researcher: “Fix it”? Can you explain what you mean?

Student A: Well, they should make the buildings nicer so kids want to come here.

Student D: Yeah, nobody wants to come here because it is ugly and broken. My teacher couldn’t use the door to her room yesterday, no today, because the door broke.

Researcher: The door broke?

Student D: Yes. She had to leave the door open or we could’ve been stuck in the classroom. That would’ve been really bad. We would’ve been late for lunch, or nutrition, or something.

Student E: My friend was in that class! They had to call the office to get out of the room because the teacher couldn’t open the door.

While the preceding discussion may seem superficial to outsiders, it was highly evident that the participants were upset by the rundown condition of their middle school. Furthermore, individual journal entries from the participants indicated that they were also aware of what this physical condition inferred about their school’s status in the Divisionville community. For example, one student wrote the following:
I know this school is not in a nice part of town and that people say bad things about us. But, we need better buildings. The holes in the fence make the school unsafe. People walk across the field in the daytime and [Mr. Hoffman (pseudonym)] gets angry. He’s always yelling at people to get off the field. This school is not safe.

Mr. Hoffman is one of the school’s physical education teachers and constantly brings up the issue about the holes in the fence and resulting security issues with the school’s administration. To this date, no actions have been taken to resolve the issue. That students noticed this problem and what it alludes to about their school presented just one indication of their awareness of the larger social issues in Divisionville. Furthermore, the student who wrote the previous thoughts about her school’s physical condition went on to explain that she felt as if the community “didn’t care” about her school and that it was “unfair” for Central students to have such an “old” and “ugly” school. Such sentiments were echoed by additional participants who wrote that they wanted a “prettier” school that was “safe” for students. One participant wrote that Central students “deserved” a school campus that students would actually “want” to visit.

As indicated by the above discussions, the Central Middle School students who participated in this study raised the issue of their school’s physical state as it connected to the school’s overall status in the community. That students knew that outsiders tended to view their school as “bad” further illustrated their awareness of the sociopolitical aspects in Divisionville. However, despite the fact that the participants were able to problem pose and raise the issue of their school’s appearance, they did not develop any realistic plans of action to resolve this issue. When pushed to consider ways of addressing their named problem, participants responded that the school district should “fix” the school but could not explain how that fixing could actually happen. It is worth noting that the school’s administrators did obtain permission from district officials to undertake a mural project to “beautify” Central after the conclusion of this study.
This project was met with enthusiasm from the students, and 10 of the 14 focus group participants took active roles in painting the murals.

“Good” vs. “bad” students. A second theme that emerged from the focus group sessions with Central Middle School students was that of “good” and “bad” students. When dialoguing about the various types of students and what it meant to be college ready, the following exchange occurred:

Researcher: What are some reasons why students don’t do well at this school?

Student A: Some students are bad. You know, they get into trouble and have to go to detention, or even Friday Night School. They just don’t care.

Student B: They also go to Wednesday Night School and have to talk to [Mr. Gandalf (pseudonym)] all the time. If you get escorted, then you are a bad student. Like, as if you just don’t care.

Researcher: Why do they have Wednesday Night and Friday Night School?

Student C: They get in trouble.

Researcher: Trouble?

Student C: You know, they um, do bad things. Things like talking back to the teacher or not turning in their work. Like he said, they don’t care about school or anything.

Student A: Sí, they don’t care about their education. They are bad kids. I don’t like to hang around them. I only eat lunch with my friends, and I think they are good students. My mom tells me that I have good friends.

Researcher: Do only bad kids get detention?

Student D: Most of the time. Sometimes you get detention for being tardy. That’s unfair because you have to walk your little brother or sister to school, and they don’t care about that stuff. I think we should have more time to get to school in the mornings. I get Friday Night School and I’m not a bad student. I like school and I try my best.

It is interesting to note that most of the students in the above exchange viewed detention as something for “bad” or unmotivated students who “don’t care” about their education. However,
Student D’s comments indicate some of the nuances when attempting to define “good” and “bad” students using set categories and descriptions. Specifically, her reference to taking care of her brothers and sisters by walking them to school and her comment that the school’s adults “don’t care” about this indicate that she may view the adults on campus in an adversarial light despite the fact that she labels herself as a “good” student who tries her “best.” The additional fact that Student B mentioned that “bad” students have to talk with one of the school’s assistant principals, Mr. Gandalf, further illustrates a potential division between the students and campus adults; if participants see authority figures as adversarial or as serving a solely disciplinary role, then they may be less likely to work with teachers and school staff members to problem solve in a collaborative nature.

Further insight into the participants’ definitions of “good” and “bad” students was revealed when participants were asked what makes students ready for college. Part of this discussion included the following:

*Researcher:* Why do you think some students are more prepared for college than others?

*Student A:* I think it’s that some students try and others don’t. Kids who value their education will be ready for college, and the bad kids won’t.

*Student B:* Kids who don’t get good grades are not going to college. I get straight A’s, so I will go to college. I want a good career to help my family.

*Researcher:* So, people go to college to have a “good” career?

*Student B:* Yes. That’s why I want to go. I want to be a lawyer.

*Student C:* I think that you have to try to go to college. Teachers tell me that I try hard, so I know I can go to college. They believe in me, and this makes me feel more ready.

*Student D:* That’s true. I get good grades even though I am lazy, but my teachers tell me I am smart. I think I will be ready for college as long as I keep trying and do my work.
Researcher: Do teachers talk to you about what you need to do to be able to get accepted into a college or university?

Student A: Um, I don’t know. I think they do. Sometimes. . . . Yeah, they tell us that you need good grades.

Researcher: Good grades? Anything else?

Student C: Maybe the A-G? I think that’s what they’re called. What are those?

Student B: Oh, I think I might know. Some teachers talk about A-G but they don’t explain them. The students don’t know what they are. [Several students start talking at once.]

Student D: Most teachers only tell us why to go to college. They don’t tell us how. Can we ask the high school kids about A-G?

Researcher: Of course. I’ll add it to your question list for the high school students.

This conversation clearly indicates a desire of the students to attend college despite the fact that they did not know the exact steps they would need to take to enroll in a 4-year institution after high school graduation. Such a trend mirrored the findings of Olsen (2010) when she discovered that Long-Term English Language Learner (LTELL) students possessed a desire to attend college yet lacked the academic skills or histories necessary to apply for college. Furthermore, that the participants in this study seemed to agree that one only needs to “try hard” and earn “good grades” to be ready for college provided yet another indication of their general unawareness of the structures they would need to be able to navigate successfully to be accepted into a 4-year college or university. However, they did mention the A-G requirements, which illustrated that they had a small understanding that college readiness entails more than a teacher’s “belief” in students and individual effort.

Finally, when asked to reflect on the previous discussions concerning “good” and “bad” students as well as college readiness, participants provided a very common set of responses.
Specifically, students frequently mentioned their ability to “try” as well as their motivation to earn good grades as indicators of their potential. One seventh-grade boy wrote,

I am a nice person and my teachers like me. I think they believe in me and want me to be successful. I always try my hardest and don’t talk in class. I get good grades and do my homework on time. I know I can go to college.

His thoughts were reiterated by a fellow participant who explained that “good” students did not talk during class and that she was a good student because she did not want to “get in trouble” by talking during class. That participants used such defined categories for “good” and “bad” students illustrates the fact that they believed the status quo definitions of successful students as those who try hard, are motivated, and do not get into trouble. It is also interesting to note that two students brought up the idea that talking during class was viewed as a negative. While individual classroom procedures at Central Middle School were not observed during this study, these comments allude to the traditional teaching methods that may be in use at Central; the teacher acts as the deliverer of knowledge while the students passively receive that knowledge.

“Easy” classes and “nice” teachers. The third theme that arose from the focus group sessions with the Central Middle School students included the idea of “easy” classes taught by “nice” teachers. During one session, students created posters to describe themselves and their thoughts of Central Middle School’s teachers. The final posters included references to the following ideas:

1. Teachers at Central were “nice” and “understanding.”
2. When students did not do their homework, the teachers let them make up the work.
3. The classes were not “hard,” and students felt that they did not need to do much other than “try” to earn solid grades in their academic courses.
4. The students felt that it was a positive to have easy classes and that it was a negative when classes were too hard or when they did not earn high grades.

The references to such ideas on student posters illustrate an aspect of the hidden curriculum at Central Middle School. For example, the fact that students believed that their classes were easy alludes to the concept of lowered teacher expectations for certain student populations. That Central Middle School had a population of 94% Latino students with 93% of the total population qualifying for the federal Free-and-Reduced Lunch program may indicate that the teachers at Central viewed their students as incapable of academic success due to their supposed “deficits.” Furthermore, the “easy” classes may also provide evidence of watered-down curriculum designed for students perceived to be at lower academic levels.

Individual student journals also supplied additional details of “easy” classes taught by “nice” teachers. Specifically, one eighth-grade girl wrote, “I like that we can talk to friends in school and class. The classes are easy and that some teachers are really nice and that they also treat you nice.” An eighth-grade boy elaborated on this same sentiment by explaining that “the classes are not hard at all and teachers don’t give up on you.” One seventh-grade boy also commented in his journal that “all the teachers I have are nice and they help me a lot.” While it certainly can be viewed as a positive that Central Middle School teachers “don’t give up” on their students and that they “help” their students, the common theme of “easy” classes makes one wonder how “nice” the teachers truly are. For example, are the classes less challenging because the teachers are scaffolding instruction to make grade-level curriculum accessible to Central’s students, or are they less challenging due to lowered expectations and a lack of tasks that require students to think critically during their time in class? To answer this question, the primary
researcher had a short discussion with students about “easy” classes and “nice” teachers during the following focus group session. Part of this conversation was as follows:

**Researcher:** Many of you wrote about easy classes last week. Can you explain why they are easy?

**Student A:** Sure. We do the same thing each week, and I know what to expect each day.

**Researcher:** The same thing? What does that mean?

**Student A:** Like in social studies. We read a chapter and do a packet. It’s easy. Sometimes I don’t even read the book and just do the worksheets.

**Researcher:** We do the packet. It is easy!

**Student C:** We only do part of the packet in my social studies class.

**Researcher:** Why? What else do you do?

**Student C:** We have to watch short videos after school or at home with the teacher talking and explaining something to us. Then we do things in class that are like what she shows in the video. We don’t do the whole packet like other classes—only like 1-2 pages.

**Researcher:** Do you like this?

**Student C:** Um, I think so. Yes. The teacher explains it better than the book. We also do activities in class instead of the packet. [Unintelligible] homework.

**Student D:** I don’t like the classroom activities.

**Researcher:** Are you in the same social studies class?

**Student D:** Yes. I think it’s hard. Social studies is my worst class.

**Researcher:** Why?

**Student D:** Because the teacher doesn’t tell us what to do during class. We have to figure out on our own.

**Student E:** Some teachers are like that. I don’t like them. They should explain more.

**Researcher:** So, some of your teachers don’t explain things?

**Student E:** No. They tell me to do it on my own.
The above dialogue indicates just some of the nuances in the students’ beliefs about their teachers that emerged during the course of the focus group work at Central Middle School. Specifically, some students believed that their teachers explained concepts to them while others seemed to have them work more independently. Furthermore, the idea that “packets” were seen as a positive because they were routine and less difficult than some other classroom tasks provides a glimpse into the actual instructional pedagogies that may be in use at Central Middle School. Again, it was unclear what students meant by “explaining things.” Discovering what exactly students meant by these comments would be an interesting line of inquiry for future work at Central Middle School.

Racist teachers. The final and fourth theme that emerged from the discussions with the Central Middle School students presented a sharp contrast to their statements regarding “easy” and “nice” teachers. This theme dealt with the presence of “racist” teachers. It should be noted that this topic did not come up in discussions until the final focus group meeting and therefore was not explored in as much detail as the previous three themes. Furthermore, this theme resulted from participant journal entries and did not have the benefit of a follow-up discussion with a focus group of students. Despite these limitations, the naming of “racist teachers” and issues related to bullying was important to include in these findings, especially given the linguistic and ethnic composition of the Central Middle School focus group.

When asked to reflect on the overall discussions throughout the four focus group sessions and what participants still viewed as problems at Central Middle School, an eighth-grade girl replied,

I also know this school isn’t built in the best area, but keeping the school looking old and mistreated just makes the school feel like a bad school. Now, if it could improve its appearance, students could feel more confident at the school. They can also feel like it is a good school even if it is built in a bad area. It could improve the learning of the
students too. I would change the way some of the teachers teach because sometimes it’s
either too boring, too out of control, or teachers don’t really pay attention to students. I
also think some teachers don’t like that students speak Spanish.

This quote indicates that students continued to view the physical appearance of their school as
negative and potentially harmful to students as well as the image Central Middle School has in
Divisionville. Additionally, this student showed that she was starting to question the motivations
and pedagogies of individual teachers. Specifically, she stated that the school should “improve
the learning” of its students and that teachers need to “change” the way they teach. When she
mentioned that some classes were “boring” or “out of control,” this participant alluded to the
idea that teachers may not really care about their students’ learning or recognize the potential of
their students at the level necessary to promote access to a relevant and challenging curriculum.
Again, the concept of “easy” classes can be seen as a factor; the classes may be easy because the
teachers simply do not care about their students.

While the student in the above example did not explicitly name racism and racist
teachers, this issue was raised by others in the Central Middle School focus group. Another
eighth-grade girl explained that “the teachers are mean. They do not teach us or explain the
homework. We have to find out for ourselves what it is. They also hate Spanish and are racist to
Mexicans.” This student went on to suggest that the district should “replace the teachers” at
Central Middle School. Her sentiments were mirrored by those of an eighth-grade boy who
wrote,

I don’t think it’s fair that some people get in trouble for things they didn’t do. Teachers
judge students because of how they look (like skin color and little things). [Central] has
racism from teachers and students. Teachers don’t do anything about it.

Another female eighth-grade participant had the following to say about the same subject:
Another thing I don’t like is that there is discrimination from teachers. I don’t like when some teachers are racist. I don’t judge people for their color like some teachers do. I don’t like to judge people for how they dress, look, or skin color.

Finally, a seventh-grade boy wrote, “I don’t like some of the teachers because they don’t explain. They get mad when we speak Spanish. They also don’t do anything about bullying. I try to stop bullying but teachers don’t listen.” Evidently, not all of Central Middle School teachers are “nice” and “believe” in their students.

As the previous quotes from Central students indicate, Central Middle School has underlying tensions along racial and linguistic lines. The fact that students were willing to call out teachers for “judging” students based on skin color and physical appearance illustrates that students might have been starting the process of critically looking at their teachers and education, and were therefore less willing to see teachers in a positive light as earlier in this study. Furthermore, the participants showed that they were aware of the social stigma placed on Spanish speakers at Central Middle School and that they disagreed with such sentiments and found them “unfair.” This shift from their previously optimistic visions of their teachers and school additionally points to the idea that the Central Middle School participants had arrived at a “crossroads,” as defined by Torres (2009), in their identity formation. The possible pathways after arriving at such a crossroads were elaborated through the work with the Divisionville High School focus group.

**Summary: Upholding hegemony.** As evident through the discussion of the themes that emerged from working with the Central Middle School students, the power of hegemony, deficit theory, and identity formation through the perceptions of the dominant social groups remained largely unchallenged. Table 8 indicates the social constructs as well as the perceptions and reactions to such events as discussed by the Central Middle School participants.
Table 8

Central Middle School: Social Constructs and Student Perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Social construct</th>
<th>Student perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A “broken” school</td>
<td>• Inequality as social status</td>
<td>The disrepair of Central Middle school caused students to feel as if they were not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sociopolitical hierarchy of larger community</td>
<td>“worth” a “good” school. (Crossroad Event)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “Good” vs. “bad” students</td>
<td>• Traditional teaching beliefs and practices</td>
<td>Students upheld the status quo by expressing their belief in traditional views of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Banking model of education</td>
<td>student behaviors and consequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “Easy” classes and “nice”</td>
<td>• Hidden curriculum</td>
<td>Students desired to be ready for both high school and college but did not have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers</td>
<td>• Expectations of capability to enter college based on</td>
<td>knowledge of what such readiness meant due to low teacher expectations and lack of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>deficit-based concepts of college readiness</td>
<td>belief in student capabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Racist teachers</td>
<td>• Racial and linguistic identity</td>
<td>The social stigma of speaking Spanish as well as being valued for one’s physical</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>appearance and skin color was named as a challenge by students. (Crossroad Event)</td>
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</table>

As indicated in Table 8, the Central Middle School students did not have the social awareness necessary to name the discriminatory practices around them and challenge hegemony. For example, when the middle school students discussed their ideas concerning “good” and “bad” students, their reliance on the indicators of homework completion, not earning detention, and not being “disrespectful” to the adults on campus illustrated their inherent belief in the superiority of the American education system (Carlson, 2008; Collatos et al., 2004; Gonzalez, 1990; Olsen, 2010). Additionally, that these students did not challenge such messages, with the exception of taking action against their school’s physical state of disrepair, further provided evidence of the role that hidden curriculum and social messages of dominance played at Central Middle School (Gorski, 2005; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997). The students knew that the larger Divisionville society did not value their school, and they thereby implicitly accepted their place.
in that society (Cline et al., 2004; Daoud & Quirocho, 2005; Fine et al., 2008; Gutiérrez et al., 2002). Finally, the Central Middle School students had not been forced to conceptualize their identity and perceptions of the world around them due to the fact that they did not expressly name the societal problems around them (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2007; Morrell, 2004). As indicated by the work of Torres (2009), crossroads events can push students to such naming. However, the Central Middle School students were not at this point of their educational journeys just yet. The Divisionville High School students presented a slightly different image.

**Divisionville High School: A School Divided**

Divisionville High School is divided along racial and socioeconomic lines as it is the oldest high school in the city of Divisionville and represents several of the city’s different neighborhoods and communities. Indeed, the school’s demographics of 67% Latino students and 22% White students, with 59% of the school’s population on free and reduced lunch, present a broader portrait of the larger community than the fairly homogenous Central Middle School demographics. Additionally, the school’s total enrollment of 1,977 students during the time of this study provided a larger sample of the Divisionville community than would have been possible with a focus on the 999 students at Central Middle School.

As noted in Chapter 3, the Divisionville High focus group (n = 15) consisted of the following students:

- One ninth-grade student—female
- One 10th-grade student—female
- One 11th-grade student—male
- Twelve 12th-grade students—four males and eight females
Students in this focus group represented a range of 3-14 years in the California school system.
All students spoke Spanish as their first language and were involved with the school’s
Movimiento Esdudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) organization. The insight that these
participants provided to this study was a continuation of that generated from the time spent with
the Central Middle School students. The following findings were gathered from data in the
forms of transcripts and notes from three focus group sessions and individual student journals.
The focus group sessions yielded three themes at the high school level.

“Greentoppers” and everyone else. The first and most dominant theme that stemmed
from the discussions with Divisionville High students was that of the school hierarchy. During
the first focus group session, participants were asked to describe the most pressing issues at their
campus. The following is what was recorded:

*Researcher:* What do you see as the biggest issues or problems at this school?

*Student A:* We have bad diversity at this school. I mean, the school is diverse, but we
have many different groups.

*Student B:* I agree. Nobody mixes outside their own group. Everyone is divided, and
people believe in stereotypes. A lot of people judge others outside of their
group.

*Student C:* Yeah, like everyone has their own section or place on campus.

*Researcher:* Their own section? Can you explain?

*Student D:* Um, like during lunch and breaks each group has its own place. They all have
their own tree or spot.

*Student E:* [Interrupting Student D] Like the greentoppers have their spot, the queers have
theirs, the *paisas* have theirs, and others too. [Several students in the group
begin talking and agreeing with Student E simultaneously.]

*Researcher:* Okay, let me see if I’m hearing you all correctly. There is a group of
students called the “greentoppers,” and they have their own space, and so do
the “queers” and “*paisas.*” Can you explain these groups to me? Who are the
members? Where are their places on campus?
Student F: The greentoppers are the popular kids. You know, the jocks and ASB [Associated Student Body] students. They eat lunch at the greentop, and they don’t like it when anyone else tries to cross the greentop.

Researcher: The “greentop”?

Student G: The greentop is the grassy area at the front of the school by the front parking lot. The jocks have a tree on the greentop, and so do the ASB and the cheerleaders. They have their place on the greentop. [Other students begin talking to explain where each group of greentoppers congregates.]

Researcher: Oh, so the greentoppers are popular. What about the “queers” and the “paisas”?

Student A: The queers have the queer corner close to the handball courts. They don’t get along with the greentoppers because people think they are weird. I have friends who hang in the queer corner—they are just like everyone else. People shouldn’t judge.

Student D: Yeah, that’s like the paisas. Their spot is at the end of the school. You know, like near the trailers at the end of this row. [This session took place in a relocatable classroom in the second-to-last row of school buildings.]

Researcher: Why are they called “paisas”?

Student C: Because they don’t speak English and just got here. I think they are afraid of the greentoppers. Like, they don’t go near the greentop or anything like that. They keep to themselves. Even when we try to invite them to different events at lunch, they don’t like to leave their place and stay by themselves. Maybe we should hold events nearer to them.

The preceding exchange led to a longer discussion regarding bullying and student interaction that is further detailed in this chapter. However, this short portion of that discussion indicates the heightened awareness that Divisionville High focus group participants had regarding the social makeup and hierarchy of their school. The fact that the greentoppers were seen as the group in power, complete with their own greentop at the school’s entrance, showed their elevated social status. Furthermore, that the greentoppers included more affluent or middle-class White and English-speaking athletes, cheerleaders, and ASB members illustrated the importance placed on traditional school values, systems, and functions. The fact that the students who did not fit
within these values (the queers and paisas) due to their sexual orientation or status as non-English speakers were called out as being deviant or different by MEChA members provided further evidence of the traditional social roles and norms at Divisionville High School.

The students in the Divisionville High focus group additionally provided insight into the pervious discussion in their journal entries reflecting on the focus group session. In particular, one 12th-grade female student responded,

This school is a diverse school. Not necessarily in race but in ranking. We have the people who hang out on the greentop (the “popular” jocks, wealthy) then we have people who are classified as the “paisas” (the Mexicans, don’t really talk English). We also have the in-between, the “normal” people who just hang out with friends, and the Asians, the queers, and the soccer guys.

A 12th-grade male further explained,

[Divisionville] is a big high school for which means big problems unlike smaller high schools. . . . This school does have its own little cliques of where different races spend their breaks or lunch. Many students dislike others because they are not like them and racism is a problem.

Unlike the Central Middle School students, who did not name divisions between student groups as an issue, their Divisionville High counterparts were clearly proficient at identifying social fissures as a major problem at their site. Because such segregation was clearly along social lines, complete with the favored groups of students earning a physical space at the forefront of the school, such divisions were bound to carry into the classroom as well as interactions among various groups of students and teachers. Indeed, the next major theme that arose during the time spent at Divisionville High was that of bullying and negative student interactions.

**Bullying: Negative student interactions.** The second theme that emerged from the discussions with the Divisionville High School students was that of bullying and negative interactions on campus. As noted in the previous discourse, segregation among social groups at Divisionville High was viewed as a pressing issue by the focus group participants. Furthermore,
such divisions influenced the ways students interacted with each other throughout the course of the school day. When continuing to discuss the issue of within-school segregation during the second focus group session, the Divisionville High participants related the following:

*Student A:* Yes, I think bullying is a big, like major, problem at this school. Like when they started GSA [Gay-Straight Alliance club], I think last year, there was hostility.

*Student B:* Yeah, that’s true. The greentoppers also call people names if they crossed the greentop, even if this was an accident. It’s not like people want to walk on the greentop, but sometimes you don’t want to walk around it.

*Researcher:* Names? Such as?

*Student B:* They were saying things like “queer” or “fag.” You know, stuff like that.

*Student C:* It’s like that—they, um, resent anyone who goes on their space. They act like they own the greentop, like it’s theirs or something.

*Student A:* Yeah, like one time when I went to talk to a friend on the greentop. Even though he is a friend, the rest of the greentoppers gave me dirty looks as if I didn’t belong there. I felt uncomfortable, and I left as soon as I could.

*Student C:* They mad-dog you when you are in their space. That’s not like name calling, but I think it’s still bullying.

*Student D:* They also can be physical.

*Researcher:* Physical? How so?

*Student D:* Well, they get into physical fights or gang up on others.

*Student E:* If you’re different, then they treat you badly.

*Student B:* Like last year, we had all these fights between the *paisas* and the greentoppers. The greentoppers would put *paisas* in the trashcan, or anyone else they thought was different or who don’t really fit in.

*Researcher:* In the trashcan? That really happens? I thought that was just a story people tell freshmen.

*Student B:* Oh, it happens. I’ve seen it. Sometimes they put freshmen in the trashcan, but last year they would bully the *paisas* and queers the most. I think that’s why
they stay in their own space and don’t go to the greentop. They might be afraid, or maybe they just don’t want to bother with it all.

Researcher: How did the adults on campus react to these events?

Student A: Most of the time, they don’t know, so it’s not a problem for them.

Student E: Some care, but they respond in like minimal ways. You know, they think it’s just a problem with “gangs” and not the greentoppers. [Several students are talking at once and discussing who the school’s staff decides to punish for such infractions.]

Researcher: There seems to be a difference in who gets punished for fighting and bullying. Can you explain what you mean?

Student D: Last year the paisas got suspended for fighting, but the jocks and athletes didn’t. If they think you are a good student or kid, then you don’t get in trouble.

Student C: They, I mean the teachers, defend the jocks and ASB more. They don’t care about others as much.

Student A: Yeah, I mean like, security is always watching the paisas and the troublemakers who hang by the handball courts.

Researcher: The troublemakers by the handball courts? Is that where the GSA group is?

Student A: No, they hang near the handball courts at the back of the school, but the troublemakers are next to the courts. They do things like smoke pot and other stuff.

Student E: Security only watches them and the paisas. They don’t care what the greentoppers do, even if it’s bad.

Researcher: What about the teachers? Do you think they care what the greentoppers do?

Student D: No. They have favorites. There is favoritism in their classes too.

Evidently, the social divisions at Divisionville High School were seen as being so divisive that they impacted how students interacted with each other, as well as which social groups were punished for fighting and other such transgressions. It is also interesting to note that the participants indicated a sense of “favoritism” toward the greentoppers, ASB members, and
student athletes. This privileged position in the school’s hierarchy made it possible for students to be physical and mental bullies without fear of repercussions from the school’s teachers and security. Additionally, the fact that participants indicated that school security seemed to monitor the *paísa*s and “troublemakers” by the handball courts more than the athletes and greentoppers presented yet another indication of the school’s social makeup. To be a greentopper was to be in control and uphold the status quo of being a “good” student or young adult, while anything seen as “other” was less valued and therefore deserved to be watched closely by campus adults. Finally, participants spoke of feeling “unwelcome” and uneasy when approaching the greentop, even if they were at that location to visit a “friend.” This sense of uneasiness speaks to the overall bullying and name calling engaged in by the greentoppers. How such interactions influenced classroom activities was the focus of a follow-up discussion and led to the final theme raised by the Divisionville High School participants.

**Classroom divisions: AP vs. “regular” classes.** The third and final theme identified illustrated the differences between academic “tracks” of learners at Divisionville High School. Just as the outside activities at Divisionville High followed a set social hierarchy, events inside the school’s classrooms further strengthened and valued this hierarchy. When asked to chart the differences between advanced placement (AP) and other, or “regular,” classes, the participants broached some interesting issues. These issues are presented in Table 9.

As illustrated in Table 9, the teachers in AP classes had “high expectations” and discussed college and the application process with their students, while those in “regular” classes held relatively low expectations and did not tell their students about college. Such insights further heightened the traditional notions of “good” students in the sense that only AP students were viewed as “capable” of attending college and therefore worth the teachers’ time and effort.
Table 9

*AP Versus “Regular” Classes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AP classes</th>
<th>“Regular” classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers give students more freedom</td>
<td>• Teachers are strict and don’t trust students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students are trusted—can listen to music on iPods</td>
<td>• Classroom activities are boring and easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students can use their phone during class to look up information</td>
<td>• Students are not trusted—no iPods or phones in most classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers talk about college</td>
<td>• Teachers don’t seem to care about students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers tell students what they need to do to get into college</td>
<td>• Teachers don’t talk about college or expect much from students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers believe in students and push them</td>
<td>• Students can get by with doing little in class—homework and activities are not challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The work is challenging—it prepares students for college</td>
<td>• Teachers and classes don’t prepare students for college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students are pushed to take AP tests</td>
<td>• Teachers just lecture for 20 minutes and then let students do whatever they want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The assignments are difficult, but manageable—the teachers support students</td>
<td>• Too much group work and no student choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students have a chance to participate and work in groups or independently—teachers let students choose</td>
<td>• Only some students really try in these classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students have to discuss their ideas in class</td>
<td>• Teachers have favorites—only those students learn something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers have higher expectations for students</td>
<td>• Teachers are lazy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students have more freedom and responsibility</td>
<td>• Students have no freedom and are treated like children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, the reference to the “freedoms” and “responsibility” given to students in the AP classes versus the sense of being “treated like children” in the “regular” classes provides additional evidence concerning the deeper ramifications of the social structure at Divisionville High. For example, just as the greentoppers were given more freedom to bully, taunt, and basically do what they wished at Divisionville High School, the students in AP classes were also trusted and given freedom to use such items as iPods and phones in class responsibly. Similar to the monitoring of the *paisas* and handball court troublemakers, students in “regular” classes were not trusted by teachers and therefore did not enjoy the liberties granted to their AP counterparts. More importantly, when asked which student groups were in the AP classes, the answer from the participants was “mostly greentoppers” and no *paisas*. Even though the participants in this focus group were Latino and 100% native Spanish speakers, they realized that their ability to speak
English elevated them above the *paisas*. They also expressed gratitude toward their MEChA advisor for “pushing” them to enroll in AP classes, even at the expense of interacting with the greentoppers during such classes. This revelation provides yet another illustration of the nuanced social interactions present at Divisionville High School.

The Divisionville High participants were given a chance to expand on their “AP versus regular classes” discussion in their journal reflections of the session. Students had a variety of responses. For example, an 11th-grade female wrote that “the AP teachers are good teachers and some will go out of their way to make students understand the objectives more thoroughly. Then again, there are those who simply go to school to teach because it’s their job.” This quote relates to the issues concerning “easy” classes that emerged with the work at Central Middle School, and it expanded on the concept that some teachers only attend school because it is part of their job, not necessarily because they want their students to learn. Another 12th-grade female also discussed the instructional focus in Divisionville High’s various classrooms and stated,

> There is a lack of teachers who care in the regular classes. Some teachers would just do a lesson for 20 minutes and then let students do whatever they wanted for the rest of the period. There are some AP teachers who care, if they know you have potential to pass the class. Many teachers are not trying to do anything to fix the problems at this school.

Yet again, the divisions between the “regular” and AP classes and teachers were evident. For example, when this student wrote that teachers help students with “potential,” she was referring to AP teachers, not the others. This reference implicitly omits the *paisas* and other such students who are not granted access to the AP courses and teachers.

Additional comments from student journals that explicitly related to their teachers included the following:

- “Teachers have favorite students and favoritism towards the greentoppers and jocks.”
- “Teachers aren’t doing anything to help regular students because most don’t care.”
“Some teachers discriminate based on your clothes and the classes you take.”

“The administration office doesn’t really try to connect with the lives of the students. They just want to resolve problems they see with the school.”

“The teachers that try to emphasize the importance of going to a university are usually AP teachers.”

The above examples of student comments regarding their teachers clearly present yet another illustration of the larger social hierarchy at Divisionville High School. In other words, teachers can discriminate based on the same stereotypes present in the interactions among the greentoppers and other student groups at Divisionville High. Even more alarming is the fact that the students in this focus group called their teachers out for “not caring” or for simply showing up to teach because “it is their job.” Such insight describes students who are capable of reading the world around them, as well as their place in that world. While methods of changing that place were seemingly unknown to these particular participants, their California State University counterparts were aware of different possibilities.

**Summary: A school within a school.** Similar to themes of segregation uncovered by Olsen (2010) and Daoud and Quiocho (2005), the Divisionville High School students’ portrayal of their high school presented a clear picture of a highly segregated school environment. Table 10 provides an explanation of the three themes illustrated by the Divisionville High School participants.

Despite the fact that Table 10 illustrates several crossroad events, Divisionville High School students did not exhibit signs of being able to challenge the status quo and the hierarchical system on their campus. Furthermore, their school environment also included
Table 10

Divisionville High School: Social Constructs and Student Perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Social construct</th>
<th>Student perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. “Greentoppers” and everyone else</td>
<td>• Social hierarchy</td>
<td>Students indicated the elevated social status of those individuals valued by traditional White and middle-class society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Diversity</td>
<td>School systems were based on societal rankings. (Crossroad Events)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Segregation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bullying and negative student interactions</td>
<td>• Hostility</td>
<td>Adults did not perceive bullying as a problem or minimalized its impact—attributed it to gangs. Punishment was differentiated. (Crossroad Events)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Social division</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Privilege</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. AP vs. “regular” classes</td>
<td>• Social structure based on academic capital</td>
<td>Students desired to be ready for college but did not have knowledge of what such readiness meant due to low teacher expectations and lack of belief in student capabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• School represents a social hierarchy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

several examples of the societal value given to English speakers, as indicated in the work of previous educational researchers (Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004; Daoud & Quiocho, 2005; Fine et al., 2008; M. P. López & López, 2010; Olsen, 1997, 2010; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997). That the Mechistas who participated in the Divisionville High focus groups would use the derogatory term *paisas* to describe the students who do not speak English additionally highlighted the concept of subtractive bilingualism and the negative impact it can have for students from linguistically disenfranchised groups (Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004; Gutiérrez et al., 2002; M. P. López & López, 2010; Olsen, 1997; Petrzela, 2010; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997). Certainly, the fact that the *paisas* and the “queers” were seen as being on the fringes of the school’s physical layout further provided insight into the school’s social hierarchy. Such a hierarchy reiterated the hidden curriculum built around White, English-speaking, and meritocratic values for education and society on the whole (Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004;
Gonzalez, 1990; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997). Indeed, the fact that enrollment into AP classes, as well as one’s inclusion in Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID), was viewed as a predictor of future success and academic “merit” clearly indicated a school based on the ideologies of deficit theory, capitalism, and meritocracy as defined by earlier works (Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Sloan, 2007; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela et al., 2007). Such notions were explored in more detail by the third group of students included in this study, the California State University Mechistas.

**California State University**

As noted in Chapter 3, the focus group session format was altered to fit the needs and schedules of the California State University students. Specifically, participants interacted with the primary researcher during short e-mail conversations and a larger meeting with members of the California State University MEChA organization. The final composition of the focus group participants from California State University ($n = 12$) was as follows:

- Three male students—two were 20 years old and in their second year of college, and one was an 18-year-old in his first year of college.
- Nine female students—one was 21 years old and in her second year of college, two were 20-year-olds in their second year of college, two were 19-year-olds both in their first year of college, and four were 18-year-olds all in their first year of college.

These participants all identified as native Spanish speakers and as Mechistas. Additionally, they had been in the California school system for a range of 13-16 years. Due to the fact that many of the participants were in their first or second year of a 4-year university, some were “undeclared” as majors. However, one male student identified as a kinesiology major, one female student identified as a women’s studies major, and two female students identified as sociology majors.
The following three themes were derived from the conversations with university students as well as a short journal entry from each participant.

**Building relationships: Create your own pathway.** When asked about the barriers preventing Latinos and Latinas from being successful in a college environment as well as the factors that help circumvent such obstacles, the participants indicated that being “overlooked” as “college material” can lead many students to choose different career paths. In particular, several of the participants discussed feelings of isolation and disillusion with the high school system. One student mentioned that finances were a barrier to her enrollment in college until a friend told her about the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). She further explained that her teachers and counselors in high school did not explain the financial aid process to her or offer to help her find scholarships. When asked if anyone else had similar experiences, 10 out of the 12 students raised their hands to indicate that they had been similarly treated. Part of this conversation was as follows:

*Student A:* I didn’t even find out [about financial aid] from the high school counselor. I found out from the AVID professor. I had a good relationship with the AVID professor and walked in one day and he was holding a workshop, and I just walked in. . . . But I mean, if I hadn’t of walked in that day, I wouldn’t have even had access to that information. Like, I mean, you’re in high school and stuff, and they give you the pamphlets, but I don’t think you even read them. Like I know that there’s other programs on campus like CAMP [College Assistance Migrant Program], that students don’t even know about.

*Researcher:* So lack of awareness is an issue?

*Student B:* I think that for me being undocumented and like knowing that I wanted to go to college. Just the fact that I was undocumented, I knew that I didn’t have access to any of that. Whenever we would discuss college in AVID, everyone who was undocumented would get pulled out of class. Like, they, we wouldn’t be part of the workshops. The teacher would send us out of the class.

*Researcher:* The teachers knew?
Student B: The teachers knew that we were undocumented, but they said, “Oh just go to the library because this workshop doesn’t pertain to you because you’re not going to apply for it anyways.” So like now, even with the DREAM Act, most undocumented students that I know don’t even know how to go through the process. We’ve been out of the system for so long that it’s just like we’ve been working outside of the system to pay for college, that it’s like, I don’t want to deal with it. I’ve been doing it by myself for so long that I don’t want to deal with the paperwork. I know others feel the same.

In the above exchange, Student B related the need that disenfranchised students have to find their own way through education systems and structures. Specifically, Student B’s undocumented status added yet another barrier that could have prevented her from enrolling as a student at California State University. That her high school teachers knew that she was undocumented and not only did nothing to help her but sent her and her peers out of the room during “college workshop” days in AVID vividly presented one shameful example of the numerous obstacles that students in this situation face. If one’s own AVID teacher, who is presumably teaching AVID to help first-generation college students obtain a college degree, refuses to assist with the application process, the hidden messages become very clear: Students such as Student B are not “college material” and should not even bother to apply.

The concept of which students were considered “college material” by their high school teachers was also discussed by the California State University Mechistas. Just as the Divisionville High School students were highly aware of their teachers’ perceptions and biases, the California State University participants also understood such biases and could further elaborate on the impact these beliefs had on marginalized students in general. The following conversation related some of these ideas.

Researcher: Any other issues that could have prevented you from enrolling in a 4-year college?
Student C: I think also motivation and support. The people who the teachers believed would go to college were successful. If they didn’t believe in you, then they wouldn’t like tell you about it.

Researcher: Was it pretty clear who the teachers believed in and who they didn’t believe in?

Student C: Uh, yeah. Like, “Oh you won that scholarship. Wow. That’s a surprise.”

Student D: For me, that’s true. There were kids in class who wouldn’t pay attention, and the teachers would notice that and like right away kick them out. You know, it’s not your fault. You’re in high school. The teachers would push kids out who they didn’t like.

Student E: My story is kind of like that. Our AVID teacher knew all of our grades, and the kids with the good grades were favored. He would say, “Oh, you’re going to a UC [University of California] school,” and the rest of us would get pushed aside. We were treated poorly.

Student F: The same here. Our AVID teacher had a specific few who she would tell about all these scholarships, but she didn’t tell the rest of us.

While Student F was sharing her AVID experience with the rest of the group, several students were nodding and agreeing with her statements. They further explained that favoritism on the part of the teacher, especially AVID teachers, was highly evident during their time in high school. The previous exchange additionally described the dual barriers of finances and teacher perceptions that were present for the California State University participants. Not only did they face monetary challenges to attending college, but several were actively prevented from applying for financial aid and scholarships due to the biases of their AVID teachers. Such pushing out of students inevitably led them to create their own networks of support.

When the participants were asked what could be done to help other students in similar circumstances overcome the double barriers of a lack of financial capital and teacher biases, they suggested forming “communities of color” on campus to help other students learn how to go through the process independently. In particular, Student B discussed how she was able to
overcome the lack of support given to her by her AVID teacher and counselors and was able to find resources for undocumented students:

For me, I remember not really wanting to go to college, but I reached out to a community organization, and then they were able to provide information on how to fill out an AB540 and other resources for undocumented students. I would take them back to other undocumented students, and I think that’s one of the things that helped. I saw it as not having to depend on my AVID teachers. I was like, “I don’t have to depend on my AVID teacher. I don’t have to depend on my counselor.” I even got yelled at by my counselor. She thought I was doing everything wrong, but like I was able to rely on other community folks to be there and step up and to open up those doors again, of like hope. You know like, there is hope. You can do something.

Once Student B realized that she did not have to rely on her AVID teacher or counselors and reached out to different organizations on her own, she was able to find “open doors” and “hope” again. Furthermore, she was able to become self-reliant and learn how to navigate the system on her own. That she took information on the AB540 form as well as additional resources to other undocumented students also showed that she was willing to begin forming additional networks designed to help other students traverse such obstacles.

The idea of forming “communities of color” was an additional focus of students during this point in the discussion. After Student B related her experience, other students related that they would not have been able to “get through” high school without having the support of their families, teachers of color, and peers in similar circumstances. Specifically, students raised the following points:

- Teachers who had similar experiences were more likely to be helpful than those who were White.

- Families could be supportive and wanted “the best” for their students, even if they did not know how to navigate the system themselves.
• Finding “communities of color” on campuses was extremely valuable for racially marginalized students trying to access college.

• Sharing knowledge of the college application process and available financial aid was a method of helping one’s community and starting systemic change.

The above ideas were further explained as students conversed regarding their treatment by faculty and staff on the California State University campus.

**White professors and students: Rudeness and privilege as on-campus obstacles.** The second theme identified by the university students centered on the idea of White rudeness and privilege. As indicated by the previous conversations, the Mechistas who participated in this study were highly aware of the perceptions that their high school teachers had concerning students of color. Such negative perceptions were also prevalent as participants discussed their California State University faculty. It should be noted that given their experiences at a highly divided and segregated high school, the Divisionville High School focus group participants wanted to know how Latino/a students felt at California State University. The following discussion was a direct result of the questions generated by the Divisionville High School focus group:

*Researcher:* How are Latino and Latina students treated by others, including students, staff, and faculty, at this campus?

*Student A:* In my perspective, it depends on what department you’re in. I used to be a political science major, and I didn’t feel like I really connected with the professors. They were really strict, and I didn’t feel, I just didn’t feel like I connected with them. But since I’ve moved into the social sciences major, I actually feel better. Well, I feel like the professors in the sociology department were more approachable. I’ve been able to form relationships with them where they can help me in my academics, so [unintelligible] it’s just better.

*Researcher:* Why are they more approachable than the political science professors?
Student A: Um, just like their tone and the way they come off. Their teaching too—whether they respond in a very calm manner or whether they say, “I just went over this. Why didn’t you get it?” or something. There are some professors who do give attitude and some who are just very understanding.

Student G: Going off on what she said, I am a kinesiology major, so I notice a lot of other students in the major who are White and they’re male. So I don’t notice a lot of other Latino students who are kinesiology majors. I feel like I have to, um, push a lot more. ‘Cause I see that they form, I guess groups, and so I feel like I really have to watch what I say. You know, I have to really think about what I say when I am in a group or class.

Student F: Going off of that, I’m a bio major and I’ve only met one other Latina who is in my major. So, the vast majority are White. And also it depends on, like, who you talk to—I’m really involved in other clubs, and all the staff have been beyond supportive to me. I see them being really supportive to other minorities. Getting involved is one way to make school bearable ’cause they know a lot of the same struggles and they are really accepting of you.

Student A found her support when she switched to a different major, Student G seemed to be creating his own support system by being self-reliant as a kinesiology major, and Student F sought to build relationships outside of her major area of study. Despite the fact that the predominantly White disciplines discussed above were viewed as potential challenges to adjusting to campus life, Student F again raised the point of forming networks and reaching out to others with similar experiences to find support while in college. Student A further explained her feelings of frustration with White students and faculty in her journal when she wrote,

Rude privileged White people annoy me. Professors who are not as nice as they should be make it difficult to feel like you belong in their class. This depends on their departments, but they should be more understanding. Social Sciences professors are very accepting and understanding and genuinely care about their students.

These sentiments were echoed by Student G’s journal comments when he wrote that “professors are not very supportive if they aren’t of color themselves.” Student F also described, “I see those [professors] who have gone through the same struggles are the ones that are more supportive.”

Once again, the need to form relationships with individual mentors and role models from similar
backgrounds and experiences became apparent, specifically as a means of combating the less than welcoming environments created by some of the White faculty on campus.

Concerning the White students at California State University, the Mechistas had similar experiences to those of their Divisionville High School counterparts. In particular, students sometimes felt as if they did not belong on campus or in certain groups of people. During part of the discussion about how students of color were treated by others on campus, the following comments were recorded:

**Student B**: I think that for me, I see this a lot. I have a hard time with White people, like a really hard time. Like when I’m in a group or a class, they just dismiss me. Even though I’m like the coordinator of the group, they just dismiss anything I have to say. There is that lack of connection with me and everything. I don’t think that I have experienced this in a long time because I am a women’s studies major, but I am in this geography class. But like, because I’ve also like stepped out from being in this world where there are a lot of White people, I don’t really interact with them a lot. Now, in this geography class I’m like, “Oh yeah, this is why I don’t.” As a *mujer* and as a *Chicana*, you try to, like, make the best of it, but you also stick to your people, you know. Because that’s where you’re comfortable, and in class when you’re forced to work with others or with people who are not of color, you see that blatant, “Oh, you don’t exist,” or “We’re going to dismiss you completely because we don’t believe you can achieve as much as we can.”

**Student A**: When I was in political science, in a few of my classes the majority of the class was White. Whenever we were in groups and it was my turn to speak, they were kind of like mean. They would look at me like, “Oh what does this little Mexican girl have to say?” You know what I mean? They just had this vibe, and I’m really thankful that this school has organizations like MEChA where we can find people that we can share our stories with and that we can bond with.

**Student G**: I had a similar experience in one of my classes. I was in this all-White group, and when I spoke, I felt like I had to speak with a little more, um, I guess a little bit more power to my words. I had to speak more professionally to show them that I could do just as good or even better than what they think I can.

**Student H**: Yeah, like they question your ability. I mean, the White students do especially in some classes. We go to a predominantly White and Republican school in San Diego County where it’s the same; I feel like we have to try even harder to even be seen as equals. Like my last name is not a “Mexican”
name, so I’m not like judged by my name right away. But then when I walk in it’s like (pointed to her face), “Oh, you’re Mexican,” and standards go back down. So I think that just always having your guard up and always knowing that you’re being judged. It just sucks sometimes.

Just as the Divisionville High School students felt that the greentoppers judged them when they were forced to interact, the Mechistas also experienced similar harsh treatment at California State University. That this particular university is a nationally known Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and still has issues of implicit and explicit racism toward Latino and Latina students serves as yet another vivid example of the pervasiveness that racial bias and the resulting assumptions about groups of students continue to have within the California education system. However, the Mechistas also raised the idea of networks of color and working with younger students as two methods of overcoming such barriers.

**Taking it to the system: Just “own it.”** The third and final theme yielded from the work with the university Mechistas illustrated a desire to “take it to” the education system. While the middle school and high school participants seemed less able to name and identify areas of hope and potential transformation, the college students were able to indicate a few methods that could be employed to combat White privilege and the resulting challenges placed on students of color. When asked to pass along advice to the Divisionville High School and Central Middle School students about being a college student and why becoming a college graduate is important for marginalized students, the Mechistas had the following to relate:

*Researcher:* What advice can you pass along to the middle school and high school students about becoming a college graduate or the reasons why you wanted to enroll in college?

*Student G:* I don’t know, but I’m not related to anyone who has a bachelor’s degree or even a master’s degree, but that’s the reason why I want to get a master’s degree in the future. Being that first person—that’s huge.
Student I: Yeah, being that first person, that role model, is important. It’s important to know as they get older. I didn’t have anyone to look up to that went to college—no one in my family went to college, but when or if I have kids, they’ll be able to look up to me and say that I did it. I went to college.

Researcher: I see many of you nodding. Is this similar to your experiences?

Student B: I think that for me, it’s not about, well, it is about my brothers. My brother got pushed out of the educational system, like suspended. Well, they don’t think about it. I’m the first in my family to go to college. Coming from an immigrant community, they don’t think about it. I don’t think about it because I really want it. To me, it’s just a piece of paper, you know. I do it because I know that when I walk down that aisle, like my mom’s eyes are going to be like she’s so proud. I don’t do it for myself anymore. I do it for my community, to give something back. That piece of paper is not about me. That piece of paper is about my community, because if I didn’t have my community behind me, I wouldn’t even be here.

Student H: Yeah, even if they’re the first in their family to go to college, it’s still worth it. Both of my parents went to college. I think that realizing that education is important and that it’s the only way your community is going to move forward and press others is a huge motivator. Without that, we’re just going to keep being taken advantage of.

Student J: For me, I was really bad in middle school. [Laughs] Yes, I was really bad. It was really bad. My parents didn’t even think that I was going to graduate from high school, but when I got to high school, I was like, “I’m going to show them that I can do it.” I wanted to show my younger brothers and sisters that they could do it too. I have a bunch of cousins who go to UCI [University of California, Irvine] and UCR [University of California, Riverside], and it was like, “If they can do it, I can too.” That’s what I want others to know. I mean, I also want my parents to be proud. They want the best for me and I do too.

The above comments indicated just some of the potential prevalent in the formation of networks for students from traditionally disenfranchised groups across multiple levels of education.

Furthermore, the Mechistas wrote the following inspirational comments and general advice to take back to their middle school and high school counterparts:

- “Don’t think that you can’t be a college student, don’t feel like you are inferior to other students and walk through a college campus like it’s your home. Own it!”
• “Keep trying. Don’t be afraid of the risk of failure. Don’t even think about it.”

• “Don’t give up and get a degree. Do it for yourself and family.”

• “Join other clubs and organizations to find other students you can connect with.”

• “You are smart enough for college. You are just as capable of success as everyone else!”

• “Don’t let anyone tell you what you can or cannot do.”

• “Look for resources and use them. There are people out there who will understand your struggles. You are not alone.”

• “Look for a support community. This will inspire and motivate you to keep going.”

• “You can overcome every challenge. ¡Si se puede!”

• “¡Si se puede! We are in the struggle together, and together we’ll make it out.”

The common theme of finding support groups and of working through challenges together with others from the community also indicated the hope prevalent in the formation of networks to navigate through the education system successfully. Such pathways were the focus of the next step in data analysis and evaluation during the course of this study.

**Summary: Beginnings of transformation.** While the Central Middle School and Divisionville High School students showed fewer tendencies to go against the existing education systems, their California State University counterparts were less willing to follow such prescribed educational pathways. Table 11 displays a summary of the social constructs and student perceptions of the California State University Mechistas.

As the university students navigated through their college environment, they encountered a need to create their own pathways and find “networks of color” to help with such journeys. Specifically, the spaces created within more “accepting” fields of study, such as sociology and
### Table 11

**California State University: Social Constructs and Student Perceptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Social construct</th>
<th>Student perceptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Building relationships to create your own pathway</td>
<td>• Perceived social capital</td>
<td>Academic isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Networking</td>
<td>Unperceived potential to attend college (Crossroad Events)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Self-reliance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. White rudeness and privilege</td>
<td>• Unequal treatment</td>
<td>Need to form relationships with individual mentors and role models from similar backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Critical mass</td>
<td>Express and put power in individual words and interactions with White professors and students (Crossroad Events)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Taking it to the system</td>
<td>• Goal orientation</td>
<td>Walk through campus like you “own it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Risk taking</td>
<td>Do not be afraid of risks or potential failure (Crossroad Events)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Networks of color</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

women’s studies, as well as the formation of “networks of color” illustrated the potential for social transformation as discussed in earlier literature (Bernal et al., 2012; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Elenes, 1997; Morrell, 2004; Téllez, 2005). Additional connections to the literature were also evident in the naming of racism and White privilege as catalysts or “crossroads” toward individual transformation, specifically in the case of the undocumented student who was able to maneuver around the racist practices of her AVID teacher (Anzaldúa, 1999; Freire, 2007; hooks, 2003; Taylor, 2008; Torres & Hernandez, 2007; Wink, 2005). Finally, methods of expanding individual workings against an exclusionary education system should be further explored if the cycle of oppression and discrimination against marginalized social groups is to be broken. Such a need becomes further evident in the explanation of the educational pathways followed by each group of students that follows in Chapter 5 of this work.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

As discussed in the previous chapter of this work, the educational pathways and journeys experienced by the participants in the three levels of focus groups indicated areas of assimilation and hegemony, as well as places of tension and crossroad events where the status quo could be challenged. In particular, due to their lack of educational choices and identity formation through the definition of authority figures such as teachers, the Central Middle School students were found to follow the most conforming and constricted pathway. Their Divisionville High School counterparts additionally upheld ideals of social and academic capital, as defined by socially dominant groups and meritocratic ideologies. However, they also indicated moments where they began to transform the social constructs that surrounded them. Finally, the California State University Mechistas were the most adept focus group at naming the social inequities and racism inherent in both their previous schooling and their time spent at the university level. That these students actively began to form “networks of color” and mobilize against oppressive structures illustrated just one method of initiating social change. This chapter provides both a detailed explanation of the pathways undertaken by all three levels of participants and a discussion of whether such pathways and actions followed conforming, reforming, or transforming tendencies.

Educational Pathways and Journeys

Once the narratives that emerged from the focus group sessions were chronicled and analyzed, it was possible to create detailed “pathways” representing the educational levels of the participants in this study. Figure 6 illustrates the educational pathway of the Central Middle School participants.
Figure 6. Central Middle School students’ educational pathways and journeys. SA = student awareness; E = empowerment; SN = structural navigation; CR = college readiness; AP = academic proficiency; I = identity.

Figure 6 can be read as a flowchart that goes from the bottom to the top of the image. This flowchart is intended to show how the experiences of individuals from oppressed populations might help to move them from more conforming and reforming positions in society to transforming situations. For example, the group of Central Middle School participants ($n = 14$) related interpretations of their experiences and journeys at Central Middle School that embodied all three levels. In terms of identity and structural navigation, they were in a position of conforming to the dominant notions set for linguistically disenfranchised groups. The students who related that they were “good” students who tried hard and never got in trouble or
had detention indicated their categorized view of the social parameters at Central Middle School. Because teachers and other authority figures at Central Middle School were the ones in control of the school, they were the individuals to decide how to assign grades, determine who needed detention, hand out rewards, and other such actions that the students internalized as being part of their overall identity at the school. Furthermore, these students knew their school was in a “bad” neighborhood and thereby illustrated their belief in stereotypes of the Central Park neighborhood as they were set by the larger community and media. Such internalization additionally made these students more conforming in nature; they accepted the identity given to them by those in dominant social positions. Finally, their peers also solidified such concepts of individual identity due to the fact that they also believed in the ideas of “good” students and a “bad” neighborhood as they were defined by others from the larger society. Such interaction proved to be just one example of the influence sociopolitical and sociocultural factors can have on students from disenfranchised populations.

In the construct of college readiness and academic proficiency, the Central Middle School participants illustrated students from oppressed groups who were conforming themselves to fit within the status quo. For example, students expressed a strong desire to attend college and obtain what they saw as a “good career.” Such sentiments echoed the dominant view that college readiness first included the desire to attend a college or university. The value placed on college by the student participants at Central Middle School was not really questioned by them, although one student did mention that he was not “sure” about college. However, that the students clearly articulated the desire to attend college after high school shows how they reformed their personal identities to match the general “we’re going to college” culture at Central Middle School. This act of conforming to the norm was heightened by the students’ shared
belief that individuals must “try hard” and be able to be “self-sufficient” in the future. By upholding the Protestant work ethic, including the capitalistic notions of hard work and self-reliance, the Central Middle School students further indicated how the hidden curriculum at Central was shaping and reforming their personal identities. What then, if anything, could move students to become more transforming?

Two revelations by the participants served to push them to think beyond the conforming and reforming constructs that surrounded them. These insights came as a direct result of the “broken” physical state of Central Middle School and the naming of “racist” teachers. These experiences are labeled as crossroads in Figure 6. According to Torres (2009), a crossroad represents a stage in the formation of one’s identity when she or he first recognizes an example of discrimination or racism. The act of naming this event as racism presents the individual with a choice: to transform her or his view of the world or to continue as if nothing had happened and conform to the dominant viewpoint. When confronted with the realization that teachers at Central Middle School were “racist” and did not allow students to speak Spanish at school, three of the focus group participants expressed a strong desire to attend college for the express purpose of “proving people wrong.” Furthermore, another student indicated that she wanted to attend a new science and technology magnet high school being built in Divisionville. Her reason for choosing to attend the magnet school instead of the neighborhood’s Divisionville High School was that she wanted to “show others that kids from our neighborhood are smart too.” One of her peers in the focus group had also applied for the magnet school because he wanted to do something to “help” his neighborhood in the future and thought that the magnet school would help him be able to do so. The fact that the students were able to name an issue (racism) and actively look for ways to resolve that issue indicated their ability to move beyond the existing
social norms and regulations in their community. While their responses to similar experiences in the future cannot be determined, it can be assumed that these students may be ready to meet such challenges and possibly become agents of change.

What the participants viewed as a “broken” school provided another instance when they were able to name oppression and injustice and seek ways to stop such treatment. In this instance, the students were motivated to “clean up” the school and make it a “nice and pretty” place for students to congregate. Because they knew that finding funds was necessary to repair the school, students appealed to Central’s GEAR-UP program for help. This program had already received a grant to create a mural at Central Middle School, and the students asked what they could do to help make sure the mural was approved by the Divisionville School Board. To this end, students wrote letters to the board and appealed to Central Middle School’s principal to make sure the mural project went through. Although this project involved more than just the focus group participants, the fact that they were willing to write letters and take action against the school’s dilapidated physical appearance illustrates another example of transforming actions and ideas. As previously noted, the mural project was approved, and several of the focus group participants were actively involved in the design and painting of this mural.

The synthesis of the educational pathways suggested that the Central Middle School participants were mostly situated in conforming and reforming positions in terms of the views on the four constructs of identity, college readiness and academic proficiency, structural navigation, and student awareness and empowerment. However, their Divisionville High School counterparts were in different positions. In reference to the Divisionville High School participants (n = 15), Figure 7 indicates their particular pathways.
The discussions and individual journals of the Divisionville High participants illustrated a group of students who were in the process of either reforming their identity to assimilate into the norm or going against the dominant ideology to transform themselves and society. Specifically, students indicated that they needed to become “self-reliant” and “capable” if they wanted to achieve in college and successfully navigate the school systems to enroll in college in the first place. Participants further illustrated reforming tendencies in terms of their personal identities. They frequently wrote about “fitting in” and not wanting to “cause problems” with the greentoppers and other dominant groups such as teachers at Divisionville High School. In doing
so, they unwittingly reformed their own personalities to assimilate into the norm. Their mention of the “queers,” “paisas,” and “troublemakers” as deviants provided yet another example of reforming behaviors. In this case, participants seemed to reform their views of the school’s social groups to reflect the dominant greentopper ideology.

The crossroads for Divisionville High School participants led to divergent pathways. One pathway of resulting actions allowed students to become more transforming, while the other caused them to remain in a reforming state. In particular, the naming of “teacher expectations” and “teacher biases” resulted in two different pathways. One pathway that students followed after this experience was to change their own behaviors to match the expectations and definitions of college readiness held by the Divisionville High teachers. One such student wrote,

I don’t try to cause problems in class. I see myself as capable, and complete the work that the teacher assigns. I am self-reliant and will be able to go to college. Our [AP] teachers tell us to be independent and I am.

This student’s desire to refrain from “causing problems” as well as her reference to being “independent” and “self-reliant” further illustrate her unwillingness to counter the norm. This same student had expressed a belief that teachers were “biased” against students enrolled in “regular” classes, and she made an effort to disassociate herself from the “regular” students by taking advanced placement (AP) classes and becoming more “self-reliant.” This disassociation again describes a student who was highly aware of the impact that teacher perceptions can have on students and who was unready to go against such expectations at the time of this particular study.

Despite the fact that some participants did not move beyond the crossroads into more transformative territory, a few of their peers were able to make such a move. While writing about the social divisions and control the greentoppers had at the school, one participant stated
her belief that more “school and community outreach” would help break down the “barriers” at her school. She also expressed a belief that this outreach would be beneficial for middle school students who were getting ready to transition to Divisionville High School and that it might be a way to “change” things in the future. This same student additionally wrote that she wanted to become a social worker in the future with the express purpose of helping her community. This desire for both community outreach and finding methods of supporting her community in the future clearly depicted a student who was acutely aware of the social issue in both Divisionville High School and its surrounding neighborhoods, and who was motivated to seek methods of transforming such a system. The transformative nature of this individual student was mirrored by three of her focus group peers. These individuals described how they wanted to meet with Central Middle School students before they entered Divisionville High School as ninth-grade students. They further explained that they wished to meet with Central Middle School students to describe what to expect from the greentoppers and teachers at Divisionville High and how to “stand up for themselves” and self-advocate in the future. Despite the fact that this type of joint meeting did not occur during the course of this study, a future meeting between the middle school and high school students was in the process of being developed by the Divisionville High focus group, their Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA) advisor, and the primary researcher.

In the case of the California State University students, the idea of advocacy and empowerment was further expanded. Figure 8 illustrates their various pathways.

Just as the Central Middle School and Divisionville High School students faced various crossroads during their particular educational journeys, the California State University Mechistas were no exception. However, the crossroad of “the FAFSA” emerged as being of particular
importance due to the fact that it also served as a “doorway” from high school to higher education. Because all of the college-age focus group participants were enrolled at California State University, they had successfully navigated through this doorway and therefore did not conform to the societal notion that Latinos do not belong in institutions of higher education. The participants took two different routes after being confronted by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). One group completed the process on their own, thus conforming to the American ideologies of self-reliance and determination. Such structural navigation did allow participants access to the threshold of higher education; however, it did not bring about actual

*Figure 8.* California State University students’ educational pathways and journeys. SA = student awareness; E = empowerment; SN = structural navigation; CR = college readiness; AP = academic proficiency; I = identity.
systemic transformation and empowerment. These results emerged in the pathways of students who turned toward “communities of color” and shared resources with others. For example, when Student B shared AB540 resources with others in her community who were undocumented, she empowered them to be able to navigate a major section of the systemic structures in place to monitor access to educational opportunities. Furthermore, by seeking out “communities of color,” students were able to find space for dialogue with others from oppressed and marginalized populations. This space marked the potential for future actions and challenges to the dominant cultures and ideologies.

Discovering methods of communicating with other students of color was another pathway that appeared after the crossroads of “White rudeness and privilege” and “lack of space.” Specifically, participants whose actions were seen as more transforming were able to find groups such as MEChA where they were able to discuss their experiences and find ways to combat the White rudeness and privilege that they encountered at California State University. For Student G, this problem solving was a powerful method of empowering him to stay true to his identity as a Latino, even in the White-dominant major of kinesiology. He did not need to reform his identity to fit the expectations of the norm and was instead able to use his presence in his kinesiology classes to “prove others wrong” concerning their assumptions of Latino students. Again, the presence of groups such as MEChA not only provided a viable space for students of color to engage in problem solving and dialogue, but gave them tools for combatting White privilege and rudeness as well.

Despite the presence of MEChA and other students of color at California State University, some of the focus group participants were more reforming in their actions. For example, when Student A decided to switch her major from political science to sociology, she
unconsciously reformed her identity to match the dominant expectation that Latina students do not meet the standards for achievement in the political science field at California State University. When she encountered professors who were not “welcoming” and who were instead “strict” and “distant,” she did not use the space provided by MEChA to transform the system. On the contrary, she changed her identity, or major, to meet the needs of the White political science professors who most likely did not want her in their classes anyway. While she felt “welcome” and “valued” in her sociology classes, her presence in this discipline did not transform the overall system as much as staying in political science would have been able to achieve in terms of promoting societal change.

Finally, most of the California State University participants recommended that incoming students seek out clubs and organizations similar to MEChA. Additionally, they mentioned that they would have felt “isolated” and even “depressed” without the presence of MEChA. One student expressed that she was very “disillusioned” with her college experience until she became involved with MEChA. While none of the students were in the position of being “isolated,” the fact that they brought up such issues indicated the power that organizations similar to MEChA have in terms of providing a means for students from traditionally disenfranchised groups to navigate through the system and even promote social transformation at times. Without MEChA, it seems, students faced the very real chance of conforming to the larger society’s deficit-based beliefs and assumptions about Latino students and would therefore have been more likely to discontinue their college pathway. For this reason, discovering methods for extending MEChA-like programs into the K-12 realm of education should be considered in the future as concerned educators seek to transform the existing pathways for linguistically disenfranchised students at
all educational levels. Such a need was further evident in the development of the scatter-gram used during the analysis of the data gathered during the course of this project.

**Conforming, Reforming, or Transforming**

The final step in data analysis and synthesis included the process of plotting individual student positions in the four constructs of identity, college readiness and academic proficiency, structural navigation, and student awareness and empowerment, as well as determining whether participants were conforming, reforming, or transforming in each construct. The following questions were used to place participants as conforming, reforming, or transforming within the four main constructs of this study:

1. **Identity**
   a. Conforming—Did participants view individual identity in terms of the status quo? Which social groups’ definitions were used to define individual identity?
   b. Reforming—Did participants seek to negotiate their identity to accommodate what they thought was expected from the dominant society? Was there evidence of assimilation?
   c. Transforming—Did participants maintain their own sense of identity without conforming or reforming to fit within the status quo? Did they promote their identity as a means of social transformation?

2. **College readiness and academic proficiency**
   a. Conforming—How did participants define college readiness and academic proficiency? Did their views conform to match those of the status quo?
b. Reforming—Were participants aware of what they needed to be college ready or academically proficient? Did they attempt to negotiate their experiences to accommodate this awareness?

c. Transforming—Could participants name and define the ways through which the status quo used college readiness and academic proficiency to continue the oppression of marginalized groups? Were they able to use their own concepts of college readiness and academic proficiency to promote their social development and change?

3. Structural navigation

a. Conforming—What pathways did participants use or envision for their educational journeys? Were such pathways based on dominant culture and traditional in nature?

b. Reforming—How did participants use strategic ways to navigate the system? Did such journeys alter the participants in terms of assimilating into the status quo?

c. Transforming—Did participants seek to negotiate effectively through the education systems and structures during their educational journeys? Were they able to use such journeys to name social problems, identify tensions, and seek transformative change?

4. Student awareness and empowerment

a. Conforming—Were participants aware of their position in the larger society? Did they express sentiments of disempowerment, and did they accept their sense of powerlessness and hopelessness?

b. Reforming—Did participants exhibit awareness and ability to traverse the social hierarchy in context of their schooling experiences? Did such awareness lead to empowerment, or did it lead to individual assimilation into the norm?
c. Transforming—Throughout their schooling experiences, did participants become aware of their situations and status? Did such awareness lead to empowerment and actions to undo unjust and limiting access conditions?

To create a more holistic description of each participant, only those students who had attended each focus group session and who had written complete journal reflections were included in the scatter-gram. Overall, 26 participants met the above conditions for this step in data analysis. This group comprised 10 Central Middle School students, six Divisionville High School students, and 10 California State University students. Table 12 illustrates the patterns of the four constructs using the social consciousness continuum of conforming, reforming, and transforming.

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Conforming</th>
<th>Reforming</th>
<th>Transforming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>4 middle school</td>
<td>4 middle school</td>
<td>2 middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 high school</td>
<td>3 high school</td>
<td>3 high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 college</td>
<td>2 college</td>
<td>8 college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n = 4</td>
<td>n = 9</td>
<td>n = 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College readiness &amp; academic proficiency</td>
<td>5 middle school</td>
<td>5 middle school</td>
<td>0 middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 high school</td>
<td>5 high school</td>
<td>1 high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 college</td>
<td>8 college</td>
<td>2 college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n = 5</td>
<td>n = 18</td>
<td>n = 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural navigation</td>
<td>7 middle school</td>
<td>2 middle school</td>
<td>1 middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 high school</td>
<td>4 high school</td>
<td>2 high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 college</td>
<td>4 college</td>
<td>6 college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n = 7</td>
<td>n = 10</td>
<td>n = 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student awareness &amp; empowerment</td>
<td>2 middle school</td>
<td>3 middle school</td>
<td>5 middle school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 high school</td>
<td>4 high school</td>
<td>2 high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 college</td>
<td>3 college</td>
<td>7 college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n = 2</td>
<td>n = 10</td>
<td>n = 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \( N = 26. \)
As illustrated in the layout of student data in Table 12, the shift along the conforming, reforming, and transforming timeline that students undergo from middle school through college enrollment clearly becomes evident. For example, in any of the four constructs examined by this project, only middle school students were found to exhibit predominant examples of conforming actions and beliefs. On the contrary, high school and college students displayed more evidence of reforming and some transforming behaviors and beliefs. For college and some high school participants, the potential to transform was particularly evident in the constructs of identity and student awareness and empowerment. Such findings further indicate that students benefitted from the ability to encounter “networks of color” and groups similar to MEChA as they navigated through the mainly White and English-only high school AP classes and made the transition to college. This evidence suggests that such networks could be used to allow students to become agents of social change, as demonstrated by the undocumented California State University student who shared her AB540 resources with others who shared in her situation. That students were found to portray more examples of transforming actions at the college level additionally serves to illustrate how access of educational opportunities can indeed promote social change, provided that “networks of color” and “doorways of hope” exist to facilitate such transformation.

Despite the fact that college and high school groups indicated a clear movement toward transforming behaviors and beliefs in the constructs of identity and student awareness and empowerment, they clearly exhibited reforming tendencies in the construct of college readiness and academic proficiency. In particular, the high school participants seemed more willing to see this construct through a more traditional lens and therefore were more likely to reform their own behavior to fit the norm of earning “good grades,” not “slacking off,” and “working hard” to
achieve one’s goals than to find fault with the deficit-based structures that surrounded them. For the most part, the California State University students upheld similar views about staying on the “right track” during high school to be able to access college enrollment in the future. However, two college participants in the college readiness and academic proficiency construct went against such meritocratic ideologies, as evident through their realizations that high school teachers “push students out” and that networking with one’s community and family can help counter such mistreatment. Finding methods of making this type of counteraction more prevalent in the future should be explored in future work connected to promoting social change in the kindergarten-through-college pathways for linguistically marginalized students.

Finally, the construct of structural navigation was additionally problematic for participants. Middle school students were again the most conforming, with the high school and college participants being divided between reforming and transforming actions. Even more interesting was the existence of crossroad events such as “teacher expectations” and “teacher biases” at the high school level. Students reacted to these crossroads by either reforming or transforming, which indicates that more could be done to enable students to become more transforming when confronted with a crossroad event. Such a finding was also evident when the college students encountered the crossroads of “the FAFSA,” “White privilege and rudeness,” and “lack of space.” Yet again, students were divided in their reactions, which further intensified the need to discover a method of capitalizing on these crossroads as a means of social transformation and true empowerment for oppressed groups. This area of need is further discussed in the final chapter of this project.
Discussion

As clearly evident in the above portrayal of data, each of the three focus groups provided a wealth of information throughout the course of this study, thus illustrating the power of mutual respect and trust between the researcher and participants. This trust was developed in a slightly different manner for each of the three focus groups. Because the researcher worked as a literacy coach at Central Middle School and knew many of the students on campus, fostering a sense of respect and confianza was initially easier than at the high school and college levels. Additionally, many of the middle school students wanted to participate in the study because they had taken several field trips to local colleges with the researcher during the previous year, and several had parents who were involved with the site’s English Language Advisory Council (ELAC) and therefore had a relationship with the researcher. However, it was also necessary to build the foundation for respect and trust before the first focus group session. This was accomplished by explaining the purpose of the study as well as the importance of hearing from actual students during the initial meetings in English language arts (ELA) classes to recruit participants. Confianza was also established via the following means during focus group sessions:

1. Including icebreaker activities designed to allow both participants and the researcher to share about themselves;
2. Selecting a well-respected and trusted teacher’s classroom as the site for the meetings;
3. Asking for participant input into the length and number of meetings, the focus of meetings, and norms for the meetings;
4. Providing snacks at the direct request of the participants;
5. Remaining accessible to participants throughout the normal course of the school day, including visiting with them at lunch;

6. Reaffirming that the ideas and discussions shared by the participants were valued and important; and

7. Consistently reminding participants that any negative comments about Central Middle School, its teachers, administrators, and students would not be used to “get participants in trouble.”

The thought that went into this process clearly worked to foster a sense of confianza, as was evident by the dialogues that occurred when meeting with the Central Middle School students.

At Divisionville High School, the process for developing trust and respect with the students took a slightly different path. Specifically, the researcher needed to work with the school’s MEChA advisor to obtain access to potential participants. To this end, she first met with the school’s principal to obtain approval and then contacted the school’s MEChA advisor to explain the purpose and design of this project. At the request of the MEChA advisor, the researcher visited two MEChA meetings at Divisionville High School to share information on the California Latino Higher Education Pipeline (CPEC, 2010) as well as her personal connection with the city of Divisionville. The fact that the researcher had grown up in Divisionville and had taught at two of its middle schools was not lost on the potential participants, and many of them admitted that they wanted to participate to hear more of the researcher’s personal story. After the focus group sessions began, confianza was maintained by doing the following:

1. Continuing to share personal stories from the researcher’s professional and personal Divisionville experiences;
2. Encouraging participants to ask questions about the college application and enrollment process;

3. Working around the numerous scheduling issues that came with planning meetings for 15 extremely busy high school students;

4. Reaffirming the value that their individual voices and comments had for the study; and

5. Being accessible before, during, and after the study in case participants had questions or concerns they wished to share with the researcher.

Just as the thought and care throughout the process of working with the middle school students was illustrated by their focus group sessions, the power of personal stories in developing trust and respect emerged when working with the Divisionville High School students.

At the California State University campus, due to the fast-paced college environment and the stress that came with it, fostering *confianza* with the college students was one of the most difficult tasks of this project. Even though the researcher had previously worked with California State University Mechistas during the 2011-2012 school year, they were initially cautious when approached regarding this particular study. In part, this was due to the constraint of having to work through the faculty advisor instead of the Mechistas personally known to the researcher. Once approval from the MEChA faculty advisor was obtained, the researcher was directed to contact the student chair of MEChA. The researcher communicated via e-mail with the MEChA chair, who presented the project at a MEChA community meeting. In the meantime, the researcher was also in contact with two Mechistas who worked at Central Middle School as tutors. They additionally supported her during the community meeting. This support made it possible for this project to proceed, and the researcher was able to meet with the Mechistas to
answer questions and provide further explanation in person. During the focus group sessions, trust was promoted by the following:

1. A willingness on the part of the researcher to share her experiences related to her time as a student and faculty member at California State University;

2. Flexibility in the time and format for meeting with California State University participants;

3. Bringing Central Middle School students, at the special request of the Mechistas, to the annual MEChA High School Conference;

4. Facilitating a conversation between the middle school students and Mechistas during this conference;

5. Reaffirming the value of the conversations that took place with the California State University students; and

6. Sharing the findings of this project with the California State University students.

The above actions made it possible for this project to span from middle school to college and to answer the research questions in detail, which would not have been feasible via more positivistic and traditional research methods. The final chapter of this work details the responses to the research questions for this study as they emerged from the data analysis and synthesis of findings. Finally, recommendations for new educational policy and future research are also detailed at the conclusion of this document.
CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS

Bringing issues of social justice and equity into the current discourse regarding public education continues to face many challenges, particularly in Southern California (Callahan, 2005; Olsen, 2010; Valenzuela et al., 2007). For example, Latino students whose native language is not English are forced to struggle through an education system designed to assimilate them into the English-only meritocracy, often at the expense of their native tongue and heritage (Cross, 2007; Fine et al., 2008; Valenzuela et al., 2007). Furthermore, the focus on standardized testing results, as well as traditional, quantitative research methods to explain such results, leaves little space for counternarratives against the status quo to emerge. Without such counternarratives, systemic change and empowerment for linguistically marginalized students cannot be obtained on the widespread level necessary for social transformation (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2007; Wink, 2005). This project was designed to begin such a process.

Synthesis of Data and Findings

As depicted in the previous two chapters, the data gathered during the course of this study represented a collection of experiences and perceptions from linguistically marginalized students at the middle school, high school, and college stages of their educational journeys. To reflect the overall patterns of the study, the individual narratives, pathways, and social consciousness of the participants were synthesized. The results of this synthesis are presented in Table 13.

It should be noted that identity patterns were fluid among the various participants and could not be easily delineated into separate categories. Indeed, the qualitative nature of this study as well as the process of critical pedagogy employed throughout this study made such
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Central Middle School (n=14)</th>
<th>Divisionville High School (n=15)</th>
<th>California State University (n=12)</th>
<th>Dominant trends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Conforming (as defined by others)</td>
<td>Reforming (becoming self-reliant and capable)</td>
<td>Conforming to Transforming (assertiveness, disprove assumptions)</td>
<td>Mixed: Middle school to high school—conforming; College—reforming to transforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College readiness &amp; academic proficiency</td>
<td>Reforming</td>
<td>Reforming</td>
<td>Reforming</td>
<td>Reforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural navigation</td>
<td>Conforming</td>
<td>Reforming</td>
<td>Reforming and Transforming</td>
<td>Developmental—Students move from conforming to reforming to transforming as they grow older and develop social consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student awareness &amp; empowerment</td>
<td>Transforming</td>
<td>Transforming</td>
<td>Transforming</td>
<td>Transforming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

categorization impossible and unadvisable. However, Table 13 was generated as an attempt to represent the overall trends of social consciousness, as indicated through the discussions, journals, and artwork of the students who participated in this study. Table 13 was also used to address the three research questions that drove this study. The discussion of these questions is presented in the following section of this work.

**Research Question 1: Identity Formation**

The first research question that guided this project focused on the identity formation of linguistically marginalized students, including the concepts of academic proficiency and college readiness. The first research question and its associated subquestion read as follows:

1. How do middle school, high school, and college students from linguistically disenfranchised populations conceptualize their individual academic identities?
a. What do the terms *college readiness* and *academic proficiency* entail for students from populations outside of the White, monolingual status quo?

The overall patterns of students with regard to identity suggested pressure to conform to existing beliefs as to what is a “good” or “bad” student through conforming and reforming practices. In terms of academic identity, the middle school and high school students involved in this study tended to view themselves through the dominant lens of meritocracy. For example, the Central Middle School students discussed their perceptions that students were either “good” or “bad” based on their behaviors and willingness to work in class. They also focused their notions of academic identity on whether or not one was seen as a “troublemaker” by others. While the Divisionville High School students had more nuances in their ideas related to academic and individual identity, they still fostered a belief that students needed to “work hard” and become “self-reliant” to become successful in high school and college. Such beliefs certainly indicated the presence of the hidden curriculum related to capitalism and meritocracy in California’s public schools. Indeed, that the Divisionville High School students saw their advanced placement (AP) classes as indicators of individual “success” and “potential” spoke volumes concerning the differences among the various tracks of learners at Divisionville High School. The presence of these tracks served as a further example of the pervasive nature that meritocracy and deficit theory continue to maintain in the arena of public education.

Even the Mechistas from California State University were not immune to the influence of meritocracy and deficit theories behind definitions of academic achievement and college readiness. However, two of the focus group participants indicated that they believed that teachers had the tendency to “push students out” and that more students could enroll in college and enjoy success despite the beliefs of individual teachers. Furthermore, the undocumented
student who was able to navigate around her Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) teacher’s blatant dismissal of undocumented students as “college material” was another illustration of a tension between the dominant descriptions of identity, college readiness, and academic proficiency. Finding methods of exploiting these tensions should be considered in the future with the direct purpose of countering the dominant ideologies of meritocracy, deficit theories, and self-reliance as indicators of academic worth and potential.

**Research Question 2: Structural Navigation**

The second research question that drove this project related to the systems and structures that students from linguistically marginalized populations must navigate to obtain educational access of opportunity. This question was as follows:

2. How do students from linguistically disenfranchised populations navigate through existing school structures?

   a. Do the pathways that marginalized students use to navigate through the school system reaffirm the status quo or provide access of opportunities?

The overall pattern of the data from the 26 students suggested that these students followed traditional academic pathways imposed by existing educational practices that provided students with the choice to adjust their identity to accommodate the demands of the existing education system. Such practices allowed them to obtain levels of educational access that would have been almost impossible to achieve otherwise. Regarding the navigational pathways of the individual students in this project, the middle school students had little to no choice in their classes and, by default, upheld the dominant educational climate of English proficiency as the main indicator of academic potential. The Divisionville High School students also followed more prescribed pathways in high school, as illustrated by their beliefs that AP classes and
teachers were the most successful at preparing students for college. Again, the status quo was reaffirmed, and little access of opportunity for linguistically disenfranchised students was evident.

Similar to their middle school and high school counterparts, the California State University students who participated in this project followed pathways that were largely defined by the educational and societal status quo. With the exception of the undocumented student and the kinesiology student who did not switch his major to one that was more accepting toward students of color, the Mechistas used a pathway that was defined by more socially dominant others. That being said, the California State University students expressed a willingness to seek out “networks of color” and rely on their families and communities in a way that was not evident in the discussions with the middle school and high school students. This suggests that seeking methods of including such groups and communities in the development and maintenance of educational pathways for students outside of the status quo could be a powerful tool for structural and systemic transformation in the future.

Research Question 3: Transformation and Empowerment

Finally, the third research question for this project was designed to look for methods of promoting educational change. This question was as follows:

3. What school structures and practices give voice to counternarratives that work either against or for empowerment and systemic transformation regarding linguistically disenfranchised students?

The overall pattern of the data collected on the 26 students implied mixed results of both reforming and transforming social consciousness and actions. Despite the fact that the high school and college focus groups displayed evidence of awareness and empowerment, the school
structures and practices themselves that surrounded the participants were not seen in such a transformative light. Specifically, the class placement structures of the middle school and high school systems did not promote educational access or empowerment for students from linguistically disenfranchised groups. Furthermore, the financial aid process, including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), was additional evidence of restrictive policies. The White-dominant California State University environment and lack of students of color in certain fields of study provided yet another means of stifling student empowerment and counternarratives. However, groups such as Movimiento Esdudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) and the “networks of color” did enable traditionally marginalized student groups to discover a space for the creation of counternarratives. Actively promoting and expanding these spaces should be a major focus of future work for those trying to counter the status quo of White-dominated meritocracy and capitalism.

**Discussion and Contextualization of the Problem**

As indicated in the first chapter of this study, the use of deficit theory as an explanation for the supposed lack of achievement of language minority students existed throughout the previous century and continues to be extremely pervasive (Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004; Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001). California’s “English-only” Proposition 227, No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and Race to the Top (RTT) legislation further intensified the virtual attack on students who carried the label of English Language Learners (Cashman, 2006; Cline et al., 2004; Gutiérrez et al., 2002; Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001). To explain the current context of this issue, the earlier work of Gonzalez (1990) should be revisited. For example, the dominant ideology of capitalism played a major role in the rise of meritocracy and the oppression of non-White groups in America’s educational institutions (Gonzalez, 1990). Figure
2 (repeated here for ease of reference) depicts the historical influences on Latino education in the United States, as detailed by Gonzalez.

Figure 2. Historical influences on Latino education in the United States. Adapted from *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation*, by G. G. Gonzalez, 1990. Copyright 1990 by The Balch Institute Press.

The combination of capitalism, assimilation into the “American” lifestyle, and social education theories contributed to the lack of space for dialogue and voice currently available to Latino families and students. Such a lack of space was evident in the tensions between the individual identities, loyalty to family and home community, and larger school environment expressed by the participants in the three focus groups during this project. Additionally, both the
high school and college students were able to name their White counterparts as being more “accepted” and “valued” by their teachers and fellow students. Indeed, the above framework could be expanded to include a description of the current educational realities facing Latino families, communities, and their students. While such a reality would undoubtedly entail connections to the eugenics movement and the assimilation of “the other” into a White and English-speaking mold, it would also include evidence of areas of tension that can be explored in the future for the express purpose of empowerment and social transformation.

Connections to Literature

The literature that was reviewed during the preliminary stages of this study detailed a multifaceted and complex set of educational realities and histories associated with linguistically marginalized students. Figure 4 (repeated here for ease of reference) presents an explanation of the theoretical frameworks used to review literature for this project.

During the course of the literature review, the systemic realities for linguistically marginalized students were explored in their social and historical contexts (Frederickson, 2002; Gonzalez, 1990; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997). Further relationships among the systemic navigation and its associations with meritocracy and capitalism (Gonzalez, 1990; Valencia, 1997), the educational pipeline for Latino students (CPEC, 2010), and Americanization and assimilation (Frederickson, 2002; Gonzalez, 1990; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997) were also detailed in this discussion. Methods of challenging hegemony via multicultural curricular reform and ethnic studies (Nieto, 2000; Olsen, 1997; Sleeter, 2005), critical pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2007; Hinchey, 2008; Stringer, 2007; Wink, 2005), and nontraditional research methods (Hinchey, 2008; Stringer, 2007) added to this review. Finally, areas where it was possible to seek empowerment and transformed sociocultural contexts (Duncan-Andrade &
Figure 4. Conceptual framework of systemic realities in California.

Morrell, 2008; Freire, 2007) were examined for the purpose of framing the methodology and data analysis needed for this project.

**Methodological Considerations**

Given the historical use of quantifiable data, mainly in the form of standardized test scores, to segregate students into separate “tracks” of learners (Gonzalez, 1990; Olsen, 2010; Valdés, 2001; Valencia, 1997), this project was designed to counter such oppressive and positivistic research methods. Specifically, participatory action research and critical pedagogy played integral roles in defining the scope and sequence of this project. By creating spaces for the three focus groups to dialogue regarding their educational experiences and concepts of
individual and group identity, it was possible to gather a rich collection of data. Furthermore, the mutual respect and confianza developed between the researcher and participants additionally allowed for the emergence of personal stories and insights that simply would not have been possible via a survey or less personal research approach. The voices of the Latino and Latina students who participated in this project possessed a power that deserves to be shared with a wider audience. How to achieve that goal is considered in the recommendations and implications that were generated by the preceding conversations.

**Limitations**

Despite the powerful stories that were shared throughout the course of this project, several limitations were also evident. Perhaps the biggest limitation to this project was its relatively small scope. By only including students from three different academic institutions, the conclusions drawn from this project were somewhat limited. For example, it would have been beneficial to include students from more ethnically diverse middle schools and high schools in Divisionville. Such inclusion may have made it possible to examine the influence that individual school demographics have on the formation of identity and the resulting educational pathways that linguistically marginalized students traverse as they progress through the California school system. Furthermore, a more varied picture of possible pathways could have emerged if more students had been included throughout the course of this project. Using more than a single researcher or having the students themselves act as researchers at different sites is a possibility that should be considered for future work connected to this project.

Another limitation was the fact that this project did not include students from the community college level. It was the original intention to include such students from a MEChA organization at a local community college. However, the logistics of meeting with students as
well as the scheduling constraints of the researcher made this meeting impossible. While the researcher did consider attending a class taught by the community college’s MEChA advisor, this action did not fit with the overall methodology of this project and therefore seemed more like an addition or afterthought. Such was not the intention of this project, and meeting with the community college students unfortunately was omitted from the final project. In the future, community college students from linguistically marginalized groups should play an integral role in examining the realities and educational pathways currently available to them. Through such discussions, it may be possible to discover more areas of tension for the direct purpose of empowerment and social transformation.

A third limitation to this particular project was its limited timeframe. Even though great care and time were taken to connect with the various students before the focus groups, more time during the focus groups would have been a huge asset. Specifically, the sessions might have been extended over several days, or more sessions could have been added. The fact that students who participated in all three focus groups mentioned how powerful and beneficial they found the process to be of sharing their experiences with others indicates the role that critical pedagogy and praxis can play in the empowerment of traditionally oppressed and marginalized groups. Not only does the physical space necessary for this coming together need to exist, but time for the rich conversations that are produced during this sharing needs to be included as well. For this reason, it would be beneficial to extend this project to at least span the length of a traditional academic school year. Such expansion would also make it possible for participants to run their own focus group sessions, travel to different sites, and further examine the sociocultural and sociopolitical climate that surrounds public schools and their students in Southern California.
A final limitation associated with this project is concerned with the dissemination of the findings. Given that the process of naming and dialoguing about the various systemic barriers that linguistically marginalized students must navigate around was something that the participants valued, methods of bringing these stories to a wider audience must be explored. Possibilities include holding a participant-led symposium or conference, creating public service announcements to share resources for language minority and undocumented students, visiting different school sites to share the results of these conversations, and other similar actions. At the time that this report was written, how to disseminate the individual participant stories, the larger implications of these stories, and recommendations for future courses of action were not yet determined. Finally, the participants themselves should play a role in follow-up discussions to adhere to the participatory action research and critical pedagogy approach used during the course of this project.

Implications

The wider implications that resulted from this project clearly illustrated an existing reality of compliance and assimilation for middle school students who carry the label of English Language Learner. For example, the Central Middle School students did not want to be viewed as “troublemakers” or as “bad” students, thus depicting the importance they placed on being a part of the status quo and of “fitting in” with the norm of their school setting. The Divisionville High School students also revealed issues connected to popularity and dominant social groups on their campus. However, they were not as ready to assimilate to meet the expectations of the ruling “greentopper” class as their middle school counterparts and were more likely to maintain their own social identities. Their concepts of academic identity painted a different picture. Because the Divisionville High School students tended to see “successful” students as those in
AP classes and as individuals who “cared about their education” and who “worked hard,” they upheld the dominant social ideologies of meritocracy, capitalism, and deficit theory in education. Evidently, the high-stakes pressure to perform well on standardized tests and to “work hard” in traditional academic settings was clearly felt by the Divisionville High Mechistas who participated in this project.

The California State University Mechistas continued to express sentiments of hard work, academic rewards, and other ideals associated with capitalism. Despite this, they were far more likely to break from the status quo than either the middle school or the high school students. As indicated in Chapters 4 and 5, several of the California State University Mechistas actively sought out “networks of color” while also maintaining their connections to their home communities. These actions provided them with some of the resources necessary to navigate through the predominantly White environment at California State University and even allowed some students to stay in major fields of study whose faculty and students were viewed as less than welcoming to students of color who did not speak English as their native language. Finding methods of expanding these “networks of color” would be an interesting course to follow during future projects and studies of this nature.

As discussed earlier, the concept of forming “networks of color” arose as a major implication throughout the dialogue with the California State University Mechistas. In a sense, they formed a microcommunity of color during their focus group session and through their continued involvement in MEChA. Extending this community to span more academic disciplines and cross more extracurricular activities would allow more students from traditionally marginalized groups to form relationships and collaborate with others as they travel through the mainly White and monolingual college environment. Additionally, such networks could serve as
a bridge to connect various groups; larger communities of color at the level of higher education would undoubtedly give oppressed students a more powerful voice. Such is the birth of more widespread and pervasive social change.

Along with creating broader networks of color at the college level, such communities should also be developed at high school, middle school, and elementary levels. If these networks connected throughout the various educational levels, students would be able to use their own experiences as vehicles for empowering those who follow after them. For example, had the undocumented student in the California State University focus group known about the FAFSA from previous students in similar circumstances, she could have taken a more active stand against the discriminatory and racist attitude and actions of her AVID teacher. These actions, in turn, could serve as a model for other high school and middle school students facing similar obstacles hindering their access of educational opportunity. Again, the ripple effects of these resulting actions would carry into the larger undocumented community, and so on. Given the racism and the resulting systemic barriers inherent in virtually every aspect of American education, such spiraled effects and positive consequences could be very power fuel for the empowerment of oppressed groups. Finding the space to begin such networks and encourage true dialogue and praxis is a challenge that must be addressed if such social transformation is to begin.

**Recommendations**

The recommendations for future work in this area draw on the sociopolitical and historical contexts, as detailed in the review of literature; the concepts of participatory action research and critical pedagogy; and the educational pathways and experiences shared by the
participants in this project. Recommendations concerning educational policy that were derived from this study are as follows:

1. Write, implement, and enforce district policies designed to include multiple measures of assessment for students with the English Learner label with the express purpose of using such data to provide differentiated and targeted instruction for such students.

2. Write, implement, and enforce district policies to “de-track” the K-12 pathways for linguistically disenfranchised student populations and provide equitable access to “college readiness” programs such as AP courses and the International Baccalaureate (IB) program.

3. Write, implement, and enforce district policies to ensure equitable use of data from new common assessments, such as English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) and Smarter Balanced, to prevent linguistically disenfranchised students from being “re-tracked” according to such data.

4. Write, implement, and enforce district policies to provide teachers and preservice teachers with professional development regarding the alignment of instructional practices to both the 2012 California English Language Development (ELD) standards and Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

5. Write, implement, and enforce district policies to provide content area, AP, and IB teachers with targeted professional development on the process of language acquisition and how to facilitate this process via challenging and grade-level-appropriate instruction in their classrooms.

6. Write, implement, and enforce programs designed to push current and preservice teachers to name and actively confront their individual biases concerning students from outside the status quo.
7. Write, implement, and enforce teacher recruitment polices to encourage the growth of a more diverse teaching core.

In addition to the preceding policy recommendations, the results of this study indicated several areas for future research essential to the social transformation of the educational pathways and access of opportunity provided to students from linguistically marginalized communities. These recommendations include the following:

1. Research and develop methods for streamlining the K-12 articulation process for linguistically marginalized students with the specific purpose of college entrance and retention for such students after high school.

2. Research current educational programs grounded in critical pedagogy and empowerment for traditionally marginalized student communities. Use this research to develop similar programs on a wider level.

3. Research how the concepts of multiple identities and racial battle fatigue, as defined by critical race theorists, can be used to create more transformational educational pathways and experiences for students from outside the White, monolingual status quo.

4. Research explicit methods for establishing trust and confianza among researchers, teachers, and educational leaders and participants and students from different backgrounds for the express purpose of encouraging the participants and students to become more proactive in their educational journeys and decisions.

5. Based on the research from the previous recommendations, design and implement curricular as well as extracurricular programs for the specific purpose of providing space for dialogue to empower, validate, and reaffirm the experiences of linguistically disenfranchised youth.
6. Create a network of critical scholars, including students in Grades K-12 and institutions of higher education, where student activists and researchers can disseminate their findings to a wider audience as well as actively push for social change and educational transformation.

The above recommendations for educational policy and research development represent the absolute minimum work that must be undertaken to provide true access of educational opportunities to linguistically marginalized students. As indicated throughout the course of this study, the current education system and its policies are anything but socially just and equitable and continue to fail students at an alarming rate. Such should not be the case in a country that prides itself on the promises of “liberty and justice for all.”

**Conclusion**

To summarize, the three focus groups played an integral and engaged part throughout the duration of this study. The sentiments of mutual respect and trust additionally were key factors in the development and maintenance of confianza among the researcher and the various participants. Without such trust, the depth of data that were gathered during this project would not have been possible. Furthermore, the inclusion of students ranging from middle school to college in the same geographical location provided a vivid snapshot of the experiences and educational journeys that linguistically marginalized students undertake in the greater Divisionville area.

Despite the fact that these pathways and their associated definitions of college readiness, academic proficiency, and individual identity formation were seen mainly as methods of upholding the status quo of meritocracy, space for counternarratives emerged in the form of groups such as MEChA, individual families, and “networks of color.” To transform the education system and provide more access of opportunity for traditionally oppressed groups,
these spaces must be expanded and become more integrated into the current discourse related to
college access and creating opportunities for all students.

The current educational pathways available to students from linguistically
disenfranchised groups can be very limiting and additionally push students toward assimilation
into the status quo of the dominant society. However, the process of creating space for dialogue,
problem posing, and considering methods of taking action against systemic issues can lead to the
emergence of voice and power for traditionally disenfranchised student groups. With the
upcoming implementation of the CCSS as well as the instructional shifts that will follow with the
implementation of the new ELD standards in California, a tremendous opportunity to reshape the
current discourse on academic proficiency and achievement exists. Creating space and
developing the mutual trust necessary for dialogue to occur within networks of color will provide
yet another opportunity to explore methods of promoting social transformation. As clearly
indicated throughout this work, students such as the undocumented Mechista should not have to
wait years for such a process to begin; those individuals in the arena of public education who are
truly concerned with social justice and equity will discover ways for moving forward in the
present. Indeed, the time for such action is now.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX: IRB DOCUMENTATION

Informed Assent (High) Form for Linguistically Disenfranchised Students:

Systemic Silencing within the Academic World and Counter Narratives of Possibilities

My name is Mae Chaplin, and I am a student from the School of Educational Studies, at Claremont Graduate University (CGU). I am asking you to participate in this research study because you speak Spanish and English and are Latino/a, and are a member of MEChA at Escondido High School.

PURPOSE: In this study, I am trying to learn more about what it is like to speak Spanish, learn English as a second language, and go to school in California. I am also interested in hearing what students who do not speak English as a first language think about school and how we can change things to help students like you attend college in the future.

PARTICIPATION: You will be asked to participate in three focus group sessions. The first two sessions will occur after school from 4:00-5:00 at Escondido High School. I will give you the date and time for these meetings later. The first two sessions will include about 10 other students from the MEChA organization at Escondido High School. The third session will also happen at Mission Middle School in Escondido on a time and date to be determined later. During this third session, you will meet about 20 students from Mission Middle School, Palomar College, and CSUSM.

The first two sessions will include “getting to know you” exercises and writing exercises where you will be asked questions such as: “Do you see yourself as a ‘good’ student or not and why?”, “What do you see on campus that makes you upset?”, and “Do adults at your school talk to you about going to college?” There will also be group discussions about similar topics. In the third session, you will meet with college and middle school students to talk about ways to get to college. You will also be able to ask questions to the college students.

All of the information that you write down or say during these three sessions will be included in the research data files, but your name will not appear anywhere in the research files.

RISKS & BENEFITS: You will be at minimal risk during this study. The benefits of this study will help you learn more about what you can do to prepare for high school and college. You will also be able to meet high school and college students.

COMPENSATION: I have already asked your parents if it is ok for me to ask you to take part in this study. Even though your parents said I could ask you, you still get to decide if you want to be in this research study. You can also talk with your parents, grandparents, and teachers (or other adults if appropriate) before deciding whether or not to take part. No one will be upset if you do not want to participate, or if you change your mind later and want to stop. You can also skip any of the questions you do not want to answer.

You can ask questions now or whenever you wish. If you want to, you may call me at (760) 432-2452 or (760) 212-9726.

Please sign your name below, if you agree to be part of my study. I will give both you and your parents a copy of this form after you have signed it.

Signature of Participant ____________________________ Date __________________

Name of Participant ______________________________

Signature of Researcher ____________________________ Date __________________
Informed Assent (Middle) Form for Linguistically Disenfranchised Students:

Systemic Silencing within the Academic World and Counter Narratives of Possibilities

My name is Mae Chaplin, and I am a student from the School of Educational Studies, at Claremont Graduate University (CGU). I am asking you to participate in this research study because you speak Spanish and English and are Latino/a, and are enrolled in the “Structured Reading” class at Mission Middle School.

PURPOSE: In this study, I am trying to learn more about what it is like to speak Spanish, learn English as a second language, and go to school in California. I am also interested in hearing what students who do not speak English as a first language think about school and how we can change things to help students like you attend college in the future.

PARTICIPATION: You will be asked to participate in three focus group sessions. The first two sessions will occur after school from 3:00-4:00 at Mission Middle School in room 50b. I will give you the date and time for these meetings later. The first two sessions will include about 10 other students from “Structured Reading” classes at Mission Middle School. The third session will also happen at Mission Middle School in Escondido on a time and date to be determined later. During this third session, you will meet about 20 students from Escondido High School, Pulomar College, and CSUSM.

The first two session will include “getting to know you” exercises and writing exercises where you will be asked questions such as: “Do you see yourself as a ‘good’ student or not and why?”, “What do you see on campus that makes you upset?”, and “Do adults at your school talk to you about going to college?” There will also be group discussions about similar topics. In the third session, you will meet with college and high school students to talk about ways to get to college. You will also be able to ask questions to the college students.

All of the information that you write down or say during these three session will be included in the research data files, but your name will not appear anywhere in the research files.

RISKS & BENEFITS: You will be at minimal risk during this study. The benefits of this study will help you learn more about what you can do to prepare for high school and college. You will also be able to meet high school and college students.

COMPENSATION: I have already asked your parents if it is ok for me to ask you to take part in this study. Even though your parents said I could ask you, you still get to decide if you want to be in this research study. You can also talk with your parents, grandparents, and teachers (or other adults if appropriate) before deciding whether or not to take part. No one will be upset if you do not want to participate, or if you change your mind later and want to stop. You can also skip any of the questions you do not want to answer.

You can ask questions now or whenever you wish. If you want to, you may call me at (760) 432-2452 or (760) 212-9726.

Please sign your name below, if you agree to be part of my study. I will give both you and your parents a copy of this form after you have signed it.

Signature of Participant ____________________________ Date __________________

Name of Participant ____________________________

Signature of Researcher ____________________________ Date __________________
Informed Consent Form for Linguistically Disenfranchised Students:

Systemic Silencing within the Academic World and Counter Narratives of Possibilities

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Mae Chaplin, a student in the School of Educational Studies, Claremont Graduate University (CGU) and San Diego State University (SDSU). You are being asked because you speak both Spanish and English, are Latino/a, are part of the MEChA organization, are over the age of 18, and have attended school in the United States.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to further the discussion concerning the academic realities and opportunities for educational access provided to students from linguistically marginalized populations and to develop the counter narratives and political voice necessary for systematic transformation and empowerment.

PARTICIPATION: You will be asked to participate in three focus group sessions. The first two sessions will occur from 4:30-5:30 at California State University, San Marcos in UH 444. The date for these meetings will be provided to you by Ms. Chaplin. The first two sessions will include about 10 other students from the MEChA club at CSUSM and Palomar College. The third session will occur at Mission Middle School in Escondido on a time and date to be determined later. You will need to provide your own transportation to Mission Middle School. The third session will include about 20 students from Escondido High School, Palomar College, and CSUSM. These students belong to local chapters of the organization Movimiento Estudiantil Chican@ de Aztlan (MEChA).

The first two session will include “getting to know you” exercises and writing exercises where you student will be asked questions such as: “What challenges did you have when applying for and enrolling in college?”, “Do you feel that your high school prepared you for college”, and “what barriers prevent students from marginalized backgrounds from obtaining a college degree?” There will also be group discussions about similar topics. In the third session, you will meet with students from high school and middle school to work together to discuss the possible pathways from middle school through high school and college. You will also have the chance to answer questions from the middle school and high school students.

All of the information that you write down or say during these three session will be included in the research data files, but your name will not appear anywhere in the research files.

RISKS & BENEFITS: Potential risks are minimal during this study. We expect the project to benefit you by giving you the opportunity to share your schooling experiences with your peers.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: Please understand that participation is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will in no way affect your current or future relationship with CGU or its faculty, students, or staff. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason, without penalty.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Participants will be audiotaped during the focus group sessions. The notes from each focus group session will be kept in a locked file cabinet that is only accessible to the primary researcher. In order to preserve the confidentiality of responses, we will use pseudonyms when sharing
results and comments from this study. However, we cannot guarantee that other participants in the focus group will keep the answers confidential.

If you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact me at (760) 432-2452 or mchaplin@eusd.org. You can also contact my research advisor, Dr. Linda Perkins, at (909) 607-7964 or linda.perkins@cgu.edu. The CGU Institutional Review Board, which is administered through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP), has approved this project. You may also contact ORSP at (909) 607-9406 with any questions.

A signed copy of this consent form will be given to you.

I understand the above information and have had all of my questions about participation on this research project answered. I voluntarily consent to participate in this research.

Signature of Participant ________________________________ Date __________________

Printed Name of Participant ________________________________

Signature of Researcher ________________________________ Date __________________
Informed Parent (High) Consent Form for Linguistically Disenfranchised Students:
Systemic Silencing within the Academic World and Counter Narratives of Possibilities

Your student is being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Mae Chaplin, a student at the School of Educational Studies, Claremont Graduate University (CGU) and San Diego State University (SDSU). Your student is being asked because he/she speaks both Spanish and English, is Latino/a, is in the MEChA club, is under the age of 18, and attends school in the United States.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to further the discussion concerning the academic realities and opportunities for educational access provided to students from linguistically marginalized populations and to develop the counter narratives and political voice necessary for systematic transformation and empowerment.

PARTICIPATION: Your student will be asked to participate in three focus group sessions. The first two sessions will occur after school from 4:00-5:00 at Escondido High School. The date and room for these meetings will be provided to you by Ms. Chaplin. The first two sessions will include about 10 other students from the MEChA club at Escondido High School. The third session will occur at Mission Middle School in Escondido on a time and date to be determined later. You will need to provide your own transportation to Mission Middle School. The third session will include about 20 students from Escondido High School, Palomar College, and CSUSM. These students belong to local chapters of the organization Movimiento Estudiantil Chican@ de Aztlán (MEChA).

The first two session will include “getting to know you” exercises and writing exercises where your student will be asked questions such as: “Do you see yourself as a ‘good’ student or not and why?” “What do you see on campus that makes you upset?” and “Do adults at your school talk to you about going to college?” There will also be group discussions about similar topics. In the third session, students from different levels of school will work together to discuss the possible pathways from middle school through high school and college. The college students will also answer questions from the middle school and high school students.

All of the information that your student writes down or says during these three session will be included in the research data files, but your student’s name will not appear anywhere in the research files.

RISKS & BENEFITS: Potential risks are minimal during this study. We expect that the project may benefit your student by giving him/her the opportunity to share your schooling experiences with his/her peers.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: Please understand that participation is completely voluntary and will not affect your student’s grades or status at Escondido High School. Your decision whether or not to grant your student permission to participate will in no way affect your, or your student’s, current or future relationship with CGU or its faculty, students, or staff. You and your student have the right to withdraw your student from the research at any time without penalty. Your student also has the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason, without penalty.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Participants will be audiotaped during the focus group sessions. The notes from each focus group session will be kept in a locked file cabinet that is only accessible to the primary
researcher. In order to preserve the confidentiality of responses, we will use pseudonyms when sharing results and comments from this study. However, we cannot guarantee that other participants in the focus group will keep the answers confidential. None of your student’s information will be shared with you as well.

If you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact me at (760) 432-2452 or mchaplin@eUSD.org. You can also contact my research advisor, Dr. Linda Perkins, at (909) 607-7964 or linda.perkins@cgu.edu. The CGU Institutional Review Board, which is administered through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP), has approved this project. You may also contact ORSP at (909) 607-9406 with any questions.

A signed copy of this consent form will be given to you. You will also receive a signed copy of your student’s assent form.

I understand the above information and have had all of my questions about participation on this research project answered. I voluntarily give permission for my child to participate in this research.

Signature of Parent/Guardian _____________________________ Date ______________

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian _____________________________

Printed Name of Student _____________________________

Signature of Researcher _____________________________ Date ______________
Mae S. Chaplin es una estudiante doctorada con la Escuela de Estudios de Educación de Claremont Graduate University. Ella está siendo supervisado por Dra. Linda Perkins y ella quiere que su alumno/a participar en un proyecto de investigación. Ella quiere hablar con su alumno/a porque él o ella habla inglés y español, está en el club de MEChA y tiene menos de 18 años de edad, y está en escuela en Los Estados Unidos.

**PROPÓSITO:** El propósito de este proyecto es para adelantar el discurso de las experiencias de las oportunidades académicas de los alumnos/as de poblaciones bilingües y para desarrollar voces políticas para empoderamiento y transformación sistemática.

**PARTICIPACIÓN:** Su alumno/a va a participar en 3 reuniones después de escuela. Cada reunión será después de escuela para 45 minutos. Las dos reuniones primeras van a estar en Escuela Secundaria Escondido de 4:00 hasta 5:00. Estas reuniones van a incluir 10 alumnos/as del club de MEChA en Escuela Secundaria Escondido. La tercera reunión va a estar en Mission y usted necesitará proporcionar transporte a Mission. Esta reunión va a incluir 20 alumnos/as de la Escuela Secundaria de Escondido, Colegio de Palomar, y CSUSM. Estos alumnos/as son parte del grupo Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano@ de Aztlan (MEChA).

Durante las dos reuniones primeras, su alumno/a participará en actividades de “conocer a otros” y ejercicios de escritura. Su alumno/a va a contestar preguntas como “¿Pienso que eres un(a) alumno/a bueno/a o malo/a y por qué?”, “¿Hay algo en esta escuela que no quieres ver y por qué?”, y “¿Puedes hablar con los adultos en esta escuela sobre el colegio?” También, los participantes van a hablar sobre otras temas similares. Durante la tercera reunión, los alumnos/as de las escuelas intermedias y secundarios van a hablar con los/las alumnos/as del colegio sobre las posibilidades de llegar al colegio. También, los/las alumnos/as del colegio contestarán las preguntas de los/las otros/as alumnos/as.

Toda de la información que su alumno/a escribe o dice va a incluir en los datos de este proyecto, pero el nombre de su alumno/a no estará en ningún parte de los archivos de investigación.

**RIESGOS Y BENEFICIOS:** Riesgos están minimales durante este proyecto. Nosotros creemos que este proyecto va a dar a su alumno/a la oportunidad a compartir sus ideas con otros alumnos/as y oir las experiencias de los otros.

**PARTICIPACIÓN VULNATÍUMARIA:** Participación en este proyecto es voluntaria. Su decisión para permitir a su alumno/a a participar o no, no impactará las calificaciones de su alumno/a ni la relación, que su alumno/a tiene con Escuela Secundaria de Escondido, ni la relación que usted o su alumno/a tiene con CGU, sus profesores o estudiantes. Usted y su alumno/a tiene el derecho para terminar con el proyecto sin pena. También, si su alumno/a no quiere preguntar las preguntas de la investigación, él o ella tiene el derecho para excusarse sin pena.

**CONFIANZA:** Participantes se grabarán durante este proyecto. Las notas de los reuniones estarán en un sitio seguro. También, cuando estamos hablando de los resultados usaremos seudónimos. Sin embargo, es posible que otros/as participantes hablarán sobre las reuniones. Tampoco, no vamos a compartir nada de la información sobre su alumno/a con usted.
Si tiene preguntas o quiere más información de este proyecto, por favor, llámeme a (760) 432-2452 o e-mail a mchaplin@ebsd.org. También, puede hablar con Dra. Linda Perkins, a (909) 607-7964 o e-mail a linda.perkins@cgu.edu. Este Proyecto ha sido aprobado a la Junta de Revisión Institucional de CGU. Puede hablar con ellos a (909) 607-9406 si tiene otras preguntas.

Su firma indica que usted ha leyendo la información en este documentado y que ha tenido la oportunidad para discutir sus preguntas de esta investigación. También, su firma indica su permiso para su alumno/a a participar en esta investigación y que le ha dicho a usted que podrá retirar su consentimiento durante la investigación. Le ha dado a usted una copia de este papel y le ha dicho a usted que no está renunciando los derechos de su alumno/a.

Firma del Padre o Encargado/a ____________________________ Fecha _____________

Nombre del Padre o Encargado/a ____________________________

Nombre del Alumno/a ____________________________

Firma de Investigadora ____________________________ Fecha _____________
Informed Parent (Middle) Consent Form for Linguistically Disenfranchised Students:
Systemic Silencing within the Academic World and Counter Narratives of Possibilities

Your student is being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Mae Chaplin, a student at the School of Educational Studies, Claremont Graduate University (CGU) and San Diego State University (SDSU). Your student is being asked because he/she speaks both Spanish and English, is Latino/a, is enrolled in “Structured Reading,” is under the age of 18, and attends school in the United States.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to further the discussion concerning the academic realities and opportunities for educational access provided to students from linguistically marginalized populations and to develop the counter narratives and political voice necessary for systematic transformation and empowerment.

PARTICIPATION: Your student will be asked to participate in three focus group sessions. The first two sessions will occur after school from 3:00-4:00 at Mission Middle School in room 50b. The date for these meetings will be provided to you by Ms. Chaplin. The first two sessions will include about 10 other students from “Structured Reading” classes at Mission Middle School. The third session will occur at Mission Middle School in Escondido on a time and date to be determined later. The third session will include about 20 students from Escondido High School, Palomar College, and CSUSM. These students belong to local chapters of the organization Movimiento Estudiantil Chican@ de Aztlán (MEChA). This organization works to gain self-determination for Chicanos/as. If you would like more information about MEChA, please visit the website www.nationalmecha.org or contact Ms. Chaplin at mchaplin@eusd.org.

The first two session will include “getting to know you” exercises and writing exercises where your student will be asked questions such as: “Do you see yourself as a ‘good’ student or not and why?”, “What do you see on campus that makes you upset?”, and “Do adults at your school talk to you about going to college?” There will also be group discussions about similar topics. In the third session, students from different levels of school will work together to discuss the possible pathways from middle school through high school and college. The college students will also answer questions from the middle school and high school students.

All of the information that your student writes down or says during these three session will be included in the research data files, but your student’s name will not appear anywhere in the research files.

RISKS & BENEFITS: Potential risks are minimal during this study. We expect that the project may benefit your student by giving him/her the opportunity to share your schooling experiences with his/her peers.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: Please understand that participation is completely voluntary and will not affect your student’s grades or status at Mission Middle School. Your decision whether or not to grant your student permission to participate will in no way affect your, or your student’s, current or future relationship with CGU or its faculty, students, or staff. You and your student have the right to withdraw your student from the research at any time without penalty. Your student also has the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason, without penalty.
CONFIDENTIALITY: Participants will be audiotaped during the focus group sessions. The notes from each focus group session will be kept in a locked file cabinet that is only accessible to the primary researcher. In order to preserve the confidentiality of responses, we will use pseudonyms when sharing results and comments from this study. However, we cannot guarantee that other participants in the focus group will keep the answers confidential. None of your student’s information will be shared with you as well.

If you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact me at (760) 432-2452 or mchaplin@eusp.org. You can also contact my research advisor, Dr. Linda Perkins, at (909) 607-7964 or linda.perkins@cgu.edu. The CGU Institutional Review Board, which is administered through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP), has approved this project. You may also contact ORSP at (909) 607-9406 with any questions.

A signed copy of this consent form will be given to you. You will also receive a signed copy of your student’s assent form.

I understand the above information and have had all of my questions about participation on this research project answered. I voluntarily give permission for my child to participate in this research.

Signature of Parent/Guardian _____________________________ Date ________________

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian _____________________________

Printed Name of Student _____________________________

Signature of Researcher _____________________________ Date ________________
Mae S. Chaplin es una estudiante doctorada con la Escuela de Estudios de Educación de Claremont Graduate University. Ella está siendo supervisada por Dra. Linda Perkins y ella quiere que su alumno/a participar en un proyecto de investigación. Ella quiere hablar con su alumno/a porque él o ella habla inglés y español, está en el clase de “Structured Reading,” y tiene menos de 18 años de edad, y está en escuela en Los Estados Unidos.

**PROPÓSITO:** El propósito de este proyecto es para adelantar el discurso de las experiencias de las oportunidades académicas de los alumnos/as de poblaciones bilingües y para desarrollar voces políticas para empoderamiento y transformación sistémica.

**PARTICIPACIÓN:** Su alumno/a va a participar en 3 reuniones después de escuela. Cada reunión será después de escuela para 45 minutos. Las dos reuniones primeras van a estar en Escuela Intermedia Mission de 3:00 hasta 4:00 en salón 50b. Estas reuniones van a incluir 10 alumnos/as de clases de “Structured Reading” en Escuela Intermedia Mission. La tercera reunión va a estar en Mission y va a incluir 20 alumnos/as de la Escuela Secundaria de Escondido, Colegio de Palomar, y CSUSM. Estos alumnos/as son parte del grupo Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano@ de Aztlán (MEChA). Este grupo trabaja por los derechos Chicanos/as. Si quiere usted más información sobre MEChA, visite a sitio [www.nationalnacho.org](http://www.nationalnacho.org) o ponerse en contacto con Ms. Chaplin a [mchaplin@eusd.org](mailto:mchaplin@eusd.org).

Durante las dos reuniones primeras, su alumno/a participará en actividades de “converse con otros” y ejercicios de escritura. Su alumno/a va a contestar preguntas como “¿Piensa que eres un(a) alumno/a bueno/a o malo/a y por qué?”, “¿Hay algo en esta escuela que no quieres ver y por qué?”, y “¿Puedes hablar con los adultos en esta escuela sobre el colegio?” También, los participantes van a hablar sobre otras temas similares. Durante la tercera reunión, los alumnos/as de las escuelas intermedias y secundarios van a hablar con los/las alumnos/as del colegio sobre las posibilidades de llegar en el colegio. También, los/las alumnos/as del colegio contestarán las preguntas de los/las otros/as alumnos/as.

Toda la información que su alumno/a escribe o dice va a incluir en los datos de este proyecto, pero el nombre de su alumno/a no estará en ningún parte de los archivos de investigación.

**RIESGOS Y BENEFICIOS:** Riesgos están minimales durante este proyecto. Nosotros creemos que este proyecto va a dar a su alumno/a la oportunidad a compartir sus ideas con otros alumnos/as y oír las experiencias de otros.

**PARTICIPACIÓN VOLUNTARIA:** Participación en este proyecto es voluntaria. Su decisión para permitir a su alumno/a a participar o no, no impactará las calificaciones de su alumno/a ni la relación, que su alumno/a tiene con Escuela Intermedia de Mission, ni la relación que usted o su alumno/a tiene con CGU, sus profesores o estudiantes. Usted y su alumno/a tiene el derecho para terminar con el proyecto sin pena. También, si su alumno/a no quiere preguntar las preguntas de la investigación, él o ella tiene el derecho para excusarse sin pena.

**CONFIANZA:** Participantes se grabarán durante este proyecto. Las notas de las reuniones estarán en un sitio seguro. También, cuando estamos hablando de los resultados usaremos seudónimos. Sin embargo, es posible que otros/as participantes hablarán sobre las reuniones. Tampoco, no vamos a compartir nada de la información sobre su alumno/a con usted.
Si tiene preguntas o quiere más información de este proyecto, por favor, llámeme a (760) 432-2452 or e-mail a mchaplin@ebsd.org. También, puede hablar con Dra. Linda Perkins, a (909) 607-7964 or e-mail a linda.perkins@cgus.edu. Este Proyecto ha sido aprovado a la Junta de Revisión Institucional de CGU. Puede hablar con ellos a (909) 607-9406 si tiene otras preguntas.

Su firma indica que usted ha leído la información en este documento y que ha tenido la oportunidad para discutir sus preguntas de esta investigación. También, su firma indica su permiso para su alumno/a a participar en esta investigación y que le ha dicho a usted que podrá retirar su consentimiento durante la investigación. Le ha dado a usted una copia de este papel y le ha dicho a usted que no está renunciando los derechos de su alumno/a.

Firma del Padre o Encargado/a ___________________________ Fecha ______________

Nombre del Padre o Encargado/a ___________________________

Nombre del Alumno/a ___________________________

Firma de Investigadora ___________________________ Fecha ______________
RE: Full Board Approval for IRB# 1903
Title of Study: Linguistically Disenfranchised Students: Systemic Silencing within the Academic World and Counter Narratives of Possibilities

Dear Mae:

Thank you for submitting your research protocol to the IRB at Claremont Graduate University. Your protocol has been approved as indicated on the coversheet that you provided when you submitted the protocol. Your signed cover sheet is being returned with this letter.

Your protocol is approved for a period of one year from the stamped date on this letter. At that time you must send a brief report on your progress-to-date to the IRB and have your protocol renewed if necessary. Be sure to submit your report in time for a renewal to be issued before this one expires. Include in your report any changes that should be made to the originally approved protocol for the renewal.

If your research is completed before this protocol expires you must notify the IRB that your research has been completed and identify any problems encountered that will assist the Board in approving future research of the type you conducted.

If any injuries or unanticipated problems are encountered in the conduct of your research that are related to risks to participants or others it is your responsibility to notify the Chair of the IRB and the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs as soon as practical but in no more than five days of the occurrence (phone: 909-607-9406 or via email to irb@cgu.edu).

If, during the conduct of your research, you discover changes that should be made to the procedures in the approved protocol you must promptly report the proposed changes to the IRB. The proposed changes must not be implemented without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to participants.

The entire Institutional Review Board of Claremont Graduate University wishes you well in the conduct of your research project.

Sincerely,

Paula Palmer, Chair
Institutional Review Board

[Stamp: APPROVED
JAN 8 2013
CLAIREMONT GRADUATE UNIVERSITY IRB]

Harper Hall 152 • 150 East Tenth Street • Claremont, California 91711-6160
Tel: 909.607.9406 • Fax: 909.607.9655