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EMBRACING RESISTANCE AT THE MARGINS: FIRST-GENERATION LATINO  
STUDENTS' TESTIMONIOS ON DUAL/CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT HIGH  
SCHOOL PROGRAMS

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Michelle R. Turner

August 2010

Advisor: Dr. Franklin A. Tuitt

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Author: Michelle R. Turner

Title: EMBRACING RESISTANCE AT THE MARGINS: FIRST-GENERATION  
LATINO STUDENTS' TESTIMONIOS ON DUAL/CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT  
HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS.

Advisor: Dr. Franklin A. Tuitt

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### **Abstract**

Despite moderate gains in equal educational opportunities over the past 60 years, low-income students of color continue to lag behind their middle-class, White peers. This is particularly true for first-generation Latina/o students who: (a) have the highest K-12 drop-out rate than any other ethnic group in U.S. schools; (b) are underrepresented in high quality, rigorous secondary curricular tracks; and (c) continue to be overrepresented in two-year institutions and postsecondary vocational schools. Using a conceptual framework comprised of critical race theory (CRT), social theory, and community cultural wealth theory it was clear that the U.S. education system is still plagued by systemic and endemic racism. Contrary to the predominate neoliberal discourse that emerged in the education field after the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, it is clear that meritocracy is a myth and students continue to face disproportionate opportunities to learn. One of the current school reform initiatives being used to help underrepresented students not only gain access to four-year institutions but also persist to the attainment of a Bachelor's of Arts (B.A.) degree are dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs. Multicultural and antiracist educators argue that these programs may fall short of reaching their intended outcomes if the teaching staff does not utilize culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy. Research findings show that students of color learn best in

environments where they feel welcomed and valued. At the time of this study very little evidence existed showing whether or not dual/concurrent enrollment programs were reaching their intended outcomes for underrepresented students. In addition, the literature was unclear to what extent, if at all, culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy were being integrated into these programs. Using testimonio narrative inquiry (TNI) as methodology the researcher attempted to address this gap in the literature. The primary method for data collection was in-depth interviewing. In total, six Latino students were interviewed on three separate occasions for 90 minute intervals. First, individual narratives were developed by analyzing and coding the data within each individual case. Next, a collective narrative emerged by analyzing and synthesizing the major themes across the cases. The major finding of this study indicates that significant improvements need to take place in order for dual/concurrent enrollment programs to be a viable pathway for first-generation Latina/o students to persist to the attainment of a B.A. degree.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Overview of Study**

Latina/o<sup>1</sup> students have the highest drop-out rates in the U.S.; consequently, the social and economic impact is problematic in that a large segment of the population is unable to contribute economically and/or politically to the stability of our nation (Padilla, 2005; Perez & de la Rosa Salazar, 1997; Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2005). For example, in 2003, 31% of 25-29 year-old Latinas/os completed some college and only 10% completed a Bachelor's of Arts (B.A.) degree (Sanchez et al., 2005; Ward, 2006). Similarly only 18% of African Americans had completed some college during the same time period (Sanchez et al., 2005; Ward, 2006). In order for historically disadvantaged students to secure entrance into the middle-class, it is imperative they gain access to four-year colleges and universities—the same type of postsecondary institutions that the majority of middle-class, White students attend (Sanchez et al., 2005; Hoffman, 2003; Ward, 2006). This is a worthy goal not only for economic and political reasons but it is also the socially and morally right action to take, particularly for a country that espouses to provide all of its citizens with equal opportunities (Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Ward, 2006).

One of the current education reforms taking shape in the U.S. to help low-income and first-generation students of color gain access to four-year colleges and universities is the creation of dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs (Hoffman, 2003).

Proponents of this model believe that by changing the structure of high schools, from the current K-12 system to a K-16 system, educators would be better situated and more readily accessible to help low-income and first-generation students of color gain access to four-year colleges and universities (Hoffman, 2003). In this initiative, educators would be in a strategic position to help these students bridge the gap between high school and college (Hoffman, 2003). Recent research has shown this transition period between high school and college to be particularly difficult for many underrepresented students who are the first in their families to go to college, because they may not possess the knowledge or the social networks that enable them to maneuver within the unfamiliar organization of colleges and universities (Greenhouse Gardella, Candales, & Ricardo-Rivera, 2005; Hoffman, 2003; Oakes, Rogers, Lipton, & Morrell, 2002).

In addition to changing the structure of secondary education, many educational researchers are calling for educators to use antiracist culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000, 2001; Kailin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Lea, 2006; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Tejeda & Gutierrez, 2005; Yosso, 2002). Educators who use antiracist culturally relevant curricula and culturally relevant pedagogy have been shown to build on the strengths, lived experiences, and knowledges that historically marginalized students bring with them to the learning environment (Dardar, 1997; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Sleeter & Delgado, 2003; Tejeda & Gutierrez, 2005). Many multicultural and antiracist educators and scholars have found that all students, but particularly students of color, learn best in environments where they feel validated and welcomed (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Kailin, 2002; Lea, 2006; Tejeda & Gutierrez, 2005).

While the dual/concurrent enrollment high school models provide a structural change to schooling, it is not clear if these models utilize culturally relevant curricula and/or pedagogical strategies; thus, this educational reform movement might fall short in helping underrepresented students gain access to postsecondary education if they are not culturally relevant (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Kailin, 2002; Lea, 2006; Tejada & Gutierrez, 2005). In light of this research and the assertions of multicultural and antiracist educators, it seems vital that educators integrate culturally relevant pedagogy and curricula within these new structural models.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The current literature on P-20 school reform suggests that several dual/concurrent enrollment high school options provide a structural change to secondary schools which are instrumental in helping underrepresented students gain access to higher education. They achieve this goal by helping underrepresented students earn a high school diploma while concurrently earning two years of college credit. These two years of college credit enable graduates to enter four-year colleges and universities at the junior level; thus, the amount of money and time it will take them to earn a B.A. degree is significantly decreased. Based on this premise, one of the purposes of this study is to investigate which aspects of dual/concurrent models specifically prepares first-generation Latina/o students to gain access to and to succeed in four-year colleges and universities. The literature also suggests that dual/concurrent enrollment high school models might fall short in reaching their goal if they do not utilize culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy. Therefore, a second purpose of this study is to investigate what role, if any, culturally relevant

curricula and pedagogy play in preparing first-generation Latina/o students to persist at college level academics.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In the literature review section of this study, critical race theory (CRT), social theory, and community cultural wealth theory will be used to examine the educational experiences of first-generation Latina/o students to help explain why academic success continues to elude the majority of these students enrolled in the U.S. public education system. Together, these theories provide a conceptual framework to examine the endemic and systemic racism that exists within the U.S. education system (Bell, 1980; Delgado Bernal, 2000; Gillborn, 2005; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Tate, 1997). In addition, these theories worked conjointly to explore the following question: What are the challenges first-generation Latina/o students encounter when trying to gain access to four-year colleges and universities?

#### *Critical Race Theory (CRT)*

CRT scholars ground their work in the following two premises (a) to unmask the ideology of Whiteness, and (b) to engage in social transformation (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 2000; Madison, 2005; Tate, 1997). In addition, CRT is composed of the following six tenets:

- 1) Claims that racism is every day.
- 2) Denunciates colorblindness.
- 3) Claims that race is purposefully and socially constructed.
- 4) Claims that non-essentialist approach to identity and experience is important.

5) Claims that ethnic minority voices are vital.

6) Contextualizes law and society at large. (Madison, 2005)

The primary functions of CRT are to reject the classical liberalism, to deconstruct colorblindness, and to expose the invisibility of White supremacy (Crenshaw et al., 2000; Madison, 2005; Tate, 1997). CRT also seeks to challenge the notion that the social institutions in the U.S. are innocent of any racial wrong doing (Crenshaw et al., 2000; Madison, 2005; Tate, 1997). In addition, one of the main functions of CRT in education is to work toward the elimination of racism and subordination of students of color (Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). CRT also problematizes what multicultural education has become; arguing that educators should provide students with a radically different form of multicultural education which includes culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy (Banks, 2007; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Sleeter & Delgado, 2003).

In this literature review, I will focus on the following CRT tenets (a) racism occurs every day in U.S. classrooms, (b) racism is purposefully and socially orchestrated in the U.S. education system, (c) counter hegemonic-narratives of students of color are a necessary form of resistance to help combat the racism that is still prevalent in U.S. classrooms, and (d) revamping the traditional Eurocentric curricula is a social justice issue.

### *Social Theory*

Social theory provides a lens to examine how cultural and political forces translate into conventional conceptions of merit to college eligibility, and it also enables one to unpack the ideology of merit and the place it holds in the current uneven



distribution of opportunities to learn (Oakes et al., 2002; Ward Schofield, 2007). Specifically, social theory examines the unquestioned ideology of merit that is employed by members of privileged groups which helps them maintain an unfair advantage in the college admissions process (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006; Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Oakes et al, 2002). Powerful and elite groups advance a meritocracy which becomes the moral and rational foundation for maintaining their competitive edge in college admissions (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006; Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Gillborn, 2005; Oakes et al, 2002; Shom & Spooner, 1991; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002). “This ideology conflates the ability to profit from educational opportunities with prior achievement in the traditional academic curriculum, as gauged by conventional measures. Moreover, it positions [White] students with this prior achievement as more *deserving* of those opportunities” (Oakes et al., 2002, p. 109). Social theory also reveals the cultural and political contexts that work together to halt the efforts of disadvantaged communities to prepare its students for the college admissions process (Gillborn, 2005; Oakes et al., 2002).

It is important to note that the theory of meritocracy is inherently flawed because it is not based on pure unadulterated ideals of equality, but rather it is slanted to give advantage to the powerful in society (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006; Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Gillborn, 2005; Oakes et al, 2002; Shom & Spooner, 1991; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002). Thus, merit becomes a social construction whereby it “actively relate[s] to structural forces in the political and economic life of the larger culture as well as those in school, and the conceptions are salient as educators

decided how to organize curriculum and how to respond to students” (Oakes et al., 2002, p. 112). Since middle-class parents believe that a college education is a requisite to the attainment of high status occupations and a middle-class income and lifestyle, they become resistant of the efforts to democratize access to high status curricula (Auerbach, 2002; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Greenhouse et al., 2005; Oakes et al., 2002; Taylor, 2000). They think these attempts are jeopardizing their children’s chances of obtaining a precious commodity—a seat in a four-year college or university (Auerbach, 2002; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Greenhouse et al., 2005; Oakes et al., 2002).

In response to this stressor, middle-class parents, especially middle-class, White parents, “will employ a full range of resources, knowledge, and associations at their disposal to enhance their children’s chances at capturing the available slots” (Oakes et al., 2002, p. 112). This ever increasing escalation of standards for college eligibility is referred to as the “zero-sum game” (Oakes et al., 2002), meaning that as low-income and parents of color increase their efforts of getting their children extra help with academic needs, middle-class, White parents will respond by doubling their efforts in these same areas (Delgado Bernal, 2000; Oakes et al., 2002). It is for this reason that co-curricular college preparatory programs alone cannot compensate for the deficits in the core curricula of many inner cities impoverished school districts (Swail, 2000). In order to help students from these communities compete for access to selective universities, a different type of schooling is needed (Hoffman, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2004).

### *Community Cultural Wealth Theory*

Community cultural wealth theory challenges the traditional interpretation of cultural capital (Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Delgado Bernal, 2000; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005; Yosso, 2005). This theoretical approach to education involves a commitment to develop schools that acknowledge the multiple strengths of marginalized communities in order to serve a larger purpose of struggle toward social and racial justice (Banks, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 2000, 2001; Gay, 2001; Yosso, 2005). In a traditional sense, Pierre Bourdieu argued that the knowledges of the middle- and upper-classes were considered capital that was valuable to a hierarchical society (Brieschke, 1998; Carroll, Tyson, & Lumas, 2000; Delgado Bernal, 2000; Gillborn, 2005; Lopez, 2003; McLaren & Torres, 1999; Yosso, 2005). Therefore, it followed that individuals born into these classes could easily access the knowledges that were deemed necessary for social mobility through one's formal schooling (Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Oakes et al., 2002; Sanchez et al., 2005; Swail, 2000; Yosso, 2005). Thus, the assumption that follows is that individuals who do not fit into the hegemon "lack" the social and cultural capital that is required for this type of social mobility in a hierarchical society (Delgado Bernal, 2000; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005; Yosso, 2005). In response, schools viewed all disadvantaged students through a deficit lens (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006; Brieschke, 1998; Delgado Bernal, 2000; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005; Yosso, 2005). They then see it as their job to impart the knowledges of the dominant classes in society to these 'disadvantaged students' (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006; Brieschke, 1998; Yosso, 2005). This type of schooling led to what Paulo Freire called the banking method of education (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick,

2006; Brieschke, 1998; Yosso, 2005). When education is disseminated through such means, it silences the knowledges of disadvantaged students which then push them to the margins of society (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006; Brieschke, 1998; Yosso, 2005). Through this process, disadvantaged students become invisible and their ways of knowing become the ‘Outsider’ knowledges, mestiza knowledges, and transgressive knowledges, but it is also on these margins that transformative resistance is given birth (Anzaldúa, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 2004, 2007; McLaren & Torres, 1999; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2005).

When one utilizes the lens of CRT and community cultural wealth theory conjointly, it becomes possible to challenge the traditional interpretations of Bourdieuan cultural capital theory by way of introducing the concept of community cultural wealth (Ladson-Billings, 2004, 2007; McLaren & Torres, 1999; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2005). It is then through this new theoretical lens that the process of transformative education can take place (Ladson-Billings, 2004, 2007; McLaren & Torres, 1999; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2005). “According to Bourdieu, cultural capital refers to an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society” (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). It is further proposed that privileged groups in society maintain their power because they have access to acquiring and learning strategies to use these forms of capital as a means for social mobility (Ladson-Billings, 2004, 2007; McLaren & Torres, 1999; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2005). Bourdieu’s theories have been used as a structural framework to

understand how social and cultural capitals are reproduced in a hierarchical society (Ladson-Billings, 2004, 2007; McLaren & Torres, 1999; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2005). These theories have also been used to assert that “some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor” (Yosso, 2005, p. 76). Community cultural wealth theory challenges this traditional view of cultural capital as being narrowly defined by middle- and upper-class, White values (Ladson-Billings, 2004, 2007; McLaren & Torres, 1999; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2005). Together, the scholars who embrace these theories seek to expand this view (Yosso, 2005). Looking through a CRT and a community cultural wealth lens, it becomes clear that historically disadvantaged communities accumulate cultural wealth through at least six forms of capital which are the following:

1. Aspirational capital: refers to the ability to maintain hope and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers.
2. Linguistic capital: includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style;
3. Familia capital: refers to those cultural knowledges that are nurtured among kin that carry a sense of community, history, memory and cultural intuition.
4. Social capital: is understood as networks of people and community resources. Peers and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society’s institutions.

5. Navigational capital: are the skills they possess for maneuvering through institutions not created with communities of color in mind.
6. Resistance capital: those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenged inequality (Yosso, 2005).

The main goal, then, of identifying these components of community cultural wealth theory is to empower marginalized individuals to utilize assets that are abundant within their communities in order to transform education and schooling of their young (Ladson-Billings, 2004, 2007; McLaren & Torres, 1999; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2005). Community cultural wealth theory embodies the “commitment to conduct research, teach, and develop schools that serve a larger purpose of struggling toward social and racial justice” (Yosso, 2005, p. 82). Lastly, the community cultural wealth theory exposes the racism and classism underlying cultural deficit theorizing and reveals the need to restructure schools around those knowledges, skills, abilities and networks that are possessed and utilized by historically marginalized communities (Delgado Bernal, 2001; McLaren & Torres, 1999; Yosso, 2005). In addition, this theory helps illuminate the importance of building upon these assets in order to help low-income and first-generation students of color gain access to four-year colleges and universities that predominately embrace White Eurocentric values, traditions, and ideologies (Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Greenhouse et al., 2005; Kurlaender & Flores, 2005; Shom & Spooner, 1991). The literature shows that, when students have a strong sense of oneself and one’s culture, they are more able to gain access to postsecondary education (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Gay, 2001; Katz, 2001). These students

also have higher persistence and college graduation rates than peers from similar socioeconomic and ethnic groups, because they feel a sense of validation in the learning environment, which helps them maneuver through a foreign and sometimes hostile learning environment of postsecondary institutions (Hidalgo, 2005; Huerta-Macias, 1998; Sowell, 2002; Valadez & Cajina, 2000). In summary, the research shows that by validating and building upon the strengths of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic communities, marginalized students will be better equipped at gaining access to, maneuvering through, and negotiating their way through a foreign and sometimes hostile learning environment of postsecondary education (Ladson-Billings, 2007; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000).

### **Importance of Study: National Economic Stability**

There are a multitude of reasons why the prosperity of our nation's future is closely linked to the success of low-income and first-generation students of color and their achievement in school (Padilla, 2005; Perez & de la Rosa Salazar, 1997). A close examination of low-income and first-generation Latina/o students helps to clearly illuminate the magnitude of this problem. For example, many educational researchers have collected data that suggests Latina/o students are the fastest growing minority population in the U.S. during the past two decades (Padilla, 2005; Perez, 2004). Researchers predict that if these low postsecondary graduation rates for the second largest ethnic group continue to persist, there will be negative long term consequences for society as a whole (Sanchez et al., 2005; Perez, 2004). As a large sector of the U.S. labor force is left behind, the ability to compete in the global market is becoming increasingly

compromised (Perez & de la Rosa Salazar, 1997; Perez, 2004; Ward, 2006). For example, between 1990 and 2000 the Latina/o population in the U.S. grew by 58%, and by 2003 Latinas/os became the largest minority group constituting a total of 38.8 million people (Perez, 2004).

Secondly, in terms of the U.S. education population, Latinas/os are the second largest segment of the school-aged population in the U.S. after their White peers (Perez & de la Rosa Salazar, 1997; Perez, 2004; Ward, 2006). The fact that Latina/o students have the highest drop-out rate in the U.S. is problematic because of the social and economic impacts that result from having a large segment of the population which is unable to contribute economically or politically to the stability of our nation (Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2005). Furthermore, of the Latina/o students who do graduate from high school, only 53% were reported to having matriculated into some form of postsecondary education (Sanchez et al., 2005). Estimates place 15% in two-year institutions and a mere 6% in four-year institutions (Sanchez et al., 2005). The 2003 completer rates show 31% of 25-29 year-old Latinas/os completed some college, and only 10% completed a B.A. degree (Sanchez et al., 2005). In contrast, in the same age group, 34% of White students had completed a B.A. degree, and 18% of African American's had done so during the same time period (Sanchez et al., 2005; Ward, 2006). The point is that not all college experiences are substantively equal (Bok, 2003; Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Oakes et al., 2002). A college degree from a community college does not bear the same value in the job market as does a degree from a four-year college or university (Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Ward, 2006). In order for low-income and first-generation students of color to



secure entrance into the middle-class it is imperative they gain access to the more prestigious colleges and universities that middle-class, White students attend (Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Gillborn, 2005; Heckman & Krueger, 2003; Karen & Dougherty, 2005).

Thirdly, researchers predict if these low postsecondary graduation rates for the second largest ethnic group continue to persist, there will be negative long term consequences for society as a whole (Sanchez et al., 2005; Perez, 2004). In part, this is because technological advances in today's world necessitate the labor force in the U.S. to become increasingly skilled and educated in order to compete in a global job market (Perez & de la Rosa Salazar, 1997; Perez, 2004; Ward, 2006). Within the next decade, 35% of Latinas/os who are currently children will become of working age and potential taxpayers (Perez, 2004). Thus, their academic and job preparation will have a direct impact on the productivity of the U.S. economy (Perez, 2004). Research has shown those with B.A. degrees earn as much as \$400,000-\$500,000 more over the course of their lifetime (Perez, 2004). Put another way, if today's Latina/o 18-year-olds were to increase their college completion rate, this would translate into a three percentage point increase in social security payments by \$600 million (Perez, 2004). When applied to California's Latina/o population alone, this would generate an increase of \$79 million in state income tax revenue (Perez, 2004). In light of the research, it is clear there will be wide spread benefits for the entire U.S. society if Latina/o students are well educated.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Historical Background

Despite the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), equitable education in the U.S. still has not been achieved (Bell, 1980; Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005; Gillborn, 2005; Lopez, 2003; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Oakes et al., 1995; Stuart Wells, 2004). One of the main reasons for the lack of progress is that *Brown* did not address the underlying causes and covert forms of racism that exist within the education system (Bell, 1980; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Stuart Wells, 2004). Although the *Brown* ruling primarily pertained to African American students, the liberal discourse that emerged after this ruling made it more difficult to address and pinpoint the more subtle forms of racism all students of color face in U.S. schools (Bell, 1980; Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006; Brieschke, 1998; Delgado Bernal, 2000; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005). One of the main outcomes of this ruling was the adoption of race neutral politics within the education field (Bell, 1980; Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006; Brieschke, 1998; Delgado Bernal, 2000; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005). The liberal discourse that has emerged in the last 50 years centers on meritocracy, which presupposes there is an equal starting point for all ethnic and racial groups in education (Lopez, 2003). However, a growing body of educational research provides evidence that meritocracy is a myth and that the liberal discourse, which currently dominates the field of education, works to uphold the status quo (Bell, 1980; Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006; Brieschke, 1998; Delgado Bernal, 2000; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005). As a result, White students

continue to outperform low-income and first-generation students of color, particularly Latina/o students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Delgado Bernal, 2000).

Simply stated, low-income, first-generation Latina/o students are not graduating from high school at the same rate as their middle-class, White peers. Those that do graduate from high school are overrepresented in two-year institutions compared to their White peers who seem to be gaining access not only to four-year colleges and universities but also to elite and selective four-year institutions at an ever increasing rate (Hoffman, 2003). For example, the data shows that in the 18 to 24 year-old group, approximately 90% of middle-class, White students complete high school, but only 81% of African Americans and 63% of Latina/o do so (Hoffman, 2003). Similarly, educational researchers Karen and Dougherty (2005) showed that low-income and first-generation students of color are not gaining access to four-year postsecondary institutions at the same rate as middle-class, White students. Moreover, low-income and first-generation students of color are overrepresented in two-year nonselective institutions and vocational schools (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005; Greenhouse Gardella, et al., 2005; Hoffman, 2003; Karen & Dougherty, 2005; Oakes et al., 2002). Also troubling are the findings that underrepresented students college completion rates are lower than their middle-class, White peers (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005; Greenhouse Gardella, et al., 2005; Hoffman, 2003; Karen & Dougherty, 2005; Oakes et al., 2002). For example, studies show that first-generation college students are about twice as likely as those with college-educated parents to leave a four-year college before their second year (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005; Greenhouse Gardella, et al., 2005; Hoffman, 2003; Karen &

Dougherty, 2005; Oakes et al., 2002). In addition, the research shows that while African Americans represent 16% of the current 15 to 18 year-old population, they are shown to earn only 10% of all Associate's (A.A.) degrees (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005; Greenhouse Gardella, et al., 2005; Hoffman, 2003; Karen & Dougherty, 2005; Oakes et al., 2002). Likewise, Latinas/os, who constitute, 14% of the college age population, earn a meager 7% of A.A. degrees (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005; Greenhouse Gardella, et al., 2005; Hoffman, 2003; Karen & Dougherty, 2005; Oakes et al., 2002).

Educational researcher, Patricia Gandara (2002), directly addresses the disparities that are occurring in the education system from kindergarten to graduate school (K-16). While it is true to say that college attendance has increased over the past three decades, from 6.9 million students in 1967 to 14.3 million in 1997, this assertion alone does not paint the whole picture of equity and access to postsecondary education (Gandara, 2002). In fact, the gap in access to higher education among students of different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups has grown larger (Birnbaum & Shushok, 2001; Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Carroll et al., 2000; Gandara, 2002). For example, in 1997-1998 African Americans were only 11% of all college students while they comprised 14.3% of the college-age population (Gandara, 2002). Similarly, Latina/o students held only 8.6% of the seats in higher educational institutions while comprising 14.4% of the college-age population (Gandara, 2002). Research also shows that students who go directly into a four-year college have a higher likelihood of completing a B.A. degree than those who matriculate into a two-year college initially (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005; Karen & Dougherty, 2005; Gandara, 2002). Furthermore, in their study Karen and Dougherty

(2005) provide empirical evidence which supports the claim that an “increasing percentage of college entrants are attending two-year colleges; this increase is particularly apparent among Blacks and those with lowest SES, [while] students from the most affluent backgrounds have become increasingly likely to attend the most selective colleges” (p. 38). Data also shows that upper-income students are seven times more likely than low-income students to earn a four-year degree by the age of 24 (Hoffman, 2003; Sanchez et al., 2005).

### **Literature Review Guiding Questions**

The analysis of the literature in this report focuses on access to higher education for first-generation Latina/o students, dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs, and antiracist and culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy. In this literature review I will be guided by the following overarching question: How might educators envision a culturally relevant dual/concurrent enrollment programs for first-generation Latina/o students? I will also examine the following two sub-questions: (a) How might these dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs improve access for first-generation Latina/o students?; and (b) What might a culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy look like in a dual/concurrent enrollment high school program?

### **Systemic Educational Barriers**

On the one hand, some higher education researchers argue that there is not an access crisis in higher education, because more people are currently attending postsecondary institutions than ever before (Birnbaum & Shushok, 2001; Karen & Dougherty, 2005). However, while it is true that postsecondary enrollment is increasing,

this does not negate the argument that there is still a current access crisis in higher education (Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005; Venezia & Rainwater, 2007). There is overwhelming evidence to support the claim that there is a leaky pipeline to higher education (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005; Greenhouse et al., 2005; Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007, Lewis & Vazquez Solórzano, 2006; Price & Wohlford, 2005; Venezia & Rainwater, 2007). Furthermore, the evidence suggests that underrepresented students of color continue to be overrepresented in community colleges and postsecondary vocational schools (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005; Greenhouse et al., 2005; Karen & Dougherty, 2005; Ortiz, 1995; Price & Wohlford, 2005; Shom & Spooner, 1991).

The fact that access for underrepresented populations continues to be a current crisis for higher education is concerning for the nation as a whole (Heckman & Krueger, 2003; Lewis & Vazquez Solórzano, 2006; Perez & de la Rosa Salazar, 1997). If countries wish to remain competitive in the global knowledge economy they will need a more highly educated workforce than ever before (Heckman & Krueger, 2003; Levine, 2001). For the U.S., in particular, this means that in the twenty-first century knowledge economy it must do a better job of educating all of its citizens at higher levels of educational attainment (Heckman & Krueger, 2003; Levine, 2001). In addition, educational researchers predict that the demand for higher education will continue to increase in the coming years (Levine, 2001). One of the main reasons why there is this increased demand for education is based on the premise that modern society is shifting from an industrial economy to an information economy, and an information economy requires an

increased need for intellectual capital (Heckman & Krueger, 2003; Levine, 2001). “As a result, education is fundamental to an information society, which demands higher levels of skills and knowledge of its workforce and citizenry than an industrial economy” (Levine, 2001, p. 43).

This places increased pressure on institutions of higher education to meet the growing demands of an information economy and a global job market (Heckman & Krueger, 2003; Levine, 2001). Postsecondary institutions will need to reevaluate their missions and values as they are being forced to meet the changing and growing needs of its constituents (Levine, 2001). Furthermore, institutions of higher education will need to reevaluate the importance and utility of offering courses to a student population that is becoming increasingly nontraditional (Heckman & Krueger, 2003; Levine, 2001). Similarly, if individuals wish to remain competitive in this new high tech knowledge economy, they will need to be educated at higher levels than ever before (Heckman & Krueger, 2003). In the past, individuals could obtain and secure a middle-class life style with a high school education, but this is no longer the case (Levine, 2001). Thus, it follows that in order to secure passage into the middle-class, people will need to obtain higher levels of education than previous generations, and they will also need to continually update their knowledge and skills over their life span (Heckman & Krueger, 2003; Levine, 2001). In sum, institutions of higher education will be placed in a position to help improve the access pipeline for all individuals in society throughout the twenty-first century (Levine, 2001).

## **Underrepresented Students Struggle to Gain Access to Higher Education**

There are a myriad of reasons why historically underrepresented students of color are not matriculating into four-year postsecondary institutions. One reason for this disparity is the fact that underrepresented students of color have historically been placed into low-level tracks in schools (Auerbach, 2002; Oakes & Guiton, 1995; Ochoa, 2003; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002; Stuart Wells, Tijerina Revilla, Jellison Holme, & Korantemaa Atanda, 2004). To this day, historically underrepresented students of color are being deliberately marginalized, oppressed, silenced, and discarded in U.S. educational institutions (Stuart Wells et al., 2004; Taylor, 2000). To illustrate this point more clearly, it is helpful to examine what has, and still is, occurring to these students in K-12. For example, high schools across the U.S. continue to do a poor job of educating Latina/o students, which is evident because collectively they have “attained lower levels of education than any other major racial or ethnic group in the United States” (Brief of Latino Organizations as Amici Curiae, 2003, p. 30). Other research findings suggest that Latina/o students are being marginalized in classrooms as early as kindergarten (Brieschke, 1998; Oakes & Guiton, 1995). Educators’ low expectations for Latina/o students creates self-filling prophecies that follow them through high school (Brieschke, 1998; Oakes & Guiton, 1995). Most troubling of all are the narratives of administrators and educators who believe that Latina/o students’ poor academic performance is attributed to genetic predispositions (Brieschke, 1998; Oakes & Guiton, 1995). In the literature, few, if any, of the educators interviewed challenged this position; in contrast most accept this belief unquestioningly (Oakes & Guiton, 1995). By the time Latina/o



students reach high school most educators believe that their destiny is already written across the wall (Brieschke, 1998; Lopez & Salas, 2006; Oakes & Guiton, 1995). In addition, many educators interviewed in these studies indicated that they believed Latina/o students are destined for low paying and low skilled dead end jobs (Oakes & Guiton, 1995). The research also supports the claim that most high school teachers believe Latina/o students' academic ability is fixed and unchangeable by the time they get to high school (Oakes & Guiton, 1995). Many of these beliefs perpetuate the vicious cycle of tracking within schools (Auerbach, 2002; Delgado Bernal, 2000; Gillborn, 1997; Oakes & Guiton, 1995; Ochoa, 2003; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2002; Stuart Wells, et al., 2004; Taylor, 2000).

Solórzano and Ornelas (2004) examined the issues of access and availability of Advanced Placement (AP) courses in high schools. They also investigated the overall impact on the educational outcomes for Latina/o and African American students who do not have access to these types of rigorous courses (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). They found that even in schools where there is high enrollment of students in AP courses, students of color are underrepresented (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). This phenomenon leads to educational structures called "schools within schools" (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). For example, in 2002 in the Los Angeles Unified School District Latina/o students were 66% of the high school student enrollment, but they comprised only 49% of the district wide AP enrollment (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). In addition, African Americans were 14% of the overall high school population and only 8% of the AP student enrollment (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). In contrast, White students comprised a mere

12% of the total student enrollment and 22% of the AP enrollment. Similarly, Asians comprised 9% of the district's student enrollment and 2% of AP enrollment (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). These findings speak volumes to the barriers that Latina/o and Black students face within the education system.

It is also extremely troubling to note that once students are placed into these low-level tracks, they are hardly ever given the opportunity to move out of these tracks, at any point in K-12 academic careers, and into higher level curricular tracks (Auerbach, 2002; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). These unfair practices lead to a large amount of students being academically unprepared for college level work (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Greenhouse et al., 2005; Montano & Lopez Metcalfe, 2003; Narro Garcia, 2001; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). Research findings also illuminate that colleges and universities continue to focus on traditional indicators to determine college eligibility (Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Shom & Spooner, 1991; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004; Taylor, 2000). These traditional forms of evaluation include high school grade point averages (GPAs), standardized tests, and AP courses (Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Shom & Spooner, 1991; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004; Taylor, 2000). Thus, the claim can be made that when students of color do not have access to rigorous curricula, that include AP courses, they are greatly disadvantaged in the college application process (Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Shom & Spooner, 1991; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004; Taylor, 2000). The fact that students of color as a whole are underrepresented in four-year higher education institutions highlights the need to reevaluate the process by which students are able to gain access to college preparatory curricula (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004).

According to researchers Villenas & Deyhle, the curricula of low-level tracks that Latina/o and Black students are perpetually exposed to are boring and mundane (1999). The exact reasoning as to why students of color are disproportionately being placed into these low-level tracks is debatable (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). As one researcher so aptly put it, “There is still much debate surrounding the causes of this disproportionate placement; however, to some extent, race appears to have an independent effect on this pattern of outcomes” (Carroll et al., 2000, p. 129). Empirical evidence shows that the low-tracking of Latina/o students directly correlates with both lowered student performance and it also increases the number of students who drop-out of school (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Furthermore, Latina/o students have stated that one of the primary reasons they decide to leave school is not because the work was too hard, but rather the work was at such a low level that they did not feel motivated to stay in school (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). For these students of color, their schooling became a meaningless experience (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999).

These feelings were compounded by the low-expectations their teachers had for them (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). In one study, a Latino student recalls being told by his middle school English teacher that “he was worthless and would never amount to anything” (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999, p. 432). One would like to think this negative attitude and behavior toward Latinas/os is an exception and not the norm, but ethnographies of Latina/o students illuminate this is the message many of these students receive almost from the onset of their formal schooling (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999).

According to a report issued by the Joint Center for Economic and Policy Studies (1998) the following was found:

...that teachers form negative, inaccurate, and inflexible expectations based on such attributes as the race and perceived social class of their pupils. These expectations result in different treatment of minority and white students and affect the minority students' self-concept, academic motivation, and level of aspiration as they conform, over time, more and more closely to what is expected of them. (pp.16-17, as cited in Slaughter-Defoe and Carlson, 1996)

In order to reverse this trend, it is imperative that students of color and Latina/o children get exposed to grade-level curriculum, high expectations, and concrete support from their teachers and other school personnel such as guidance counselors (Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). In order to ameliorate atmospheres of conflict and crisis in educational settings, schools should focus their efforts on building climates of trust that include forming collaborative partnerships with parents (Slaughter-Defoe & Carlson, 1996). When students of color and Latina/o students feel valued and supported in school, their academic performance increases as does their matriculation into postsecondary institutions (Slaughter-Defoe & Carlson, 1996).

In addition to the importance of teachers' expectations for students' success, research indicates that the best predictor for postsecondary academic success is the curricula that a student is exposed to during his/her K-12 education (Barth & Haycock, 2004). As previously mentioned, it is clear that students of color are not gaining entrance into postsecondary institutions because they are not receiving the academic preparation they need to succeed in higher education (Barth & Haycock, 2004). One major reason for

this is that students of color falsely assume that if they meet their high school's graduation requirement then they will also be meeting the requirements needed to gain entrance into four-year colleges and universities (Barth & Haycock, 2004; Kirst & Venezia, 2004). Unfortunately this false assumption leads to students of color not being able to compete for entrance into four-year institutions, and if they are lucky enough to gain entrance into these institutions, they are not able to sustain the academic rigor that is required to succeed in this new academic environment (Barth & Haycock, 2004).

Research has also uncovered the disconnect that exists between many high schools' minimum graduation requirements and the minimum requirements that are needed for entrance into four-year colleges and universities (Barth & Haycock, 2004; Kirst & Venezia, 2004). For example, one study found that the majority of high schools across the nation have lower minimum graduation requirements in comparison to the minimum qualifications needed to compete for entrance into four-year colleges and universities. Table 1 provides an example of the disconnect between minimum high school requirements versus minimum college entrance requirements.

Table 1  
*High School Graduation Requirements and College Entrance Minimums*

<b>Min. HS Graduation requirements:</b>	<b>Min. 4-year institution requirements:</b>
English, 3 years	English, 4 years
math, 2 years	math, 3 years
science, 2 years	science, 3 years
history, 3 years	history, 2 years
language, none	language, 2 years
visual/performing arts, 1 year	visual/performing arts, 1 year
electives, 2 years	electives, 1 year

(Kirst & Venezia, 2004)

This information makes it clear that the majority of high schools do not have graduation requirements that are high enough to meet even the minimum requirements for their students to be competitive in the admissions process (Kirst & Venezia, 2004). Thus, it is clear why many underrepresented students face academic struggles in these rigorous postsecondary learning environments. Put simply, the minimum graduation requirements of many high schools across the country are not enough to adequately prepare students for collegiate level work (Kirst & Venezia, 2004).

In addition to not being exposed to the same type of rigorous curricula as their White peers, another reason why historically underrepresented students are not prepared for college level work is the fact that they are often times denied access to Advanced Placement (AP) courses in their high schools (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). The curricula of dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs specifically address this disparity through the core structure of the academic program (Hoffman, 2003). For example, the curricular structure of dual/concurrent enrollment models parallels programs like AP classes and the International Baccalaureate (IB), two programs commonly offered in suburban schools (Hoffman, 2003). All three curricular models (AP, IB, and dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs) provide students with the opportunity to earn college credit while still enrolled in high school (Hoffman, 2003). Research indicates that many urban high schools do not offer either AP or IB programs because they do not believe that there is a need for these types of classes in their schools (Oakes & Guiton, 1995). This faulty logic disadvantages students who attend inner-city high schools in the college admissions process, because many four-year institutions use high

school curricula as an admissions criterion (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). Hence, the more competitive and rigorous the high school curricula, the more points a student will receive on his/her admissions application, which increases the chance of being admitted (Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). Lastly, strategic placement of dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs in urban school districts might provide historically underrepresented students with the opportunity to receive a quality education through the rigorous curricula offered at these schools (Hoffman, 2003). Ultimately, the college credits students earn upon graduating from high school will help them compete for access to four-year colleges and universities (Hoffman, 2003).

### **Current P-20 Educational Reform Efforts**

Recent education trends are trying to integrate all sectors of the education system (Barth & Haycock, 2004; Gandara, 2002; Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Michelau, 2006; Ward, 2006; Venezia & Rainwater, 2007). Some of these reform efforts focus on the entire education pipeline from kindergarten through graduate school, i.e. P-20 school reform (Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Michelau, 2006). Other efforts only focus on the improvement of the system from kindergarten through the undergraduate degree, i.e. P-16 school reform (Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Michelau, 2006). The commonality between all of these efforts is that they are trying to make the system a more seamless educational experience for underrepresented populations (Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Michelau, 2006). The benefit is that when the education system works as an integrated whole students experience smoother

transitions from one grade level to the next (Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Michelau, 2006; Venezia & Rainwater, 2007).

Dual/concurrent enrollment programs are a recent reform that has helped smooth the transition from high school to post-secondary education. Specifically, students who are enrolled in dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs take college level courses on campus or at a satellite center, and the courses are taught by college faculty (Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Michelau, 2006). On the other hand, high school concurrent enrollment programs are school-based credit programs. This means that students who are enrolled in these programs take college level courses at their local high school and the courses are taught by their high school teachers under the guidance of a college professor (Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Michelau, 2006). Regardless of which program a student is enrolled in, the commonality of the two programs is that high school students should in theory be able to earn two years of college credit while simultaneously earning a high school diploma (Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Michelau, 2006). It is important to understand that these programs do not extend the time it takes students to complete their secondary education (Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Michelau, 2006). Generally students begin dual/concurrent enrollment programs during their junior year of high school, and they are able to apply the credit they earn in these college level courses toward the completion of their high school diploma (Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Michelau, 2006).

These programs are also significantly different from AP courses. For example, students who participate in AP courses generally do not take accelerated courses in all of



the core subjects (Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Michelau, 2006). The result is that by the time a student graduates from high school s/he will have some college credit but usually not two full years of college credit (Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Michelau, 2006). The amount of college credit a student earns through this program depends on the number of AP courses a student takes and it depends on how many AP examinations a student passes with a score of three or better (Hoffman, 2003). Dual/concurrent enrollment programs are designed so that high school students graduate with an Associates of Arts (A.A.) degree in addition to a high school diploma (Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Michelau, 2006).

Students who have successfully completed a dual/concurrent enrollment high school program should be able to apply all of the college credit they have earned toward an undergraduate degree, which enables them to enter any four-year postsecondary institution at the junior level (Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Michelau, 2006). The benefit for students is that it takes them less time to complete a four-year undergraduate degree (Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Michelau, 2006). This saves students both time and money. Another clear advantage for students is that they will be more adequately prepared for college level academics, because they have been exposed to rigorous curricula during their secondary education (Hoffman, 2003).

Proponents of dual/concurrent enrollment programs believe that by changing the structure of high schools, from the current K-12 system to a K-16 system, educators would be better suited to helping low-income and first-generation students of color gain access to four-year colleges and universities. The rationale behind this train of thinking is

that educators would be in a strategic position to help historically underrepresented students bridge the gap between high school and college (Hoffman, 2003). Current educational research has shown this transition period to be particularly difficult for many underrepresented students who are the first in their families to go to college (Hoffman, 2003).

In summary, dual/concurrent enrollment programs are one of the current education reform movements taking shape across the U.S. The dual/concurrent enrollment high school model provides a structural change to traditional high schools that is necessary to help historically underrepresented students gain access to higher education. In addition, proponents of dual/concurrent enrollment programs believe that this structural change to the high school curricula provides underrepresented populations with the opportunity to become college ready in order to more effectively compete for admissions to four-year colleges and universities. Most importantly it is proposed that by being able to earn two years of college credit while concurrently earning a high school diploma, these historically underrepresented groups will be able to bypass the community college system which has, unfortunately for many, become a trap door (Oakes et al., 2002)

### **Culturally Relevant Curricula and Pedagogy**

#### *Culturally Responsive Curricula*

Some multicultural specialist fear that while dual/concurrent enrollment models may provide the structural change to schools that is needed to help students of color and underrepresented students gain access to four-year institutions, this change alone is not

sufficient (Gay, 2000, 2001; Ladson-Billings; 2007; Sleeter & Grant, 2007). For example, this dramatic educational reform movement might fail to fulfill its promise because the traditional Eurocentric curriculum that is predominant in all U.S. schools is still intact (Gay, 2000, 2001; Ladson-Billings; 2007; Sleeter & Grant, 2007). Many scholars argue that all P-16 educators also need to use culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy to help historically underrepresented students gain access to four-year postsecondary institutions (Gay, 2000, 2001; Ladson-Billings; 2007; Sleeter & Grant, 2007).

While dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs provide the structural change needed to help underrepresented students become academically prepared for college level academics, it is not clear if these programs use culturally relevant pedagogy or curricula. For this reason, it is necessary to ensure that a culturally relevant curriculum is being utilized by the school personnel. Dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs could easily embrace both a culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy by presenting students with literature that is rich in diversity, by building on students' academic and personal strengths, by valuing the native languages and discourse styles of students, and by providing students with opportunities to learn in communal environments (Gay, 2000). Research shows that when students feel valued, embraced, and honored in the learning environment, their academic achievement increases (Gay, 2000).

#### *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*

Coupled with the importance of the content in the curricula, it is also important to examine the pedagogical strategies being used by the teaching staff. Although

information was not readily available on this topic, research indicates that it would be important for educators at these schools to use culturally responsive teaching techniques (Gay, 2000). The reason why this approach to teaching is important is culturally responsive pedagogy is based upon the belief that education is for and about cultural diversity (Gay, 2000). This approach to teaching also helps educators to understand their own cultural attitudes, assumptions, mechanisms, rules, and regulations which have traditionally made it difficult for them to teach students from historically underrepresented backgrounds (Gay, 2000, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Sleeter, 2000). In addition, by teaching cultural diversity in schools this helps to circumvent the homogenization of diverse peoples (Gay, 2000). Culturally responsive teaching also helps to open-up intellectual freedom and psychic space, both of which are necessary to help facilitate academic and other types of school achievement (Gay, 2000).

Furthermore, culturally responsive teaching specifically addresses the six forms of cultural capital underrepresented students bring to the educational setting because it helps educators to teach to and through the strengths of these students (Gay, 2000). This pedagogical practice is also culturally validating and affirming (Gay, 2000). According to Geneva Gay, culturally responsive teaching has the following characteristics:

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' predispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy contents to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.

- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
- It teaches students to know and praise their own and each others' cultural heritages.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools. (p. 29)

Honoring students' native languages and discourse styles is of utmost importance because it is a way of demonstrating to the students that the school personnel respect and value the cultural wealth they bring to the school (Gay, 2000; & Yosso, 2005). This helps students feel valued, accepted and safe, which in turn helps to create a positive learning environment (Gay, 2000). In addition, through this practice, students are no longer viewed through a deficit lens (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Yosso, 2005). However, this does not mean that students are not taught the language and literacy skills necessary for survival in a dominant Eurocentric society, but rather students are taught through their native language and discourse style in order to gain English language proficiency (Delpit, 1995). In addition, Delpit states very clearly that all students, but particularly students of color, need to be taught how to code switch in order to become part of the culture of power (1995). Educators would be remiss to act as though power structures did not exist in schools or in the larger society (Delpit, 1995). Power structures do exist and educators have the professional responsibility to teach students how to gain access to the culture of power (Delpit, 1995). Membership to the dominant group will lead to greater academic

success for historically underrepresented students. Specifically, Delpit (1995) states educators should:

...recognize that the linguistic form a student brings to school is intimately connected with loved ones, community, and personal identity. To suggest that this form is “wrong” or, even worse, ignorant, is to suggest that something is wrong with the student and his or her family. On the other hand, it is equally important to understand that students who do not have access to the politically popular dialect form in this county, that is, Standard English, are less likely to succeed economically than their peers who do... Teachers need to support that language that students bring to school, provided them input from an additional code, and give them the opportunity to use the new code in a nonthreatening, real communicative context. (p. 53)

Therefore, all dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs should utilize this type of culturally responsive pedagogy, and it is clear this type of pedagogy goes hand-in-hand with culturally responsive curricula.

It is hardly arguable that any student should have to choose between family, friends, and their culture or being economically viable and successful in the dominant U.S. society (Delpit, 1995). Unfortunately this is exactly what happens when historically underrepresented students are viewed through a deficit lens by their teachers (Delpit, 1995). Multicultural and antiracist educators argue that when educators utilize culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy, all students are taught the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in school and their chosen careers, while maintaining true to their

inner-self and cultural identities (Delpit, 1995; Sleeter, 2000; Yosso, 2005). Again, it cannot be stated enough that if all U.S. citizens were to become educationally and economically viable in the global job market, society as a whole would benefit (Padilla, 2005; Perez & de la Rosa Salazar, 1997; Perez, 2004).

### *Infusing Culturally Relevant Curricula & Pedagogy into Hegemonic Practices*

Currently many CRT scholars and educators are calling for a new antiracist education, which encompasses a critical pedagogy and culturally relevant curricula (Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003). This new approach to pedagogical practices and curriculum development will enable educators to infuse multiculturalism into the traditional Eurocentric curriculum, which is still the most prevalent form of curricula in U.S. schools nationwide (Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003). A traditional Eurocentric curricula can be defined as one in which the predominant ideas being expressed, studied, and analyzed are generated from a White European background (Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003). The infusion of multiculturalism into the dominant curricular paradigm is a critical concept and it is the key to truly transforming the dominant Eurocentric curricula into an antiracist and culturally relevant curricular model (Gay, 2000). It is a genuine shift away from the more predominant forms of conservative multicultural curricular models currently being used in classrooms across the U.S.—which usually appear as mere add-ons which could be characterized as simply “fun, food and fiesta” (Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003).

In contrast to these hegemonic educational teaching practices, a culturally relevant curriculum provides a space for a variety of knowledges and viewpoints to be

embraced in the learning environment (Gay, 2000). For example, historically underrepresented students are no longer viewed through a deficit lens in the educational setting, but rather they are viewed as the holders of knowledge, and they are able to engage in the creation of new knowledge in the learning environment (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Gay, 2000; Yosso, 2002). It is argued that when students feel valued in the learning environment, this leads to higher levels of academic achievement (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003). Culturally relevant curricula also provide all students with the opportunity to tell their personal stories as a form resistance to the grand narratives of the traditional Eurocentric curriculum (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Gay, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

Importantly, in culturally relevant curricula, this form of counter-story telling takes place on a daily basis (Gay, 2000). Counter-story telling can be viewed as both a means to change the Eurocentric curricula by making it more culturally sensitive, and also as a means for changing the pedagogical strategies utilized by the predominant hegemonic educators in U.S. schools (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Gay, 2000). By practicing counter-story telling on a daily basis, across all grade levels, and in all content areas, it becomes possible to infuse the curricula with cultural relevance for those populations and viewpoints that were once rendered to the margins of the learning environment (Gay, 2000). This is a major step in moving away from conservative multicultural curricular paradigms in order to move towards a new form of multicultural education that is both antiracist and culturally relevant for all students (Gay, 2000).



### *Potential Challenges to Implementing Dual/Concurrent Enrollment Programs*

Looking forward, educators may face challenges to the implementation of both dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs and to the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy and curricula. Currently a raging debate is taking place surrounding the issue of monies and resources for dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs (Hoffman, 2003). Opponents of these models argue that tax dollars should not be spent on education past the 12th grade (Hoffman, 2003). Therefore, those wishing to develop and implement these types of alternative high school programs will need to secure funding through grants and other private sources of funding. One possible source of funding is the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This foundation has sponsored several Early College High School (ECHS) programs (one specific type of dual/concurrent enrollment high school program) in their early stages of operation (Hoffman, 2003).

Although most states have adopted policies that govern the implementation of these programs, there is a great deal of variety across the nation and within states as to how these programs are being implemented (Palaich, Blanco, Anderson, Silverstein, & Myers, 2006). Some states assume the costs associated with these programs, while other states place the burden on students and their parents (Palaich, et al., 2006). This last point may illuminate a tension that exists between the original goal of these programs and a current reality. These programs are intended to help underrepresented students gain access to higher education, but if students are not able to pay for these courses, this becomes yet another barrier for them in obtaining access to postsecondary opportunities (Hoffman, 2003; Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). Unfortunately

those who could benefit the most from these accelerated learning programs are faced with access challenges; thus, these programs might potentially privilege those who are already privileged (Hoffman, 2003; Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001).

In addition to the challenges regarding the funding for dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs, some potentially graver concerns are looming regarding the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy and curricula. This concern stems from the fact that the majority of teachers are White, and these teachers continue to embrace the traditional Eurocentric curricula (Delpit, 1995). Estimates at the turn of the century indicate that roughly 40% of the school age populations were students of color, while at the same time only 10% of teachers were from non-White groups (Delpit, 1995). It is expected that this inverse trend will continue well into the twenty-first century (Delpit, 1995). Potentially this could be a barrier, because White educators may not see the urgency or immediate value of redesigning the traditional Eurocentric curricula (Delpit, 1995; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2002). In addition, many White educators may feel inadequately trained at implementing this new type of curricula, and they may avoid unfamiliar pedagogical strategies out of fear of not being able to handle racially charged situations in their classes (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2002). These challenges and concerns could easily be addressed through professional development courses and through additional funding to school districts (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2002). The greater challenge is in the recruitment and retention of people of color into the education field period (Kurlaender & Flores, 2005; Venezia & Rainwater, 2007). This argument does not mean to suggest that

some teachers of color do not also embrace hegemonic ideologies, values, and traditions, but the literature suggests that White teachers are less likely to embrace and practice culturally relevant curricula and culturally relevant teaching practices in comparison to teachers of color (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Sleeter, 2000; Yosso, 2002).

Among the reasons people of color are choosing not to enter the teaching profession are low wages, poor working conditions, and demoralizing experiences in teacher education courses (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Sleeter, 2000; Yosso, 2002). While it is a concern that students of color do not have role models in the schools that look like them and who share a common cultural heritage with them, this is not to suggest that White teachers are incapable of embracing culturally relevant curricula and pedagogical strategies (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Sleeter, 2000; Yosso, 2002). On the other hand, it is clear that the overall ethos of teacher education programs need to change to be more affirming and culturally relevant for people of color (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Sleeter, 2000; Yosso, 2002). In the long run, having more teachers of color in the classrooms may help the education field as a whole transition more quickly to the embracement of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Sleeter, 2000; Yosso, 2002).

### **Implications for Higher Education Institutions**

As society moves into the knowledge age and as technology continues to be a driving force in the global economy, education will continue to be a necessity for all citizens. Institutions of higher education will be faced with challenges associated with the growing demand for postsecondary education (Levine, 2001). These challenges may

create tension with the traditional on-site campus delivery of college courses as institutions begin to move toward more asynchronous methods of delivering higher education (Wilson, 2001). While Derek Bok (2003) believes that mass customization of higher education is a highly risky venture because it impinges upon the core values of higher education, other higher education experts (e.g., Levine, 2001) believe that in a knowledge economy the mass consumption of higher education is inevitable. Thus, in the future students will become both younger and older and more racially diverse, as a result institutions of higher education will be forced to change the way they address the needs of this increasingly nontraditional student population (Bok, 2003; Levine, 2001).

### **Summary**

In summary, dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs are one of the current school reform efforts that may prove to be a valuable pathway to help first-generation Latina/o students gain access to four-year institutions. However, there is currently little information available about first-generation Latina/o students' success in gaining access to dual/concurrent high school enrollment programs. In addition, relatively little information is available related to first-generation Latina/o students' experiences in these types of alternative high school programs. For these reasons, this study will focus on first-generation Latina/o students' experiences in dual/concurrent high school enrollment programs and their current experiences at four-year colleges and universities. In this study, I will use critical race theory, social theory, and community cultural wealth theory as a conceptual framework to help K-12 teachers, high school academic counselors, K-12 administrators (school and district level), higher education admissions

counselors, higher education students affairs professionals, and education policy makers understand the educational experiences of first-generation Latina/o students in order to better meet the needs of this student population. The following chapter will explain the rationale for using qualitative research methodologies--specifically testimonio narrative inquiry-- to help explain why critical race and community cultural wealth epistemologies are an appropriate theoretical foundation for this study. I will explain why and how my target audience members can be informed consumers of the research presented in this study, and I will explain the specific methods used to collect and analyze the data. Finally, I will provide a synthesis of the research findings.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology and Research Design**

*“Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.”~Albert Einstein*

### **Introduction**

This chapter will begin with an explanation why qualitative research design was an appropriate methodology for this study. In addition, this beginning section of the chapter provides an explanation as to how critical race theory and community cultural wealth theory serves as a foundation for this study’s research methodology. A rationale for using testimonio narrative inquiry for data analysis and the synthesis of the findings is provided. The next section of this chapter provides an overview of the research design including the following: (a) research questions, (b) research participant recruitment strategies, (c) gaining access, (d) establishing rapport, and (e) description of the research participants. The next major section of this chapter describes the data collection methods, which are: (a) in-depth interviews, (b) research participants’ journals, (c) researcher’s field log, and (d) data organization and storage. The next major section covers data analysis including: (a) data coding and thematic development, (b) trustworthiness, (c) credibility, (d) reliability, and (e) ethics. Next, the researcher’s role is situated within the study, including: (a) situating the self, (b) building trust, and (c) reciprocity. The final three sections of this chapter cover the analysis and synthesis of the research findings, limitations of the study, and a section summary. The primary goal of this study was to collect the stories of first-generation Latina/o students’ lived experiences with

dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs to gain a deeper understanding as to whether or not there is a hegemonic discourse surrounding racial equality in the U.S. education system.

### **Rationale and Assumptions for Qualitative Design**

Just as is the case with education, research is a political act (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005). Research is also subjective—this is true for both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005), whether the researcher acknowledges this dirty little secret or not. “Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 15). The researcher’s biases, prejudices, judgments, and ideologies are ever-present in all research studies (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005) even when researchers use bracketing to limit and control these factors from impacting the study, it is impossible to eliminate them in their entirety (Creswell, 2007). As a qualitative researcher, I also disagree with the perspective that either quantitative or qualitative research can be objective or value-free. A post-postmodernist ontological perspective leads me to reject the notion that there is only one true objective reality waiting to be discovered and measured by the researcher. Rather, I believe that reality is socially constructed, and it is not objective because it is filtered and interpreted through the researcher’s filter—the mind (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Linda Tuhiwai Smith states, “The word [scientific research] is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary.... It is implicated in the worst

excesses of colonialism” (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). This is not an argument against using scientific research to understand phenomena, as much as it is an argument for post-positivistic research methodologies. One of the primary benefits for using qualitative research methodologies is the researcher’s willingness to be transparent about his/her biases before, during, and after entering the research site, in addition to seeking an understanding of the deep complexities of a social phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & McCormack Steinmetz, 1991).

In other words, quantitative data can show social scientists how many and/or how much of a phenomenon has occurred, but it cannot help researchers discover the underlying reasons as to why a phenomenon has occurred (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). For example, with regard to this current study, quantitative research can provide important information such as how many Latina/o students are in four-year institutions, and quantitative methods can also help social science researchers understand how many Latina/o students have persisted in attaining a four-year degree. However, quantitative methodologies cannot help social science researchers dig below the surface of numerical data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The following quote helps to support this point:

[Qualitative researchers] seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Proponents of such studies claim that their work is done from within a value-free framework.” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 15)



Applying this epistemological perspective to this study helps explain why qualitative research methodologies are better suited to help social science researchers understand the complexities of why so many first-generation Latina/o students struggle to gain access to four-year colleges and universities, and why even fewer first-generation Latina/o students succeed at obtaining a four-year degree. Furthermore, qualitative research methodologies can help social science researchers investigate whether dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs are an effective mechanism to help first-generation Latina/o students gain access to four-year institutions, and/or what improvements need to be made to these programs. In order for researchers to have a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of what is or is not working in dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs for first-generation Latina/o students, it is imperative that researchers understand their experiences in these programs. Qualitative research methodologies can help social science researchers develop a more intimate understanding of the root causes of the difficulties first-generation Latina/o students face in dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs and within the U.S. education system as a whole. In order to develop possible solutions to these problems, social researchers need to have an in-depth perspective of these phenomena.

#### *Epistemological Framework for Methodology*

Using critical race theory and community cultural wealth theory as a conceptual framework, social science researchers have a solid foundation to help justify their use of qualitative research methodologies when studying the educational experiences of students of color, including Latinas/os, because qualitative methodologies enable social science

researchers to understand the multiple layers and complexities of such phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). As applied to this study, this conceptual framework was useful in understanding the socially constructed radicalized experiences of Latina/o students in the U.S. education system. This conceptual framework also helped develop a rationale for creating a space for first-generation Latina/o students' counter narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In essence, using this conceptual framework as the epistemological perspective of this study enabled first-generation Latina/o students to explore their socially constructed radicalized experiences within the U.S. education system, provided them with the space to develop counter narratives that disrupt the hegemonic discourse of the education system, and helped them make visible what hegemonic discourse has concealed—that the U.S. education system is not a meritocratic system (Delgado Bernal, 2000; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005).

However, not all is lost and there is no need to dwell in despair. Critical race theory helps social science researchers uncover the systemic racism that still exists within the education system (Tate, 1997), which is an important step toward creating a sense of critical agency among both researches and educators. On the other hand, community cultural wealth theory can capitalize on the momentum for change by providing a foundation on which social science researchers and educators can collaborate to abolish the racist practices that far too often thwart the academic achievement of students of color (Yosso, 2005). This is an important social justice issue that can be realized when educators build on the assets and lived experiences students of color bring with them to the learning environment (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Gay, 2000, 2001; Ladson-Billings,

2007). In addition, community cultural wealth theory stresses the importance that students can and need to be included in the co-construction of knowledge in the classroom (hooks, 1994; Freire, 1970; Yosso, 2002, 2005). When educators maintain high expectations for students, they are capable of achieving at high academic levels (Gay, 2000, 2001).

### **Testimonio Narrative Inquiry**

Testimonio narrative inquiry (TNI) is a powerful form of research methodology because it avoids essentializing the narratives of the research participants (Beverley, 2008). In addition, this research methodology seeks to validate the unique lived experiences of individuals while building solidarity among marginalized groups by acknowledging the commonality between the research participants' lived experiences (Beverley, 2008). Testimonios are a powerful form of narrative inquiry, because they aim to intertwine the "desire for objectivity and the desire for solidarity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1991, p. 257). In other words, testimonio narratives strive to represent the unique lived experiences of the research participants without essentializing their experiences, but at the same time these stories become powerful through their collective representation of similar lived experiences of the disenfranchised in society (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

#### *Rationale for Testimonio Narrative Inquiry*

In this study, TNI (Beverley, 2008) was the methodology used to investigate first-generation Latina/o students' opportunities to engage in critical race discourse as they made meaning of their racial and ethnic journey through the education pipeline (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). The historical roots for using TNI as a research methodology

can be traced back to anthropologists gathering the stories of indigenous peoples' experiences with extreme atrocities in Latin American countries (Beverley, 2008). Typically the individuals interviewed were oppressed, marginalized and disenfranchised members in their societies (Beverley, 2008). Their position within hierarchical societal structure made it difficult, sometime impossible, for their stories and voices to be heard by the dominant groups around the world (Beverley, 2008). In these situations the researcher acted as an interlocutor for these disenfranchised individuals so their stories could be acknowledged and heard by privileged groups (Beverley, 2008).

Similarly, TNI is appropriate research methodology for this study, because it provides an opportunity for marginalized and oppressed students with an opportunity to share their lived experiences with the U.S. education system. Specifically, TNI provides a space for first-generation Latina/o students to share their counter narratives with dual/concurrent high school enrollment programs with the dominant members of society. As stated in the previous chapter, in theory, dual/concurrent enrollment programs should help students of color gain access to four-year institutions by helping them graduate from high school with both a high school diploma and an A.A. degree (Hoffman, 2003). Graduating with these types of credentials should ensure that students of color are competitive in the college admissions process (Hoffman, 2003). In addition, it is proposed that dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs should enable students of color to earn a B.A. degree in less time and with less expense (Hoffman, 2003). However, very little research data is currently available to substantiate these claims. At the time of this dissertation study there were also no peer reviewed qualitative studies available that

explored the lived experiences of first-generation Latina/o students who had graduated from these types of alternative high school programs, or whether these programs have helped them succeed in four-year institutions. Therefore, the collection of Latina/o students' counter narratives serves as a necessary component to challenge the dominant narrative and the neoliberal discourse prevalent in today's educational rhetoric (Beverley, 2008; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

### *Research Questions*

Through the collection of the research participants' testimonio narratives, I sought to answer the following overarching research question and two sub-questions:

- Overarching question: What impact did dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs have on the lived experiences of first-generation Latina/o students in the Denver Metropolitan area that helped them persist to the attainment of a four-year degree?
- Sub-question #1: What facets of dual/concurrent enrollment programs did first-generation Latina/o students describe as being instrumental in helping them gain access to four-year institutions?
- Sub-question #2: What role, if any, did culturally relevant curricula and/or pedagogy play in preparing first-generation Latina/o students gain access to a four-year institution and persist to the attainment of a B.A. degree?

The testimonio narratives of research participants are a call for action and critical agency (Beverley, 2008). This is where TNI gets its power—from its call for political agency (Beverley, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). This call for political action is aimed

not only at those who are sharing their lived experiences in this study, but also from privileged individuals who are bearing witness to these students' testimonio narratives (Beverley, 2008). I believe that many Latina/o students have unique stories to tell about racism in the U.S. education system, which are important to acknowledge. It is also important to show that the majority of Latinas/os have encountered some form of racism at school. Collectively, it has been a struggle for the majority of Latinas/os to gain access to higher education, and it has been even more difficult for Latinas/os to graduate from a four-year institution with a B.A. degree. "In this sense, *testimonio* also embodies a new possibility...[a] recognition of and respect for the radical incommensurability of the situation of the parties involved. More than empathetic liberal guilt or political correctness, what testimonio seeks to elicit is coalition" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 268).

The U.S. education system has failed to live up to its promise of providing all students with a high quality education (Auerbach, 2002; Bell, 1980; Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005), and it is now time to re-evaluate the effectiveness of current education reform efforts such as dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs. At this important juncture, testimonio narratives seek to build solidarity with those who have had similar educational experiences and coalitions (Beverley, 2008) with individuals in society who hold the power to make the necessary changes to the U.S. education system.

I used testimonio narrative analysis as a means of re-storying and re-telling of the lived experiences these research participants have had with the U.S. education system (Beverley, 2008). It is worth reiterating TNI was an appropriate methodology for this

study, because the goal of my dissertation research study was not simply to provide the reader with a story. Rather, the intent of my study was to move the reader to feel personally compelled to take action(s) that will improve the education system for historically underrepresented students, in particular first-generation Latina/o students, because it is important that they are provided with equal opportunities to learn and succeed within the P-20 education system. In addition, I wanted the research participants to view their personal narratives as an emancipatory act whereby their personal stories and unique voices will be heard, acknowledged, and validated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

### **Research Design**

#### *Contextualizing the Research Setting*

The overarching research question of this study is aimed at understanding the impact dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs are having for first-generation Latina/o students in the greater Denver Metropolitan area. More specifically the main goal of this study is to learn if these programs are helping first-generation Latina/o students not only gain access to higher education but also persist to the attainment of a four-year degree. This question is important because previous research findings have shown that Latina/o students have the highest drop-out rate in the U.S. (Padilla, 2005; Perez & de la Rosa Salazar, 1997; Sanchez et al., 2005). In addition, a recent study conducted by Harvard University's Civil Rights Project titled *Denver Public Schools: Resegregation, Latino Style* found this negative trend is also prevalent in one of Colorado's largest school districts (Lee, 2006). Specifically this report found that while

Latina/o students are the majority ethnic group in DPS they also have the highest overall drop-out rate (Lee, 2006).

### *Recruitment of Research Participants*

As previously mentioned, dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs have recently become a focus of educators and policy makers as a mechanism for helping historically underrepresented students gain access to four-year colleges and universities (Hoffman, 2003). Due to the relatively newness of these programs there is still very little data available showing whether or not these programs are having any effect for first-generation Latina/o students. For this reason, I set out to recruit first-generation Latina/o students who had graduated from dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs, and ideally who were enrolled or had graduated from a four-year college or university. Due to the small number of dual/current enrollment high school programs in the state, and also based on the even smaller number of Latina/o students who have graduated from these programs and are currently enrolled in four-year institutions (Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Delgado Bernal, 2000; Greenhouse et al., 2005), I knew the challenge of finding my ideal research participants was going to be a great challenge. Over the course of several months I used the following strategies to find research participants:

- I established contact with a case manager at a local scholarship foundation in the Denver Metropolitan area that works with historically underrepresented students enrolled in college preparatory programs including dual/concurrent enrollment programs offered at comprehensive high schools. Through this contact I obtained a list of six students: four



males and two females. I was able to leave a telephone message for all of the males, but the telephone numbers for the females were out of order. My contact at the scholarship foundation tried to find updated phone numbers and e-mail addresses for these individuals, but unfortunately I was not able to make contact with them. Out of the four males, two agreed to participate in my study.

- After I established rapport with my first two participants, I asked them if they had any friends (fitting the participant profile) who might be willing to participate in my study. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) call this recruitment strategy the snowball effect. Through this strategy, I was able to successfully recruit two more males to participate in my study.
- I also called and sent e-mails to administrators and counselors at comprehensive high schools offering dual/concurrent enrollment programs. I was unable to obtain research participants through this strategy.
- I also called and sent e-mails to administrators at two Early College High Schools in the greater Denver area. I received responses from both schools. I met with the principal and founder at one of the schools for approximately 1 hr 30 min. Although I found our meeting to be informative, it was not helpful in locating potential participants, because the school had opened only three months earlier, and they did not know any graduates I could speak to. At the other ECHS, I met with the

principal on two separate occasions for 2 hour intervals. During our second meeting, I was able to obtain a list of five names. From this list, I was only able to make contact with one of the students--who agreed to participate in my study.

- I also called and sent e-mails to community college counselors who worked at institutions that had formed partnerships with high schools offering dual/concurrent enrollment programs. This strategy was not effective. I was unable to get any response from the individuals I tried to contact.
- I also contacted first and second year student affairs professionals at four-year universities in the Denver Metropolitan area. I primarily focused on contacting departments that work with first-generation students and Latina/o students. It was my hope that the staff in these departments would know some first-generation Latina/o students at their institutions who had graduated from dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs.

Through this strategy I was able to recruit one participant for my study.

### *Gaining Access*

During this phase of my study, I experienced what Feldman, Bell, and Berger (2003) describe as a multilayered process of gaining access--meaning there were multiple gatekeepers I had to establish trust and rapport with before I was able to obtain the names and contact information of potential research participants. In most cases, the first challenge was gaining access to the different organizations and departments on my

contact list. Typically this involved leaving a message with the secretaries. When e-mail addresses were available for the administrators and counselors, I also sent them e-mails in addition to leaving a phone message. Once initial contact had been established with the administrators and counselors I gave a brief explanation why I was contacting them and I also gave them a brief overview of my study. In most cases, they asked me to send them a copy of the informed consent form (Appendix A) which I did as an e-mail attachment in PDF format. Having a copy of this form helped them accurately explain the study to the students they contacted on my behalf. This was an important step in the recruitment process. Because of FERPA laws (protecting students' right to privacy), the administrators and counselors had to obtain approval from the students before releasing their contact information to me. In addition, after obtain permission from the students that I could contact them, several of the administrators still required a face-to-face meeting with me before they would release the students' contact information. There was only one university counselor that I did not meet with prior to receiving the contact information for a student who agreed to participate in my study. However, she did contact the student first to obtain his permission for me to contact him.

Once potential participants had been identified, I contacted most of them by phone, because I did not have their e-mail addresses. But if I also had their e-mail addresses, I used both methods to establish contact. In both the phone messages and e-mails, I briefly explained who I was, how I got their contact information, and why I was contacting them. As succinctly as possible, I tried to explain the overall gist of my research study. I ended the messages by providing them with my home and mobile phone

numbers and my DU e-mail address. If I had not heard back from the students after four or more days, I repeated the process I previously used to establish contact. In total, I attempted to make contact with 14 students, but was only successful in recruiting six students to participate in my study.

### *Establishing Rapport*

During my initial conversation with the potential participants, I once again gave a brief overview of my research study, and I answered any questions they had about the research process and what their participation would entail. Fortunately, most of the students agreed to participate in the study, so before hanging up I scheduled our first face-to-face meeting. In the mean time, before our first meeting, I sent them the informed consent form to review.

Seidman (2006) advises qualitative researchers to use the first meeting with potential participants as an opportunity to review the informed consent form, to review the logistics of the study, and review the anticipated time commitment required for participation in the study. By taking this extra step, researchers are able to begin establishing rapport with the participant before beginning the data collection process (Seidman, 2006). It also provides participants the opportunity to think about the study and really evaluate whether they want to participate (Seidman, 2006). Theoretically this informative meeting might also prevent participant attrition once the data collection process has begun (Seidman, 2006). Due to the extremely busy schedules of four research participants and because of the physical distance required to travel to meet with another participant, I was only able to use this strategy with one of the research participants.

Although I did find this brief introductory meeting helpful, I do not believe the interaction or interviews with the other participants were compromised in any way. And since I knew this type of introductory meeting was not going to be possible with the majority of my research participants, I took the time to communicate with them several times prior to our first meeting. I believe I was able to begin establishing rapport with the research participants by maintaining close communication with them before our first official meeting. In summary, during our initial meeting I reviewed the informed consent form and answered any questions they had about the study. Next I had them sign the informed consent form if they wanted to participate in the study, and I also had them sign a separate section of the consent form giving me permission to audio record our conversations. Lastly, I had the participant chose a pseudonym before I began taping our first interview.

### *Research Participants*

The research participants are all first-generation Latino students, and they all attended a dual/concurrent enrollment high school program at either a comprehensive high school or an ECHS in the Denver Metropolitan area. Due to the extremely small number of students who have completed a dual/concurrent enrollment high school program in this area I have used pseudonyms to help protect the identity and anonymity of the research participants which are: Max, Ivan, Robert, Sergio, Pedro, and Juan. In addition, the names of the schools they attended have been changed and/ or omitted again for the purpose of protecting the participants' identities and anonymity. In summary, their demographic information is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

*Participant Profiles*

Name	Type of high school student attended	Completed dual/concurrent enrollment program with an Associate's degree?	Years to complete dual/concurrent program?	Currently enrolled in a four-year institution?
Max	Comprehensive	Yes	High school + 2-3 years	No
Ivan	Comprehensive	Yes	High school + 2-3 years	Completing admissions process
Robert	Comprehensive	Yes	High school + 2-3 years	Yes
Sergio	Comprehensive	Yes	High school + 2-3 years	Yes
Pedro	Early College High School	No, high school diploma only	4 years	Yes
Juan	Early College High School	Yes	3 years	Yes

Out of the six participants, Juan was the only one who was able to complete his high school diploma and his A.A. degree during the time frame proposed in the literature, which is the typical four years it takes to earn a high school diploma. Specifically, Juan was able to graduate from an ECHS a year early with a high school diploma and an A.A. degree. Pedro also attended an ECHS, and although he was able to graduate from high school within four years with his diploma, he was unable to earn his A.A. degree. By the end of his senior year, he was one semester short of earning his A.A. degree, and instead of remaining in high school for an optional fifth year, he decided to graduate on time and begin attending a four-year university. He made this decision because his long term goal was to earn a B.A. degree not an A.A. degree, so he wanted to move onto college instead of staying in high school another year. The remaining four participants all attended comprehensive high schools that offered dual/concurrent enrollment programs as one possible option for students to earn college credit while still in high school. Interestingly,

however, the structures of these programs were not conducive for students to begin taking classes at the community college until they had completed 12<sup>th</sup> grade. They were able to receive funding for their dual/concurrent enrollment courses, because their schools withheld their diplomas so they could still be considered high school students. Although it was advantageous for them to receive financial assistance to earn their A.A. degrees, it took them an additional 2 to 3 years to earn both credentials. After completing the dual/concurrent enrollment program, Robert and Sergio entered a four-year university. At the time of this study, Ivan was in the process of completing his paperwork to begin taking courses at a four-year university to complete his B.A. degree. Lastly, although Max successfully graduated from his high school's dual/concurrent enrollment program, at the time of this study he had not yet begun attending college classes to complete his B.A. degree.

## **Data Collection**

### *In-depth Interviews*

Utilizing TNI, I collected and analyzed first-generation Latino students' experiences in dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs, and inquired about their academic performance at four-year institutions. Since one participant had not yet enrolled in a four-year institution, our conversation instead focused on his future plans to complete his B.A. degree. In total, six first-generation Latino students were interviewed regarding their experiences with dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs. Each participant (with the exception of Pedro) was individually interviewed on three separate occasions for 60 to 90 minute intervals (Litoselliti, 2003; Seidman, 2006). I developed all three

interview protocols prior to meeting with the participants. All questions were semi-structured and open-ended (Seidman, 2006). The interview protocols were primarily used as a guide to help me stay on track during the actual interviews. Furthermore, the open-ended structure to the questions provided me with the flexibility to be receptive to the participants' answers; in other words, I was able to follow-up their answers with questions that were applicable to what each individual participant had to say. In addition, I feel that using this structure for the interview questions allowed the conversation to feel more natural and organic and less structured and rigid. I also felt as though my research participants began to relax half way through our first interview, and they became less self-conscious about being interviewed and began to open up and candidly talk about their educational experiences.

Through these in-depth interviews, the participants shared their unique experiences with their high schools' dual/concurrent enrollment programs. While focusing on the guiding research questions previously mentioned, the interviews were structured to help contextualize the participants' overall educational experiences, including: (a) how they learned about their high schools' dual/concurrent enrollment programs; (b) why they joined these programs, how they performed academically in these programs; (c) how they performed and/or are still performing academically at collegiate level academics; and (d) if they have plans on returning to college to complete their B.A. degrees (if applicable).

- In the first interview I asked the participants a series of questions related to their overall educational experiences both in K-12 and higher education.



I was interested in knowing if their overall educational experiences had been positive, negative, or a combination of both. In addition, I wanted to investigate whether or not they felt they had equal access to high quality college preparatory courses (Appendix B).

- In the second interview I focused on the participants' experiences in the dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs they attended.

Specifically, I was interested in gaining a better understanding as to which aspects of their high schools' dual/concurrent enrollment programs helped them gain access to four-year institutions. I was also interested in knowing whether or not the dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs they attended utilized culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy (Appendix B).

- In the third interview, for the participants who are enrolled in a university, I asked them a series of questions related to their experiences in college. I asked them how they are performing academically at a university.

Specifically, I was interested in knowing if they entered their university classes feeling well-prepared or under-prepared for college-level academics. For the two students who had not yet enrolled in a four-year institution, I asked them about their future plans to return to college to complete their B.A. degree. We also talked about some of the challenges and barriers that prevented them from enrolling in a four-year institution directly after completing a dual/concurrent enrollment program.

Furthermore, I asked all of the participants which aspects of their high

schools' dual/concurrent enrollment programs they feel should be continued and if they have any suggestions for improving these programs. The participants also had the opportunity to add any additional comments they had about their educational experiences that I may not have asked about (Appendix B).

### *Research Participants' Journals*

I asked the research participants to keep either a hand written or a word processed journal over the course of the research study. If they chose to hand write their journals I provided them with a notebook and a writing utensil. I sent them the interview questions before each in-depth interview, and I asked them to jot down ideas they had related to the research questions. In addition, to help the participants reflect on their past educational experiences, journaling also provided them with an opportunity to answer questions that were not covered during the allotted 90 minute interview sessions. In an effort to honor the participants' time I tried not to let our meetings run longer than what was stated in the informed consent form, and I did my best to stay within this the agreed upon time limit even if it meant not covering every question for that particular interview session.

During the data analysis process, I reviewed the participants' journal entries to gain a deeper understanding of their past and current lived experiences in the educational system and to gain a deeper understanding of their thought processes during the research study (Creswell, 2007). It is important to note that none of the content in these journal entries has been used in this paper. The intent of asking them to keep a journal over the course of the study was to help the participants begin to reflect on their past educational

experiences (Creswell, 2007) in their high schools' dual/concurrent enrollment programs, and to reflect on their current educational experiences in a four-year institution. I hope journaling helped the participants become more self-aware (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) of their educational experiences and the educational experiences of other first-generation Latina/o students. I also hope the self-awareness they gained from this activity will lead them to action to improve the education system in their own personal way (Beverley, 2008). I also hope the journaling and dialogue that took place during this study helps them feel empowered (Beverly, 2008) to engage in the process of creating change to the education system to one that is equal, just, and meritocratic.

#### *Researcher's Field Log*

Throughout the entire research process, I kept a field log. In this field log, I kept all e-mail correspondence with individuals I contacted to help me find participants for my study. I also kept all e-mail correspondence that took place with the research participants. In addition, I kept all notes and memos I wrote regarding any phone conversations I had with my contacts and with my research participants. The notes I took during the interviews have also been placed in my field log. Lastly, I also wrote journal entries throughout this process, and I have kept my journal entries in my field log. Throughout the writing of this paper, I have consulted multiple documents in my field log to refresh my memory of thoughts, ideas, and reflections I had during the study.

#### *Data Organization and Storage*

All in-depth interviews were recorded on microcassette tapes using an Olympus PearlCorder J300 recorder and a digital Sony audio recorder which included the

technological capability to download the recordings onto a computer hard drive. All interviews recorded on the Sony digital recorder were downloaded onto my laptop computer's hard drive. These recordings were then organized into electronic files under the participants' pseudonyms. Using a combination of the microcassette tapes and the electronic digital recording, I personally transcribed all of the in-depth interviews into word processed document on my personal computer. These transcripts were also saved electronically on my laptop's hard drive under the research participants' pseudonyms. According to Ely et al. (1991), personally transcribing interviews instead of outsourcing this part of the project helps researchers become more intimately familiar with their data. Furthermore, recording and transcribing interviews is advisable for qualitative researchers because tangible records are more accurate and reliable than memory or handwritten notes (Seidman, 2006). Transcripts also help researchers efficiently retrieve information during the data analysis process (Seidman, 2006).

In order to protect my research participants' anonymity and to safeguard the information collected during this research project, all electronic documents and audio recordings are stored on my personal laptop computer that only I use (Seidman, 2006). In addition, all digital recording devices and microcassette tapes used during this research study are being kept in a locked, fire proof safe in my home, and these devices and materials will be kept for 3 years (Seidman, 2006). Lastly, all documents containing sensitive information related to this study are being kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office.

## **Data Analysis**

### *Data Coding and Thematic Development*

I began the data coding process by printing out hardcopies of every transcript, and I read through them from beginning to end numerous times. During the first several readings, I developed descriptive categories by making notes in the margins, and underlining and circling key words and phrases (Seidman, 2006). This process produced an overwhelming number of descriptive categories. In order to make the data more manageable, I began the process of winnowing the data (Seidman, 2006). After several more readings I began to develop analytic categories (Seidman, 2006). Although I had fewer categories at this point, I still found the data unmanageable. So once again I went through the winnowing process (Creswell, 2007) until I had eight to ten analytic themes that could be given short acronyms. Using these acronyms I once again read through each transcript and wrote acronyms next to phrases, sentences, and passages that fit the different analytic themes. Next I gave each acronym a color code. This time as I read through the transcripts, I color coded the data in every single line. Now that I had all the data in each transcripts accurately coded, I created electronic word documents for each of the analytic themes. I completed this process by opening the electronic copy of each transcript, and I then highlighted, copied, and pasted the data into the correct thematic document. When I pasted the information into the thematic documents, I made sure to accurately label every passage with the participants' pseudonyms, the transcript numbers, page number(s), and the line number(s) from the original transcript from which the information was taken (Seidman, 2006). Systematically labeling the data passages in this

manner was helpful if I needed or wanted to go back and check the original transcript. Importantly, I did not cut out the data from the original transcripts because I wanted to keep these documents in their original format to help facilitate with the writing of the participants' individual narratives.

With all of the transcripts coded with analytic themes, I could begin writing the individual and collective narratives. I first wrote the individual narratives, because I wanted to honor the lived experiences and the unique voice of each participant. To help with brevity and to reduce redundancy of the findings, I wrote the individual narratives by focusing on the themes that were most salient to that individual. Next I wrote the collective narrative by focusing on the major themes that emerged across the individual cases. This is also an appropriate way to organize the final chapters of this research study, because it avoids essentializing the experiences of the research participants, but it also provides the opportunity to build solidarity among the research participants by highlighting the commonalities of their lived experiences with the education system (Beverly, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

### *Trustworthiness*

Due to the highly emotive and somewhat combative nature of TNI, it is particularly important for qualitative researchers to ensure their findings are trustworthy (Beverly, 2008). As is true with all qualitative studies, researchers have the professional responsibility to ensure that the findings or their research accurately reflect the lived experiences of the participants (Ely, et al., 1991). It is important to acknowledge that in qualitative studies all researchers have the propensity to distort and alter what has been

observed (Ely, et al., 1991; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). At the same time, qualitative researchers also need to acknowledge that all research findings are filtered through the researcher's mind's eye and, therefore, can never be entirely free of researcher bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). "Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the world of—and between—the observer and the observed" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 29). Since these distortions can happen unknowingly and unintentionally, it is important for qualitative researchers to control for these occurrences by paying attention to the following issues:

1. That we participate as closely as possible in line with the needs of our study.
2. That we make ourselves as aware as possible of the ripples caused by our participation.
3. That we attempt to counter those ripples that might hinder the participant observer relationship and, hence, the study.
4. That we describe in the report both what worked and what did not (Ely, et al., 1991, p. 47).

It is particularly important when presenting testimonio narratives that the participants' voices come to the foreground while the researcher's voice recedes to the background (Beverley, 2008).

In the life history, it is the intention of the interlocutor-recorder (the ethnographer or journalist) that is paramount; in testimonio, by contrast, it is the intention of the direct narrator, who uses (in a pragmatic sense) the possibility the ethnographic

interlocutor offer to being his or her situation to the attention of an audience—the bourgeois public sphere—to which he or she would normally not have access because of the very condition of subalternity to which the testimonio bears witness. (Beverley, 2008, p. 258)

Based on this epistemological perspective, I used member checking, peer debriefing (Ely et al., 1991), and bracketing (Creswell, 2007) to help control for my own biases that might impede my ability to capture the most comprehensive and accurate depiction of my participants' lived experiences in the U.S. education system.

### *Credibility*

Qualitative researchers use bracketing to become aware of their biases, assumptions, feelings, and preconceptions and then filter out in order to be open to their research findings (Creswell, 2007; Ely et al., 1991). This process also helps researchers to become self-aware during the research process (Creswell, 2007; Ely et al., 1991). This is important because it helps researchers reflect on their own experiences throughout the research process, and it reduces the risk of allowing their predilections from influencing their findings (Creswell, 2007; Ely et al., 1991). One way researchers can learn this technique is “to begin a project by describing their own experiences with the phenomenon and bracketing out their views before proceeding with the experiences of others” (Moustakas as cited in Ely et al, 1991, p. 60). In addition to being aware of their ontological and epistemological research perspectives, it is also important for researchers to be self-aware, since they become the research instrument in qualitative studies (Ely et al, 1991). This requires researchers to know how their own personal history, race,



ethnicity, gender, and social class will impact the research study (Ely et al., 1991). I used bracketing to write a short synopsis of my educational experience included at the end of this dissertation study (Appendix C). I also used a journal throughout the research process (Creswell, 2007; Ely et al., 1991), and all journal entries have been kept in my researcher's log (Ely et al., 1991).

### *Reliability*

*Member checking.* As a form of reliability, all transcripts were sent to the research participants as a form of member checking. The participants were asked to review the transcripts for accuracy (Ely et al., 1991). I also told the participants they could add, delete, and/or change information to the transcripts if they felt such alterations would help more accurately capture their lived experiences. When discrepancies occurred in what the participants intended to communicate and what was originally recorded and transcribed, I read through both transcripts and evaluated the content in each document (Ely et al., 1991). Instead of discarding the original transcripts, I saved an electronic copy of the revised transcript the participants sent to me.

*Peer debriefing.* During winter quarter 2010 at the University of Denver (DU) I was enrolled in a research processes course that enabled me to receive feedback on my chapters that focused on the participants' individual narratives and the collective narrative of the participants. This process of peer debriefing took place over the course of 10 weeks. The feedback I received not only focused on grammatical aspects of my paper but also on the overall conceptualization and rationalization for the inclusion and organization of specific information in my paper. This feedback was very helpful, as it

served as a way for me to step back and analyze my work from a new perspective. I used both the instructor's and my peers' feedback in the writing of the participants' individual narratives and their collective narrative.

### *Ethics*

Due to the sensitive nature of this topic and the participants' willingness to be candid during their interviews, it is critically important that I protect their identities and confidentiality as best I can. For this reason, I had the participants chose a pseudonym, and I have exclusively used these names throughout this paper. In addition, all electronic and hard copies of the transcripts and other sensitive correspondence are being stored in secured locations in my home office. I have also tried to represent their lived experiences as accurately as possible.

## **The Researcher's Role**

### *Situating the Self*

From the onset of introducing the research study and reviewing the informed consent form with the research participants, I tried to be transparent that my position on this research topic is not one of neutrality, but rather I view myself as a social justice researcher who believes in the power of agency and change with regards to the education system. I also shared with the participants that I hope the findings from this study will help improve dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs for future generations of Latina/o students and other historically underrepresented groups that continue to struggle to gain access to and persist through the higher education system. Undeniably, I was a full-participant in this research study by contributing to the co-construction of knowledge

during the in-depth interviews and also by being a supportive listener during the in-depth interviews. However, with that being said, I was also cognizant of the importance of maintaining enough professional objectivity so as not to bias the research participants' responses to the research questions. In other words, I did not want the research participants to perceive me as being cold and distant particularly because of the personal and sensitive nature of the research questions; therefore, I tried to maintain a balance between being warm and receptive to what they had to say without being overly obtrusive and leading. I found the navigation of this slippery slope to be particularly precarious, but I do not think this conundrum was unique only to my qualitative study. All qualitative research is marked by the researcher's fingerprint (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), even if ever so slightly, it is unequivocally present.

### *Building Trust*

I did my best to take the necessary time to build trusting relationships with my research participants. I also shared small portions of my personal and educational biography with the participants if they asked me specific questions or if I felt that such information would add to the depth of the conversation. This entailed sharing personal and professional information with my research participants. Specifically, I shared with most of the participants but not all, that I am Latina and a first-generation college student. I shared this information with them when they asked me pointed questions regarding why I was studying this particular topic. I know that there were other responses I could have given, but I felt as though the participants were very guarded when asking me these questions, so I hoped my response would help them feel more at ease. It is important to

note that even though I share a racial identity with my participants, also sharing the commonality of being a first-generation student, I know that this alone did not necessarily help me develop an inside perspective of my participants' lived experiences with the U.S. education system. I also built trust with my participants by using nonverbal cuing to communicate that I cared about and wanted to hear what they had to say. Lastly, I fully disclosed the objectives and goals on my research project, and I answered any questions they had about the study as honestly and openly as possible.

### *Reciprocity*

I know that I am indebted to my participants for their willingness to participate in my study. I, in part, reciprocated by offering to buy lunch, coffee, or dinner for my participants during our in-depth interviews. In addition, after the last interview had ended, I told each participant that I would be willing to remain as a resource for them as they continue to complete their college studies; particularly if they might need information about how to maneuver within the higher education system, since I have a lot of knowledge in this area. I also told them if they ever needed a tutor I would be glad to help them with their studies.

### **Analysis and Synthesis of Findings**

Testimonio narrative inquiry is a type of qualitative research methodology that focuses on the lived experiences of the research participants (Beverley, 2008). It is a unique form of narrative inquiry in that it acknowledges the uniqueness of each participant's individual experience while it gets its power from the collective story that emerges across these individual stories (Beverley, 2008). Following the tradition of TNI,

in chapter four I will first present the analysis of the participants' individual narratives of their lived experiences with their schools' dual/concurrent enrollment program. In chapter five I will present the synthesis of the participants' collective narrative with these programs that emerged across their individual stories.

This research study would not exist without their stories and their willingness to share their lived experiences with me, and I am very grateful that they trusted me and shared their stories with me. Therefore, the remaining chapters of this dissertation will focus their stories and their voices, and I have attempted to portray their stories as accurately as possible.

### **Limitations**

When I first conceptualized this research study, I envisioned the inclusion of both Latina and Latino voices, but unfortunately I was unable to find Latina students who fit the participant profile who could participate in the study. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be representative of their lived experiences with dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs. There might be several hypothetical reasons why I was unable to find dual/concurrent enrollment high school Latina graduates which are: 1) Since these programs are a relatively new strategy aimed at helping Latina/o students in the Denver Metropolitan area graduate with an A.A. degree in order to persist to a B.A. degree, perhaps there are Latina students in the pipeline who have not graduated from these programs. In other words, the timing of my study might be slightly ahead of the curve. Within the next couple of years there might be a significant number of Latina students who have successfully completed these programs. This is an area that has great

potential for further study; and 2) Latina students might overall be significantly underrepresented in four-year institutions compared to their male peers. This is also an area that needs further research. Although this is a limitation to my study, I do not think that the findings should be discarded, because I feel that the population I was able to talk to about dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs in the Denver Metropolitan area at this particular time was representative of the overall general experience Latinas/os are having with these programs. This position is based on the commonalities that emerged across the participants' narratives. The common themes that emerged from the participants stories indicates that Latino students are experiencing the education system in similar ways, and it is quite possible that Latina students are also having similar experiences, but, again, this is an area that needs to be studied in greater depth.

### **Summary**

This chapter began with the rationale for using qualitative research methodology for this study. Specifically, in this chapter I outlined the specific methods I used in the data collection process. I included a clear description of the information I was trying to gather based on the open-ended interview protocols I developed. Next, I described the process I used to code the data, winnow the data, and to develop analytic themes. Then I described the methods I used to build trust and the methods I used to bracket my emotions, feelings, and presuppositions so that I was able minimize the impact the effect I might personally have on the data collection process, the data analysis process, and on the data synthesis process. Furthermore, I discussed how trustworthiness was established

for my research project. Lastly, I discussed my role in the project and how I gained access to my participants and how I built trust and reciprocity with them.

## **Chapter Four: Individual Testimonial Narratives**

### **Introduction**

Chapter four presents the individual testimonio narratives of my research participants. In total I interviewed six Latino students for this research project. To help organize this chapter, I have divided it into three parts. In part one I will present Max and Ivan's individual testimonial narratives. The commonality between Max and Ivan is they both graduated from a dual/concurrent enrollment program at a large comprehensive high school, and at the time of this study they were not attending classes at a four-year postsecondary institution. In part two I will present Robert and Sergio. The commonality between these two students is they both graduated from a dual/concurrent enrollment program at a large comprehensive high school, and at the time of this study they were both attending a four-year postsecondary institution. Lastly in part three, I will present Pedro and Juan. The commonality between these two students is they both graduated from an ECHS, and at the time of this study they were both attending a four-year postsecondary institution.

### **Presentation of Individual Testimonio Narratives**

Testimonio narrative inquiry is a type of qualitative research methodology that focuses on the lived experiences of the research participants (2008). It is a unique form of narrative inquiry in that it acknowledges the uniqueness of each participant's individual experience while it gets its power from the collective story that emerges across these individual stories (Beverly, 2008). Following the tradition of TNI, I will first present the



participants' individual stories of their experiences with their schools' dual/concurrent enrollment program. In the subsequent chapter I will present the synthesis of the participants' collective experiences with these programs.

In order to help the reader establish a clear context of my interaction with the participants, I will create a narrative depicting our face-to-face interaction including a description of the research setting. These narratives will become portraits which will enable the reader to visualize the research setting and the face-to-face interaction that took place between the research participants and me. The setting-up of this initial context is being presented from my personal perspective and, as such, it should not be assumed that the research participants would describe our first encounter in the exact same manner. I acknowledge that these encounters have been filtered through my mind's eye and are therefore my own unique experience. But again keeping with the tradition of TNI what is of utmost importance is the ability to understand each of the research participants' lived experiences. One way these experiences can be accurately portrayed is to allow the research participants' voices to come to the foreground while my voice, as the narrator of these stories, recedes to the background. Therefore, after the initial context of the research setting has been established I will present the research participants voice through rich descriptive quotes.

## Part One

### *Max: Navigating Pathways to the Future*

Max was the first participant I had the opportunity to meet. I initially received a phone number for Max through an individual who works at one of the local scholarship foundations designed to help underrepresented students gain access to four-year postsecondary institutions. The day after I received permission from the University of Denver's (DU) Institutional Review Board, I called the phone number I had for Max. To my surprise, it was not Max's phone number but his mother's work number. After a cordial and brief conversation with Silvia (pseudonym) she gave me another number where I could reach Max.

During our initial phone conversation, Max expressed interest in participating in my research study but explained that he would not be able to meet with me for several weeks since he was in the process of moving. At the conclusion of our first phone conversation, I told Max I would send him the informed consent form and the interview questions via e-mail to review before our first meeting. Several weeks lapsed before we were able to set-up a time and place to meet. Since Max was working in the mountains and did not have a vehicle, I agreed to meet him at his workplace after he got off work.

Before the day of our meeting I mapped out my drive and determined that it would take two and a half hours to reach his location, so on the day of our first meeting I set-out early and gave myself plenty of time to spare. But before leaving my house, I made sure all the materials I would need for the interview were packed including an extra digital recording device, extra microcassette tapes, extra batteries for my recording

devices, and of course extra writing utensils and paper. Although I had printed out directions from MapQuest, I still input the address of my destination into my SUV's GPS system, and after double checking that all of my research materials were in place, only then did I head out for my meeting with Max in the Rocky Mountains.

The trip up the mountain was beautiful and I enjoyed the drive immensely! The distance and the time it took to reach Max's location provided me with the opportunity to rehearse the questions I was going to ask and to visualize how the conversation might unfold. After an hour of mentally preparing for my meeting, I began to relax, so I turned up the music in my vehicle and enjoyed the rest of my drive. By the time I reached my intended destination I was feeling confident that my meeting with Max would go well, but admittedly, I was still a little nervous since this was my very first meeting with any of my research participants. I wanted to make a good first impression, and I was aware of the importance of being able to quickly establish trust and respect with my research participant in a very limited amount of time.

I arrived on time and Max was standing outside the lodge waiting for me. He graciously greeted me and after a quick face-to-face introduction we entered the lodge. We found a comfortable spot to sit down and talk in the dining hall. On the opposite side of the entrance to the lodge was a 50'x50' wall of glass windows with a view of the entire mountain range. It was now close to dusk and the color of the setting sun against the mountain ridge was serene and surreal. In a word the setting for our meetings was—breathtaking! After enjoying the magnificence of our surroundings for brief moment, I

quickly got back on task since I had a lot of ground to cover in a very limited amount of time. After finding a comfortable place to sit down Max began relaying his story.

*I only attended three schools during elementary, middle, and high school. They were all in the same state and in the same neighborhood, so I didn't jump around schools at all. Overall, I would say my experiences in school were good. I always found school fairly easy (laugh) in terms of the curriculum with the exception of a few teachers here and there, but overall it was fairly easy. I grew up with the people I met at school and my neighborhood so I had a lot of positive experiences. I had some negative experiences here and there, just (laugh) run into people you don't agree with, but in terms of the institution I didn't have too many negative experiences.*

*Interestingly there were a large percentage of Hispanics at all three schools I attended. And the institution of the school district I attended they kind of placed especially first-generation students, from not only Latino but all different types of races, into English as a Second Language classes. So I would say that my race kind of played a role in the education I received. And with me being a Latino mixed in with a bunch of different races most people would describe me as a Caucasian or some people might describe me as a Latino if they see my last name. So I guess I could kind of go back and forth between those two groups of people. To clarify, I am fourth-generation here in the United States from my dad's side of the family, but if I go back to college to pursue my Bachelor's degree I would be considered a first-generation college student. But in terms of culturally I would say that I identify with the Hispanic culture more from growing-up*

*in the neighborhood that I did rather than it having to do with me being a fourth-generation Latino.*

*To give you a clearer picture of my neighborhood there were a lot of Mexican restaurants, and the fashion and the culture had a Mexican flair to it. Still to this day Mexican food is my favorite type of food. And even though my mom is white, and doesn't have a trace of Hispanic lineage in her, she probably cooks Mexican food the most out of anyone I know. And so I think the culture grew onto me more from just the area and being around a lot of first and second-generation Hispanics that have a lot of cultural identity than say people who grow-up in a typical suburban neighborhood. But in terms of my race and how I was treated in the classroom I would say it was equal to all of my other classmates.*

*Middle school I would say was a bit of a struggle for me, not necessarily because I was being treated badly by the teachers or administration but just because I wasn't really applying myself academically. I wouldn't say that I was a bad student and I didn't fail any classes, but I just wasn't jumping higher than the bar. I would say that high school was a turning point for me in my education. I really started to apply myself academically, and I was even getting good grades in Advanced Placement (AP) classes. At this point my parents started encouraging me to go to college, and they basically said it would be a waste if I didn't go. But I knew it was going to be tough for us financially to afford a college education. My parents have a lot of medical debt due to an accident my dad was in. On paper it looks like they make a lot of money when they are actually in debt; it doesn't look like it but they are. And on the FASFA they don't compensate for*

*debt to income ratio. I remember one of the high school counselors looked over my FASFA, and he said, "Well, you might be able to squinch a little here or squinch a little there." I can't remember what the god awful number was for our family contribution, but I sure didn't have it. So he basically told me I might as well wait until I am 23—until you're not under your parents anymore and considered an independent.*

*Other than that one time of looking at my FASFA, my high school counselors had little involvement in helping us plan for college. I remember this empty filing cabinet they had in their office and inside it there was just this little file that was supposed to be for scholarships. But there were only a couple of scholarships in it like the Toyota scholarship, the Burger King scholarship, and some lottery scholarships. Our counselors mostly focused on the Daniels Fund, but being in the financial bracket my parents were in, I didn't qualify for it. So in terms of other types of scholarships there wasn't really much proactiveness on their part. The only times we were scheduled meetings with our counselors was during class changes or half way through the school year to register for next year's classes. That was pretty much the only time we talked to our counselors, so it was never like they would call Joe-Shmow down to their office to see what educational path he is on. But then again I could have done more on my part. Ultimately I just didn't save properly and my parents never set-up a bank account to put money aside. I guess it was just the position I was in—not planning well. I could have planned better for it. I could have saved up more money. I guess I was just stupid and I wasn't really thinking. I didn't know how much you have to put yourself out there in terms of scholarships. You know I would have filled out one a day if I could go back in time.*

*So when our principal started talking about the dual/concurrent enrollment program they were going to be offering at our high school, I was interested. Well, no that's not exactly true. To be honest I didn't want to do it at first because I wanted to go to a four-year university. But after thinking about the program some more, I realized this was a sure shot way to get some college credit, and it was basically a free ticket to college! The first time it was pitched to everyone was during an assembly to start off the school year in the fall of 2004 which was the beginning of my senior year. He started the assembly by asking everyone who wanted to go to college to stand-up. Pretty much everyone stood up except for a few handfuls of kids who for whatever reason didn't stand. Then he said some statistics about college, and he started asking people to sit down if they didn't meet college requirements or if they didn't know what they were doing for college. And then he said, "Well, what if I could tell you that every single person sitting down right now in this auditorium could go to college?" And you know pretty much everyone was sitting down at that point. It was like a really big feeling and it was really cool.*

*The principal also explained some of the loose criteria to get into the program. Specifically we were told that you had to have a 60% attendance for the past couple of semesters and a C grade point average. We also had to take either the Accuplacer or the ACT to see what level of classes we placed into. The students who scored low on those tests were placed into prerequisites courses like the 030, 060, or the 090 series of classes which were basically high school level courses but they were taught at the community college by college professors. Otherwise if you scored high enough on the placement tests*

*you could start taking college level courses. So pretty much anyone who met those requirements was admitted to the program, but one of the stipulations were you had to be 20 years old or younger in order for them to pay for your classes. So, I think there were some people in the program who may have failed a couple of years, and let's say were 20 years old at the time of graduation and may not have been able to finish the program. But if you were 18 years old and didn't fail any years, they would pay for the two years. If you passed the class you didn't have to pay for it. The funds were just divvied out by class. But if you failed a class, you had to put up that money. I remember my one friend failed a math class and he had to just pay that class back. But they paid for him to retake it. But I think people became a lot wiser after the first semester to drop a class before the deadline or else you might get a big bill. That is just part of the harsh reality (laugh) of enrolling for a class. But I don't think any student there in that whole entire program put up the money up front. Books were paid for too, but we had to give them back to the high school when we finished the program.*

*Another aspect of the program I liked was when it was originally pitched to us it wasn't just about getting an Associate's degree, because that doesn't have too much ramifications in the real world in terms of employment. The program was structured with the intention of helping us transfer to a four-year institution to complete our Bachelor's degree. But unfortunately after the first year, the program changed. The principal left for a new position and he took that counselor with him to his new job. And I think it was just becoming a burden on the school, but definitely after that there was less contact with the high school administration and with the counselor who was overseeing our program to*



*go on to a four-year. I remember I had to argue with my community college counselor about getting a credit to graduate with my Associate's degree, and I guess it was just how she was reading it, because the course plan changed after we entered the program. Anyway I remember just having to really combat with her even to get my Associate's degree.*

*Reflecting back on my academic experience in high school, I definitely think there were certain teachers who did a better job preparing me for college. It kind of depended on what classes one would take at the high school, because a lot of the regular classes, the non-AP classes, were really laid back. The ones I took I didn't find them to be challenging at all. And I guess the administration had to focus on, which is quite unfortunate, is the CSAP scores of our school. And especially those non-accelerated classes were pretty much just training grounds for the CSAP tests. They actually had these CSAP test prep books, and there were a lot of worksheets. And they had a lot of mindless activities from these books that were geared toward the CSAP tests. They were like all these mock CSAP things all the friging time. Even in some of the AP classes. I think the principal would make them do it. He was pushing a lot of the CSAP stuff on the AP teachers as well, and they (laugh) kind of didn't like that. But that's what I liked about the AP classes—that they weren't just CSAP review. In those classes we actually received a real book, not just a CSAP prep book. But sometimes the principal would come into our AP classes and stand in the back of the room for a while just to make sure the teachers were doing the prescribed curriculum and not just having an open ended discussion. And I think it really frustrated the teachers and it was kind of like stepping on*

*their toes a little bit. I think some good teachers left our high school because of that as well, unfortunately. But I think it had more to do with the state wanting us to pass the test, or--they were going to” shut you down”!*

*And I just think high school was fast track to graduation. If one wanted, if they didn't apply to AP classes, it was really easy to graduate. And so it was a cake walk and the standards in regular classes was really low. So compared to the regular classes I would say the AP classes were pretty challenging; well,(laugh) challenging enough. I think I was challenged a tad bit more at the community college, and I did okay in my community college classes. But I still had doubts that I wasn't receiving the same volume of education as I would at a four-year institution. So I would say it was a combination of my AP classes and the community college classes that have helped prepare me for the next level of college. So I feel they both really prepared me, and I hope they prepared me for the more intense classes to come.*

*The teaching strategies of my high school and my community college teachers for the most part were pretty similar with the exception of a few here and there. It was like a lot of group work and there wasn't much just taking notes and lecturing. It was a lot of just interacting with classmates. I really liked it because I don't mind hard work, but I can see how other students might benefit more from a different type of learning. And sometimes I think when I am doing group activities I have to tell myself to shut up a little bit and not run the whole thing myself, and let someone else figure something out. And especially if they are socializing I'll maybe pick on them a little bit and say, “Well, what do you think about this or that?” Because I don't want to do all of the work and I don't*

*want to be the only one to pass the class either, so I really liked the group work activities. It was beneficial for me, but I could definitely see how it might not cater to other students.*

*In terms of the cultural relevance of the curricula of my classes, I would say I was exposed. I think the high school really geared its curriculum toward cultural relevance, and it had a lot of pride in its ethnic diversity and background. So I think the high school focused more on the demographics they were dealing with. And at the community college the demographic was a bit more diverse and things weren't so much oriented towards Mexican-American history. And like I said I kind of identify with Mexican and Hispanic culture in general. Just from growing-up in the area that I did. But my specific cultural outlook or cultural model incorporates more than just that; I see my culture as so mixed that cultural relevance is kind of a hard concept for me to grasp I guess. So I can dip into both and really get into to both at the same time. And I do think the cultural relevance aspect of the curricula has played a role in preparing me for four-year classes. But I think what has helped prepare me more is just constantly doing homework and just being in that state of constantly reading and writing and sharpening those skills.*

*I think one of the strengths of the dual/concurrent enrollment program is it gave everyone an opportunity to go to college. You just had to show that you were going to put forth a little bit of effort and they would give you a chance. And I think everyone should have the chance at a four-year level or even more. A main weaknesses of the program is it felt like it was spinning its wheels a lot times like having special circumstances to get our books and stuff. Another weakness was you weren't forced to branch away from your*

*high school connections and I think it hindered some people's growth in a way. I think it would have worked better if it wasn't called a dual enrollment program, if it was just looked at separately and if taxpayers would just accept the bill. To have the state pay for college I think would work better because it would help work out some of the kinks in the education system instead of having what I call beating around the bush by only having high school paid for. Why not just flat out have the state or the United States pay for college and not beat around the bush. It would kind of circumvent some of the issues of the mindset of the government saying, "Oh well. We only pay of K-12 education." Because there are other countries that have a flat out better education system than the one we got. So if we want to be number one we have to step it up. That is why I think restructuring the education system, especially the higher education system, to where student can go to whatever college they want in whatever state they want, it would just mix it up a whole lot more and make things a lot more colorful.*

*Overall I would recommend the dual/concurrent enrollment program to any student, not only Latina/o students, but to any student who is in a situation where maybe they didn't apply themselves through high school or maybe they were in a situation where the atmosphere of a high school is one where you can fail a whole year and still graduate on time. I just think everyone should be given the opportunity to get out of that slower moving stream. I definitely think that having it to where high school students are taking college classes is kind of beating around the bush. I don't want to say it's cheating the taxpayers, but they kind of don't have much of a say in how the money's being spent. I think restructuring the education system on a grand level would probably be more*

*beneficial, but in the mean time if this program is being offered, definitely jump on board and take advantage of it. I think the more support we show for a system like this and the more students are succeeding at the program I think America is going to be more willing to restructure the education system to the extent that it needs to be.*

*Although I am not currently enrolled in college classes I am still planning on going back to school to get my Bachelor's degree. I don't feel hesitant to reengage in the college admissions process because I know I can figure my way through it. Applying and registering is pretty easy, especially since I took a class at a four-year institution when I was in the dual enrollment program through the inter-institutional transfer process. So I have already been through the enrollment process on my own, and I feel like I could do it again. It is just a matter of navigating the pathway to college and being able to afford it.*

*Ivan: Visualizing Academic Success*

Ivan was the only participant that I came into contact with through the snowballing technique. I called him on the day I received his phone number. In the voice message I left on his phone, I quickly left my name, how I got his phone number, the context of my research, and my contact information. Ivan returned my phone call a couple of days later. He told me he would be on campus meeting with his college counselor on a late Friday afternoon. We agreed to meet after his meeting in front of the campus library at 5:30.

By the time I came into contact with Ivan, I had my interviewing routine down. The day of our meeting, I packed my interviewing materials into my car and I was able to head out of the house an hour and a half early. Although the traffic was heavier than normal, I still made it to campus on time. Because it was late afternoon, I was lucky enough to find a parking spot along the street, saving me a couple of dollars on parking. As I began my ten minute walk to campus, I could feel the crisp autumn air against my face. It was a calm, quiet evening on campus. The peacefulness of the walk gave me time to reflect on my accomplishments over the past several months, and I was feeling confident that my meeting with Ivan would go well.

When I approached the library, I could see a couple of people standing around in front of the building on the stairs leading up to the entrance. Although I did not know what Ivan looked like, I told him I would be wearing a visor with the school logo across the front of it. Ivan was the first person I made eye contact with. When he saw me he smiled and asked if I was Michelle. After our short introduction, we went into the library

and found a quiet place to talk, which was rather easy since it was late Friday afternoon. Our conversation began much in the same manner as with the other participants. We went over the informed consent form and I answered any questions he had that pertained to the study. As with the other participants, we began by talking about his overall educational experience.

*I attended four schools during my formative education—one elementary, two middle, and one high school. The first two schools I attended which were my elementary school and my first middle school were in located in the southwestern United States. Then when I was twelve and going into the seventh grade I moved to Colorado and this is where I finished high school. Overall I would describe my educational experiences as positive. All the teachers I ever had were cooperative and they seemed like they cared and wanted the best for me. I was also always pretty involved at school; therefore, I always got along with everybody.*

*The only negative aspect of school was that the curriculum focused on trying to get CSAP scores up. Which I think is preparation to take a test, and I don't think that was helpful at all. And our high school counselors never talked to us about going to college. They just worried about whether students had enough credits to graduate. They also never had any college fairs for us only job fairs. It was also one of my teachers who helped me fill-out my FASFA, but there were no workshops on how to get financial aid or scholarships to continue on to college. Slowly things started to change towards my senior year they started to focus more on getting students prepared for college, but before that the culture of the school was not conducive to helping students develop a college bound*

*attitude. It wasn't until the introduction of the dual/concurrent enrollment program that our school culture started to change. Before that program, it was only the teachers you were closest to that would talk to you about college. But even then, it was only the kids who were really involved at school who were able to get close enough to teachers who would encourage them to go onto college. But let's say the kids who worked through high school and who were only at school for a couple of hours--they probably weren't exposed to any of the teachers who encouraged kids to go to college. But basically, if you really wanted to do it and you were persistent, were raised properly, and had a backbone, then you would do what you want. Mostly I think it is all about individual effort, and that is how I have succeeded. More support is necessary, but unfortunately the support just isn't there. And like I said, I think the entire school administration tried to do a better job of pushing everyone towards college. Plus if you really look you can find the resources and the people to help you. It's just going to be a little tougher, but you can still do it if you want to.*

*The first time I heard about the dual/concurrent enrollment program at my school was during my senior year, but I wasn't able to start taking college classes until the summer after my senior year. What happened was the school withheld my diploma so I could continue to be considered a high school student, so I could get my Associate's degree paid for. When I was getting ready to graduate from high school, I was considering going to college to play football, but when the principal started talking to us about how much more money we would make with a Bachelor's degree and just giving us real life examples of the benefits of the program, I chose this path instead. I thought it*



would be a good opportunity to have two years of my college paid for, plus they were going to pay for our books. And I knew right away that I wanted an accounting degree so my counselor at the community college put me on the path right away of earning a Business Administration Associate's degree. I also went to the university and got a course plan for a Bachelor's degree in accounting so I would know what classes I needed to take at the community college that were guaranteed to transfer over to the four-year.

When I reflect on my academic preparation for the courses I was taking at the community college, I think I came in at a disadvantage because my writing skills were not up to par with the other students who were going to college because of the high school I went to. There are a lot of high schools that aren't funded like others; therefore, the preparation is not the same. It's just that's how it is, and that is how it was for us because I have asked a lot of my old classmates and they say the same thing that once you go to college (laugh) there's other people that might know a little bit more than you. But I mean you can get by. You can definitely get by and you can do your best, but we are always going to be at a disadvantage, because we didn't get the same education that everybody else did. So as far as the high school curriculum, I think it needs to get a little tougher in high school. Maybe the freshman and sophomore year they can start getting a little tougher as that when they do get to that junior or senior year when they enroll in the dual/concurrent enrollment program. It's not that big of a step and it's a smoother transition.

I also think they need to start teaching kids critical thinking skills in high school rather than having students work in groups. When students get to college they need to be

*able to work and think critically on their own rather than depending on that one smart kid who is sitting next to them that knows it all and usually gets the good grades and other kids just feed off of that and it gives them an excuse to slack. So students need to be able to think critically on their own and if they mess up then the teacher just corrects them but you keep moving forward. So the teacher and the students keep moving forward in steps and you can keep going like that throughout the whole year, and that contributes to the curriculum. That's how the curriculum should be, and critical thinking skills should be taught in steps. When I was in high school I never even heard of critical thinking. I didn't know about that until I got to college. In high school it wasn't emphasized at all. For example, in my high school the way it was done most of the time was you would actually read the book in class, so the teacher would just sit there and pick on people to read because in my high school kids actually wouldn't do the reading. Why? Because they didn't feel the need to; there was no necessity to read the novel or whatever story you were reading because at the end of the story were the questions, and all you had to do was read the questions and go back in the book and find the answer and there you are. You didn't have to read it to get the right answer which is part of what contributed to me never reading in high school. The teachers never forced us to use critical thinking skills and it is necessary to learn those skills in high school. But I did notice that the community college teachers emphasized critical thinking skills and I think that was helpful. If I hadn't been exposed to those college professors I don't know if I would be prepared to take the next step in college.*

*The content of the curricula was straightforward and traditional. It was pretty much what everybody learns. Usually teachers will just teach what's in the book which is pretty traditional and most teachers don't deviate from that. I think it would have been helpful if the curricula at our school were more culturally relevant especially considering the majority of students, probably 85%, were Hispanic. I think it would be particularly helpful if Hispanics were represented positively in the curriculum because kids can feed off of that. If they see somebody has already accomplished it and it's someone of their own ethnicity then they can definitely see themselves being successful. It's tough being Hispanic because you are forced to learn just like everybody else but your first language may not be English, so you are at a disadvantage right away. For example, it is going to be very difficult for your vocabulary to get close to somebody who has learned English when they were young. They have always spoken English, and they have never had to learn another language. So I feel like Hispanic students are forced to be perfect in two different cultures. Which brings me back to the point of representing Hispanics positively in the curriculum, I think this would definitely help them succeed not only in school but it would help them overcome the negative expectation society has placed on them so they can move forward and succeed in life.*

*In addition I think the dual/concurrent enrollment program is another important component to helping Hispanic kids continue on with their education to get their Bachelor's degree, because it provides them with both the support and the push they need to keep going. Maybe not all ethnic groups need the extra support and push but it is especially important for Hispanic students because they always have a doubt in their*

*minds that is constantly playing and it is saying, "Oh man! Can I do it? Nobody in my family has ever done it. Is it possible that I can?" Even though they are really smart there is always that ever present doubt in their minds. They're not like other students where it is expected of them and it has always been expected of them to go to college. In their world it's normal, but it is not the norm for Hispanic students to go to college. So I really do feel that the dual/concurrent enrollment program provided students with the support and the push, and I felt like the program kept reinforcing the message that "it's going to be okay. You are going to be successful. We'll help you get through your first two years of college." And I heard a lot of my classmates say, "Oh, if I can pass the first semester then I think I will be okay in college." Unfortunately for some students it was too tough and they ended up dropping out of the program, but I think for the students who did well in their first couple of classes they started to believe in themselves and in their abilities to do well in college. And it is just that positive feedback and that positive reinforcement is what a lot of Hispanic students really need to be able to say, "Hey, I can do this. Even though I'm the first in my family to go to college I'm going to be okay. I am going to be successful." And if this type of program helps more Hispanics get through school and it helps them to get their mentality straight so they can understand that it is not impossible to go to college and succeed—then I definitely think this program should be offered to more Hispanic students.*

*One way to get more Hispanic students enrolled in this program is to start talking to them about college in eighth grade. It would also be helpful if middle school students understood how the dual/concurrent enrollment program works, so they can start*

*preparing themselves early on to do well on the Accuplacer test. One reason I think some Hispanic kids at my school didn't enroll in the program was because they tested below college level on the Accuplacer test and it was going to take them a whole year to get up to the level where they could even start accessing college classes. So that can be a big deterrent for students, but if teachers as early as eighth grade start talking about college and beating it into the kids' heads, they will be more likely to go to college. It's too late to start talking to kids about it during their senior year because a lot of those kids have already made up their minds about getting a job after high school. But if students have already heard about the program by their sophomore year and the teachers are telling you, telling you, and telling you to enroll in the dual/concurrent enrollment program then they will be ready to start taking college classes during their junior year which makes it possible for them to graduate from high school with their diploma and an Associate's degree. And if you are always thinking, thinking, and thinking about going to college then you can see yourself going and doing it. What helps even more is when you have taken your first college classes and you have already seen yourself successful and you have already been through the process at the high school level by the time you get to college you can say, "I've already done this, and I know how to do this!" Again it's giving students that self confidence and helping them develop that internal dialogue that is telling them, "I can do this! I can be successful!" It helps Hispanic students visualize success at the college level.*

## Part Two

### *Robert: A Life Changing Opportunity*

My initial contact with Robert was via the telephone. As I dialed his number and listened to the phone ring, I kept hoping that he would answer, but no such luck--I got his voice mail instead. In less than a minute and a half I introduced myself, explained how I obtained his phone number, briefly explained my study, and asked him to call me. I was very excited when he returned my phone call the following day. During our phone conversation, I once again went through the litany of information that I left on his voice mail. At the closing of our conversation, he agreed to meet with me on Saturday afternoon at a coffee shop near his home.

On the day of our meeting, I spent the morning going through my preparation routine. I checked my equipment, packed extra batteries and tapes, and placed all of the necessary paperwork in my bag. Before leaving the house, I mapped out my route using MapQuest. I determined that it would take me forty-five minutes to an hour to reach my destination. As I headed out, I felt confident that I would be able to easily find our meeting place, especially since I had frequented this general location on many occasions when I was younger. Alas, one can only imagine my surprise when I got to the designated city only to find that it no longer looked like the city I once knew as a child. The mall I was familiar with had been torn down and replaced by a new outlet shopping district. And, of course, in my surprised state of mind, I took a wrong turn and got lost, and I realized I was now running behind schedule. I pulled into a parking lot and called Robert. No answer. So I sent him a text message telling him I was lost but I should be at the

coffee shop within the next five minutes. He said no problem and he would grab a drink while he waited. I then input the address of the coffee shop into my phone's navigation system, and bam—I was back on track.

As I turned onto the designated street, I began searching for a spot to park. I pulled into the first metered parking spot I could find, and to my delight I did not have to feed the meter on the weekend. Perfect. I scanned the area for the coffee shop and spotted it across the street and up one block. I quickly grabbed my things and began jogging up the street. I entered the coffee shop out of breath and out of sorts. As I stood in the entry way scanning the establishment and trying to catch my breath, I once again realized that I had no idea what Robert looked like.

Over to my left in the corner I noticed a young man sitting alone. Trying to act cool as a cumber I walked over and asked if his name was Robert. Relief washed over me as he smiled and said yes. I apologized for getting lost and being a few minutes late. I explained I thought I knew where I was going because I used to frequent that location often when I was younger, but I had not been there since it had been transformed and rebuilt into an entirely new shopping outlet. He smiled and said it wasn't a problem. I quickly found it very easy to talk to Robert, so we sat and chit-chatted for a few minutes before discussing the specifics of the study.

I began our meeting by reviewing the informed consent form, and I asked him if he had any questions before we began. He asked me if I could explain how I came up with my research topic. Specifically, he was interested in knowing if the topic was assigned to me or if I chose the topic myself, and if so, why? I explained that it was a

topic I had chosen and I briefly explained why it was of interest to me. After this brief discussion Robert began telling me his educational story.

*All the schools I attended were in Colorado. I attended the same elementary school for five years, the same middle school for three years, and the same high school for four years with an additional three years to complete my Associate's degree. If I had to generalize my overall educational experience I would say that the school staff was pretty nurturing, but I also think there was a lot of social promotion taking place. I think some teachers just let students get by and passed them onto the next grade without having to put a lot of effort into one's school work. So in the regular classes the standard was pretty low. For example, most of the time the teachers would just follow the course structure that had already been established and they just tried to reinforce the same ideas that had already been confirmed. So it was pretty much just taking in information and being able to memorize it and there was no focus on critical thinking skills. But fortunately I think I had some of the better teachers because I was in a lot of Advanced Placement classes. Those teachers particularly focused on writing which helped me because I was readily able to express myself through writing and I knew all the grammar tricks. I knew how to structure the paper and I knew how to express myself through writing. All of which put me in a good position when I started taking classes at the community college. And the English classes I took at the community college really helped me transition into a four-year institution. So if it wasn't for the AP classes that I took, I don't think I would have been as prepared for college level classes.*



*But to be honest I didn't intentionally take AP classes to help prepare me for college, and I really didn't have any aspirations to continue my education after high school. I kind of found out about our school's dual/concurrent enrollment program vicariously through some of my friends. Initially I only joined the program because a few of my friends were doing it and it was an easy way for me to keep in close contact with them after finishing our high school classes. So I guess you could say I pretty much jumped on the band wagon, and it was truly my friends who influenced me to pursue a postsecondary education. The program was also very easy to get into. It was truly one of the easiest applications to fill-out. All we had to do was get a few signatures and fill-out some personal information and that was it. We weren't required to submit any letter of recommendation from our teachers or anyone else in our lives. But it is also somewhat ironic in that because the program was extremely accessible, the forms were extremely easy to fill-out, and there was no hardship gaining access to community college classes, students didn't take the program seriously. When the school administration presented the program to everyone at school they did mention that we might be able to earn an Associate's degree and possibly transfer onto a four-year institution, but they really didn't elaborate on what we were getting ourselves into. I figured it would just be a couple more years of high school but that was not the case at all. In hindsight I can say that I went into the whole situation without a clue. I think from the administration's perspective they probably thought that students would realize that a college education would jump start their careers and jump start their lives, and help them get out of those downtrodden communities they were in. I just think the overall importance of the*

*program could have been stressed a little bit more, and I think the administration could have taken the time to pull a lot of us aside to figure out what our intentions were for enrolling in the program. They could have also put more effort into helping us realize the incredible opportunity the program offered us. I think they took it for granted that students would come to this realization on their own, but I think that sometimes first-generation Latinas/os can't see past their current situation in life.*

*On the other hand I want to say that I think the actual existence of the program was very positive in and of itself. It allowed a lot of kids that don't even think about postsecondary education with the opportunity to get into something whether it is a trade or with the intention of garnering more knowledge. It just offered the potential to get these kids out of the rut of picking up a typical 9-5 job, and I would say falling victim to that really boring monotonous sort of lifestyle that can be so rigid at time. I definitely think it helped a lot of these kids out considering there is not much opportunity where I come from. So I think these types of programs are particularly beneficial for Latina/o students because it gives them the opportunity to look past the situation they are in and to realize that there is more to life than the mundane. A lot of Latina/o students don't realize that there is more to education than just graduating from high school, and that there is a lot of opportunity around us. There is great affluence in this country, but Latina/o students don't realize that all they have to do is put forth a little hard work and if they are extremely focused they can be living out their dreams. Plus I think going to college just helps you become more aware of your surroundings and you become a better person in general because you can approach situations with a critical thinking mind, and you are*

*just better equipped at approaching anything you encounter in life. For me personally the classes I have taken have opened me up to several other perspectives and different ways of thinking. And the education I have received has pretty much given me the ability to look past what I have been so accustomed to my entire life and I have realized that there is so much out there and there is so much potential to not only make a small change but to pretty much change the entire situation of my life.*

*Although my mother is fully supportive of me going to college I think there is a little bit of a conflict between what my parents think about a college education and what I think and expect from getting a college education. I just wish they were more understanding of the point that a college education isn't just pursued to get into a lucrative situation, and there is a lot more to a college education than making money. I think it's really an exceptional growth process that one can allow oneself to go through. And if a person is open-minded enough to go through any sort of curiosity they have and explore any sort of objections they have then going to college can be an amazing process that allows one to build a strong sense of character. Therefore, a college education helps prepare you to readily address any sort of situation one might encounter in life, so it's not so much about being able to land a job when you are done so you can do the whole monotonous forty hour work week and pretty much just save up for retirement. But speaking from my parents' perspective they weren't really able to encourage me to go to college because they didn't know what sort of potentials laid before me, and they really didn't know how a college education could be played out for me. And because my parents didn't pursue any sort of postsecondary education they really didn't know what kind of*

*institutions there were. But they did encourage me in the sense that they always asked me not to settle, and to get into something that could better my situation foremost and hopefully our entire family's situation and I guess I am kind of looked at as the supposed benefactor of the family.*

*Sergio: Vital Connections*

My first contact with Sergio was over the telephone. We decided that the best time to meet would be on a Thursday after his afternoon class and before his evening class, so we decided to meet from 4:00-5:15p.m. Since our meeting was going to be a tight fit between his classes, I agreed to meet him in front of the campus library. Prior to our meeting I once again mapped out my route, packed all of my recording equipment, and all the necessary paperwork for our meeting. But before heading downtown I had to pick-up my son from school so he could babysit his little sister for a couple hours before my husband got home from work.

So, I put my five year old daughter in the car and headed over to the high school. I arrived at the school by 2:40, and even though school didn't get out until 2:45, it was already mayhem. A long line of cars with parents waiting to pick-up their kids had already formed in front of the school. Ironically, I could not help but think to myself that I was surprised at how many parents need to pick-up their kids after school--they should make their kids ride the bus. After a quick chuckle, I glanced at the clock and I was now fairly concerned that this did not appear to be an efficient method of ensuring Rob would be home by 3:10 so I could head toward campus with enough leeway in case I encountered traffic on the highway, which always seems to be my misfortune. In fact, I realized that I would be lucky to get out of the school parking lot by 3:10! By the time I got the kids home and started heading toward campus it was 3:20. I knew I did not have a moment to spare. At this point I was literally praying out loud that I would not run into any traffic jams.

Thankfully on that particular day the traffic was flowing smoothly. I was able to find parking with enough time for my ten minute walk into campus. As I approached the library, I once again realized I had no idea what my research participant looked like and there were people milling about everywhere. As I got closer to the stairs I saw a young man sitting on the steps. It looked like he might be waiting for someone so I approached him and asked, “Are you by any chance Sergio?” “Yes, are you Michelle?” “I am.” After our quick introduction, we decided to find a quiet place to talk in the library. Sergio began his story by talking about his overall educational experience.

*During my formative education I only moved once during middle school. I went to middle school up to fourth grade in California and then in fifth grade I started and finished school here in Colorado. I also only attended one middle school and one high school once we moved to Colorado. At the time I thought school was okay, but now that I look back on where I went to school I know the schools I went to weren't that great. I primarily grew-up in a low-income neighborhood that was two blocks away from the projects. Everyone was pretty much Hispanic with some Black and Asian people but rarely any White people. But I never felt like my race played a role in the education I received because the majority of the people I went to school with were the same race as me. Maybe if I went to a school where I was the minority then I might have been able to tell a difference in the way students were treated. And even though the majority of our teachers were White, only about 5% of our teachers were Hispanic, but they treated all of us the same for the most part.*

*In addition, although there was no disparate treatment of students by the school administration I would say we received very little support from them. Our counselors were not very proactive in helping us get prepared for college. There really was no advising or resources for students until the College Now program started at our school which was our school's dual/concurrent enrollment program. It was just briefly mentioned to us by our counselors. They were really casual about it and they just said fill-out this paperwork and we'll pay for two years of your college. So I was just kind of like—okay, why not? But it really was not like—hey kids look at this great opportunity. We just thought it would be like another two or three years of high school. There were no prerequisites to get into the program. There wasn't even a GPA requirement and you didn't necessarily have to be Hispanic. I think everyone was admitted to the program. The only contingency was you still had to be considered a high school student so they did withhold our diploma until we finished the program. When we started taking college classes they were just like take these classes and do this or that but they never talked to us about picking a major or anything. In fact they never even mentioned it and I didn't even know how to go about picking out a major like that is how bad the advising was.*

*I think the combination of not having higher requirements to get into the program and just poor advising of the students who were admitted led to the demise of the program. For example, when we initially started the program we were told that we would get two years of funding, but after the first year of the program they told us they were going to "try" and continue the program for another year; however, six months after they said that, they eliminated the program. They just took it away from everyone.*

*Whoever was funding the program was just like—we are just wasting our money. So they discontinued the program. I guess the results they were seeing were just really bad from the start, and I think they should have planned the program better. Like I said before they should not have just let anyone and everyone into the program. Because I was part of the first group to do the program and I think there was maybe sixty students who enrolled, but by the end of the first semester half of them were done. They were just done. They just stopped going to their classes. Then by the end of the first year another five students dropped-out of the program. So out of that first group of students who started the program by the end of the first year there was only like twelve students out of the initial sixty who were still enrolled in the program. So they pulled the funding from our group the '05 class, but for some reason they decided to give the students behind us the '06 class a one year chance. Maybe they thought they would have better success with that group of students than they did with our group but it just didn't work. I don't know anyone from the '06 class that graduated with their Associate's degree. So after that the people who were funding the program really did pull all of the funding. They were just like—we just can't do it.*

*I definitely think the high school counselors and the people who were running the program could have probably helped students a bit more. Especially I especially think the high school counselors could have helped more and even our high school teachers could have helped more because if think if you gave like sixty students from Cherry Creek High School or another high school like that the same opportunity, I guarantee all of them would have performed better academically and the majority of them would have*



*completed the program. In part I think the high school counselors got the students enrolled and then they just took it for granted that students would know what to do like how to sign-up for classes and how to get extra help from teachers at the college level. I really think they did take it for granted. They assumed that the counselors at the community college would take care of the students enrolled in the dual/concurrent enrollment program, but it wasn't like that. In my case I was very fortunate to get a very good counselor at the community college but not everyone was. The whole support mechanism was missing from the program. And I think that support piece is an important component for first-generation Latina/o students because their parents don't know the system so their ability to help their kids is limited. I don't mean that they need a babysitter or anything like that but I think the counselors should support first-generation students beyond just getting them enrolled in the program. And I think if I would have had that counselor in high school things might have been a lot better for me. Maybe with better advising I could have gotten some scholarships and maybe I would have even gone to a university to start off with instead of going through the community college. So the counselor at the community college had a lot to do with my success.*

*She also played a huge role in helping me transition to a four-year institution. Specifically she helped me make connections with the counselors at the four-year institution I am attending. Those connections were huge because when you first come to a large university you are overwhelmed and I was like—Wow! Where do I go and who do I talk to get help. That's how I felt when I went from high school to the community college. So the connections she helped me form with my counselors at the university helped me*

*have a smoother transition. It was just the aspect that she cared and she didn't treat me like I was just another student. She made sure I got the right classes and she even took the time to suggest certain professors. For example, she would say I have heard really good things about this professor or that professor, and it was just these small acts of caring and good will that helped me tremendously. I am very grateful for all of her help and if it wasn't for her I don't know if I would be going to a university right now. I really don't know what I would be doing, but I am happy to tell you that I am graduating at the end of this semester. So those connections she helped me make really have been vital to my success at a four-year institution.*

### **Part Three**

#### *Pedro: Focusing on the Goal of Attaining a B.A. Degree*

My journey to finding Pedro began with a meeting I had with an administrator of a newly-opened Early College High School located approximately 45 minutes northwest of downtown. It took approximately 2 weeks of placing phone calls and sending e-mails before I got in touch with the principal of the school, and after that it was another week before I was able to have a face-to-face meeting with her. Interestingly, the founder of the school joined us in our meeting. As it turned out he was involved with the opening of another Early College High School in the state several years ago, and ironically I had been trying to schedule a meeting with him for the past 2 years—then serendipitously there he was sitting across the table from me.

At this meeting we discussed the overall gist of my dissertation research topic, and I explained I contacted them because I was hoping they would know some students who fit the profile of who I was looking for to participate in my study. I had a very productive conversation with them and they both showed great interest in my research topic. However, they did not know any students I could contact for my study since their school was still in its first year of operation. But all was not lost! By the end of our meeting they gave me the contact information of another Early College High School principal who they said would definitely have the names of students I could potentially contact. As I drove back home, I had a glimmer of hope that this new contact would prove to be fruitful in locating some research participants. During my 2-hour drive, I took the time to mentally script the conversation I hoped to have with this gentleman.

When I got home I wasted no time. I went directly into my office, turned on my computer, and sent an e-mail introducing myself, explaining my study, and asking to meet with him. I knew he would not receive my e-mail until the following day, but I planned to place a follow-up phone call the next day. It took several days of playing phone tag before we actually connected with one another, and then it was another week before I was able to meet with him in person. During our first meeting, we discussed my research topic, and at first he was very discouraging. Through our conversation it became clear to me that he did not understand my research topic or the structure of my study. After an hour and a half of conversing, I began to make some headway as he began to show some enthusiasm for what I was trying to achieve and he then agreed to contact several graduates to get their permission for me to contact them. At the end of our meeting, he asked me to return in a week at the same time and he would have names and phone numbers for me.

The following week, I returned to the school at the appointed time and at first glance he did not remember me. With a smile on my face I reintroduced myself and he said, “Oh that’s right. Come on in and have a seat. Now what was it we were talking about last week?” What I thought was going to be a quick thirty minute meeting turned into another 2-hour meeting before he compiled a list of four names, but to my dismay he added that he did not know if the phone numbers he had were still in use. At this point many thoughts were beginning to run wild in my brain, and I consciously had to tell myself to put on my poker face and remain calm, cool, and collected; which I thankfully pulled off with success and grace.

When I got home I immediately began to call the students on my new list. Within a couple of minutes I was able to discern that two of the phone numbers were no longer in service. No one answered the third number I called and there was no voice mail in which to leave a message. But alas when I called the fourth number on my list someone answered the phone. It was a woman who spoke Spanish and very limited English. At that moment I literally felt physical pain and great mental anguish over my inadequate Spanish speaking skills. But instead of hanging my head in defeat, I told myself to cowgirl up Michelle! You can do this! So I did my best to communicate who I was and that I was trying to reach Pedro. As I hung up the phone I wished for the best, and two hours later I was talking to Pedro on the phone. He told me he would not be able to meet with me for another two weeks. I told him that would be fine. He told me that DU was close to his home so we decided to meet on a Wednesday afternoon in front of the DU library.

On the day of our meeting chaos once again reared its ugly head. Before heading out the door for our meeting, I checked my e-mail, and I am glad I did because I had an e-mail from Pedro. He said he did not know how to get to the campus or where to park etc. I quickly picked-up the phone and called him. After a brief conversation I agreed to meet with him at his house. As I input his address into my GPS I felt a wave of anxiousness wash over me. I was confused about this last minute change, and I felt apprehensive about our meeting. As I backed out of my driveway, I began to feed myself positive thoughts and with a smile on my face I said, “Time for another adventure. Let’s go!”

I arrived at his home within an hour. I parked directly in front of his home. I quickly grabbed my interview materials, walked up the steps to his door and rang the doorbell. Sergio answered the door. After a quick introduction, we walked through the formal living room to the kitchen. The house was quiet as we were the only two present, so we were able to begin our interview with no interruptions.

*I attended one school for elementary, middle, and high school—one school each. All those schools were here in Colorado. I pretty much enjoyed school. I had many great teachers throughout the twelve years. I learned a lot of new things. Most of the experiences that I had will be useful in my future to try and graduate from college and earn a degree. I didn't have any negative experiences at school with students, teachers, or administrators.*

*As far as my race is concerned I don't think it had any impact on the education I received. All the students in the schools I attended had equal opportunity, but basically it was where you came from that determined how you were treated. I always had equal opportunity, but what did matter was your educational background. There could be many different races in the classroom. So for example you could have Latino student in the class reading at a second grade level alongside a Caucasian student reading at a fifth grade level, but all of them had equal opportunity to learn the material. The difference in the content level depended on the student's academic background, but it didn't mean that they didn't have equal access to learn.*

*I think possibly one of the reasons Latina/o students were reading at a lower level was because of the language barrier they were trying to overcome. So a lot of those*

*students would be placed in English as a second language classes. For example, in my house we basically speak nothing but Spanish. And I would speak Spanish at home, and English away from home making Spanish my first language and learning English over the course of my education. I think my situation would be the same for other Latina/o students, but I think overall the ESL programs at school were pretty good especially in elementary school. Plus the strategy my mom would use with my brother, my sister, and myself was through third grade she would have us in Spanish-speaking classes, and then in fourth or fifth grade she would place us in English only classes until we graduated. My parents thought it was important for us to know both languages, so that is how my parents ensured that we would learn both languages equally well.*

*I found out about the Early College High School I attended from one of my middle school teachers. When I found out that the school's mission was to help students earn both a high school diploma and an Associate's degree, and I liked that concept so I applied for admission. However I was not able to earn my Associate's degree by the time I graduated. I think the main reason I wasn't able to earn my Associate's degree is because when I started attending the Early College it was only in its second year of operation. So basically it was still trying to learn the process. It had its faults and everything. In the first two classes there weren't many students that graduated with their Associate's degree, and I fell a semester short. I feel if students had the opportunity to take college courses before their sophomore year in high school they would finish their Associate's. But that wasn't the case; most students would start after their sophomore year.*

*The reason most students couldn't begin taking college classes until their junior or senior year was because they had to first complete all of the prerequisite courses which were the 030, 060, and 090 courses. And most students were not able to complete all of the prerequisites until their junior year or later. So they had what was called a fifth year option program which basically meant that you didn't graduate until after that fifth year. Even though you were taking college level classes you were still considered to be a high school student. A lot of students took this option, but I wanted to start into a four-year college because I wanted a Bachelor's degree more than I wanted an Associate's degree. So I would rather just go straight forward rather than prolonging graduation another whole year, and I also didn't want to feel like I was still in high school.*

*Aside from falling short from earning my Associate's degree I think I was well prepared in all content areas both in high school and at the community college. How the Early College was structured is you would have a 030, 060, and 090 class for math, science, and English. So you basically had three levels in each content area. Then you would start taking college courses at the community college. So I received equal preparation in all core content areas. As for the content of the overall curricula I would say it was traditional and Eurocentric. I wasn't exposed to curricula that were culturally relevant to Latinas/os other than Spanish classes. My junior year during Hispanic heritage month we attended a tribute to Corky Gonzales. Other than that it was mostly traditional. To be honest I don't think Latina/o students need to be exposed to culturally relevant curricula, and I don't think the content of the curricula has anything to do with whether Latina/o students drop-out of school. Because like they say the United States is*



*one of the greatest countries in the world. Which is why we learn our history—American history—and it's also why we learn information that is pertinent to our country in school. And I would say in other countries they are learning about us, about this county, just because we are one of the greatest countries in the world. So I wouldn't see why they would teach history of Latinos here in the United States.*

*When I think about the types of teaching strategies that helped prepare me for college I have to admit that I really didn't like team work. What helped me was one-on-one interaction with the teachers. If I didn't understand something I would ask for clarification, and I would stay after class if I needed help. Basically I believe you need to show that you are putting forth the effort to learn the material yourself. One of the philosophies I have always told myself is that if I want to learn something it is going to come out of me not the teacher. The teacher is only there to do her job, and if a student is not willing to learn what else can she possibly do? Lectures also helped me because they would give me important facts. I would rather learn from a teacher's lecture than learning from other students. I feel this way because I think a teacher's information is more useful and accurate, and they also know what they are talking about compared to students. Another aspect I liked about my high school classes is we didn't have a lot of dialogue about our reading material. Usually we would go home and read a book, and then we would come back to class and answer questions about what we read. My college professors use a different teaching strategy. We read a book, we discuss the material in groups before class, and then we have a dialogue about it in class. I would say this*

*technique probably helps more students learn, but I would rather have a lecture based class than a discussion based class. That is just the way I prefer to learn.*

*When I reflect on my parents' involvement with my education I can say that they weren't really involved. They hardly went to any of the school programs or anything like that, but they did go to parent/teacher conferences. Other than that they hardly helped me with homework, but I didn't need any help. They always supported me and they encouraged me to do well in school. They also encouraged me to attend college. They said it would help me in life. They are both Latinos and they immigrated to the United States from Mexico. They have always had tough manual labor jobs, and they would rather have me work with my mind not my hands. They also just want me to try and better myself--to have a better life, a better home, and a better future. As for my parents' relationship with the school personnel I would describe it as neutral because I don't think the school really tried to reach out to parents. In addition, the principal was hardly around and it was basically impossible to talk with him. Unlike the principal I thought my high school counselor was pretty helpful. He helped me apply for scholarships and apply to colleges. He would write us letters of recommendation. He would also notify our teachers to help us with our college applications, so he really played an important role in helping me transition to a four-year university.*

*Juan: Support System*

I was very fortunate to find Juan. Our paths crossed at a time when I was having a very difficult time finding more participants for my study. After I had exhausted all of my initial leads, I began cold calling all of the major universities in the area and asking for department names and the names of staff members who work with first-generation Latino transfer students. I left voice mail messages with several staff members in various departments at the university. Several days passed and I still had not heard back from anyone, so I began making more phone calls. It was through this process that I got the contact information for Juan. I left him a voice mail message and several days later we spoke on the phone. We decided to meet at the office he was working at on campus.

On the day of our meeting I methodically went through my preparation routine. Since I had met another participant on this campus, I knew the route I would take to get to the campus and by this time I even had several favorite parking spots. I left my house an hour and a half early, so I could get a jump on the traffic. It worked out perfectly. I arrived on campus with thirty minutes to spare. This gave me enough time to enjoy my walk into campus and leisurely walk around and locate the building Juan works in. When I first walked into the building, I was greeted by the receptionist. I introduced myself and told her I had a meeting with Juan. At the sound of his name Juan poked his head around the corner and smiled. As he walked up to me he stretched out his hand and said, "You must be Michelle." After our quick introduction we met in one of the main conference rooms where Juan began telling me his story.

*I went a Montessori pre-school before elementary school and they really taught me a lot there. Then I went to a private Catholic elementary school for eight years. And then I attended a private Catholic high school before transferring to the Early College High School (ECHS) where I was able to earn my high school diploma and my Associate's degree. All the schools I attended were here in Colorado. My parents made a lot of sacrifices to ensure that my brother, sister, and I received the best education possible. I would say that the education I received at the private schools I attended was excellent. Overall I would describe my educational experiences as positive, but I think there was a huge difference from the private school I attended and the public ECHS I graduated from. One of the main differences at the ECHS was that the teachers were more approachable, but they were also mostly brand new teachers who didn't have a lot of teaching experience. Whereas the teachers at my private high school were all veteran teachers who had advanced degrees, so in comparison the ECHS felt like an experiment. And since it was a new school I think they were just trying to increase their enrollment numbers, so they weren't really concerned about the academic level of the students who were enrolling into the program. Which I think was somewhat of a mistake because a lot of students failed their college classes because they weren't academically prepared, and as a result a lot of students were unable to complete the program. So I think they should have had stricter requirements to get into the program which would have made the ECHS and its program more prestigious. Maybe then students would have taken advantage of the program in a positive way instead of a negative way such as not going to their classes and not caring if they failed their classes.*

*I found out about the program through two of my cousins who were attending the school. If it wasn't for them I would not have known about the Early College High School. After my first year at the private high school I really didn't like the school too much so I asked my parents if we could look into this program, so we started investigating the ECHS during the summer between my freshman and sophomore year. Our first impression of the school was really bad because overall they seemed to be unorganized. I also remember the first time we called the school and asked if they offered Advanced Placement (AP) classes the person we talked too didn't even know what AP classes were, and when she said that I was like---WHAT?! How do they not know what AP classes are? Even though our first contact with the school was not particularly positive my parents decided to take a tour of the school, but I didn't go with them because I was no longer interested in the school. But after their tour they told me I might want to considerer giving the school another try. So I took a tour of the school, and I put more effort into learning about the dual/concurrent enrollment program they offered. I knew I was receiving an excellent education at the private high school I was attending, but the tuition was extremely expensive. It was equivalent to paying for a college education, so when I learned that the ECHS promised to pay for an Associate's degree that was the determining factor for me. I almost didn't believe it at first because it seemed too good to be true. I quickly realized if I could have two years of my undergraduate education paid for this would put me in the financial position where I could afford to earn not only a Bachelor's degree but also a Master's degree. I just couldn't let the opportunity pass me*

*by, so I decided to take full advantage of the program. But the transition to the ECHS was not without its problems.*

*The first thing they had me do was take the Accuplacer test to assess my academic abilities and to determine what level of classes I should be placed into. I did very well on the test, and my scores showed that I had tested out of all of the pre-college level classes. So at the beginning of my sophomore year I was academically ready to begin taking all college level classes, but the administration at the ECHS only allowed me to take one college level course which was English 121. The rest of my schedule was filled-up with high school level classes which consisted of math 090, college literacy, and regular science. The first day of classes I honestly panicked! In my mind I kept thinking I had made a huge mistake, and I felt like I was going backwards! That whole semester I kept complaining to my teachers and the administration that the classes they put me in were too easy and not at my level. The following semester they finally allowed me to start taking all college classes because I got such high grades in all of my classes, but essentially they held me back and I lost a semester.*

*Thankfully once they realized how capable I was of handling rigorous courses they in essence allowed me to take all of the college level classes they were offering for that particular semester. The way it worked at the ECHS was all of the introductory courses were taught on the high school campus by college professors. Then once you completed the introductory courses you could begin taking classes down on the college campus. I was able to complete all of the introductory courses by the second semester my sophomore year, and by the time I was a junior I was taking all of my classes on the*

*college campus. Then by the end of the first semester my senior year I had accumulated 82 college credits, so they came to me and said you have more credits than you need. We can't pay for your classes anymore, so that's it you're done. It really surprised me when they did that because I wasn't expecting it at all. I was also disappointed because I wasn't able to finish all of the courses I needed to earn an Associate's degree with an emphasis in Business, so I just have an Associate's degree in General Studies.*

*Unfortunately this happened because they counted some of the credits I earned from my previous high school toward the credits I needed to earn my Associate's degree, so that prevented me from taking all of the college level courses I needed to earn an emphasis in Business. So my choice was kind of made for me. I think there should have been better advising at the ECHS because they should have told me before December that they were going stop paying for my classes at the end of that semester. I also don't think they helped prepare me to transfer to a four-year institution because they gave me such short notice that I could no longer attend their school. I was pretty much like—Alright--I have to figure this out by myself!*

*So I went to this transfer fair on the main college campus, and I was just wandering around lost when I came across the Denver Transfer Initiative booth. How this program works is the DTI staff provides support services to students who are trying to transfer from the community college level over to a four-year institution. They primarily focus on students who are not yet being advised by other programs, so they are trying to help students who are lost and who don't have any direction in terms of transferring over to a four-year institution to complete a Bachelor's degree. They help*

*students enroll in the right courses, they call students personally to remind them about important institutional deadlines, and they even have a private library students can borrow textbooks from. So it's a small community and even though it's not exclusively designed for first-generation Hispanic students the program does seem to attract a lot of those students because they often times need the extra help.*

*Unfortunately I didn't work with them when I was taking classes at the community college because no one at the ECHS told me about the program. So again it was like the advising at the ECHS was not the best. I find it difficult to believe that the staff at the ECHS doesn't know about the DTI program. I mean how would they not know this? In my view the DTI program and the ECHS model are a perfect match. The way it would work is the ECHS helps students connect with the community college, and when students are close to completing their Associate's degree they connect with the DTI program which then helps them transition to a four-year institution. I think they should let their students know that the DTI program exists and make the suggestions that their graduates should connect with this program. I, for one, feel very fortunate to have connected with the DTI program because it truly has helped me transition from the community college over to the university. It's just a complete support system that helps transfer students make that next step to a four-year college or university.*



## **Chapter Five: Emergence of a Collective Testimonial Narrative**

### **Themes**

In this chapter I will present the following themes that emerged across the research participants' individual testimonial narratives:

1. A quality secondary education is necessary to succeed in a dual/concurrent enrollment high school program.
  - a. A rigorous curriculum at the high school level is essential for students' to succeed at college level academics and to persist to the attainment of a Bachelor's degree.
  - b. Teacher expectations impact school culture and student learning.
  - c. Culturally relevant curricula and pedagogically teaching strategies are underutilized at the secondary level of education.
2. To decrease the failure rate and secure the continuation of funding for dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs, students must demonstrate college readiness before being admitted into these programs.
3. Student support systems are instrumental in helping first-generation Latina/o students to successfully navigate through the higher education system.

### **Setting the Purpose**

The purpose of presenting this collective narrative is not to assign blame, point fingers, or impose guilt on any specific group or individual of the audience, but rather this should be viewed as an opportunity to understand the research participants'

perceptions of the strengths and the weaknesses of the current implementation of dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs for historically underrepresented college students, particularly first-generation Latina/o students. The intended outcome of this discussion is to help form a coalition between the individual stakeholders in order to create the necessary changes to dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs, so they remain a viable pathway for future generations of historically underrepresented students to gain access to four-year institutions and persist to the attainment of a B.A. degree.

### **Setting the Stage**

#### *Facilitator*

During the following imaginary discussion I will play the role of facilitator. In this role, I will ask the expert panel members open-ended questions regarding the aforementioned themes in an effort to illuminate the collective narrative that has emerged from their individual narratives. Throughout the discussion I will be identified by my first and last initials: MT.

#### *Expert Panel*

The expert panel will consist of the following members. Their individual composites were described in Chapter Three. Throughout this discussion the panel members will be identified by the first initial of their pseudonyms.

- I: Ivan
- J: Juan
- M: Max
- P: Pedro

- R: Robert
- S: Sergio

### *Intended Audience*

The imaginary following stakeholders have been envisioned to take part in this important discussion, because they serve a vital role in the education system such as working with students on a daily basis and/or they are instrumental in the development and implementation of educational programs, i.e. dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs. Other stakeholders who should be part of this discussion are part of the legislative body that helps secure the continuation of said programs, and they also work closely with the individuals who help fund these programs. So this discussion is primarily aimed at the following stakeholders:

- K-12 administrators (school level and district level)
- K-12 teachers
- High school counselors
- Higher education admission counselors
- Higher education academic advisors
- Higher education first and second year student affairs professionals
- Education policy makers

### **Welcoming Address and Opening Statement**

MT: I want to begin by thanking our stakeholders for taking the time to be present today to listen to our expert panel's collective testimonial regarding their experiences with their high schools' dual/concurrent enrollment programs. I also want to thank each of our

panel members for their willingness to share a piece of their life story with us. The conversation today is not meant to essentialize the panel members' unique experiences with these programs, but rather it is an acknowledgement that commonalities have emerged from their individual experiences that will be highlighted today. Therefore, it is through this collective narrative which has emerged across these individuals' lived experiences that have created a sense of solidarity among the panel members. This collective narrative is also a powerful form of counter discourse that cannot simply be dismissed as individual flukes in the education system. The common experiences of these individuals who grew-up in different neighborhoods and who attended different schools have had similar educational experiences that are important for the various stakeholders to acknowledge so that a coalition can be formed and strategic, collaborative efforts can be implemented to improve dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs. I want to reiterate that the intent of today's discussion is not meant to lay blame, point fingers, or impose guilt on individuals or any particular stakeholder group. Most importantly, it is with sincere hope that this discussion will have a personal impact on each audience member so that s/he feels compelled to take actions which will help improve dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs so they can remain a viable option for future first-generation Latina/o students and other historically underrepresented groups to gain access to four-year institutions. In essence, the ultimate goal of attaining a Bachelor's degree continues to become an increasingly important credential to have in the twenty-first century knowledge economy and a global job market.

## **Theme One: Importance of Secondary Education**

My first set of questions focus on the importance of a quality secondary education in preparing students for success in a dual/concurrent enrollment high school program. Since this is a rather large topic, I will structure the conversation around the following three sub-themes, which are: (a) a rigorous high school curriculum is essential for students to succeed in a dual/concurrent enrollment high school program; (b) teacher expectations impact student learning and school culture; and (c) culturally relevant curricula and pedagogical teaching strategies are underutilized at the secondary level of education.

### *Sub-theme A: Necessity of Rigorous Curricula*

MT: First, can you explain for the audience why it is so important for students to be exposed to a rigorous high school curriculum in order to be successful in a dual/concurrent enrollment program?

S: I thought it was pretty easy stuff that we did in class; it wasn't challenging or difficult. The learning standard was not as high as I think it could have been. To be candid the standard teachers had was really low in terms of the learning experience--it was really minimal! And I didn't realize how detrimental this was for my education until I started taking the dual/concurrent enrollment classes at the community college. I met people who went to other high schools and they already knew a lot of the material we were working on at the community college, and it was just like totally new for me! It wasn't a review for me like it was for other students. This was especially true for me in my math classes at the community college, and it was surprising to me because I was never behind in any

of my high school math classes and I wasn't in remedial math or anything like that. I was always in the regular math classes and I always got good grades, but when I started taking classes at the community college I quickly realized I was academically behind. And I remember when class first started the professor kept saying that we were going to begin the course with a quick review, and in my mind I kept thinking—what?! The material they were “reviewing” was brand new stuff for me! I had never heard of nor seen the concepts and formulas he was “reviewing”! So I was definitely behind when I started classes at the community college, and it took me a while to catch-up. Thankfully I like math and I learn things quickly so I was able to catch-up, but I know other students from my high school that couldn't do it so they dropped-out of the dual/concurrent enrollment program. For example, one of my friends that I have known since the fourth grade, he joined the dual/concurrent enrollment program the same year I did. He wanted to major in business, but he couldn't pass the math class he was taking at the community college. He kept taking the class and trying to pass it, but after the second time he failed. He just stopped going to school. He was like, “I just can't do it. And I have to work.” So he is just working a minimum wage job now. But you know what is really sad about his story is that his lack of preparation in math at the high school level was the main reason he stopped pursuing his dream of having a career in business, and now he just has a job instead of a career. It's like he now thinks there is something wrong with him and this is why he can't pass the math classes at the community college. And he doesn't believe me when I tell him there is nothing wrong with him; it's just that we didn't receive the same

education and preparation as kids at other high schools. I guess he just feels embarrassed, and he just doesn't want to go through the humiliation of failing another class.

I: At my high school a lot of what played into the curriculum was trying to get CSAP scores up which I think is just preparation to take a test, and I don't think that helped prepare students for college at all. When I started taking college level classes I felt like I needed more preparation in writing. I came into college at a disadvantage because my writing skills were not up to par with probably other kids that were going to college because of the high school I went to. What I mean is there are a lot of high schools that are not funded like other schools; therefore, academic preparation is not the same and the writing program at my high school is a good example of a substandard education. It's just how it is. And that is how it is for a lot of us who attend inner-city and underfunded schools. Because I have asked a lot of my high school classmates how they are doing in college, and they tell me they have experienced the same thing as me in their college classes--that once they got to college they realized there were a lot of other people who knew more than they did. This isn't to say that students who went to my high school can't get by in their college classes. They can definitely get by, but students from my high school are always going to be at a disadvantage because we didn't get the same education that the majority of students did in other high schools and in other school districts.

M: Similar to what has already been said, I think the regular level classes at my high school were really laid back and I didn't find them to be challenging at all. To be honest all of the non-accelerated classes at my high school were pretty much just training grounds for the CSAP tests. In those classes we didn't even get real textbooks or

literature books instead they gave us CSAP prep books and worksheets. So there was no real focus on high standards or critical thinking skills. And this sort of substandard education really does make you feel as though you are starting behind your peers when you start taking college level classes.

MT: Juan your academic preparation was significantly different from the other panel members. Could you please explain to the audience how your academic preparation was different, and also explain how your elementary and secondary education contributed to your success in the college level classes you took at the ECHS you attended?

J: Before enrolling into the public ECHS I graduated from I had only attended private Catholic schools. My parents even enrolled me in a private Montessori pre-school.

Although my parents never attended college they understand the importance of having a good education, and they sacrificed a lot so my siblings and I could receive a high quality education. The excellent education I received from these private schools became apparent when the administration at the ECHS had me take the Accuplacer test to see what level of classes I placed into, meaning either high school level or college level courses. I performed extremely well on the test! In fact my scores indicated that I was ready to begin taking college level courses in all subject areas at the beginning of my sophomore year in high school. And I think my performance on that test was a direct reflection of the excellent education I received from the private schools I attended because those teachers really focused on over preparing students for college. And ever since I can remember the message at my private schools was always “when you go to college” not “if you go to college”, but I quickly realized that public school students did not have this same



mentality. It felt like their highest aspiration was to graduate from high school, and if they got lucky they would earn an Associate's degree. Whereas I specifically transferred to this school because they essentially promised I could earn my high school diploma and an Associate's degree at the same time. So I entered ECHS knowing the benefits of being able to transfer into a four-year institution with two years of college credit. However, one thing the administration at the ECHS did that upset me was they placed me in high school level classes and they only allowed me to take one college level class during my first semester at their school. Even though my Accuplacer test scores indicated that I was capable or taking all college courses at the beginning of my sophomore year they still placed me in the classes that were before my academic ability! The regular high school courses I was forced to take were extremely easy for me, and it wasn't until I got straight A's in those classes and vehemently complained, that they agreed to let me take all college level courses the following semester. So technically I could have graduated from high school with my diploma and an Associate's degree a year early instead of just a semester early.

*Sub-theme B: Impact of Teacher Expectations*

MT: Another theme I want to discuss is the connection between teacher expectations and school culture and student learning. During our individual interviews an important issue surfaced in our conversations which were that, even though students successfully complete their high school classes, when they take the Accuplacer college placement test, they are still unable to score high enough to begin taking college level courses at the community college. From your experience what do you think are some of the

contributing factors that are preventing students from being college ready even after they successfully complete their high school coursework?

R: From my experience throughout high school I think students just felt like they were going to school just to kill time. And it was mainly viewed as a structure that was put into place to babysit children. So obviously throughout the years students became used to seeing school just as an obligation and not so much as a place where they can develop their potential and abilities. But when I started taking classes at the community college education was viewed very differently. For one we were actually asked to use critical thinking skills and we were actually expected to develop our own ideas about what we were learning. And we actually dialoged about what we were learning which also helped us develop critical thinking skills. As opposed to my high school classes where we pretty much just took information in and were asked to memorize it. I don't think that was a very effective way to learn.

I: I also agree that high school teachers need to have higher expectations and higher standards for students. They need to start treating students like they are adults instead of kids because that is what's coming in college, and they need to be prepared for the higher expectations that college professors are going to have. For example, in my high school the way it was done most of the time we would read whatever book was assigned to us during class time instead of assigning reading for homework. The teachers would just sit there and randomly pick students to read because in my high school kids wouldn't do the reading because they didn't feel the need to have to read on their own. This contributed to me never reading a single book in high school. So class time was never used to focus on

critical thinking skills, and to be honest I had never even heard of critical thinking skills in high school. That concept was not emphasized at all, and I personally didn't begin to develop or use critical thinking skills until I started taking classes at the community college. I think high school teachers need to have higher standards for students and they need to use class time to help students develop better academic skills especially critical thinking. I think it is important for high school students to see themselves as learners and critical thinkers earlier in high school so they can be successful in college and in life.

S: One of the main differences I noticed between high school and college was that the teachers in college would tell students to learn the material not just for the test but because the information was going to help them in life. And a lot of examples the college professors used were related to real life examples, and the material made a lot more sense when it was applied to real world situations. In contrast a lot of my high school teachers would just tell us to memorize the information for the test, and then they would say we could just forget about the material after taking the exam. So I think when a lot of my friends who are first-generation Hispanic students tried to take college classes they thought the classes were just too hard, and they would say, "It's just too hard! I can't do this!" And a lot of them just gave up and quite. So I think high school teachers really need to care. I think if they had a different mentality and truly communicated to students that what they were learning was important to move onto the next level in their education then the students would have cared more about their own learning. The verbal cuing they used undermined what they were trying to teach and it really set a low standard in the classroom. And I think it also set a really negative tone in the school at large because

when the teachers who really did care and were trying to help prepare students for the next level the students had already developed that negative attitude of “I don’t care”. So it was like the teachers with the negative mentality had a bigger influence on the students than the positive teachers so when they took classes from teachers who cared they were just like—whatever. And I really think the majority of the teachers really didn’t care, but if it was the other way around where if most, if not all, the teachers really cared then students would be like—oh, okay I need to know this.

*Sub-theme C: Underutilization of Culturally Relevant Curricula and Pedagogy*

MT: The last question I have related to academic preparation for college focuses on culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy. As I mentioned during our individual interviews, some anti-racist and multicultural educators believe the academic performance of Latina/o students would dramatically improve if they were exposed to a curricula in which Latinas/os are presented positively rather than being marginalized or completely absent from the dominant Eurocentric curricula which is currently being taught in schools across the U.S. In addition to the curricula, multicultural educators argue that it is vital for educators to use culturally relevant pedagogy. From your perspective, please elaborate whether you experienced culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy, and what role, if any, did they play in preparing you for college level academics.

S: The curriculum at my high school was Eurocentric and traditional, and it was not diverse at all. In particular I can say that the Hispanic culture was completely absent from the curriculum at my high school even though the majority of students were Hispanics.

So overall I would say that none of the classes I took in high school were culturally relevant, and since my college major is in business I haven't taken any courses that emphasize cultural relevance. Personally, I don't think I would have been better prepared for college level academics if I had been exposed to a culturally relevant curriculum because I don't think cultural relevance has anything to do with a business major. But maybe if I was a history major then maybe it would have had a negative impact on my educational preparation because I wouldn't have any knowledge about different cultures and stuff like that. So I guess for some college majors it would be helpful. And the teaching strategies my high school teachers used were traditional and straight forward. Since we never had homework we usually completed worksheets in class which were mainly focused on preparation for the CSAP tests. Occasionally we would work in groups but I don't think teachers intentionally used this strategy to incorporate cultural relevance into the class. It was just a way for them to mix things up so students would get bored.

R: At my high school I think some of the history and literature classes were more culturally relevant because there was more material they were teaching that related to different cultures in general. I mean honestly the cultural relevance was present in some of the content we learned in high school, but it depended on the student whether or not they consumed the information that the instructor wanted them to and to feel inspired by it. And hopefully the cultural relevance of the material they were learning would change their whole perspective on things and the outcomes of their lives. But I think it would have been more helpful if students were initially given that sort of representation in the

curriculum during elementary school because then they would have garnered a sense of admiration and respect for it; in turn they would have more respect for themselves and more respect for their own potentials and abilities. I think when students get to high school they see this representation of cultural relevance but it just doesn't touch them because it's too late. For example, at my high school I think the teachers tried to celebrate the Hispanic culture along with the traditional western civilization, but again I don't think there was any real effort made to help students understand what it meant. It was pretty much left up to the students to understand why it was important to celebrate diverse cultures. I think for a lot of students the assemblies were just an excuse to get out of class to see all of the lavish artwork, intricate sort of structures, and different types of ethnic music, but the teachers didn't necessarily attach any sort of importance to these celebrations. The teachers did not use any class time before these events and celebrations to teach students why we were celebrating a particular culture. They also didn't use any class activities to help students understand the deeper meaning of the cultural celebrations and/or why the celebration should have any personal meaning for students if they were from that cultural heritage. Because there was no significance attached to these celebrations, instead of embracing them as learning opportunities students just thought they were fun activities that gave them a day off from doing any school work. So I would say overall I think the culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy I was exposed during high school played a minor role in preparing me for college.

I: At my high school the curricula was pretty much traditional and Eurocentric, and the teachers used traditional and straightforward teaching strategies. What I am trying to say

is that most of the teachers just got to the point of what they were trying to teach, and they really didn't incorporate cultural relevance into what they were teaching or how they were teaching. Again it was just pretty straightforward. For the most part our teachers would tell us what we needed to know and we would just memorize the information they gave us. There wasn't really any critical thinking or dialogue involved; we just memorized what we needed to know for our tests and that was pretty much what we did in class. But I agree that it would be helpful if more teachers infused cultural relevance into their curricula because kids can definitely feed off that information in a positive way. And I can definitely see how culturally relevant content could help Hispanic students succeed academically because if they can see somebody from their own ethnic group who has overcome obstacles and was able to achieve their goals then they can mentally visualize themselves achieving the same sort of success in life.

J: I think changing the curricula to be more culturally diverse when students are younger would have a greater impact than when students are studying the major leaders in a field of study. But I think kids in elementary school would be more receptive to culturally relevant material which in turn could have a positive effect on their academic achievement. But I honestly don't see how the traditional curriculum taught at the high school and college levels is ever going to change! I also don't think the lack of cultural relevance in a high school's curricula has anything to do with Hispanic students dropping-out of high school. I think whether or not a student drops-out of high school has more to do with their personal values. And I know it's sad and politically incorrect to say this but the majority of Hispanics don't value education, particularly higher education,

the same way White people do. I have particularly seen this attitude of devaluing higher education in my friends and family. It's as though they only think about the here and now, and they don't think about their future, so they already have the mindset that they are going to get a job after high school. Most of them don't even consider college an option. Although I will say I think the cost of higher education is a major deterrent for Hispanics because a lot of these families can't afford a postsecondary education. But this is also why I think more Hispanic students need to take advantage of the ECHS model because it, in part, helps eliminate the high cost of attending college. It still amazes me that these schools will pay for two years of college classes. No, it doesn't pay for a Bachelor's degree but it gets you half way to achieving that goal. I think one of the reasons I was so frustrated with a lot of the students at my ECHS because they weren't taking advantage of the program in a positive way like I was. When students would tell me they failed a class or that they would just randomly pick their community college classes I would tell them that they just wasted their time and the school's money. It was as though they just didn't get it or maybe they just didn't care. It was like the classes were free so it didn't really matter to them if they passed or failed. In any case the students who kept failing their college classes it felt like they just didn't understand the importance of earning a Bachelor's degree, and especially the importance of earning a Bachelor's degree so they could be competitive in the job market to get a good job. On the other hand, I understood the importance of earning my four-year degree because my parents constantly explained to me and my siblings how important it was to get a college education and also how expensive postsecondary education is. My parents don't have



college degrees but they both took some classes at the community college and they told us that postsecondary education classes are very expensive. This is the main reason why I switched high schools after my freshman year. Although I was receiving an excellent education at a private school it was also a very expensive education. So the way I looked at it I could either spend a lot of money to earn a high school degree or I could transfer to ECHS and put myself in a position where I would have two years of my college paid for. So the money I was going to use to graduate from a private high school will now be used to pay for the rest of my Bachelor's degree and the remaining money will be used for my Master's degree. And even though I ran into some problems here and there with the ECHS program, it was still worth the switch to have some of my college paid for. To answer the second question you asked regarding the culturally relevant teaching strategies the teachers used at the ECHS is somewhat difficult for me to answer because I only took one semester of classes at the school. But I can try to compare the teaching strategies of the teachers at the private high school and at the ECHS. From what I experienced I would say that none of the teachers at either school really used cultural relevance in their teaching methods. As the private high school that teachers used linear and top down methods. The teachers were viewed as the experts in the classroom and students just tried to learn what they told us we needed to know. The teachers did not have class discussions where students were asked to share what they knew about a given topic or what they thought about the material they were learning. It was pretty much— here is what you need to know now go learn it. So I wouldn't say they focused on teaching us critical thinking skills. Well, at least they didn't focus on this during my

freshman year, and beyond that I can't really say because I left after that year. Maybe they taught these skills later on in high school but I really don't know because I wasn't there. The environment in the classroom was very competitive. For the most part we did not work in collaborative groups. We completed our school work individually, and I think this gave the teachers an accurate picture of our academic skills and abilities. They would tell us—okay, here's the best in your class, now try to get there. In contrast at the ECHS they had us work in groups all the time, and it seemed like that was the only strategy the teachers knew how to use. I also would not say they used this strategy to incorporate cultural relevance into the class. A lot of the teachers at ECHS were brand new teachers who had not ever taught before. I also would not say they used this strategy to incorporate cultural relevance into the class. A lot of the teachers at ECHS were brand new teachers who had never been in a classroom before and it felt like they were still trying to learn how to teach and it didn't feel like they knew who they were yet as teachers. For example, I think a lot of the teachers at ECHS were trying to be friends with the students where as the teachers at the private high school maintained very professional relationships with students. So in reflection I don't think the teachers at either school used culturally relevant curricula or teaching strategies. At ECHS group work was just a way to structure the classroom without any cultural relevance intentionality, and at the private high school they offered a very rigorous but it was Eurocentric and the teachers didn't focus on teaching us critical thinking skills they just told us what they thought we needed to know so we could be successful in college. Admittedly I do think they did a good job meeting this goal because I feel like my private education taught me a lot and

they over prepared me for college, and for this reason I don't think cultural relevance needs to become an essential component of the dual/concurrent enrollment high school program in order for Hispanic students to succeed in high school or to help them to successfully transition to a four-year college. What I think is most important is for students to be exposed to a rigorous curriculum and it would also be very helpful to have better advising at both the high school and college levels.

**Theme Two: Decreasing Attrition in Dual/concurrent Enrollment Programs**

MT: When I talked to each of you individually it became clear that there is little to no consistency as to how these dual/concurrent enrollment programs are being funded. For example, several of you indicated that if you failed a college level class you were required to reimburse your high school for that particular course, but again it seems ironic that some schools were willing to pay for students to retake courses they had previously failed. So it sounds as though some of the schools did not enforce their policy regarding funding, while other schools would just flat out continue to pay for students to take college level course no matter how many times the student had previously failed the class. But the commonality I am hearing across your stories is that there is a colossal waste of funding, and, unfortunately, at some of your high schools, the funding for these programs was discontinued because of the high failure rate. So, in light of these facts, would you agree that there should be stricter requirements for students to be admitted to a dual/concurrent enrollment high school program to ensure the continuation of funding for these programs?

J: As I was saying before it appeared as though a lot of students at the ECHS didn't understand the huge benefit of having two years of college paid for because they would sign-up for some of the college classes that were being offered, but after a few weeks they would just stop going to class. Then when they failed the class amazingly the school would pay for them to retake the class! That is why I was very upset when I was told they weren't going to pay for my community college classes anymore because I was doing very well in my classes; however, there was a large group of students who just kept failing their college level classes, but they were allowed to retake those expensive college classes time and time again. And I want to say I am almost 100% positive they did not have to pay the school back for the classes they failed. So I feel like a lot of the students in the program weren't qualified to take college level classes, and they should have been sent back to regular high school level courses to get the academic preparation that is necessary to succeed in college. Or maybe the school administration just needed to have stricter regulations on the distribution of funding for the college classes. For example, when a student initially enrolls into the dual/concurrent enrollment program the student and his/her parents should be required to sign a mandatory contract that states if the student should happen to fail a college level course, which the school has paid for, the student and his/her parents agree to reimburse the school for the course. Another possibility is to implement a policy that states if a student fails even one college level course the student will be placed on academic probation, and then if s/he fails the class a second time the student is required to reimburse the school for those lost funds. From my point of view it seemed like a huge waste of funding to pay for students who kept failing

their college courses. As I said before I felt like there were a lot of students who were not qualified to be enrolled in the college courses, and instead of putting that extra money toward helping me and other students who were doing well in college they were wasting money on students who continued to fail their college level courses. At the time they cut off my funding, all I needed to do to earn an Associate's degree with a specialization in business was to take a few more classes, but they wouldn't give me the funding to take the couple of extra courses I needed. So instead of earning a specialization in business I was forced to get an Associate's degree in general studies. So when I got to the four-year institution I had to pay to take those classes that I could have taken while enrolled in the dual/concurrent enrollment program.

S: At my high school I think the high failure rate in the dual/concurrent enrollment program really had a negative impact on our school's program because the funding was discontinued after the first year for the students in my cohort. I think this happened because more than half the students dropped-out of the program after the first year. A lot of students who were enrolled in the program were academically unprepared and for this reason they just couldn't pass their college level classes. Although there were a few of us who were still going to classes and doing well but the funding was still discontinued for all students. I guess the people funding the program just felt like they were wasting their money, so they pulled the funding from everyone in the program.

M: Overall I would agree that raising the requirements would help weed out students who were not high achievers and students who were at-risk of dropping-out of the program from the start. Specifically I think raising the grade point average requirement from a C

to a B would help because getting a C average is not that hard. For example, I remember I had a friend, who didn't meet the grade point average requirement, but he begged and he begged and he begged so they gave him a chance and let him enroll in the program. And of course after the first couple weeks of classes he dropped-out, so I do think they need to increase the requirement for admission to the dual/concurrent enrollment program.

### **Theme Three: Importance of Student Support Systems**

MT: I would like to shift focus from the curricula and pedagogy, and talk about the support systems outside of the classroom that you feel were instrumental in helping you transition from your high schools' dual/concurrent enrollment programs to a four-year institution. What departments and/ or individuals were most instrumental in helping you make a successful transition to the current institution you are attending?

S: Well, my high school counselors had very little involvement with trying to help students get prepared for college. But I was very fortunate to connect with a good counselor at the community college who was helping students who were enrolled in the dual/concurrent enrollment program. She was the one who guided me pretty much through the community college and she also helped me transition over to the four-year institution. During our first meeting she was already asking me about my career goals and if I had plans on transferring to a four-year institution after finishing my Associate's degree. I told her my long-term goal was to have a career in business. She even suggested which business schools I should consider applying to in state because they are considered to be really good business schools, and going out-of-state really was not an option for me because I wouldn't be able to afford out-of-state tuition. I remember her saying to me—

alright, I am going to find all the classes that will transfer to the state's flagship university because it has an excellent business school, and it also has an articulation agreement with the community college so the majority, if not all, your Associate's degree credits will transfer. Throughout the process she kept telling me that an Associate's degree is important because it gets you halfway to the Bachelor's degree, but what really matters is the Bachelor's degree in terms of employment opportunities. And when I transferred to the university every single one of my credits transferred! Every single one of them! She also helped me connect with my academic advisor at the university even before I started taking classes there. In essence she really did help me build that bridge to the next level by helping me form this very important connection. It really does help to have a connection at the university knowing someone who will help you figure out what type of resources are available makes success in college easier to attain. So she just really helped me overall, and if it wasn't for her it might have taken me longer to get my Associate's degree and I may not successfully transferred to a four-year university. Truly she made a huge difference in my life by taking the time to help me, and more importantly she took the time to care about me as an individual instead of treating me like I was just another person in the crowd.

J: I also think it is necessary to have better advising and more student services available to help students transferring from the community college into a four-year university. From my experience there are still a bunch of gaps in the system! So even though they might say the goal of the dual/concurrent enrollment program is to have students transfer into a four-year university, the support systems that are necessary for students to have a

smooth transition are not adequately coordinated. For example, at my high school they had a counselor who was trying to help students get through the dual/concurrent enrollment program, but whenever I tried to ask him for help and advice on transferring to a four-year university he really didn't help me at all. Again maybe it was because the school was new and they were just trying to figure things out like how to even run the school, but there was no one available at the school who was able to connect us with a counselor or advisor at the four-year institution. So when I suddenly learned they were no longer going to pay for my community college classes I felt totally lost and I like I had to figure everything out on my own. And being a first-generation student there wasn't really anyone in my family who could help me figure out how to maneuver through the higher education system. I truly felt like I was on my own. I was lucky to come across the Denver Transfer Initiative (DTI) program at a transfer fair I attended the December I graduated with my Associate's degree. They really helped me with advising, and they taught me how to manage all of the institutional obligations and deadlines that are part of attending a large university. But before I connected with this program I was basically bouncing back and forth between departments at the community college and the university. It was like I would go to one department and they would tell me to take a particular set of classes to get my Associate's degree, but then I would go to another department and they would say—yes, but you also need to take these classes. And then I would go to yet another department and they would tell me—no, you need to take these classes because these are the classes that will transfer to the university; those other classes don't transfer. I felt frustrated and confused before I connected with the DTI



office and met with one of their academic advisors. The DTI advisor helped me sort through the information I was given from all the different departments I met with at both schools until the list of classes shrunk down to exactly what I needed to take—the ones that would count toward a business degree and were also guaranteed to transfer. But I never would have known what I needed to take if I had just listened to the counselor that ECHS because he was only focused on helping students earn an Associate's degree in general studies, but that was not helpful for me because I kept telling him I wanted an Associate's degree in business! So if I had not been proactive and taken the initiative to meet with all of those different departments I would not have been prepared once I got to the university. I might have even lost a semester or a year just trying to make all of those connections. So I think since the goal of the dual/concurrent enrollment program is to ultimately help students earn their B.A. degree, not just an A.A. degree, there needs to be better alignment between dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs and four-year institutions. To put it another way the dual/concurrent enrollment program should not be solely focused on what is required to earn an Associate's degree, but rather they should be more closely aligned with the four-year institutions and the requirements to earn a Bachelor's degree. These connections should already exist meaning the counselor who was in charge of my high school's dual/concurrent enrollment program should have been able to connect me with a counselor in the business department at the university. In addition, it also would have been helpful to have both degree plans, one for an Associate's degree and one for a Bachelor's degree, so it is clear what is required to complete both degrees. Most importantly it should be very clear which classes transfer

toward the different degree tracks at the four-year institution. I don't think it should be so difficult for students to figure out what they need to take in order to earn a B.A. degree. This is a really important point because if students take the wrong set of classes at the community college, and those classes don't transfer to the four-year university, they have lost both time and money—which I think is in direct conflict with the intent of the dual/concurrent enrollment program. Having these connections is particularly important for first-generation Latina/o students because the system is totally new to them, and it is not as though they can go home and ask their parents for advice as to what they need to do in order to successfully maneuver through the higher education system. I think some students feel lost and frustrated, and instead of being able to persist through the system they just give up and drop-out. So from my perspective better advising and support systems are vital for first-generation Hispanic students so they can successfully transfer to a four-year institution. And definitely better advising helps students feel confident they are on the right path, and it helps them feel like they know what you are doing and that they will be able to succeed at a university.

R: The counselors at my high school also could have done a lot more to engage students in the education process. I think I can speak for others when I say it was pretty much a hit or miss when it came to getting good advising from our counselors. I think if students showed they were interested in school the counselors would give them more support and attention. But for those students who were disengaged and only seemed to come to school to hang out with their friends, I think the counselors would just let them run that course without any intervention. They really didn't try to develop very solid or productive

relationships with those students. Similarly I think at the university level students need to take the initiative to stay in contact with their advisors. I think most college counselors are way too busy which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to keep up with every student they come across. So students really have to take the initiative. One program that has really helped me is the TRIO program. I feel like they really make the effort to keep in close contact with their students. They send us a lot of e-mails and newsletters to keep us abreast of important information and deadlines. They also personally call every student in the program to ask how they are doing in school. In addition, this program offers support programs that help first-generation students stay on track with meeting their smaller academic goals so they can successfully attain their Bachelor's degree in a timely manner. So I think the support offered in these types of programs for first-generation Latina/o students is very helpful.

### **Closing Remarks**

This concludes our discussion for today. I want to thank our panel members once again for sharing their testimonials with us. I also want to thank the members of our audience for taking the time to listen to the panel members' personal experiences with their high schools' dual/concurrent enrollment programs. The goal of having this discussion is to build collations among the various stakeholders who are instrumental to helping improve the education system and programs such as the dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs our panel members attended. After today's discussion, it is clear that there is a lot of work that needs to be done in order to improve dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs so they can remain, if not become, a

more viable pathway for first-generation and other historically underrepresented students to gain access to and to persist to the attainment of a Bachelor's degree. As we move forward I hope that we can continue to work together to help improve these programs for future first-generation Latina/o students including all students who might need these types of programs to help make access to postsecondary education easier and the attainment of a B.A. degree possible.

## **Chapter Six: Key Findings, Recommendations, Implications, & Concluding Remarks**

### **Research Summary**

Dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs appear to be a sound solution to help historically underrepresented students make a smooth transition into postsecondary education as they provide a structure to help students persist to the attainment of a B.A. degree (Hoffman, 2003; Ward, 2006). However, currently there is very little quantitative or qualitative data to substantiate that these programs are meeting their intended outcomes. Therefore, this research study was designed to explore how these programs were being implemented and the impact they had on first-generation Latino students. Accordingly the two main purposes of my study were: (a) to investigate which aspects of dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs were preparing first-generation Latina/o students gain access to and succeed in four-year institutions; and (b) to investigate what role, if any, culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy played in preparing first-generation Latina/o students to succeed at the collegiate level. In order to investigate these questions I used TNI as my research methodology. TNI was an appropriate methodology to use for this study because it enabled me to gain a better understanding from the students' perspective of their lived experiences with dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs. In addition, this methodology helped me understand from the students' perspective what were and what were not some effective practices in these programs.

Overall the findings of this study indicate that the research participants felt as though the dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs they attended helped them acquire the academic skills and knowledge they needed to be successful at a four-year institution. In addition, most of the participants felt that being exposed to the institutional structure of a two-year institution helped them learn how to negotiate their way through a four-year institution. However, it is also clear from the findings that dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs do not that the students who enroll in these programs will be successful. Specifically, the participants in this study who attend different schools and who did not know one another could have similar negative experiences with the education system indicating that there is still a need to address systemic inequalities in the education system.

The key findings of this study indicate the following three components are necessary for a successful dual/concurrent enrollment high school program (a) rigorous curricula, (b) high teacher expectations and standards, and (c) strong student support systems. As evidenced from the research participants' narratives in the previous two chapters when one or more of these components is missing or lacking it becomes increasingly difficult for first-generation Latino students to complete a dual/concurrent enrollment high school program and/or obtain a B.A. degree. Under adverse conditions only the most resilient, tenacious, and persistent students have and will continue to successfully meet the intended outcomes of these programs.

## **Rigorous Curricula**

The findings of this study suggest that the best predictor of students' academic success in postsecondary education is directly related to the curricula they were exposed to during their K-12 education (Barth & Haycock, 2004). Specifically, the study findings reinforce how critical it is for students to be exposed to rigorous, high quality curricula over the course of their entire K-12 education. If students are academically behind when they enter the ninth grade it will be difficult, if not impossible, for them to succeed at college level academics while concurrently earning a high school diploma. Several of the research participants interviewed for this study shared that the curricula in many of their schools was low-quality and substandard, and several of them felt the impact of their schools' low quality K-12 education when they began taking classes at the community college. This is evident when Sergio states, "It was pretty easy stuff we did in class. It wasn't challenging or difficult...the learning experience [at my high school] was really minimal. It was not as high as I think it could have been." The detrimental impact of this low quality education became apparent when Sergio began taking classes at the community college through his high school's dual/concurrent enrollment program. Sergio continues:

When I came to the community college I met people who went to other high schools, and they already knew some of the stuff we were doing—and I was like this is totally new for me! This was especially true in my math classes when the teachers would say that we are going to begin this course with a quick review before jumping into the new material we will be covering in class. I was like—WHAT IS THIS?! I had never even seen or heard of the stuff these teachers were calling "review material". In the beginning I had to do a lot of catching-up! Luckily I am a pretty fast learner, and I would just go home and read and read and read the book until it made sense to me. But I knew some kids from my school who got really scared when the teachers kept saying this is a review and they

didn't know the material. For some students it was just too hard, and even though they tried they just couldn't get caught-up. So when they started failing their classes they just gave up and dropped-out of the program.

The long term detrimental effects for Sergio and others who attend K-12 schools that do not provide students with a rigorous curricula is evident in his experience with having to do a lot of extra work to get caught-up just so he could pass his community college classes. This is not to say all students who do not receive a rigorous, high quality K-12 are destined to fail at the collegiate level. Some students will be able to overcome deficits in their education, but unfortunately many students who attend high schools similar to Sergio's are far too often unsuccessful and drop-out of the dual/concurrent enrollment programs (Barth & Haycock; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Delgado Bernal, 2000; Gandara). The high attrition rate of these programs negatively impacts all students enrolled in these programs because funding is often times discontinued (Michelau, 2006; Palaich et al., 2006). Unfortunately this was the outcome at Sergio's high school when more than half the students who initially enrolled in the dual/concurrent program had dropped-out by the end of the first year of its inception.

I was part of the first group to do the program. At the beginning I think there was somewhere around 60 students who enrolled in the program. By the end of the first semester half of them were done—they were just done. They just stopped going to classes. Then by the end of the first year there was maybe 12 students still enrolled, so they decided to discontinue the program. Whoever was funding the program was just like—we're just wasting our money and we can't do this anymore.

All of the students interviewed indicated that the admission requirements for dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs were minimal in that they only needed a C grade point average, a 60% attendance rate, and no letters of recommendation. Two of the main stipulations for admission were that the students needed to be concurrently



enrolled in high school in order to receive funding for their classes at the community college. In addition, the students had to be less than 21 years old. An advantage of minimal admissions requirements is that it makes dual/concurrent enrollment programs more readily accessible for the majority of students, but in the end it may have been a double edge sword. Correspondingly a lack of focus on students' academic preparation to succeed in college led to higher attrition rates than anticipated which may have contributed to the demise of these programs because in some cases funding was entirely discontinued. Therefore, it is unlikely that students who are only meeting the minimum requirements to succeed in high school could possibly be adequately prepared to succeed in a dual/concurrent enrollment program.

Open access versus college readiness is an inherent tension of dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs, and both sides of the argument have serious repercussions and implications for students and the programs themselves. This assessment is by no means a plea for restricting access to these programs for historically underrepresented students, but it does highlight the importance of ensuring that all students are receiving rigorous, high quality college preparatory curricula over the course of their entire K-12 education. In the short term more care needs to be taken during the admissions process for dual/concurrent enrollment programs so students who are ready for the challenge of taking on college level classes while completing their high school diploma are likely to succeed. The long term solution to this dilemma is to address the achievement gap which continues to plague the P-20 educational pipeline (Barth & Haycock, 2004; Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Gandara, 2002; Kirst & Venezia, 2004). There

are no short cuts to solving this systemic issue. Dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs are helping address the access gap for historically underrepresented students, but these programs are not an effective mechanism to help close the achievement gap. Therefore, by ensuring that dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs are having low attrition rates will help secure the continuation of funding for these programs.

The research participants of this study indicated that there is a misalignment between high school curricula and college curricula, and that the attainment of a high school diploma does not necessary mean that one is college ready. Max provided one clear example when he shared that his brother was able to fail two semesters in high school but was still able to graduate on time. Ivan and Sergio provide examples of a substandard secondary education through their experience that they never took textbooks home or read a novel from beginning to end during high school.

Based on the substandard education many of the participants received in high school they firmly believe the community college courses were instrumental in helping them succeed at a four-year institution.

**Sergio:** I probably would not have started off as good at the university, and it just would have been a lot harder. Overall I think the program did a pretty good job preparing me to continue onto a four-year institution. It gave me the chance to get into college and the program helped introduce me to everything about college. It helped me see the difference between high school and college. I also learned how different the teaching strategies were at the college level compared to the teaching strategies used by high school teachers. One thing I noticed immediately was how fast paced the classes were at the community college, and I think just being in a college environment really helped me a lot. It is probably one of the best things that have ever happened for me. It definitely changed my life for the better. I don't think without the program...I seriously don't know if I would have made it this far or if I would be where I am right now if I hadn't gone through the dual/concurrent enrollment program. I just think if anyone gets a chance to do it they should take advantage of it.

Based on the participants' lived experiences it appears as though community college courses are providing students with the necessary skills and knowledge to attain a four-year degree. In addition, from these students' perspective secondary education is currently not providing students with an adequate education for them to succeed at college level academics. As several of the participants have pointed out taxpayers are essentially paying for the same education twice because students are often times not college ready when they graduate from high school. Therefore, it is clear that students should receive the same high quality, rigorous education during high school that they experience at the community college level. Students need to learn to view themselves as knowledge creators and critical thinkers by the time they graduate from high school (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Gay, 2001; Huerta-Macias, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2004; 2007; Padilla, 2005).

#### *Minor Role of Culturally Relevant Curricula & Pedagogy*

In addition to the structural change these programs offer, from the current K-12 system to a K-16 system, many antiracist and multicultural educators also suggest that underrepresented students of color would have a greater chance of succeeding at all educational levels if they were exposed to culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy (Gay, 2000; 2001; Sleeter & Delgado Bernal, 2003). Culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy encompasses not only teaching content in the core curricula to include diverse cultures and perspectives but it also includes providing students with the opportunity to learn in a variety of formats, such as collaborative groups. This paradigm shift to

pedagogical strategies also provides students with the opportunity to contribute to the co-construction of knowledge within the learning environment (Gay, 2001).

Interestingly in contrast to the literature on the importance of utilizing culturally relevant curricula and pedagogical strategies with students of color, including Latina/o students, the participants in this study did not agree with the perspective that being culturally marginalized in the curricula or being taught through traditional pedagogical strategies leads Latina/o students to fail and/or drop-out of school.

**Robert:** I think if students were initially given that sort of representation in the curriculum throughout elementary school then they would have garnered a sense of admiration for it and respect for it, and in turn more respect for themselves and have more respect for their own potentials and abilities. But I think throughout school, especially in my experience, it was like you would just go to school to kill time. And schools are just structures to babysit children, and so obviously throughout the years students are going to lose interest. And I think by the time they get to high school they see this representation, but it just doesn't touch them because they are so used to seeing school just as an obligation and not so much as a place where they can develop their potential and their abilities. So I think by the time most students get to high school it's too late. And I remember in my school we had culture based assemblies, but again there was no real effort made on the teachers parts to help the students understand what it meant or why these celebrations were important. It was pretty much left up to the students figure out and understand the significance of culture based assemblies. There was no real time set aside, before these times of celebration when students would learn why they were celebrating x, y, or z or learn why it should mean something to them especially if they were from that particular cultural background. In reflection I would definitely say that the cultural relevance of the curricula played a minor role in preparing me for college. The content was there, but again I just don't think the importance of the cultural relevance was stressed.

In alignment with Robert's perspective, the majority of the participants do not agree with the multicultural and antiracist position that there is any direct connection to Latina/o students' drop-out rate and the traditional Eurocentric curricula that is prevalent in U.S. schools (Kailin, 2002). While there was some acknowledgement that a culturally relevant curricula could be a source of motivation and inspiration for students of color, if this is to

happen students need to be exposed to this type of curricula at a much younger age (Gay, 2000; 2001). It seems as though the cultural relevant content these students were exposed to at the high school level was viewed as add-ons to the core curriculum, and the teaching staff usually did not make a direct connection between the cultural celebrations and the educational importance as to why they should be learning about different cultures (Gay, 2000; 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2007). This lack of pedagogical intentionality reduced these culturally relevant experiences to trivial “fun days” at school in which students were given what they viewed as a day off from learning (Yosso, 2002).

When analyzing the participants’ perception of cultural relevance through the lens of CRT it becomes apparent that these students may have been indoctrinated into the hegemonic discourse of a society that was developed based on White Eurocentric ideals (Crenshaw et al., 2000; Delgado Bernal, 2002). It should, therefore, not be surprising that these first-generation Latino students do not see the direct connection between the marginalization of people of color in the traditional Eurocentric curricula they all were exposed to throughout their educational experience and the educational failure of other Latina/o students (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005; Gillborn, 2005; Tate, 1997). After all, the participants are survivors of an educational system that was not designed to embrace their Hispanic cultural heritage and their academic success is a testimony that students of color can succeed in spite of the educational system (Lynn & Parker, 2006; Tate, 1997). Again this viewpoint underscores the racism that is deeply embedded within the U.S. education system (Tate, 1997). Since all students are being taught to view education through a color blind lens, such a view leads students to believe

that education is racially neutral (Lopez, 2003; Ward Schofield, 2007). Albeit this is a fallacious assumption because it does not acknowledge that the curricula in most U.S. schools is taught from a White European perspective (Tejeda & Gutierrez, 2005; Ward Schofield, 2007). Metaphorically the White Eurocentric curriculum has become the water in which students live. They cannot conceptualize a different curriculum or a different reality because they have never experienced anything different than the hegemon.

Just within the past year the progress made during the 1960's civil rights movement has been dealt a major setback with the recent enactment of Arizona's Senate Bill 1070 (SB 1070) which makes it crime to be in the U.S. illegally (Archibold, 2010; Nowicki, 2010). While this law is currently focused on immigration policy, it is unclear what long term repercussions this law will have on the nation as a whole, and what, if any, detrimental impact this law will have on U.S. education policy. If California's English- Only laws of the 1990's serves as precursors for today's political climate the impending impact on the U.S. education system is foreboding. Currently SB 1070 is similar to California's English-Only laws in that the original intent of these legislative movements focused on domestic policies outside the education realm; however, California's English-Only laws quickly led to Proposition 227 which was a direct attack on bilingual education in U.S. schools, so it is not improbable that SB1070 will have the same type of negative impact on U.S. classrooms.

This national context highlights the importance of teachers taking the time to examine the reasons why students should learn about and celebrate diverse cultures so this material does not become trivialized and disconnected from the core curricula

(McLaren & Torres, 1999; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2002). In addition, in terms of culturally relevant pedagogical teaching strategies it is clear that students need to be viewed as knowledge holder rather than as just knowledge depositories (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2002). Educators need to explicitly teach students how to relate their unique lived experiences with what they are learning in the classroom (Gay, 2000, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2002). Students need to be given the opportunity to use their minds to think critically about the content they are learning rather than merely expecting students to memorize and regurgitate information for a test (Gay, 2000, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2002).

Several of the research participants stated that they were not taught critical thinking skills until they began taking classes at the community college level. For example, Robert stated that the first time he was asked what he thought about the learning material was in a community college course. Juan also stated that even though he attended private schools until the ninth grade, the curricula he experienced was rigorous but it did not focus on critical thinking. In his private school classes he was expected to learn large amounts of information and regurgitate it on tests, but it wasn't until he began taking college courses that he was taught how to think critically about what he was learning. Unfortunately, these lived experiences of the research participants is far too often the normative learning experience in a typical high school classroom; therefore, it is particularly important for students to be given these opportunities prior to entering college so they can succeed at college level academics (Oakes et al., 2002; Sanchez et al.,

2005). Students should enter college with the ability to use critical thinking skills (Gay, 2000, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2002). Those students who have not been given the opportunity to think critically about the learning material throughout their educational experience will enter postsecondary education at a disadvantage; thus, reducing their chances of persisting to a B.A. degree (Gay, 2000, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2002).

### **High Teacher Expectations and Standards**

Teacher expectations are another critical component to preparing students for college level academics. One of the primary symptoms of low teacher expectations is when teachers dumb-down the standards in their classroom. Unfortunately students often internalize these low expectations which inevitably lead them to falsely believe they cannot achieve academic success (Burke & Johnstone, 2004). Researchers have found that low-income and students of color are more likely to be the recipients of low teacher expectations than their middle-class, White peers (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2006).

Several of the participants of this study indicated that the work they did in school was easy and that many of their teachers did not maintain high standards.

**Max:** I definitely think there were certain teachers who prepared me for college more than others. I think a lot of the regular classes, non-AP classes, were really laid back and I didn't find them challenging at all. I think the regular classes were pretty much just training grounds for the CSAP tests. If one didn't want to apply themselves academically it was really easy to graduate. My brother actually failed I think an entire year, two full semesters, and was still able to graduate on time.

**Ivan:** When I started taking classes at the community college I think I came in at a disadvantage because my writing skills weren't up to par with other students because of the high school I went to. There are a lot of high schools that aren't funded like others; therefore, the preparation is not the same.



As Ivan's comment points out when teachers at the high school level have low expectations and low standards in their classroom this puts students at a disadvantage when they begin college level academics because they lack the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in postsecondary education. Some students who face this added challenge when they start college are able to rise to the challenge by putting forth the extra time and effort necessary to get caught-up with their college classmates. However, not all students, despite repeated attempts, are able to fill-in their academic gaps, and as a result are unable to persist through college.

**Sergio:** When I started taking classes at the community college I quickly figured out that I was academically behind because when the professors would say we are going to begin class with a quick review, it wasn't a review for me. It was for a lot of my classmates but for me it was brand new stuff that I had never heard of or seen before. And it wasn't like I was behind in my high school level classes, it was just that we hadn't learned a lot of information that we were supposed to in high school, I guess. It took a while for me to catch-up, but I did catch-up because I think I am a pretty fast learner. But I know other students that would get scared when the teachers would expect students to already know the review material and when the teachers would say this is a review. If they had never seen the information before they would just get scared and stop going to class. I also had a friend who tried several times to pass a required math class but he never could. And I remember him telling me—it's just too hard! I can't do it. So he eventually gave up trying and dropped-out. I think a lot of high school teachers just need to care more. I remember in high school some teachers would tell their class--just learn this material for the test and then you can forget about it. But if they had a different mentality in which they would try to prepare students for the next level that would be really helpful. Because I really think that students feed off that type of negativity, and when students would encounter teachers who did care they would just blow them off. So it was like the negative teachers had a bigger influence on the students' mentality about school than the positive teachers. I truly think if the majority of teachers cared more than so would the students.

Sergio's testimony clearly demonstrates the importance of teachers' expectations and how critical it is for teachers to maintain high academic standards in their classrooms. The direct connection between teacher expectation and students academic success is

apparent. To put it simply teachers have the power to help students develop their academic skills in order to reach their fullest potential and achieve their career goals. Likewise teachers also have the power to undermine students' academic success by not providing them with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed beyond high school. If the U.S. hopes to remain competitive in the twenty-first century knowledge economy, all American children need to attain higher levels of education than ever before (Padilla, 2005; Perez & de la Rosa Salazar, 1997). Although it is highly probable that not all students will aspire to attain a college degree, the decision of whether or not one wants to pursue a college degree should be an individual's choice. This decision should no longer be made for students by K-12 teachers, which historically has too often been the case, particularly for low-income and students of color (Auerbach, 2002; Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Delgado Bernal, 2000; Gillborn, 2005; Kurlaender & Flores, 2005; Montano & Lopez Metcalfe, 2003; Oakes et al., 1995; 2002). Teachers should not hold the ultimate power to decide who is and who is not prepared to pursue a postsecondary education. All students deserve to receive a high quality, rigorous education.

### **Student Support Systems**

Historically underrepresented students have had difficulty matriculating into postsecondary institutions because they are unfamiliar with the institutional structure of the higher education system (Hoffman, 2003; Ward, 2006). In addition, first-generation college students typically do not have anyone in their immediate family who they can rely on for guidance (Lopez & Salas, 2006; Ortiz 1995). Unfortunately, many first-generation students fall between the gaps in the system into what could be thought of as a

“no-man’s” land between secondary and postsecondary education (Hoffman, 2003). The difficulty for first-generation students is figuring out how to gain entrance into the postsecondary education system which has been historically inaccessible for students who are not the traditional middle-class, White students (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs offer one possible solution to this problem by providing a structural change to the secondary education system to help provide more support for first-generation students through the first two years of college (Hoffman, 2003; Ward, 2006). In theory dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs seem like a logical solution to help more first-generation Latina/o students smoothly transition into postsecondary education (Hoffman, 2003; Ward, 2006). This structural model should create a more seamless educational experience for all first-generation students because they have support from the familiar high school staff and the community college staff (Hoffman, 2003; Ward, 2006). It is also purported that the community college staff will provide the necessary support for dual/concurrent enrollment high school students as they get close to completing their A.A. degree and begin to transition into a four-year institution (Hoffman, 2003; Ward, 2006).

The findings of this study also indicate that academic advisors played an important role in helping students become familiar with the higher education terrain which helped build-up their self-confidence so they could handle the demands of a four-year institution. When these support systems were missing the research participants stated that they had to be proactive in order to find the resources and people they needed to help them transition on to a four-year institution. In addition, academic counselors helped

connect students to other academic and/or support services at the four-year institution. For Juan it was the DTI program that served the vital role of helping him transition into a four-year university. Before connecting with DTI Juan stated that he felt lost during his transition into a four-year university because his high school counselor did not provide the necessary support to facilitate a smooth transition. Fortunately Sergio's community college academic advisor connected him with an advisor at the university he is currently attending the semester before he graduated from his dual/concurrent enrollment high school program. The research participants also stated that it was helpful knowing they had someone at the four-year institution they could turn to for guidance because the whole environment of a large university can be overwhelming for first-generation college students.

It is important for students to receive adequate academic advising at all three academic levels: high schools, community colleges, and four-year institutions (Lopez & Salas, 2006; Venezia & Rainwater, 2007; Ward, 2006). The support staff at all three institutional levels should not take it for granted that first-generation college students will be able to successfully make these connections on their own (Lopez & Salas, 2006; Venezia & Rainwater, 2007; Ward, 2006). A great deal of time and effort has been invested in these students and extra care should be taken to ensure they successfully transition into a four-year institution. Proponents of the dual/concurrent enrollment high school model make the claim that students will benefit from the extra support these programs offer so students can persist to the attainment of a four-year degree (Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Swail, 2000; Venezia & Rainwater, 2007; Ward, 2006), but

the participants of this study shared that this is not happening as often as it should and many of them had to be resilient and persistent in order to make these connections on their own. It is important for academic advisors and other student support staff to be mindful that the higher education terrain is unfamiliar to first-generation Latina/o students, and they play a critical role in helping these students succeed in a four-year institution (Lopez & Salas, 2006; Venezia & Rainwater, 2007; Ward, 2006).

Unfortunately some students are unable to persist to the completion of a four-year degree because the institutional bureaucracy becomes too overwhelming so they drop-out of college (Lopez & Salas, 2006; Venezia & Rainwater, 2007; Ward, 2006). Therefore, the student support staff can help reduce this problem by providing students with the necessary support and resources they need in order to acclimate to this new environment.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

Collectively across all grade levels educators, administrators, and student support staff share the responsibility of preparing all students for college and/or the twenty-first century global job market (Barth & Haycock, 2004; Padilla, 2005). Most importantly in order for all students to be adequately prepared for the twenty-first century knowledge economy all students must be provided with rigorous curricula (Barth & Haycock, 2004; Padilla, 2005). In addition, educators must maintain high expectations and standards for all students (Barth & Haycock, 2004; Padilla, 2005). It is also important for first-generation Latina/o students to receive extra support in order to have a seamless educational experience. Educational policy makers also play a critical role in developing and implementing legislation which provides a pathway for historically underrepresented

students gain access to postsecondary education. The following recommendations should help first-generation students and other historically underrepresented students to gain access to and persist to the attainment of a B.A. degree.

### *Educators*

First and foremost, it is necessary for educators across the P-20 spectrum to provide all students with a rigorous, high quality education. A solid K-12 academic preparation in is the best predictor for student success in college (Barth & Haycock, 2004). In addition to providing students with rigorous curricula, students should be taught critical thinking skills over the course of their K-12 education (Barth & Haycock, 2004; Padilla, 2005). Rote memorization is not an effective teaching strategy because it does not help students retain the information they are taught (Barth & Haycock, 2004). Furthermore, early in their education students need to be viewed as knowledge producers rather than simply as knowledge consumers (Barth & Haycock, 2004; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2007). The lived experiences students bring with them to the learning environment should be validated and viewed as assets that can be built upon (Gay, 2000, 2001; Kailin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2007). Teachers should focus on and build upon students' strengths rather than focusing on what they think students "ought" to know (Gay, 2000, 2001; Kailin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2007). In addition, students should be provided with a safe learning environment in which they can share their ideas, thoughts, and opinions on what they are learning (Gay, 2000, 2001; Kailin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2007). Students should be actively involved in the co-construction of knowledge in the classroom; as such students should be given the opportunity to express their thoughts,

ideas, and opinions on the material they are learning (Gay, 2000, 2001; Kailin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2007). It is important for students to be exposed to a wide variety of cultures and perspectives in the material they are learning at school (Gay, 2000, 2001; Kailin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2007). Culturally relevant material should not be used as add-ons to supplement the core curricula; doing so trivializes this type of educational material (Gay, 2000, 2001; Kailin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2007). In order to avoid trivializing culturally relevant material teachers should explicitly explain to students the importance of the culturally relevant material (Gay, 2000, 2001; Kailin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2007).

### *Student Support Systems*

In addition to a rigorous and high quality education it is important for students to receive support from educators and other educational staff members, this section will primarily focus on important support systems at the secondary and postsecondary levels. The collaborative effort of support systems is particularly important to ensure the successful transition of first-generation students of color from high school to four-year institutions.

*Secondary Support Systems.* As many educational researchers have pointed out—high school counselors are important gatekeepers in the education system (Barth & Haycock, 2004; Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Gandara, 2002). The advice they provide often times determine whether or not students will be prepared for college (Barth & Haycock, 2004; Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Gandara, 2002). Therefore, their advice can either ensure access to four-year

institutions or their advice can undermine and/or destroy students' chances of obtaining a college education at a four-year college or university (Oakes & Guiton, 1995; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002; Stuart Wells et al., 2004). Therefore, high school counselors should not only help students with administrative tasks (i.e. schedule changes) but also proactively help students prepare for life after high school. They should also make a concerted effort to meet individually with every student on their case load to make sure they are successfully meeting graduation requirements. For example, they should schedule individual meetings with students to help them develop their career aspirations. It should also be noted that this process needs to begin during ninth grade and not waiting until students are in their last year of high school because students should utilize all four years of their secondary education to prepare for their life after high school (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005; Gandara, 2002; Hoffman, 2003; Venezia & Rainwater, 2007).

*Postsecondary Support Systems.* Postsecondary support staff also plays an instrumental role in helping students develop a bridge from high school to a four-year institution. In order for dual/concurrent high school enrollment programs to meet their intended outcomes community college counselors must work collaboratively with both high school counselors and college/university counselors to help these students earn an A.A. degree and successfully transfer onto a four-year institution (Gandara, 2002; Greenhouse Gardella et al., 2005). In the absence of these collaborative efforts far too many first-generation Latina/o dual/concurrent enrollment graduates fail to matriculate into a four-year institution. They should also help students make connections with an



academic advisor at the four-year institution they are planning on attending to complete their B.A. degree (Gandara, 2002; Greenhouse Gardella et al., 2005; Huerta-Macias, 1998; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Kurlaender & Flores, 2005; .

Making connections with first-generation Latina/o students earlier rather than later in their academic careers is also very important in helping them persist to the attainment of a B.A. degree. In addition, when students are able to develop these important relationships early in their college careers helps them feel connected to the institution (Huerta-Macias, 1998; Kurlaender & Flores, 2005; Lopez & Salas, 2006; Oakes et al., 2002; Price & Wohlford, 2005). For example, postsecondary academic counselors should meet with transfer students within the first quarter of the academic year to ensure they are enrolled in the proper courses for their particular degree plan.

First and second year student affairs professionals could also help support the efforts of the academic counselors by coordinating their efforts to help transfer students succeed at a four-year institution. This is a particularly important point because the first hurdle for transfer students, including first-generation Latina/o students, is to gain access to a four-year institution and the second hurdle is for them to persist to the attainment of a B.A. degree.

#### *Education Policy Makers*

Education policy makers can help close the access gap by supporting and passing legislation that guarantees state and federal funding for alternative academic programs specifically designed for Latina/o students' and other historically underrepresented students. Monetary support of these programs helps create multiple pathways available

for historically underrepresented students to gain access to four-year institutions. Policy makers may find the following recommendations helpful: (a) create state wide guidelines outlining the rules governing the funding for dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs that are subsidized with state monies. These guidelines will ensure the more equitable and even distribution of funding of dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs; and (b) create legislation that will make it easier for school districts to track the academic progress of dual/concurrent enrollment graduates.

### **Areas for Further Research**

For this study I used testimonio narrative methodology as a means to gain a better understanding of first-generation Latina/o students' lived experiences with dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs. When I began my dissertation research there were no qualitative peer reviewed studies available that focused on first-generation Latina/o students' lived experiences with dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs. In addition, there were no qualitative studies that focused on whether or not culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy in a dual/concurrent enrollment high school program is an important component in helping Latina/o students succeed at college level academics. Accordingly what follows are some suggestions for social science researchers who have a particular interest in the education of Latina/o students.

Qualitative studies that focus on Latina students' experiences with dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs and with culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy. These studies could help ensure that Latinas' voices and perspectives are represented in the literature. I think it is important to reiterate that Latinas were not

deliberately excluded from this present study, but rather their exclusion was related to their minute representation and success with the programs under investigation. It is worth investigating to see if their representation in dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs and four-year institutions has increased since the time of this study.

In this present study the saliency of students' racial identity was not a focus. Future qualitative studies that focus on students' racial identity development could provide potentially insightful information on whether or not their racial identity impacts their success in these programs. For example, do students with a low salient racial identity have higher success rates in dual/concurrent enrollment programs than students with a high salient racial identity, or vice versa? In addition to focusing on racial identity researchers could also focus on the different experiences Latinas/os have with dual/concurrent enrollment programs? Stated another way, what role does gender identity have on the experiences of Latinas and Latinos in dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs?

Longitudinal studies in which Latina/o students are followed through the dual/concurrent enrollment high school program to the completion of a B.A. degree. These studies would give a very in-depth understanding of first-generation Latina/o students with these programs and with their experiences at four-year institutions. The findings from these types of studies would help inform both practice and education policy.

Comparative studies of dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs that utilize Eurocentric curricula and pedagogy versus programs that use culturally relevant

curricula and pedagogy is another area for future investigation. These studies could help educators improve the curricula of these programs and improve pedagogical strategies. Other comparative studies could include the investigation teachers' and administrators' perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses of dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs in comparison with students enrolled in these programs.

### **Closing Remarks**

Over the past half century educational opportunities for students of color have improved both at the K-12 and postsecondary levels; however, critical race theory uncovers the systemic and endemic racism that is still prevalent in U.S. educational institutions which helps White students maintain an unfair advantage in the education system at all levels (Auerbach, 2002; Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005; Delgado Bernal, 2000). Despite the civil right movement and the Chicano rights movement of the 1960's students of color are still overrepresented in low-level curricular tracks, underrepresented in college preparatory tracks including AP courses, overrepresented in community colleges and vocational schools, and underrepresented in four-year colleges and universities (Auerbach, 2002; Bell, 1980; Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2005; Oakes, Roger, Lipton, & Morrell, 2002). Although these dismal facts pertain to all students of color, research findings show that these trends pertain particularly to first-generation Latina/o students (Auerbach, 2002; Darder & Torres, 2000; Delgado Bernal, 2000; Greenhouse Gardella et al., 2005). If these negative trends continue the impact will be devastating not only for the Latino community but also for society as a whole because the U.S. will be unable to

remain competitive in the twenty-first century global economy (Heckman & Krueger, 2003; Padilla, 2005; Perez, 2004; Perez & de la Rosa Salazar, 1997).

One of the education reform efforts taking shape to close the achievement gap for students of color are dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs (Gandara, 2002; Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004). In essence dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs provide the necessary structural change to the current K-12 system to a K-16 system so that historically underrepresented students have the structural support they need in order to successfully transition from high school to the college level (Gandara, 2002; Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Venezia & Rainwater, 2007). Research has shown that first-generation students of color have a particularly difficult time transitioning into college because they are unfamiliar with the higher education system (Burke & Johnstone, 2004; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Hoffman, 2003; Lopez & Salas, 2006; Oakes et al., 2002; Ward, 2006); dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs help students build a bridge, so to speak, to higher education by providing them with extra support while they are transitioning into a four-year institution (Greenhouse Gardella et al., 2005; Hoffman, 2003; Kirst & Venezia, 2004; Lopez & Salas, 2006; Ortiz, 1995). In addition to this structural change, community cultural wealth theory supports antiracist and multicultural educators argument that it is also important for students of color to be exposed to culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy in order to persist through the education system (Banks, 2007; Gay, 2000, 2001; Kailin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2004, 2007; Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Yosso, 2002).

At the time of this study there were no studies available that focused specifically on first-generation Latina/o students to see if these programs are in fact helping them persist to the attainment of a B.A. degree. In addition, there were no peer reviewed studies available supporting that dual/concurrent enrollment programs using culturally relevant curricula and pedagogy are more successful than programs using rigorous Eurocentric curricula. Thus, as the researcher there were many times along this journey that I felt as though I was trying to cut a path through a very dense forest with a butter knife. However, I was willing to meet the challenge of completing this study because I believe that the findings of this study can make significant contributions to improve dual/concurrent enrollment programs so they can remain a viable option for first-generation Latina/o students not only gain access to but also persist to the attainment of a B.A. degree.

In closing this dissertation study found that dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs are a viable option for first-generation Latina/o students to gain access to and persist to the attainment of a B.A. degree, but certain components need to be in place in order for them to be successful in these programs. First and foremost it is critical for students to have a solid K-12 educational foundation to succeed in community college courses. It is possible, but highly unlikely, that students who are academically behind when they enter high school could possibly handle the workload of college courses on top of their regular high school classes. Enrolling students into these programs who are unable to demonstrate college readiness could potentially set them up to fail, and a high attrition rate in dual/concurrent enrollment high school programs could contribute to a

loss of funding or the discontinuation of these programs altogether. Therefore, the importance of a quality K-12 education cannot be understated—it is essential!

This also underscores the importance of having an education system that works as an integrated and holistic system. Educators in all academic levels need to collaborate and move away from a silos mentality in which they think they can work in isolation. Collaboration is necessary in order to successfully educate students for the twenty-first century knowledge economy. This requires that all teachers validate and value the lived experiences students bring with them to the classroom. Teachers need to view students through an assets lens and build upon their strengths rather than focusing on what they ought to know before stepping foot in the classroom. The task that lies before educators is daunting, but it is important not succumb to the challenge; through collaborative efforts it is possible to improve dual/concurrent enrollment programs so that more first-generation students can successfully complete these programs and obtain a B.A. degree.

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, I have chosen to use the term Latina/o over Hispanic for several reasons. First, I think that it is helpful for the reader when the author is consistent with terminology. The drawback of using an all encompassing term is to run the risk of essentializing a diverse group of people. This is not my intent. However, the second reason I chose to use this term is based on its widespread acceptance and usage among this population. In recent years the term Hispanic has fallen-out of favor because of the historical association of domination and colonization of the indigenous peoples in the Americas by the Spaniards (Rodriguez, 2002).

## Appendix A

### Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study that will investigate which aspects of dual/concurrent enrollment programs prepare first-generation Latina/o students to gain access to and succeed in four-year postsecondary institutions. Another purpose of this study is to understand specifically which aspects of dual/concurrent enrollment programs prepare first-generation Latinas/os students, not only to excel academically in college, but also help Latinas/os persist to the attainment of a Bachelor's degree. The researcher will use a qualitative research design called testimonial narrative inquiry to collect data. This research design entails the collection of first-generation Latina/o students' stories regarding their personal experiences in dual/concurrent enrollment programs and their present educational experiences in a four-year postsecondary institution. In addition, this study is being conducted to fulfill the requirements of a doctoral dissertation. The study is conducted by Michelle R. Martinez Turner. Results will be used to help educational practitioners in secondary and higher education institutions improve programs and pedagogical practices that will help Latina/o students gain access to four-year colleges/universities and to attain a Bachelor's degree.

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. I respect your right to choose not to answer any question(s) that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Data collection will involve the audio-recording of three 90 minute in-depth interview sessions, participants' journaling, and transcribing the information collected from an optional 90 minute online focus group session. During the first in-depth interview I will ask you approximately 17 open ended questions related to your overall educational experience from Kindergarten to the present. Next, during the second in-depth interview I will ask you approximately 14 open ended questions related to your personal experience(s) with your high school's dual/concurrent enrollment program. Lastly, during the third in-depth interview I will ask you approximately 10 open ended questions related to your current experience(s) at the four-year institution you are currently attending. It should be noted that there are no right or wrong answers to any of the in-depth interview questions, but rather these questions are meant to serve more as a guide for our discussions. In addition to help facilitate and make the most of our limited time together, I will ask you to write a journal entry before each of the interview sessions for a minimum of 20 minutes on the open ended questions related to that particular interview

session (please see attached questions for all three in-depth interview sessions). The intent of journaling is to help jog your memory and to help you reflect on your past and current educational experiences. You may either hand-write your journal entries in the composition notebook I will provide for you or, if you prefer, you can use a word processor and provide me with a print-out of your entry. At the conclusion of the study I will have collected a minimum of three journal entries from you. I will keep your entries in a locked cabinet, and I will be the only one who will read your personal entries. Lastly, based on the information I have collected during the in-depth interviews and journal entries, I will develop a series of open ended questions for the participants to discuss during an optional 90 minute online focus group session. Participants who wish to participate in the online focus group will need to obtain a password from the researcher to access the discussion. All participants are required to use their pseudonyms during the private online focus group session in order to maintain one's anonymity during the study.

In order to protect your anonymity and confidentiality I will ask you to choose a pseudonym at the beginning of the study. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and your identity as a participant will only be known to the researcher. I will use your pseudonym during the study and in all written documents generated from my study. In addition, I will do my best to remove any and all individual identifiers which might make it possible for readers of my study to identify you. Although these protective measures will be taken it is still important to point out that there is a small chance that a reader will be able to identify you. Throughout the study I will be the only individual collecting data. Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating in the study. I would be happy to share the finding of my study with you after the research is completed. I can be reached by telephone at Home: 303-840-5626, Mobile: 720-253-4949, or E-mail at [mturner6@du.edu](mailto:mturner6@du.edu). This project is also supervised by my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Frank Tuitt. He can be reached at Work: 303-871-4573, E-mail: [ftuitt@du.edu](mailto:ftuitt@du.edu), or Mail:

University of Denver Higher Education Department, Morgridge College of Education,  
Wesley Hall 2135 E. Wesley Ave., Rm. 100, Denver, CO 80208.

There are a few minimal risks associated with this study which are: 1) Being identified by someone who reads the study, and 2) Discomfort sharing personal educational experiences. The expected benefits associated with your participation is gathering information regarding how educational institutions from high school (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades) through undergraduate education can help educators improve programs and their teaching strategies to better meet the educational needs of Latinas/os. If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during this study, please contact Susan Sandler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.



You may keep this page for your records. Please sign and date this page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called “Embracing Resistance at the Margins: First-generation Latina/o Students’ Testimonials on Dual/Concurrent Enrollment High School Programs.” I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I agree to be audio-taped.

I do not agree to be audio-taped

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address

## Appendix B

The purpose of the individual interviews is to understand the students' educational experiences in dual/concurrent high school enrollment programs, and to gain an insight into how they are academically performing at the four-year institution they are attending. These interviews will take place over the course of several months.

### In-depth Individual Interview Protocol #1

The first interviews will be used to establish an overall understanding of the students' educational history from Kindergarten to present by asking the following questions:

1. How many schools did you attend during your formative and high school years?
  - a. In what state(s) was your school located?
  - b. If your family moved a lot during these times in your education what were some of the main reasons for your family's relocation?
  - c. In your opinion do you think switching schools impacted your educational experience? If so, in what ways?
2. Overall how would you describe your educational experience?
  - a. What aspects of your education were particularly positive?
  - b. If you had any negative experience at school can you describe what they were?
3. Do you think your race played a role in the education you received? If so, can you explain or describe how race was a factor?
4. In relation to your white classmates, do you think your teachers treated you the same or differently?
  - a. If so, in what ways were you treated differently?
  - b. Can you explain how this made you feel? Were you angry, sad, or indifferent?
  - c. Did this have an impact on your academic performance? If so in what ways?
    - i. Did it motivate you to try harder in school? Or did it make you feel like giving-up?
5. Overall how were you treated by the school administration?
  - a. Do you think they treated you fairly or unfairly in relation to your white classmates?
  - b. If you think you were treated unfairly, how did this make you feel?
  - c. Did this have an impact on your academic performance?
6. Were your parent(s)/guardian(s) involved with your education during elementary, middle, and high school?
  - a. If so, in what way(s) were they involved?

- b. Did they encourage you to do well in school? If so, how did they communicate this to you?
      - i. Would they give you verbal encouragement?
      - ii. Did they make you complete your homework before you could spend time with friends or engage in extracurricular activities at school?
      - iii. Did they attend parent/teacher conferences?
- 7. Growing-up did your parents talk to you about college?
  - a. Did they encourage you to attend college?
  - b. If they did not, what were some of the reasons you were not encouraged to seek a college education?
  - c. How were you able to overcome these obstacles?
- 8. Were your parents involved with the parent/teacher association at any of your schools? If not did they ever talk to you about why they were not more involved with your school's community?
- 9. Overall how would you describe the relationship your parent/s and/or guardian/s had with your teachers and the school personnel including the administration?
  - a. Do you think race and/or language was a factor in the relationship your parents/guardians had with teachers and the school personnel?
  - b. Can you describe any specific incidents when you thought this was apparent?
- 10. In middle school did you attend regular classes with your white peers?
- 11. Did your middle school teachers talk to you and/or other students about college?
- 12. Do you think your middle school education prepared you for high school?
  - a. In which content areas did you feel most prepared for high school level academics?
  - b. Similarly, in what content areas do you think you could have been more prepared?
- 13. Can you describe the most prevalent pedagogical teaching strategies your teachers utilized?
  - a. How, if at all, did their teaching strategies impact your learning?
- 14. In general how would you describe the relationship you had with your classmates?
- 15. Did you have friends from all ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds? Or were your friendships primarily with other Latina/o students?
- 16. Can you describe the overall culture of the schools you attended? Did the school culture and climate foster and/or encourage students from different backgrounds to form friendships?
- 17. Is there anything you would like to add that I have not asked you about?

Thank you for your time and participation!

## **In-depth Individual Interview Protocol #2**

The second set of interview questions will focus on the students' experiences during high school. I will first ask the students a series of questions related to their overall high school experience. Next I will ask the students how they learned about their high school's dual/concurrent enrollment program, and why they chose to enroll in this program. I will also ask the students what aspects of the dual/concurrent enrollment program helped prepare them for the college admissions process, and particularly which aspects of the program prepared them for college level academics. Lastly, I will ask them if they have any suggestions on how dual/concurrent enrollment programs could be improved for other Latina/o students. My specific questions are the following:

1. Overall how would you describe your high school experience?
  - a. What aspects of high school were particularly positive?
  - b. If you had any negative experiences what were they?
    - i. In reflection, do you think there was anything you could have done differently to have avoided these experiences?
    - ii. Is there anything your teachers or the school administration could have done differently?
2. How did you learn about your school's dual/concurrent program?
  - a. Why did you choose to enroll in the program?
3. Was it an open access program or were there any pre-requisites (classes and/or testing) you had to fulfill in order to enroll in the program?
  - a. If pre-requisites were required how did you learn about these requirements?
  - b. Do you feel as though you were given enough advance notice to easily fulfill these requirements?
4. Was the program easily accessible or did you encounter any obstacles along the way?
  - a. How did you manage to overcome these obstacles?
5. Can you describe the structure of the program?
  - a. Did you take the college level courses on your high school campus or at a college campus? If so, which campus?
  - b. Were the classes taught by your high school teachers, college professors, or a combination of both?
6. Were you able to complete the requirements for the dual/concurrent enrollment program within the expected time frame or did you have to take extra steps to complete the program by graduation?
7. Can you describe the curricula of the dual/concurrent enrollment program?
  - a. What types of curricula options were available, i.e. general liberal arts math, science, and or technology?
  - b. What aspects of the curricula, if any, were culturally relevant?

- c. In your opinion, do you think that a culturally relevant curriculum is helpful in preparing students for college? Why or why not?
8. Can you describe the pedagogy of the teachers?
  - a. What teaching strategies did they use?
  - b. Which strategies did you find most helpful? Explain how the strategies helped you learn the content?
  - c. Which strategies did you find least helpful? Can you explain why these strategies were not helpful?
  - d. Would you describe any of the teaching strategies your teachers used as culturally relevant? If so, how were they culturally relevant?
9. Did your teachers, guidance counselor, or both help you choose which classes to take during high school?
  - a. Overall, how would you describe the advice they gave you?
  - b. Do you think their advice helped you make informed decisions?
10. Were your parents/guardians involved in helping you choose your high school classes?
11. Did your parents and teachers have a good relationship?
12. Did your parents, teachers, and guidance counselor work together to help you achieve your educational goals in high school?
13. Do you think your parents' involvement was important and/or necessary to helping you become prepared for college? Why or why not?
14. Is there anything you would like to add that I have not asked you about?

Thank you for your time and participation!

### **In-depth Individual Interview Protocol #3**

The third set of interview questions will be tailored to helping me understand how the students are performing in their college classes. In order to understand specifically how dual/concurrent enrollment programs prepared them to gain access to and succeed in college I will ask the participants the following questions:

1. At the time of your high school graduation did you feel prepared to compete in the college admissions process?
  - a. If so, what aspects of your high school education helped prepare you for this process?
  - b. What specific aspects of the dual/concurrent enrollment program helped prepare you?
  - c. If applicable, what aspects of the program could have helped better prepare you for the college admissions process?
2. How are you doing academically in your college classes?
3. What aspects of your high school curricula do you feel prepared you to succeed at college level academics?
4. If applicable, are there any content areas you do not feel adequately prepared for?
  - a. In your opinion, in what ways can the dual/concurrent enrollment programs be changed to help better prepare students to succeed in these content areas?
5. In reflection do you think your high school's culturally relevant curricula played a role in preparing you for college? If so, in what ways?
6. Similarly, do you think your high school teachers pedagogical strategies help prepare you for college level academics?
  - a. Were their teaching strategies culturally relevant?
  - b. In your opinion did culturally relevant pedagogical strategies help prepare you for your college classes? If so, in what ways.
7. Would you recommend dual/concurrent enrollment programs to other Latina/o students? Why or why not?
8. What suggestions do you have for improving dual/concurrent enrollment programs in the future for Latina/o students?
9. Do you think it is important to ensure that dual/concurrent enrollment teachers continue to use culturally relevant curricula and pedagogical teaching strategies? Why or why not?
10. Is there anything you would like to add that I have not asked you about?

Thank you for your time and participation!

## Appendix C

### Bracketing: An Autobiographical Essay

*I learned how to read, write, and do math, but this required me to unlearn my Latina identity: The impact of a Eurocentric curricula on my ethnic identity development.*

I have asked myself many times over the course of my life “Who am I?” Needless to say the answer to this question has changed many times. This is not unusual. Human development theories have shown that our identity is constantly in flux (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). But it is important for researchers to revisit the answers to this question to become aware of our most salient identities before we begin our research study because undoubtedly the answer to this question will impact all aspects of our study. My answer to this question today is I am a Latina, a wife, a mother of three biracial children, a teacher, a scholar, a researcher, and a social activist. These are currently my most salient identity characteristics, and collectively they will impact my study.

In order to understand how I developed these multiple identities it is necessary to take a walk down memory lane. My story begins with my earliest memories from around the age of four. When I was little (from birth to the age of five) I lived with my mom, dad, and older brother in the heart of downtown Denver. Our home was a duplex on Mariposa Street which is one block south of Colfax and the Auraria Campus. My father’s aunt and uncle lived in the adjacent residence of our duplex. Across the street from our home was the Lincoln Park projects, and my paternal grandmother lived in this government subsidized housing unit. My mother’s family (her mom, dad, and seven younger siblings) lived approximately five miles from our home. As a small child I

remember being surrounded by a tight nit Hispanic family. Our Spanish and Mexican culture was an integral component of our lives. I remember the Spanish language being spoken in our home and I can still vividly remember the delicious authentic Mexican meals that were prepared by my relatives. All of this disappeared from my life when my mom and dad moved us to the suburbs of Denver.

Half way through first grade we moved to southeastern Arapahoe County. My parents purchased a home in a middle-class, White neighborhood, and we lived within the Cherry Creek School District's boundaries. Overnight we went from living in a low-income predominantly Hispanic neighborhood to a middle-class, White washed world, and our acculturation and assimilation into this dominant culture began. For the first couple of years we mirrored the typical middle-class, White family. Everything in my life changed. We no longer lived close to our extended family, my parents did not speak Spanish in the home, and all of our customs became Eurocentrifed.

I remember my parents telling me they moved us to the suburbs so my brother and I could receive a better education in a suburban school district then one that could be provided through the Denver Public School District (DPS). In addition, they abandoned all of our Hispanic customs so that my brother and I could learn how to assimilate into our new surroundings. And even though my father knew how to speak Spanish my parents did not teach us to be bilingual out of fear that we would develop a Spanish accent which they believed would lead to our teachers and peers treating us differently.

Although some people might admonish my parents' actions, I believe they did what they felt was in our best interests. My parents both attended Denver Public Schools



growing-up and they came of age during the 1960's. I believe their first-hand experiences with racism served as the basis for wanting to provide my brother and me with a color blind experience, and they believed that if they could teach us how to assimilate into the White mainstream culture we would not experience racism. Many people of color during this time period in U.S. history believe and bought into this liberal discourse, but over the course of time all Americans would learn that this ideology was quite erroneous. Only the children of color who had light skin pigmentation and who spoke perfectly articulated English were accepted into the mainstream—well, somewhat, but not entirely.

While I was able to pass as being White my brother was not. My brother has more of the typical Mexican features which include dark skin color, dark hair, and dark eyes. Even though I have dark hair and dark eyes like my brother I have light skin pigmentation, and I think this enabled me to pass as being White while he was not able to do the same. This was most readily apparent in our different educational experiences. My brother has stated that he experienced racism during his K-12 education. He said he felt as though some of his teachers and peers had treated him poorly because he has the typical Mexican features. On the other hand, I do not recall any of my teachers treating me poorly because of my race, and most of my peers were accepting of me. It was not until high school that I began to experience racism from my peers. I can still recall the times being called a spic, beaner, and stupid Mexican at school.

It might seem silly to some people but these comments led to the beginning of an identity crisis for me that lasted into my junior year in college. Up until late high school I had truly believed that I was White just like my peers who were calling me derogatory

names. I remember being in total shock and disbelief that someone would call me those horrible names, and I remember thinking to myself, “What are they talking about? I am White just like them!” My racial and ethnic heritage had become invisible to me, but those comments catapulted me back into reality. It was the beginning of my own consciousnessization (Freire, 1970). It taught me that people of color are not entirely accepted into the dominant White mainstream culture no matter how hard we might try we are never entirely accepted into this exclusive club. And unfortunately for many years I thought it was shameful to be Mexican-American—why else would my parents have tried to make my brother and I White?

It has taken me many years to accept my racial identity. And although I received a quality K-12 education, it was a color-blind education. I learned how to read, write, and do math, but I graduated not knowing who I was. I have moved through the stages of denial, anger, acceptance, to action. I am now ready to take action against the color-blind racist practices that are still prevalent in the U.S. education system. I believe it is possible to provide all students with a high quality college preparatory education without having to forget, relinquish, and abandon their cultural heritage. I do believe in the Dewian and Jeffersonian concept of education—that education should be an emancipator experience (hooks, 1994). Education should lead to the freeing of the mind, body and spirit. The goal of my dissertation is to investigate from Latina/o students perspectives whether or not dual/concurrent enrollment programs are doing what they propose in the literature to do—help students of color not only gain access to four-year colleges and universities, but also persist in college to the attainment of a B.A. degree.

I began my testimonio by asking myself “Who am I?”, and by making my answer to this question as transparent as possible. By recounting this story I am able to bracket out my personal biases toward the U.S. education system, my opinions about Eurocentric curricula, and my feelings about experiencing racism at school. This trip down memory lane also helps me to publically acknowledge that my racial identity has not always been a salient part of my identity, and it has taken me many years to embrace my Latin roots. This may be one potential difference between me and my research participants. The important point here is to recognize that by growing-up with a color blind lens and by having my ethnic identity rendered invisible to me, I was able to accept unquestioningly the Eurocentric curricula taught at my elementary, middle, and high schools. Therefore, my educational experience will undoubtedly be very different from Latina/o students who grew-up with a strong ethnic identity.

Ever since I began my doctoral studies I have been interested in understanding the reasons why generally students of color, particularly Latina/o students, seemed to academically lag behind their more privileged middle-class, White peers. In addition, I have also been on a mission to learn effective strategies that can be utilized by educators to help reverse this negative trend. My passion for this topic has been shaped by my professional experiences as a middle school and high school English teacher. It is not an understatement to say that I was very idealistic and, perhaps, a bit naïve when I began my teaching career ten years ago. I can honestly say that I believed I could change the world one class period at a time. One can only imagine my shock and surprise when the realities of classroom teaching set-in.

My educational background prepared me to teach and manage a secondary classroom, but my educational training did not teach me how to deal with or how to manage the politics of teaching. In fact, early in my career I was oblivious to the close connection between education and politics. I think I was initially unaware of this connection because up to this point in my life I had been taught that our education system was a meritocracy. As a result, I had bought into the ideology that the U.S. education system was a meritocracy in which the sky's the limit for *all* students. So, when I began my teaching career I believed that *all* students had it within their grasp to achieve anything they set their sights on, and the only thing holding them back from achieving their dreams was their own lack of ambition and/or effort. Over time my professional experience showed me that the ideology of meritocracy in the U.S. education system was nothing more than empty political rhetoric.

This was a particularly difficult realization for me because I wanted to believe that our education system was a meritocracy. It was difficult for me to acknowledge that collectively we were acting like hypocrites. On the one hand educators blame students for underachievement, but on the other hand we do not provide *all* students with equal learning opportunities. We propose to do so, but the reality is we do not! Despite the political rhetoric of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) I believe that collectively we educate a few students well—children who are predominantly from middle- and upper-class, White European backgrounds—but beyond this select group of children, we leave *all* students behind who do not fit into the hegemon.

As I reflect upon my teaching career I can see that there were several distinct stages that I went through as I began to grapple with the realization that our education system is wrought with inequity. At first I went through a stage of denial. I did not want to believe that our education system was unjust, unfair, and most of all, unequal. But over time in my heart I knew I could not hold onto the bogus ideology of meritocracy as it pertains to our education system. I also knew I had to make a decision. I either had to choose acceptance or action. Meaning I could either choose to accept the U.S. education system as it is or I could choose to work toward changing the inequalities plaguing the education system.

At the time I made my choice I happened to be working at a suburban middle school in the Rocky Mountain region of the U.S. I remember sitting in a meeting with the school administration along with a number of my colleagues from the English department. The administrators began the meeting by handing us a piece of paper that described one of the district's newest, latest, and this is what is "best for *all* students" policies. But in actuality it was only a small sliver of the policy. I, of course, was quick to point this out. During the meeting I asked the administration to explain how this particular policy is "best for *all* students"; I wanted to know exactly *who* was saying this policy is "best for *all* students". I also asked if we could see the policy in its entirety. I pointed out what they had given us was only a small piece of the overall picture, and I thought if we were being asked to, no let me rephrase that—we were expected to support, abide by, and believe in this great policy—we should be able to read the entire policy. In

addition, I asked if we could see the research that was informing the decision to implement the policy.

Needless to say my questions and comments were jaw dropping for everyone in the room, and it was during that meeting that I knew—I knew I was no longer willing or able to sit passively or silently through another meeting and just accept education policies because administrators, politicians, and powerful parents had determined that these politically charged policies were best for everyone’s children. I knew as the words were coming out of my mouth that I had grown beyond the walls of my classroom. I knew I had begun a journey that was going to take me away from my students. I loved my students and I enjoyed teaching, but I could feel myself being drawn toward a path I hoped would help me find solutions to the problems plaguing the U.S. education system.

As a classroom teacher I felt as though I was ineffective at bringing about change. I felt like I was caught in the claws of a machine. In a nutshell, I felt powerless. I realized that I lacked the power and knowledge I would need to bring about systemic change to the education system. My doctoral studies have been instrumental in helping me develop the knowledge and skills I need to become an effective change agent, and it is my hope that this study will provide insight into some of the effective techniques and strategies educators can use to help all students succeed in an education system that has historically silenced, marginalized, and at its worst, rendered these disadvantaged students invisible in America’s beloved ‘meritocratic’ education system.