

AT THE GATEWAY TO HIGHER EDUCATION: TRACING LATINO/A
PATHWAYS TOWARD FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

by

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Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate’s submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a critical ethnographic study of institutional, ideological, and cultural factors influencing the educational pathways of low-income Latino/a students. The study lasted for nine months, and research was conducted in two field sites: a public high school and a public university in the Southwest. There were eighteen research participants—seventeen students and one teacher. A funds of knowledge approach combined with a Latino/a Critical Theory lens and best practices in college access allow a consideration of these factors in public schooling. I balanced institutional data with interviews, writing samples, and class discussions, and I found that factors hindering students' persistence included material conditions such as overcrowding, ideological constraints such as low expectations, and a cultural disconnect between students' values and the values embedded in school curricula and policies. Although these Latino/a students demonstrate experiential critical literacy, the students are not given an opportunity to connect their lived experiences to theory in school, which can hinder college-going attitudes. To foster critical democracy, practitioners of First-Year Composition have an opportunity to rethink our purpose and goals to make sure that what we advocate in theory—college persistence for all students—matches up with our practice. This study suggests remedies to ensure that in a system in which social, economic, and political inequities are fed by and feed our inequitable educational system, we can take an active role in reshaping the educational pipeline by working in partnership with public schools and communities to bring equity to college access and retention efforts.

I. INTRODUCTION: PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE

These walls were symbols of confinement, of the deep fissuring that separated those who have more power and socioeconomic standing from those who have less. These walls heightened a certain fantasy making, for it is difficult to scale such walls. But desire and fantasy making are a kind of scaling. Walls as confinement, then, walls of a pressure cooker that caused the imagination to bubble. (Cintron 99)

First Impressions

May 2004. 8 a.m.

I drive tentatively Southwest along one of the main arteries across town, skirting the impenetrable defenses of the large U.S. Airforce base, passing the tangle of towers, wires, and smokestacks of the city's energy plant, then straightening into a southward course along the railroad tracks to Mexico. I keep thinking that what I am looking for will come into view at the next intersection, but I find that as signs of settlement and industry thin, I have still not reached my destination. Creosote-studded desert stretches before me, broken only occasionally now by gas stations, trailer parks, and billboards announcing future development communities. Finally I see spindly stadium lights on the horizon, and beneath, low buildings. I turn at the intersection, and at this time, these buildings are the only sign of life on any of the four corners. A concertina wire and chain-link fence abuts the roadway, testing an outsider's resolve to visit, and beyond, the windowless, grey, concrete buildings announce grimly that those within are not meant to leave.

The guardhouse is manned by a burly, yellow slicker-clad monitor whose gruff questioning further adds to my discomfort, but when my name is found on a list of those

who have been granted admittance, I am given an official visitor's badge and told to park in a desolate lot far from the staff cars. I cross the wedge-shaped expanse of lawn radiating from the flagpoles, deducing that the entrance to the buildings must be where I see a slight opening in one of the many steel gates blocking passageways. I hesitate before going in, but when I do, I see signs of life in the cafeteria to my right. I stop a tall young man wearing a black hoodie and khakis to ask how to get to the main office. He jerks his thumb toward the next doorway to the right, and there I am relieved to see some color—a wall-sized mosaic mural of a large, wild cat—the school mascot. “Welcome to Vista del Valle High School¹,” the wall proclaims.

A harried but helpful receptionist looks up the classroom number of the teacher I am to visit, then enlists the help of a student aide to take me there, apologizing that the numbering system for the hallways and doorways isn't entirely clear, and it isn't. Odd numbered rooms are on the right, evens on the left, with both meeting near the library. We walk past corridor after corridor, dingy walls punctuated here and there by curling, butcher paper posters announcing meeting times of various clubs whose acronyms I can't make out. Greasy footprints and quarter-sized blotches from chewing gum on the interminable charcoal carpet reveal years of frenzied activity, and indeed, as we walk a shrill bell clangs out, and classroom doors fly open, exhaling a mass of laughing, chattering, khaki and black-clad students. We wend our way through the crowd, squeezing and pushing as we go as if at a nightclub, and as we reach our destination, we

¹ All names of people and places have been changed throughout this document.

retreat into the relative comfort of an empty classroom, the door closing gently on the din behind us. The English Department chair greets me.

I have lived all over the world since childhood, moving every two years between capital cities in African and Latin American countries, and there is nothing I enjoy more than the heightened sense of awareness I feel when I encounter an unfamiliar environment. It was with this attitude that I made my first visit to a large, urban, public high school in my first year of graduate study in the Southwestern United States. I was there because when I began my graduate studies, I had been struck by how much of a discrepancy there seemed to be between the number of Latino/as living in the region and the relatively small number of Latino/a students in my First-Year Composition (FYC) classes. Chasing this first impression, I conducted a bit of institutional research, which revealed that on average, the university enrolls around 15% Latino/a students per year, less than half the percentage of Latinos/as living in our city. A state university, in my view, should reflect the demographics of its community, so I wanted to explore this issue further.

Our university president at the time had set the goal of becoming a Hispanic Serving Institution (H.S.I.) within ten years, but clearly he had a long way to go to reach that golden number: 25% Latino/a enrollment. I began to question how this goal was to be met. What efforts were being made to promote this focus? How were individual departments responding, if at all? I recall that at that time, amid significant controversy, a building was renamed after César Chávez. Some university programs focusing on

increasing diversity on campus and supporting students from minoritized² ethnic groups were reshuffled and appointed new leadership. Within my college and department, however, it wasn't clear what changes were being made. I attended a town hall meeting at this time in which the dean of the College of Humanities spoke about the need for a shift in attitude and atmosphere at the university to accompany any more overt changes, such as focusing on the recruitment of Latino/a students and faculty. This, to me, seemed key. He spoke about the inadequacy of simply increasing numbers of Latino/a and other minoritized students without fostering positive change within the institution in order to provide a supportive and equitable educational experience for all students and faculty.

With this in mind, I felt compelled to learn more about the educational experiences of students from underrepresented groups in the communities surrounding the university. It seems logical to me that we can't make change on the scale that the dean called for without considering the broader educational landscape. The more I learned, the more I became convinced that the dean's call should echo throughout the many halls of the university, from the offices of admissions, to student advising, to student services, and most importantly, to academic departments. If educational systems are the lifeblood of our country's economic and political structures, we have to acknowledge that any educational inequities both reflect and feed larger social, economic, and political inequities as well (Giroux "Literacy" 6).

² I choose to use this term, used by Norma González, for the term "minority" is often misleading—at the high school where I conducted my research, for example, Latino/a students are in the majority and White students the minority. "Minoritized," on the other hand, emphasizes that the designation is imposed upon non-White racial and ethnic groups by dominant society (42).

One of the failings of the education system, in my view, is that support for education is apportioned inequitably. Not only are schools inequitably funded, but also the so-called educational pipeline is broken. There is a general lack of conversation and collaboration between state institutions of higher education and the public schools in their communities. If this is so, how can we expect families and students to negotiate the educational pathway so that all students have equal access to a college education? When we know that now more than ever, the majority of jobs in the country require postsecondary education, (67% of new jobs, according to *Knowledge Works Educational Foundation*³) we must do more to ensure equal access. I believe that those of us who work in the academy have the potential to collaborate with public school children and schools and to effect positive change to bridge that gap. If we want our universities to provide equal access, we must do more to reach out to students in our communities who are being underserved. We must show devotion for education and a willingness to constantly change with the needs of society. In general, we set low expectations, then under-fund and undervalue education, especially for marginalized groups.

If, as Henry and Susan Searls Giroux argue, universities are places in which the implications of all of these factors are considered, critiqued, and addressed by citizens, future citizens, and intellectuals, glaring instances of social and educational inequities must come under scrutiny there (43). In order for real change to occur, the attitudes and atmosphere of the entire university system, and perhaps of the entire educational system must change, and in my view, this will require the participation and collaboration of

³Knowledge Works Foundation. "Adult Learning Initiatives: Career Pathways." Knowledge Works Foundation April 30, 2009. <http://www.kwfdn.org/adult_learning/career_pathways>

educators, community members, families, and students. We can't simply consider the university in isolation; we must reach beyond our walls to the community to seek answers. We must all ask the questions that college access professionals at the university ask: What are the barriers to college access for low-income, minoritized students, and how can we diminish the impact of these barriers before and after they arrive? In considering the disproportionately low recruitment and retention numbers, we must pay particular attention at my institution to Latino/a students. What assets do our Latino/a students possess that could be factored into our current conceptions of how and what we teach, as well as into our understandings of what we value as knowledge?

Theoretical Mestizaje

As a graduate student researcher and First-Year Composition (FYC) instructor at the university, I wanted to pursue these questions responsibly. Perhaps because of my nomadic childhood, my taste for immersing myself in unfamiliar environments in order to come to some understanding of my surroundings drew me to ethnography. Because my inquiry in this particular case has to do with perceived educational inequities, critical ethnography seemed most appropriate, and I will discuss my methodology later on in this introduction. My journey to Vista del Valle, then, became more than merely a personal quest for information. I began to look for information that might help inform practices at the university-level, specifically in FYC programs.

As a critical ethnographer, I have tried to understand the specific context I write about through a broader theoretical understanding. What all ethnographers, and in

particular, what critical ethnographers must acknowledge, is that although we attempt to keep our minds open as we research, we are also always forming questions, recording data, and analyzing our findings through specific lenses. For a consideration of the social context of my research topic, for example, I rely on Marxist articulations of the connection between political economy and schooling. I begin with the assumption that material or economic conditions are the dominant influence on social and political life. These are organized, as Foucault says, in relations of power. I rely on Critical Race Theory—Latino/a Critical Theory in particular—to focus on racism as an explanatory tool for inequitable societal structures and these power relations. Besides these material or economic conditions, which I describe in depth in this chapter as well as in chapter two, I critique the means by which these conditions and relations of power are maintained—through ideology. I work with a definition of ideology articulated by Louis Althusser, a Marxist social theorist: “the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group” (107).

For a consideration of the cultural context of my research topic, I rely on a “funds of knowledge” approach, which takes a socio-cultural perspective of education and assumes that to better serve students, educators must gain a better understanding of the students’ cultural and social contexts and to incorporate this knowledge into classrooms. This was the impulse I followed as I began my collaboration with the public school I will describe in this ethnography, and I will rely heavily on a social-cultural perspective throughout. This, combined with critical theory and pedagogy, as in Freire and Giroux,

and in particular Latino/a critical theory and pedagogy, as in González, Moll, Delgado-Bernal, Yosso, and others, will form the general lines of argument that I will be making.

This ethnography embraces *mestizaje*, a Chicano/a concept articulated by Gloria Anzaldúa to describe an ever-changing process of blending and incorporating, and as such, the format of this ethnography will take a similar approach. The field notes, interviews, and observations I made as a researcher will blend with and incorporate practical applications for educators at any level of education, including First-Year Composition, and I bring theorists from various traditions and persuasions into conversation with me and with one another while I work toward my program proposals. Theories and perspectives overlap, and while I may draw from particular theorists, I am borrowing specific concepts or ideas, and not necessarily an entire philosophy or body of works. In the case of John Dewey, for example, while I am drawn to his optimistic outlook on the power of education to uphold democratic values such as inclusiveness, equity, and progress, I do not assert, as he did that all citizens share a common culture. In fact, the myth of common culture is one of the themes I challenge in this ethnography.

In short, my treatment of theory mirrors the complex relations between the various elements I consider in this ethnography (material conditions, race, gender, language, legislation, pedagogies), and I will attempt to bring everything together as succinctly as possible as I make my recommendations for designing partnership programs between universities and communities to create equitable educational pathways for Latino/a youth.

Gateways to Higher Education: First-Year Composition

Before I visited Vista del Valle in May of 2004, I began to consider the history of the creation of First-Year Composition (FYC) in this country. Along with mathematics, FYC is the only introductory program required of all first-year students at my university. FYC was born at Harvard University in 1870 out of a perceived need by the Harvard administration to remediate the language skills of first-year students at the institution. One Harvard professor, Adams Sherman Hill wrote in 1879:

From the beginning to the end of the pre-collegiate course, the one thing that should never be lost sight of is the mother tongue, the language which the boy uses all the time as a boy, and will use as a man. Till he knows how to write a simple English sentence, he should not be allowed to open a Latin grammar. Till he can speak and write his own language with tolerable correctness, he should not be set down before the words of another language. Whatever knowledge he acquires, he should be able to put into clear and intelligible English. Every new word he adds to his vocabulary, he should know in the spelling and with the meaning accepted by the rest of the world. Every stop he inserts in a sentence should serve a definite purpose. (qtd. in Brereton 51)

Although I don't agree with the tone or the language used to describe this mandate, which places too much emphasis on "correctness" of Standard English, I do see parallels with how FYC is still perceived-- as a gate-keeping mechanism for first-year students, or as something that must be overcome in order to continue on in one's studies. What the early Harvard compositionists claimed was that many young men arrived on the first day with what they considered to be inadequate language as well as cultural skills. In particular, the pre-college preparation these students received prior to enrolling at Harvard was deemed deficient. This is key. Our field is founded on the notion that some students arrive with **deficits**, and this, coupled with the fact that a university education at the time was the privilege of an elite group of male students, helped to create a large gap between

the elite, highly educated class and everyone else. FYC became one of the measurements of a student's eligibility to set foot on the pathway to an elite education. The schism between these privileged few and the masses was great, and the world was divided between "cultivated" and "uncultivated man," as indicated by Edwin A. Abbott, whose British textbooks on Composition were adopted by Harvard in the late 1800s (qtd. in Brereton 326).

Even then, composition instructors resigned themselves to the idea of composition as remediation, and this attitude persisted across the country, even as access to education broadened. In 1914, one female professor in Wisconsin, Frances Campbell noted that, "the teaching of abstract, prohibitive rules has, of course, its function--the function of pruning the too-carelessly growing, or over-luxuriant, foliage" (qtd. in Brereton 384). It was believed that those not possessing innate ability or breeding had to be tempered in order to approximate natural intelligence. How far forward have we moved in our thinking about the function of FYC today? As David Bartholomae writes in his seminal article, "Inventing the University," we still expect that every student "has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the particular ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (589). This assumption promotes what Min-Zhan Lu calls "a politics of linguistic innocence: that is, a politics which preempts teachers' attention from the political dimensions of the linguistic choices students make in their writing" (152). Yes, learning academic discourse is part of the rite of passage for all college students, but it is important not to lose sight of the fact that for students whose schools and backgrounds

have equipped them with the tools needed in their new discourse communities, the transition is smoother than for students whose pathways to college are not so clearly aligned.

Multiple factors influence minoritized and other marginalized students' college access and persistence, and I will discuss many of these here. In the field of English composition, some of the factors being considered are students' varied experiences and capabilities with language, including the tensions between home language and the language of schooling for bilingual students (Lu; Guerra et al; Kells, et al) and cultural dissonance (Gilyard; Mejía), among others. I feel that we can learn a great deal more about how to better serve students from marginalized groups by taking a critical look at the nexus between composition and college access. After all, FYC resides within this nexus. Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar describe this moment from the college access perspective:

The challenges faced during the transition to college often affect low-income and minority students to a greater extent than their counterparts from higher SES backgrounds who, equipped with the cultural capital necessary to succeed in predominately white institutions, do not have to make as many social adjustments to the new environment. Students of color and low SES (socio-economic status) have to balance time spent adapting and learning coping strategies for survival in college with academic achievement. (5)

If we indeed consider composition to be a gateway to higher education, we have to learn more about the pathways our students take to get here and to think critically about how we can reach out to schools to ensure that those pathways are as unobstructed and as inviting as possible for all students in order to ease this difficult transition.

As seemed evident at my university, which continues to struggle to recruit and retain Latino/a students, it is time to consider new approaches. Chicano rhetoric and composition scholar Jaime Mejía contends that:

Rhetoric and composition programs throughout the Southwest, and elsewhere in the United States, are also still failing to address how rhetoric and composition pedagogies could directly and positively impact the largest segment of the largest collective ethnic minority group in the United States. This negligence on the part of these rhetoric and composition programs, especially in the Southwest, in some cases remains brutally appalling and continues to show the truly colonialist nature of these programs. (51)

If, for example, we assume a “politics of linguistic innocence,” which Min-Zhan Lu describes as a subversion of the very real challenges language learners face when they must move from one language or discourse community into another, we must assume that any form of academic discourse we introduce to our students is somehow (quoting E.D. Hirsch) “neutral,” or “existing beyond the narrow spheres of family, neighborhood, and region,” we uphold as truth the myth of a common culture and ignore the students’ real needs for means to deal with the differences they confront and embody during the transition to college, and at the same time we promote the essentialist project of those first Harvard compositionists: to “cultivate” our “uncultivated” students—indeed a colonialist project. In so doing, we smooth over difference in favor of conformity or uniformity.

The myth of a common culture can actually harm our students. Far from neutral, for example, the politics of language, as Gloria Anzaludúa asserts, becomes “linguistic terrorism” for Chicano/as in this country, as anxieties over how and when to use forms of Spanish and/or English, what usage is considered legitimate and/or illegitimate, and who should accommodate (or not) whose language plague them. These questions are bound with questions about identity, Anzaludúa says, for “ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity” (81). Mejía, who writes from experience, recalling his undergraduate years as well as his early teaching in FYC, writes that when composition pedagogy is “situated in a social vacuum,” it doesn’t touch on students’ lives and on their identity construction. It is Mejía’s contention that assignments and pedagogies that don’t allow students to examine the construction of their own identities contribute to “how Mexican-American students have been misunderstood and cheated out of gaining the critical literacy skills they’ll need to advance academically” (44).

My goal in this ethnography is to offer one potential direction for English composition programs in communities with high numbers of Latino/a students, which, as demographic trends indicate, is beginning to include a rapidly increasing number of U.S. locales.

One question that Mejía asks is how are Latino/a students’ experiences and capabilities with literacy being considered in our creation of FYC curricula? He urges us to turn to Chicano/a studies programs to enrich our approaches to Latino/a education. This is important, but I feel that it is not enough for us to consider the content of our own FYC classes or the pedagogies we enact within them, for if we are going to effect the

kind of change that will create a more equitable educational pathway for these students, we must address the schooling of Latino/a students at all levels. With this assumption, I adopt a “funds of knowledge” approach to FYC research and practice, which I practiced during my research process, and which I will endorse throughout this ethnography.

As I mentioned earlier, Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar emphasize the importance of *transitions* for historically underrepresented students, and as we know, FYC is designed to transition students from high school to college-level writing and from non-academic to academic discourse. This has been its essential function since the first Harvard program in 1850. I have recently worked in the field of college access as a Writing Specialist for a federal GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) program, and I feel that thinking about the role of FYC in college access for students from underrepresented groups is especially necessary today, when the opportunity gap between white, middle class students and non-white, low-income students is widening. In a longitudinal study following a cohort from middle school to higher education, the Pew Hispanic Center found that while over 40% of white students in their cohort enrolled in a four-year institution, only 22% of Latino/a students did so (Swail 5). Persistence rates in higher education are equally low for Latino/a students compared to their non-Latino/a white counterparts. In the same study, twice as many non-Latino/a white students as Latino/a students earned a B.A. after enrolling in a four-year institution (Swail 7).

These figures affirm that in addition to thinking about our own practices in the FYC classroom, we must look further, as suggested by González, Moll, and Amanti in

their “Funds of Knowledge” project, which speaks primarily to practitioners in the field of Education. To understand the “funds of knowledge” that our students bring to our classrooms, and just as importantly, to understand why so *few* Latinos/as and other “minoritized” students ever turn up in our classrooms, we should reach out to our public schools. We must consider where our underrepresented students come from in order to better serve them. How might we—the “gatekeepers”—create a more equitable transition? How might we work with schools to address obstacles along students’ pathways to college? How can we move instead toward a more inviting model of education? An examination of these pathways reveals serious educational inequities. We must attend to these.

To begin to consider change within my context, I had to gain a broader understanding of where the students came from and of the knowledges they brought with them from their own contexts. As I learned in that first semester of graduate school, I felt well situated to begin to engage in meaningful dialogue with colleagues and students in the public schools in the community in order to think more broadly about education—to imagine *pathways* to college, rather than *gateways*. All I had to do was to initiate the conversation. That was my hope as I made my way through the hallways of the high school during my first meeting with teachers in a public school.

When I walked into that English classroom at Vista del Valle High, a high school in a predominately Latina/o, predominately low-income community to meet with English department faculty, ten eager faces turned to greet me, anxious to hear what a visitor from the university had to say. First, I made it clear that I was there to learn, not to

presume to lecture to them from the ivory tower of the university—a stance they seemed to expect me to take. My goal at that meeting was to ask the teachers how we might collaborate in the education of their students, and I found that teachers were more than willing to speak up. What I heard was a call for more transparency about what students need in order to become college-ready. I was surprised to find that teachers were not aware that the sequence of FYC courses had switched at least four years earlier, so that close reading and critical analysis would come in the first semester, and research in the second. As a result, the teachers had been preparing them for material they would not encounter until second semester freshman year and they feared that perhaps they were not doing enough to address the skills that students would need to draw upon immediately in their fall semester of FYC. Dialogue between the university writing program and English department chairs at the high schools could have prevented this mismatch.

What I learned on that visit—the first of many over the four years of my relationship with the high school—was that the potential for change is there. I have found that we are sometimes too quick to assume that the educational system is doomed because of its top-down power structure. Federal and state mandates can and do hinder educational outcomes, but there are still avenues for school districts, schools, teachers, students, and families to pursue in order to reclaim some agency. In the example above, for instance, something as basic as more transparency between schools and universities about what is expected in terms of curriculum and skills could go far toward promoting college awareness and readiness in underserved community schools. I will signal other

moments of disconnect throughout this ethnography and offer a potential remedy in my conclusion—vertical alignment through partnership.

The larger argument that I would like to make to my colleagues is that if we are going to have a hand in creating equitable conditions for college access for ALL students in our communities, FYC programs must look to the public schools to find ways to work together to serve those students. We can't remain isolated from our community schools while we wait for students to arrive at our gates, as was the approach taken by those first Harvard administrators, resigned to the fact that there will be inevitable inadequacies we will have to correct, without first learning about the contexts from which they come and doing what we can to ensure that by the time the students enter our FYC classrooms, they have received the sort of support and preparation that will help ease their transition to college.

Furthermore, if we gain a better understanding of where students come from, we will gain a better understanding of the strengths and assets that those students bring to our classrooms, and perhaps we might begin to critique the ways in which we reify traditional definitions of literacy and academic success, such as an overemphasis on individual achievement, thereby contributing to the building of walls between “those who have more power and socioeconomic standing from those who have less” (Cintron 99). We might be able to resist those colonialist tendencies Jaime Mejía warns against and begin to create attitudes and atmospheres in our classrooms in which Latino/a students, along with other students, have an opportunity to develop the critical literacy skills they will need to succeed.

“Research that matters:” Research questions and frameworks

For my own part, I decided after my initial visit to Vista del Valle to form a sustainable partnership with the teachers at the school. It is one of the community's largest high schools, and has a Latino/a majority population. I would like to return to that description of my first impressions of the school. Like Ralph Cintron, whose ethnography I quoted in the epigraph, I wish to suggest that the physical spaces I saw and described in my field notes that day mirror the larger socio-political landscape. I depict the public education system through those initial observations of concertina-wire and windowless walls, reflecting the barriers and inequities that exist for the students within them. I do not mean to reduce my argument to a metaphor, however, and over the course of the four years during which I worked with teachers at Vista del Valle, and during my semester of research, my perceptions deepened, and as I will describe in this ethnography, I noticed much more going on in this school than initially met the eye. Pockets of resistance, advocacy, and triumph are absolutely present there, and I don't want to undermine the excellent work of many of the teachers and staff at that site. I do, however, want to critique the wider, institutional and ideological factors at play, and I will try to do so as fairly as I—an outsider here—can. In the spirit of civic engagement, I advocate research as service—reflecting “caring for and openness to all connected to and impacted by” this work, and I want very much for my research to “matter,” in a context larger than that of the academic paper (Wolman-Bonilla 324). Here I will present one

school site and its human participants, locate some of its constraints, highlight points of resistance, and suggest potential sources of support for that resistance.

My partnership with the high school opened the possibility for me to pursue the following questions in order to inform my own praxis in FYC as well as in my work in developing high school outreach programs through the university's writing program:

- What factors influence these Latino/a students' college pathways?
- What might be the university's role in promoting equitable educational pathways for incoming Latino/a students?

These questions continue to guide my work, and they are the central research questions driving this ethnography. I approach these questions through a funds of knowledge perspective, hoping to demonstrate through example the means by which educators might approach praxis at all levels of education. The remedies I will suggest combine best practices in college access and Latino/a critical theory and practice.

These remedies are based on my particular context, and I do not wish to suggest that they can be generalized. One of the main assumptions in a funds of knowledge approach is that each context must be understood in its own right in order to find the best approaches to education. I do wish to contend, however, that the consideration of these two approaches, which currently reside outside of the field of composition, can be brought successfully into First-Year Composition. First, my analysis of the factors influencing the college pathways of the students at Vista del Valle are based on a college access framework put forth by Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar. They make two

assumptions about the role of college preparation for historically underrepresented students. These assumptions will also guide my analysis:

1. “Students need appropriate *intellectual scaffolding* (skills and knowledge) to become college ready.”
2. “College-going skills and knowledge are most effectively communicated by programs that build on a *cultural scaffolding* (that emphasizes students’ cultural backgrounds)” (4).

Besides looking at curriculum, testing, and other forms of academic preparation in school, I will pay particular attention to the second of these assumptions: *cultural scaffolding*.

This is where the second framework comes in. For a critical analysis of the material conditions, ideological constraints, and cultural factors influencing my research participants’ educational pathways, I find Dolores Delgado Bernal’s articulation of Latino/a Critical Theory (Lat/Crit) to be most useful. She describes how this theoretical framework can be used to “challenge dominant liberal ideas such as colorblindness and meritocracy and show how they operate to the disadvantage of people of color and further advantage whites” (108). Lat/Crit contains five essential elements:

1. The use of trans-disciplinary approaches.
2. An emphasis on experiential knowledge.
3. A challenge to dominant ideologies.
4. A recognition of the centrality of race and racism and their intersection with other forms of oppression.
5. A strong commitment to social justice.

What this means for my work is that in my research, I approach each encounter with research subjects, each visit to the research site, and every attempt at analysis with these five tenets in mind. Rather than limiting my research to my field of college-level composition and rhetoric, I venture out into public schools; I borrow from the fields of

education and of higher education. I have chosen critical ethnography because I wish to emphasize experiential knowledge—my own as both a practitioner and researcher, as well as that of my research subjects, whose voices will be shared throughout this dissertation, and because I analyze my surroundings with a critical eye. I do so to challenge dominant ideologies, critique institutional barriers, and articulate factors contributing to cultural differences under consideration, including race, racism, gender, language, and family that play a role in the intellectual and cultural scaffolding supporting or hindering students' pathways to higher education.

I would like to emphasize the gendered implications of a study conducted by a female researcher involving a female teacher and an overwhelming majority of female students. One of the gaps in this study is a more thorough articulation of the male perspective, and it would be extremely interesting to participate in a parallel study of Latino students in similar circumstances. I will devote more attention to gender as it intersects with my questions about college access and persistence in chapter four.

Uneven Terrain: Power Relations and Latinos/as in Education

As I mentioned earlier, the education gap between Anglo-American, middle class students in the United States and the next largest ethnic group in the country, Latinos, is widening, even as the population of that minoritized group grows. In our public schools, Latino/a student enrollment nearly doubled between 1990 and 2006, accounting for 60% of the population growth of public schools (Fry and González i). According to a separate report compiled by the Pew Hispanic Center, in 2000 the national dropout rate for

Latino/a students was over twice the national average. While only 7% of Whites dropped out that year, 21% of Latinos/as dropped out (Pew 1). Why? Throughout this ethnography, I will explore the racialized institutional structures and ideologies that contribute to the inequities behind these statistics. In my research context, the economic landscape is racially stratified, mirroring the educational landscape I have described. As I suggested, this study considers the “power relations,” as Foucault calls them, which maintain these inequities.

Althusser links power and education inextricably in his argument that education functions as an ideological apparatus of the state. Schooling is one mechanism by which “official” knowledge is created and disseminated, giving shape to society and maintaining order (89). Foucault chronicles the ways in which human subjects under state control are disciplined both physically and mentally in order to maintain state control. If students are viewed as “docile bodies,” they can be subjected, used, transformed, and improved (138). We heard this view reflected in the rhetoric of the Harvard administrator (“pruning the too-carelessly growing, or over-luxuriant, foliage”). The students and their writing had to become disciplined.

When students are treated as docile bodies to be handled, shaped, or molded, we are normalizing the dominant power structure in society. Foucault contends that discipline has many functions. It organizes space, measures qualities, supervises, judges, hierarchizes, rewards, and taxonomizes. Inherent in these functions is an emphasis on ordering, classifying, ranking, etc. For those who fail to be docile, punishment is inevitable, and in his view, punishment normalizes. The fact that the campus I entered on

that first visit resembles the state penitentiary five miles further down the road more than it does the college campus ten miles north is significant. The fact that students at the school feel that their privacy is being violated by increasingly panoptic security measures (uniformed police presence on campus at all times, security cameras mounted in the inner-courtyard, bathrooms locked during class time, ID screening at the main entrance) is significant. The fact that until the school district voted two years ago to restrict visits to once monthly per branch, military personnel were free to roam campuses and to pull students out of class dozens of times each semester to hear recruitment pitches is significant.⁴ The constant threat of school closure or withheld diplomas looms in the shadows of state-mandated testing. What is normalized here, and what effect does this have on the students and teachers being disciplined? Further, does this institutional and ideological confinement “heighten a certain fantasy making” or “cause the imagination to bubble,” as Ralph Cintron contends?

I wonder if all of these walls send a message to students, teachers, and families in this community that every movement is being policed. If so, education isn't about excellence. It is, as Althusser and Foucault contend, about control. Foucault posits that when a society faces a crisis, severe disciplinary systems are often established. In chapter two of *Discipline and Punish*, he describes how governments dealt with the plague in the seventeenth century by issuing and enforcing strict regulations to the movement of the

⁴ See NCLB section 9528 for information about mandated military recruitment access to students: U.S. Department of Education. “Elementary and Secondary Education: Subpart 2.” U.S. Department of Education Policy. Jan. 2009. <<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg112.html#sec9528>>.

populace. In this century, I would argue that the crisis has to do with economics, immigration, and race.

Otto Santa Ana analyzes metaphor to reveal the ways in which Latino/a immigrants have been systematically demonized since 1993, when California governor Pete Wilson wrote an open letter to the US president, insisting that public services and rights granted to “illegal immigrants” be repealed (5). According to Santa Ana, this opened a floodgate for nativist sentiment that had been building in the previous decade during which the Chicano movement thrived. White Americans’ fears that either the nation was becoming gently browned, culturally diluted and politically subverted, or reconquered by Mexican people (3) were stoked. “The public was reminded to put Mexicans in their place” (6), and language was deployed to help incite this sentiment. In his study, Santa Ana finds that over 90% of metaphors used to describe Latino/a immigrants and immigration are derogatory, and the metaphor of “disease” is prevalent (284). If public perception is manipulated to the point that we believe that the national body is being attacked by the disease of illegal immigration, then, public reaction might be to shore up defenses quickly.

To maintain a balance of power, particularly during a crisis, docile bodies are kept in check by the state, according to Foucault. I would argue that one effect of this perceived crisis has been a general willingness to impose a rigid discipline upon the educational system, which is projected to increase by 166% in the next forty years, at which time there will be more Latino/a school-age children than non-Latino/a white school-age children (Fry and González i). What will happen to the balance of power

then, I wonder? There is much fear surrounding this question, and I believe that to our detriment, this fear too often shapes public policy.

Nationwide, this “crisis” has contributed to the creation of an educational policy called No Child Left Behind, which ties federal funding to rigid benchmarks, requiring states to implement strict measurements of educational progress, and punishing schools that fall below state standards. Latino/a critical scholar Luis Moll argues that current educational practices exercise a “pedagogy of control” to wield structural power in schools that “obviate(s) diversity in favor of controlling the student population” (“Rethinking” 125). “Standards” provide seemingly neutral tools by which to bring schools under further control. Moll discusses the injustices inherent in mandated state testing, which in his assessment, “marks” students because of test scores. This move toward standardization, he argues, is a direct response to the rapidly shifting demographics in this country. John Dewey contends that in order to foster true democracy, we must use specific and variable definitions to define qualities of individuals and to resist categorization, labeling, etc. (305). Testing, measuring, benchmarking—these are not democratic values.

In Paolo Freire’s critique of the “banking model” of education, students are viewed as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge by teachers. Inequitable systems of power are maintained this way, so as to “minimize or annul the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity (serving) the interests of their oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed” (72-3). Far from the educational process being a “mutually humanizing” one, as Freire would wish, tools of

standardization create fewer opportunities for teachers and students to produce knowledge that comes from mutual understanding and appreciation of one another's experiences and ways of knowing.

In my state, the influx of immigrants is especially marked, and drastic measures have been taken in the form of legislation designed to marginalize immigrant groups. Since 2000, seven propositions have sought to limit the rights of immigrants, including Proposition 203, passed in 2000, requiring "English Only" instruction in public schools, and Proposition 300, passed in 2008 requiring proof of citizenship to achieve eligibility for various subsidized services, such as child care and in-state tuition. Government agencies (including schools and public universities) are now responsible for reporting applicants who are unable to produce legal documentation. The policing of students and of their families persists.

Political economy theory, as Julio Cammarota points out, operates through a similarly fixed plane of power. It depends upon the continued marginalization of Latinos/as in education and society. He describes how the Californian economy has thrived under a polarized job market in which a polarized educational system provides a quality education for Whites that prepares them for highly skilled jobs and an inferior education for Latinos relegating them to low-skill, low-wage jobs. "The global political economy lowers Latinos to the bottom of the workforce by relying on them to fill low-wage job markets in the United States," creating the necessity for an educational system that engenders "racial polarization by perpetuating the academic success of Whites and the failure of Latinos" (248). Cammarota points out that racist public policy helps to

preserve this “apartheid-like” political economic system, citing state propositions 187 and 227, (the former denying public resources to undocumented immigrants and the later removing bilingual education from schools) (254). Similar legislation can be found in states across the United States. In order for the free market to succeed, a labor system must persist that locates low-income, low-skilled individuals at the bottom of an hourglass-shaped model, while higher wage, higher-skilled labor occupies the top. This creates the necessity for two educational paths: one that will lead to those higher-skilled, higher-wage jobs, and one that will continue to provide low-wage, low-skilled workers. As such, the educational system is inequitable—some students will be highly trained, and some won’t. Pathways in either direction become fixed.

To resist this control, I believe in promoting “intellectual freedom,” as described by John Dewey, who says that without this, man’s “seeming attention, his docility, his memorizings and reproductions, will partake of intellectual servility. Such a condition of intellectual subjection is needed for fitting the masses into a society where the many are not expected to have aims or ideas of their own, but to take orders from the few set in authority” (305). Inequity exists in part because the current system is set up so that those who hold official power dictate educational policy, such as the “English Only” legislation passed in my state⁵. Policies such as this do not arise from a consideration of students’ and teachers’ own experiences but are imposed from on high to serve the interests of the current power structure (Giroux; Moll and Ruiz). This oppression will not go unchecked,

⁵ Luis Moll describes this as an event of “enormous coercion and control imposed on these families and children,” because Latino/a families overwhelmingly supported access to a bilingual education at the time that this legislation was approved by voters in the state of Arizona (González, Moll, and Amanti 275).

however, for as Luis Moll asserts, echoing Foucault, “power never goes unchallenged; it always produces friction, resistance, and contestation. And schools are not fixed or immutable entities; they are built environments, socially produced and re-created through the actions of human beings who participate in and mediate their realities, even when those realities include significant constraints” (“Rethinking” 126).

A potentially powerful way to influence those who wield official power is to build a strong, educated, and assertive populace. This was the impetus behind Paolo Freire’s liberation theology, which, along with various theories connecting education with power, whether economic, social, or political, undergirds much of the work in education for social justice in the United States today. The potential for change, as Freire says, is embedded in men and women’s basic search for “humanization,” and “sooner or later they may perceive the contradiction in which banking education seeks to maintain them, and then engage themselves in the struggle for their liberation” (75). Educators who care about social justice have an obligation to work with students to “engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization [...] To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them” (75). Partnership requires mutual understanding.

In subsequent chapters of this ethnography, I will continually critique the ways in which power relations maintain institutional and ideological control over low-income, Latino/a youth in my community. In addition, I will discuss the role of culture in shaping the educational pathways of the Latino/a students. Here I will further undermine the myth of common culture masking inequities and claiming neutrality for educational

policies and practices in our schools and universities. I recognize the slipperiness of the term “culture,” as described by Norma González, who summarizes the history of the term “culture” concisely, pointing in particular to the point at which the field of anthropology experienced a paradigm shift. Culture “came to be viewed as freighted with excess baggage of its historical use and abuse and in some ways was considered more of a burden than a useful tool” (37). Instead of bounded categories and descriptions of discreet cultures, culture came to be viewed as “dynamic, intercultural, and emergent” (37). I honor those definitions here, and I would like to make it very clear that I will not attempt to assign monolithic categories or characteristics to research participants or their communities.

As Lat/Crit scholars emphasize, it is important to understand the complexity and heterogeneity of the Latino/a communities in which we serve. There should never be an attempt to create a one-size-fits-all approach to education. Instead, as Latino/a critical theorists remind us, it is important to understand history, identity politics, immigration trends, and so forth in order to gain a sense of the multi-layered experiences of our Latino/a students (Bernal; Guerra et al). Lat/Crit calls for a recognition of the intersection of race and racism with other forms of oppression. The more research I conducted, the more I appreciated that the factors influencing Latino/a students’ aspirations and persistence are deeply layered, and that to try to generalize or simplify the problems in order to come up with solutions would not help. What I advocate instead, through a socio-cultural perspective, is a “funds of knowledge” approach, wherein specific contexts must be understood in order to effect specific changes within those

contexts. This includes a consideration of particular communities' cultural practices, knowledges, and ways of knowing.

In the case of the community in which I decided to conduct my research, the majority of the Latino/as are of Mexican origin and are of low socio-economic status (S.E.S.). Among the students in my research project were first-generation Mexican immigrants, children of immigrants, grandchildren of immigrants, and Latino/a students whose families trace their ancestry and residency in this area to Spanish colonialism and beyond. Some mainly speak Spanish at home, others understand it but can't speak it, and still others grew up in households in which parents never learned to speak Spanish, the language of their foremothers and forefathers. In many cases, as I will describe later, students were kept from learning Spanish and even punished when it was used in school. I will provide additional details about each of the students whose voices enrich my work in subsequent chapters. Each of the students' backgrounds, however, fall outside the realm of the "typical" pathway to college—the one by which most university programs set their compasses--that which is naturalized through the ideological state apparatus, which privileges white, middle to upper class experience and marginalizes others who fall outside of these groups. Research has shown that "the more a student is integrated into the fabric of a college, the lower the probability that he or she will leave the school," and this requires integration into the culture of the institution. "Since dominant culture in the United States is white, minority students are likely to have a disruptive cultural experience in college," further hindering their chances of persistence (Baker and Velez 93). Cultural disconnect at the point of college access is one of the central issues I feel

educators can help address by examining and critiquing our expectations along the pathway to college.

Method and Methodology: Critical Ethnography and Researcher as Participant

I have chosen to engage in critical ethnography because I wish to challenge and critique dominant ideologies about education and Latinos/as. Quantitative methods of research fail to account for differences among students, schools, and communities, or to capture the multi-layered factors that influence them. Ethnography, on the other hand, can move more smoothly from an observation of minute details to a broader consideration of the larger factors at play in a field site.

In particular, ethnographies about Latinos/as further a Lat/Crit agenda (hence the term *critical* ethnography) by foregrounding and validating experiential knowledge as a powerful and legitimate means to expose inequities, promote social justice, and effect change (Villenas and Deyhle). In this ethnography, this includes placing an analysis of stories at the center. I will consider both dominant narratives about education and about Latinos/as as well as the counter-narratives gleaned through an analysis of my research site and of the participants' words, both written and spoken. I do not feel that one can gain a critical stance of institutional inequities and power structures that impact Latinos/as in education without listening to the stories of Latino/a students (see Villenas and Deyhle; Knight, et al.) As Latino/a critical scholars demonstrate, these counter-stories provide theoretical and practical frameworks from which to act to effect positive change (Garcia). In "funds of knowledge" research, getting to know people's ways of

knowing includes face-to-face interaction and conversation, mining people's accounts of their experiences and knowledges for alternative ways of understanding a broader context.

I also draw from the goals and values of Participatory Action Research, as articulated by Alice McIntyre, although I would not consider my project to be fully participatory. Like McIntyre, I began my work with the intenting of shifting the "perception of the academy" (8) and of emphasizing partnership with participants in the co-creation of knowledge (ix). The impetus for the research came from a discussion with teachers at my field site in which we discussed together the need for more communication between the university and the public schools, and my work with teachers, college students, and high school students has helped give shape to my research questions and goals. I will describe the ways in which I applied what I learned through this partnership to the co-creation of programs designed to improve college access for low-income, minoritized public school students in the community.

Research Participants

I observed one dual-enrollment high school English class, meaning that students were taking a college-level writing course taught by an in-house, trained high school English teacher and upon completion of the course with a "B" or better, students earned three community college credits. Those credits would also be accepted by the public four-year university in town and would satisfy one semester of the two-semester first-year composition (FYC) requirement. It is a good deal for students, as this is free to them, and it is a way for the English department at the school to add another level of rigor

to their course offerings. This is an elective course, and unlike the AP courses at the school, students can opt into the course of their own free will, rather than having to be recommended by a teacher. As such, the students' ability levels, goals, and motives varied.

There were twenty-two students in the class from January 2007-June 2007: five males and seventeen females. Of these, the vast majority were Latino/a, matching the general demographics of the school. At least two students were Mexican nationals, one of whom was in town on a temporary visa, but besides getting into specifics with this student, whose mother is pursuing a PhD at the university here, I steered clear of inquiring into citizenship issues. This question has become increasingly fraught in our Southwestern state, with the passage of legislation making schools and other government agencies liable for knowingly providing services to "illegal entrants." This would be a poignant issue to research further, but for the protection of my research subjects, I have chosen to put aside this issue, and in fact, did not even broach the subject with participants.

Individual and small group interviews

I interviewed one high school English teacher three times throughout the semester. We chatted informally before and after each weekly classroom observation. She and I also collaborated on a conference presentation and worked together to plan how to best present our collaboration to an academic audience. I also interviewed fourteen of twenty-two students in the class, three male, eleven female. I conducted follow-up interviews with four of these students at least once during the summer and into the fall

semester of their freshman year during their month-and-a-half-long summer college bridge program in July 2007 and after that into the fall of 2007, one male, three female. I have been in touch with the high school teacher and two of the student research participants in the past year (2008) to follow up informally about their progress. Interviews were conducted in English and have been transcribed.

Observation and written documentation

I took film, photos, audiorecordings, and field notes weekly from January to June 2007. I also observed one summer bridge class in the summer of 2007 at the university—three of my participants were in that class. I collected student writing during class workshops as well as at the end of the semester. The students allowed me to photocopy portfolios containing all of the writing they had produced from fall 2006–summer 2008.

Data Analysis

Triangulation is important in ethnographic research, and my methodologies, interviews, field notes, and analysis of written documents have allowed me to ensure this. I coded for themes at the conclusion of the data collection, although I followed up on themes that emerged as I was observing by asking students to talk further about relevant issues, such as how students think about race. I choose to allow the students' voices to reveal these themes here by including excerpts from student essays, interview transcripts, and field notes.

Positioning

In my first meeting with the students, I waited silently in the back of the classroom before being introduced as students read aloud their homework: lists of phrases

written in response to the prompt “What if...?” “What if I was white?” one boy asked. “What if I had a college scholarship?” another girl asked. “What if I were a different race,” she continued. As a critical ethnographer, it is important for me to discuss my own subject position, and I have found an article by Terese Guinsato Monberg and Ellen Cushman particularly helpful in thinking about and problematizing my research agenda. In “Recentering Authority: Social Reflexivity and Re-Positioning in Composition Research,” these authors discuss how to “do” socially responsible scholarship that works to cross borders. Here, I am advocating crossing the border between university and high school English classes, as well as between a white researcher and her Latino research participants. I am acutely conscious of my own subject position as a white, middle class, college-educated researcher who is posing questions of and about Latino, middle-to-low income high school students and undergraduates. I am aware of the cultural/racial, academic, and economic differences I navigated during my research. I found that students’ responses to my questions when we met for individual interviews in the high school library tended to skirt discussion of issues of difference, while their writing samples reveal much more complexity surrounding questions of identity, race, and literacy. I found that when I followed some students to the university and was able to meet them in informal settings, such as a food court or lounge, they were more relaxed and willing to share anxieties and questions.

I like Monberg and Cushman’s and articulation of “social reflexivity” as one way to bridge this type of gap. They propose developing relationships with participants based on reciprocity and on a sharing of stories, which can lead to a careful negotiation with

participants about the ethnographer's point of view, so that what is finally written down "closes distances without erasing differences," and makes knowledge *with* the individuals studied, rather than merely *about* them (173). After I began sharing information and experiences with my research participants, they became more open and willing to discuss those difficult questions about identity and difference.

In line with the goals and values of participatory action research, I see my role as "participant-observer," because although I occasionally participated in class discussions or facilitated college access workshops, I generally observed in silence while the teacher and students conducted their normal classroom activities (Moss 158). I hoped to reciprocate in some way to my participants, and one example came about during a class discussion that I observed. Students turned to me to voice very real financial concerns about how to pay for college, and it seemed that several of them had incorrectly marked themselves as out-of-state students on their FAFSAs, thereby making them ineligible for certain in-state scholarships. I called upon the institutional power that I wielded, and contacted a colleague in the Minority Student Recruitment office. He set up an in-class workshop for these students with three representatives from the university's financial aid office to clear up any lingering concerns. Several students were able to resolve their financial doubts right then. This is a small example of how closer partnerships with schools can help increase the number of Latino/a students who see college as a real possibility.

In many of my discussions with research participants, students and teachers provided me with a glimpse of their experiences by telling me their stories and offering

me hints into the ways in which they negotiate power within a social and institutional structure that does not often cater to their needs—the ways in which they scale those walls through “desire and fantasy making” (Cintron). They urge us to look at the bigger picture, to consider the complexities of their varied experiences, and to examine our own assumptions before making policy and pedagogical decisions. Veronica, who was at the time an eighteen-year old high school senior, reveals these complexities in a response to a question I posed about media portrayals of her community:

People say that the Southside is so dangerous. And like, I live in a really nice neighborhood. There’s like a park on my street, and the neighbors they all get along with each other, and I have never once heard a gunshot and seen someone killed in front of my house like they say, and it’s just, like, when I go to school, I’m not scared to come to school. I drive to school and everything and everything is fine. And I know that there are misconceptions that they’re not smart and they’re not getting educated well. I have really well qualified teachers. I’ve taken two XCC⁶ courses and my sign language teacher teaches at XCC as well, you know, she’s a professor. And then, I have the other classes. I know I’m doing well, but the misconception would be like my brothers, they didn’t do well, they dropped out, they quit, and some people do that, but others do excel and they learn well. It’s just how you acquire your skills for learning and then that’s how far you’ll get. You know, and I’m sure it’s the same everywhere. I’m sure it’s not just that in the Southside everyone’s dumb.

There is much to unpack here, and I will attempt to do so as I work through the data in this ethnography. For now, I would like to point out Veronica’s awareness of the ideologies at work in media depictions of her side of town, which tend to focus on violence, drugs, school failure, and cultural degradation. The students whose experiences inform this ethnography project a counter-story. I am humbled by their generosity, and as I present my research here, I acknowledge that it would not have been possible without their willingness to make their voices heard.

⁶ Local Community College: name changed.

Synopsis of the Chapters

In chapter two, “Seeing the Path through the Trees: Confronting Institutional Control,” I will describe the context of the study by describing the field site and the research participants in greater detail, and by analyzing institutional data as well as qualitative data from Vista del Valle High School to explore the first assumption about college access, as defined by Tierney, et. al.: *intellectual scaffolding*. I will describe stumbling blocks as well as potential solutions in the context of my field site. One theme that emerged in my classroom observations was the powerful model of teacher as advocate.

In chapter three, “Reclaiming the Pathway: Confronting Ideological Control,” I will describe some of the ideological barriers that emerged in the research, and I will include an analysis of interviews and student writing to support the argument that critical pedagogy is a necessary component in a movement toward college access and educational sovereignty. In this chapter, I will ask you to listen to the uncertainty with which my research participants discuss identity issues such as race, racism, and language. I will ask you to consider this in conjunction with some of the institutional data about Latinos/as in education that I have gathered as well as provide some models of Latino/a Critical Pedagogy that address this disconnect. I explore the potential use of “counter narrative” in composition pedagogy.

In chapter four, “Perceived Pathways: Latina Funds of Knowledge as Cultural Wealth for Education,” I will continue to examine the cultural scaffolding with a consideration of some of the funds of knowledge that can be tapped in order to reshape

Latino/a students' college pathways. I use a "cultural wealth" framework, which I borrow from Lat/Crit, and focus in particular on the gendered experiences of Latina participants in my study. Here, I will challenge some of the myths about Latino/a culture that influence expectations of Latinos/as in education, and I will use the students' counter stories to provide an asset-based consideration of what Latino/a students bring with them to college.

This will lead to my final chapter, "Rebuilding the Pathway: University and Public School Partnerships," in which I will elaborate on the potential for collaboration between schools and universities. Funding cuts in higher education are forcing departments and faculty to become more and more insulated from one another and certainly from the wider community, except in the case of seeking external funding sources. We are being distracted from the democratic project of educating an active, responsible citizenry. If our goals and curricula are created in isolation, without communicating with our colleagues in the public schools, we are bound to perpetuate the status quo with regard to the recruitment and retention of Latino/a and other underserved students. I will propose three models for educational partnership in which institutions of higher education promote service and take an active role in paving the way to college for all students in their communities.

First, I advocate for e-mentoring between university FYC students and community high school students. Next I propose a vertical alignment project involving educators at all levels of education. Finally, I propose the inclusion of Participatory Action Research as an alternative to more traditional academic assignments in FYC, a

move that would honor critical theorists' calls for greater civic engagement through mutual humanization and activism. Righting inequities in society requires righting inequities in education, and by actively engaging students and teachers in initiating change, we help influence our nation's future.

Conclusion

In essence, this dissertation is about the importance of knowing our students. A constantly shifting demographic map requires that we do more to consider our students' educational pathways and gateways to higher education so that we can transform and/or adapt the educational system to match the rapidly changing needs of our communities. The tendency to resist change through the implementation of increasingly rigid policies must cease if we are to promote equity. First, we must rupture the myth of meritocracy that exists in our educational system, which suggests that students are agents insofar as it is up to them to simply choose the correct pathway to success. They will either choose wisely and succeed in school, or they will choose poorly and fail. The problem with this model is that it assumes equal footing and doesn't account for institutional or ideological factors that obstruct pathways for some students more than for others.

Those of us who are privileged to educate the nation's students must acknowledge the interconnectedness of education, economy, policy, and society, and we must communicate and collaborate with others within and outside of our institutions as we take part in the development of an active, responsible citizenry. I will argue here that teachers have the ability to set students on a pathway to success by becoming advocates as well as

educators, but without also incorporating critical pedagogy, student agency will be limited as the obstacles to success will simply be avoided, rather than confronted head-on. Finally, I would like to suggest that educational partnerships between universities and public schools can rebuild pathways for students from underrepresented schools and communities to achieve both equity and student agency.

II. SEEING THE PATH THROUGH THE TREES: CONFRONTING INSTITUTIONAL CONTROL

I began the previous chapter with an epigraph in which ethnographer Ralph Cintron metaphorically represents the ways in which oppression causes the oppressed to dream of escape—to dream of possibilities. I suggest throughout this ethnography that educators must collaborate with the oppressed in order to foster positive change. This is difficult, however, when the walls oppress teachers as well. When schools themselves are confining, or when the educational system is complicit in this oppression, the challenge is for educators first to recognize how they themselves may be complicit, however unknowingly. Then, they must work with students to find ways to mutually overcome barriers.

In this chapter, I seek to uncover some of the material conditions negatively impacting the educational pathways of students in low-income, minoritized communities. Then I will suggest a remedy that can be enacted by individual educators, despite the constraints of state-mandated instructional standards and policies. I build on an argument by Steven R. Goldzwig, who calls for “critical localism” in the teaching of composition and rhetoric, an argument similar to “funds of knowledge.” He asserts that as most university faculty members are transplants in the communities in which they work, it is imperative that they become acquainted with the historical and current contexts in which they teach. “Critical localism” is a term used in the fields of economics and development to articulate an approach to problem-solving in which problems are analyzed at the community-level and connected to a larger global economy and political world. This

approach counters theories of globalization, which tend to create a false sense of transnational homogeneity while overlooking glaring inequities among nations, classes, and races.

In this ethnography, I engage in “critical localism,” in that I analyze a local context of oppression and resistance in order to advocate for change at a broader level (Berger 725). In my bid to connect local educational, social, and political inequities to broader national trends, I present my case study as testimony to the ill effects of trends toward educational homogeneity and uniformity. Student and teacher voices form the center of my discussion throughout, and I will compare and contrast my research participants’ experiences with institutional data to make an argument that institutional power can have a negative impact on Latino/a education and on education in general, and that change is necessary. I begin by reflecting upon my encounter with a physical representation of that “pressure cooker causing the imagination to bubble” in the form of a vast mural dreamed up and painted by former students at Vista del Valle (Cintron 99). This mural voices a powerful protest to the neutralizing messages and “color blind” curricula mandated through the standardization of education here.

Mixed messages: Moving About the Campus

April 2, 2007. Fifth Period.

I am sitting in the Vista del Valle High School library, waiting for my research participants to arrive for interviews. This is a bright, two-story space with a bank of windows along the south side overlooking the courtyard. The high ceiling is constructed

of corrugated tin girded by steel beams. Oversized, unlit lamps hang limply over empty tables in this space designed to maximize the year-round natural sunlight for which our city is known. Toward the ceiling along the north side of the room, a trio of brightly-colored murals overlook the scene below. The first shows two red-tailed feathers next to a hand holding a nopal (prickly pear) flower. A Tohono O'odham symbol rests next to the Statue of Liberty and a map of Africa with a man standing in front—Mandela? Tutu? An American flag is held by a brown-skinned woman wearing a crown over her long, dark hair. A figure wearing a kimono holds a yin/yan symbol. A Mexican folklorico dancer in a ruffled, purple dress twirls, long ribbons dangling from her hair. A hand holding a white dove overlaps with an Aztec codex. The next mural depicts small children interacting with young adults. A man helps a boy ride a bike. A woman kisses a girl's cheek. Another woman listens intently to a schoolgirl. A banner reads: "El Futuro Comienza con la Familia" (The Future Begins with Family). On either side of the banner, Aztec figures look on. The third mural shows an agave and a nopal plant in bloom, a jaguar, a white mission church, saguaro cacti, a native basket, footballs, soccer balls, baseballs, a student in Junior ROTC uniform holding a rolled-up state flag, male and female graduates in purple gowns, a cheerleader, a tennis racquet, a volleyball, a fighter jet, books, a dramatic mask, a beaker, a globe, the dome of city hall, the federal building, and a banner that reads: "Vista del Valle High School, 1995." The students who created these murals evidently celebrated the diversity of the world as well as the cultural and ecological gifts of the region. Themes of hope, familism, community, connection to history, patriotism, school spirit, achievement, justice, and love prevail.

Whiteness is not prominently featured here, at least not in the choice of heroes or in the depictions of students and families, and this is interesting to me, in light of the school's seemingly rigid conformity to standard educational fare in terms of course offerings, curricula, extra-curricular activities. I decided to probe this disconnect further in my conversations with the classroom teacher and with the students. In this chapter I will present some of my findings. What I came to understand, overall, was that these vibrant images represent students boldly voicing a consciousness and sense of identity on the walls of a school they find to be otherwise devoid of cultural resonance. Not only have the students' imaginations bubbled, they have also placed their *funds of knowledge* on display here for all to see. Clearly, as my research will show, students at this school have rich sources of support, strong values upon which to draw, and clear aspirations for success, but if these are overlooked in favor of performance measurements based on standardization, these funds are for the most part absent from their schooling.

This space tells me something else about the institution. Everything within the library seems fairly standard: volumes lining the walls, magazines and newspapers flanking the librarian's desk, a computer section for online research, and plenty of tables and chairs for students. What is striking to me, however, is that this library seems underused. I have visited this library for years, and during the time of my field research, I conducted interviews there for three months. In all of the times that I have been there, I have often found that the library is closed—even during lunchtime. Instead it seems to be used for testing, teacher meetings, or maybe just to minimize the potential for students to spend time there.

It strikes me as odd that although this space seems to have been built with a very open, welcoming intent and decorated with murals painted by students about the students and the communities they come from, students are almost discouraged from going there. Spaces within the school are strategically monitored, and student movement is carefully controlled. The school has a well-staffed security detail, with monitors and uniformed police officers present on campus at all times. Bathrooms are often locked during passing periods—those few moments between classes when students move in a great crush through the hallways—in an effort to minimize incidents of graffiti. Students tell me that several years ago, a knife was found in a locker, and that since then, security has become increasingly tighter.

From the school's perspective, I suppose, these measures protect students and increase school safety. From the students' perspective, however, the security measures merely reaffirm the message that the students are not to be trusted. Working through a Latino/a Critical Theory lens, which calls for a strong commitment to social justice, I view these measures as evidence of a larger movement to control Latinos/a youth (Bernal 108). I am not insensitive to the responsibility schools feel for alleviating public fear of school violence, but from a social justice perspective, this criminalization, surveillance, and control of Latino/a students is unfairly punitive.

Unfortunately, this attitude toward Latino/a youth is nothing new. Julio Cammarota describes how this affects males in particular ("Gendered"54), and my research participants affirm its negative impact on a collective sense of self-worth. When I arrived one morning, I noticed that office staffers were posted at the one unlocked

entrance to the school to check student I.D. cards and to send tardy students to a holding area before they could join their morning classes. Renata, one of the students in my research cohort explained that security procedures changed constantly. She complained:

It's the students who drive who come in late. And why do they have a car? Because they work. They don't... their parents don't just give them a car. And when do they work? Late at night. So then they come in late and then they (the school staff) keep the students there—you know. The students figure, "Ok, I'm five minutes late. I can still run to my class five minutes late to start work." Well, then they stop them right there. That's what? Another five minutes? Then they make students line up in the cafeteria—that's a whole load of kids—and by the time they get to you, the period has already passed. You know, I wish they had another system for it, 'cause that one's just not right.

It is interesting to compare this scenario with Foucault's description of disciplinary systems:

The enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the center and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined, and distributed [...] all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism (376).

In my study, I will consider institutional and qualitative data in order to make an argument that when students are educated in an institutional and social climate of control rather than of advocacy, they are being unfairly denied equal access to educational opportunities. This perpetuates social injustice. In order to promote social justice, then, all students, regardless of geography, socio-economic status (SES), language, or other external factors, should be nurtured in a college-going culture—should be placed upon unimpeded, equitable college pathways. I see this as an area of opportunity for partnership between public universities and public schools. If, as I will argue, a clear

pathway is not set before students, higher education is an almost unattainable goal. This chapter will consider institutional factors that contribute (or fail to contribute effectively) to students' intellectual scaffolding and college preparation, including environment, social support, economic constraints, curriculum, and testing. I will conclude with a brief case study of how one teacher resists these negative factors and affirms the possibility for creating a college-going culture in schools, despite the constraints of high stakes testing, overcrowding, and so forth.

Institutional control, as I understand it, has to do with the ways in which material conditions can be manipulated to maintain power relations. Foucault asserts that the first step the State takes in order to bring its populace under control is to create a system of spatial partitioning (135). An example of how institutional control can affect schooling is through districting. The past decade has seen a rapid increase in the number of Latino/a students attending defacto segregated schools (Fry 1). Indeed, in my county, school district lines resemble the computer game, "Tetris," with public school districts of vastly different shapes and sizes wedged together⁷. Property taxes determine educational funding, so it is not an accident that the wealthiest district serves only 3% of students free or reduced lunches. Vista del Valle has slightly better numbers than most other schools in its district, with about 69% of students on free or reduced lunch, signaling a "low socio-economic status (SES)" community (district data). In the city, median income levels according to 2004 census data fell below national averages: \$30,981 versus \$41,994 nationally, and in the district in which Vista del Valle is located, income levels

⁷ See this map: <<http://www.schools.pima.gov/site/schools>>

make up the lower end of this equation. Also not surprisingly, the wealthiest district is also the smallest, containing only one high school out of its total of seven schools, while the low-income districts are much larger. The one in which I worked, for example, is comprised of twenty-two schools, including two high schools and a public charter high schools. Obviously, a small minority of students attend the wealthiest schools in the county.

In addition to stark class divisions, the defacto segregation is racialized as well. In 2007-2008, the latest year for which data is available from the district, between 80 to 95% of students in each of the schools in the district were Latina/o, while only between 4 to 9% were White. In contrast, the wealthiest, smallest school district in the county is comprised of 77% White students, 11% Latino/a. Only 2% of the students in this district are English Language Learners. The achievement gap between the wealthy district and the high schools in Vista del Valle's district are startlingly different. The wealthy school boasts a 97.5% graduation rate and a 94% college or university attendance rate. For the past six years, all of its schools have been labeled "excelling," by the state board of education. In contrast, only 60.6% of residents in the district where Vista del Valle is located had earned at least a high school diploma, in contrast with the state average of 81%, while only 5.6% in the district earned a bachelor's degree or better, versus the state average of 23.5%. On state standardized tests in 2004, the sophomores in the district scored far below the average for local schools: 17% versus 72% passing in Math, 36% versus 84% in Reading. It is clear that there are two vastly different educational paths available to students in the county.

I reject notions that these trends can be chalked up to cultural differences, and in this ethnography, as in many other ethnographies about Latinos/as in education (Villenas and Dehyle; Yosso; Valdés), I will present qualitative data to counter those myths and to shed more light on the statistics I have presented above.

In this dissertation, I focus most closely on Pamela. I was drawn to her immediately even though during our initial interview and during class discussions, I found her to be rather reserved and perhaps overly cautious. During interviews, I noticed how she practically hid her lovely face from view behind a thick shroud of tightly curled hair and slender glasses. She considered questions, took her time in formulating answers, and spoke in low tones. On the day that she read her literacy narrative essay aloud to her class, I was astonished at the expressiveness with which she put her thoughts down on paper. Her writing revealed her to be an intensely analytic and thoughtful scholar, as well as a brutally honest and deeply personal writer, and I found this contrast fascinating. I have chosen to foreground Pamela's voice in this ethnography, and I include transcripts of oral interviews as well as snippets of her writing for the class. I will include the voices of several others as well. Following is a brief description of each of the participants whose voices are included here.

- *Pamela* comes from a two-parent home and has two older sisters and an older brother. Her parents were born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States during childhood. Her mother does not work outside of the home, and her father has worked for a large mining company for over twenty years as a mining car motor repairman. Although her parents did not attend college, all three siblings

have. Her career goal is clear. She wants to major in forensic science at the local public university and to attend medical school so that she can become a forensic pathologist. She would like to live somewhere else in the United States when she graduates, and she hopes to travel to Japan someday.

- *Miguel*, like his parents, was born and raised in this city. His parents are divorced and have remarried other people. He lives in a neighboring town with his father but continues attending Vista del Valle through open enrollment. His drive each way takes at least forty-five minutes. He is interested in becoming an FBI agent someday, and he thinks that he will probably major in criminal justice in college. Unlike Pamela, he seems less confident about how to seek the most direct pathway to the career he wants. He is concerned with finding a good job when he graduates so that he can maintain his car and pay for insurance, etc. He hasn't decided for sure if he will enroll at the public university or start out at the local community college and then transfer to one of the other public universities in the state, where there is a stronger criminal justice program. His father took some college classes but did not complete a degree, and his mother did not attend college. His stepfather graduated from the local public university. His father works as a monitor at the other high school in the district.
- *Veronica* will be the first member of her immediate family to attend college. She does not have a specific career goal but thinks she might major in psychology at the local public university. She is also interested in medicine. She comes from a large, cross-border, extended family, meaning that because her parents

immigrated to the United States from Mexico during childhood, members of their extended family live on either side of the border.

- *Monica*'s family has lived in the state since before it was a state. She doesn't know if she has family in Mexico—as far as she knows, those connections are ancient and distant. None of her immediate family members has graduated from college. One brother enrolled at one of the other public universities in the state on a baseball scholarship, but after sustaining an injury, he dropped out. *Monica* wants to go to that university to enroll in the school of journalism. Because it is two hours away, *Monica*'s friends and some family members doubt whether she will really go—they think she'll get homesick and return home. *Monica* wants to defy expectations.⁸

Unlike the others, *Renata* has been denied admission to the public university in town. In fact, she is the only one in the class who applied and did not get in. She grew up in this city, and when her parents divorced during her freshman year, she had to move out of district. She commutes by catching rides from friends and relatives. She works after school and is also very involved in extra-curricular activities. She is proud that she was student body president last year. Neither parent completed college, although her mother took some community college classes until she was unable to pay her tuition. Her father left high school during his Junior year and has worked in construction ever since.

⁸ Recently, I heard from another student that she left the university after one semester and is now attending classes at the local community college.

She has ambitions to become a principal or superintendent some day and wants to start out by teaching elementary school. She believes she will enroll in the local community college before transferring to a four-year institution, perhaps in Texas or Wisconsin.

In the sections that follow, I introduce the institutional constraints I observed at my field site more fully in order to provide an overview of their educational context of the research participants. Throughout, I balance my own observations with the students' perceptions of the factors positively or negatively impacting their educational pathways.

Crowded Off of the Pathway: Classroom Size

In part because of its proximity to the US/ Mexico border, population growth in the city from 1980 to 2000 was staggeringly high. In those twenty years, the city's population grew 89%, nearly four times more than the national trend of 24% growth. As a result, overcrowding at the public schools is a prevalent and negative factor. In my four years of partnership with Vista del Valle, I got to know some teachers well, and I sometimes attended staff meetings or met informally with teachers outside of class time. I listened to their frustrations and collected some of their reflections as I worked on creating an outreach partnership between my university and the English Department at the school. Their accounts of how overcrowding affects education are more powerful than statistical data. I will share two examples, paraphrasing what I heard, since I was not yet conducting formal research when we had these conversations.

One English teacher at Vista del Valle's sister high school in the district described how our state determines school capacity. Officials measure the square footage of usable

space, apportioning a certain amount of physical space per body. In the latest space survey at the school, closets, hallways, and bathrooms were counted, as well as outdoor courtyards. I presented a writing workshop there some time later, and I witnessed the outcome of this thrifty method of measurement. The school had been forced to semi-permanently partition the auditorium with curtains to create several additional classrooms. The students sat in theater-style seating facing the teacher station, which consisted of a portable chalkboard, a cart full of dictionaries and thesauri, and a small wooden table piled with term papers and notebooks. The noise from the adjacent “classroom” beyond the curtain was almost deafening at times, and we could hear every word of the neighboring teacher’s lecture. Even I had difficulty concentrating on my presentation, and I couldn’t blame the students for giving up on learning anything from me that day, instead turning to one another to chat, napping, or sending text messages. What did they care about preparing for college-level writing when they didn’t even have desks on which to write?

On another occasion, a teacher who had been at Vista del Valle High School for over twenty years revealed frankly that the school was being forced to over-admit students without a subsequent increase in funding and resources, and that because of this, administrators were purposely over-enrolling classes, counting on the fact that by the time they would need to report enrollment numbers (around Thanksgiving time), a third of the students would have moved or dropped out. National research supports this account of attrition. Unfortunately, Latinos have the highest high school dropout rates of any group, with two times as many dropouts as White non-Latinos. In my Southwestern

state, 35 public and charter high schools (nearly 1 in 5) made the list of ‘dropout factories,’ according to a 2007 Johns Hopkins University study, because they graduated 60% or less of their freshman class. Of those, most are schools serving a majority of minoritized students, and nine are in the town where my university is located. Vista del Valle is one of these.⁹

Renata spoke about the difference between an administration that nurtures versus an administration that seems determined to weed out underperforming students:

One thing I’ve noticed in particular that’s really crawled under my skin is the fact that um, our old administration used to, you know, get to know students. Used to sit outside with students at lunch and you know, talk to them. Help them with their homework even, you know. I’ve known them to sometimes even give lunch money, or have birthday cakes for some students who didn’t have a lot of friends and then suddenly everybody would be wanting some cake, so this kid would be popular for the rest of the day, so... This administration doesn’t seem to do that. They seem to only know the students who are, you know, 3.0 GPA students. And that’s all they seem to be worried about. It’s either you’re a 3.0 GPA, or you’re, you know... one of the bad kids that they wanna, you know, take out of here. That’s this administration. They don’t wanna get to know the students in between, or you know, get to know the students, period. They just wanna... either you’re going to college and making our school look good, or you’re a failure and they want you out of here.

This is the environment that overcrowding coupled with high-stakes testing can create in our schools, and in this scenario, it is not surprising that students slip through the cracks in such high numbers. I will write later about the importance of “authentic caring” in schools serving Latino/a students, but it is worth pointing out here that Renata perceives a shift between an administration that seems to value students’ overall well-being and an administration that values high grades and test scores at the expense of those students who perhaps need the most support.

⁹ (<http://www.azcentral.com/specials/special44/articles/1029dropoutlist30.html>, accessed 9/22/2008).

Not surprisingly, teacher turnover is also extremely high. For example, in the summer after I conducted my fieldwork, the English department chair had to hire ten new English teachers to replace those who moved on. The school had just been going through a major administrative transition as well, with a new principal, superintendent, and assistant principal on board. This year, just two years later, the principal has once again been replaced. Chaos becomes the status quo, rather than stability. As the teacher whose classroom I observed in my study revealed, teachers feel uneasy about the constant changes in leadership, and discontent is inevitable. They face ever-fluctuating expectations, policies, and demands, and newer as well as seasoned teachers struggle to find firm footing.

Recognizing the Path: Social Support Networks

Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar's summary of best practices in college access preparation emphasizes the critical role of "support agents" in preparing students for college. This includes families, peers, mentors (teachers and advisors), and guidance counselors (5). In the year that I first visited Vista del Valle, I learned that only two guidance counselors served all 2500 students at the school, and according to students, college guidance is minimal, as the counselors struggle to deal with the complexities of registering students for each semester's classes, filing paperwork associated with the many English Language Learners and students with other special needs, and helping students resolve personal and behavioral challenges. Most of the students in my research group reported hearing about college prior to 12th grade only once a year at the school--

on college day, a day in which recruiters from the three major Arizona universities and the community college set up informational booths in the courtyard. In 12th grade, some of these students had become involved in a club for college-bound students led by undergraduates from the university in town, so that had finally exposed them to more useful information, but for the majority of the students in the school, without personal motivation to seek out the college information and knowledge or without college graduates in their families or among their friends, there would be little chance to be steered in that direction.

In Pamela's case, for example, because siblings attended and even graduated from the local, public university, she has followed a college track from middle school onward:

Because of my brother graduating from the U, I've known since elementary school that college is a necessity... everyone has to go. Even though they don't tell you you have to go, you just do.

By "they," I believe Pamela means teachers, the school, and society at large. She often expresses her family's own strong belief in the value of education, mentioning how much she and her siblings have been supported in their academic endeavors, and this familial support for education is a powerful refutation of the myth that Latino/a families don't value education. I will critique this myth further in chapter four. When asked how schooling has prepared her on her pathway to college, Pamela says:

In middle school I was conscious that I was going to go to college, and I needed to take every course possible to help me prepare for high school that would in turn prepare me for college, and there were some instances where I felt that teachers weren't challenging me enough, but most of them were. I was going to take anatomy (at Vista del Valle High) but then my counselor told me it's not really in depth to where you would like it so I just took my basic science classes and just checked out books on anatomy and stuff like that. I just read 'em.

Pamela demonstrates strong personal motivation to go to college and has evidently taken a lot of initiative in challenging herself to learn ahead of the pace set by school. Her consciousness that she needed to take difficult courses comes from siblings, rather than from guidance counselors or teachers:

And I would just try to keep up by just having my sisters work with me. And helping me trying to... well, in middle school, I would try doing the stuff we're doing in high school just to be more prepared and I had my sisters to help me do that.

Research demonstrates that one of the greatest stumbling blocks for first-generation college students is a lack of information about how to negotiate the educational system to ensure that a student ends up on a college track and then to keep her there. Tierney et. al. go so far as to say that “relationships with individuals with institutional know-how or with people who can provide socioemotional support become instrumental in aiding students in negotiating the college-going process” (7). It would seem that communities with low numbers of college graduates such as Vista del Valle have a great need for college guidance in schools, and I will offer some potential solutions, such as “teacher as advocate,” which I will explain in this chapter and university partnerships, which I describe later in this study.

“Show Me the Money!”: The Economic Pathway to College

One of the myths about college access is that everyone should be able to afford to go to college if they want to go. Without proper financial planning, however, applicants may find when they apply to college that they don't know how they are actually going to be able to afford to go when it is time to matriculate. As Tierney et al. report, this may be

the largest inhibitor to college for low-income, minoritized students. “Knowledge about the costs of college and the benefits of college graduation on lifetime earning power, and the expertise to manage college costs are complex skills to master” and should be attended to by educators who wish to help prepare students to be college-ready (6). Even for the dual-enrollment students I observed, this seemed to be the largest gray area in their futures. As I mentioned in chapter one, I observed a class discussion about finances that emerged from an analysis of the PBS documentary, “Declining by Degrees,” which touches only very briefly on the costs of college. Still, this is the theme students picked up on most strongly in their freewrites for the day.

Field Notes

February 20, 2007. 9 a.m.

One student says that she “freaked out,” after hearing students in the film talk about how hard they had to work to pay tuition costs. Other students in Ms. D’s class note that they think the hardest part about college is going to be paying for it. “Where’s the money,” asks one student? “Show me the money!” Another remarks, “The money for college is like winning the lottery!” Someone else notes that there seem to be inequities in who gets scholarship money—it only goes to top students. Another student defends this, “But honors students work hard for it.” Ms. D. asks students how much college is going to cost at the public university. No one knows for sure. Someone says that they don’t think it’s fair that the government requires degrees (?) but then cuts the budget. Another

student notes that colleges only want to make money. "I'm discouraged to be getting an education that won't be worth the money."

It was at this point that I asked if anyone from the university had talked to students either as a group or individually about financial aid. No one had spoken directly with anyone from that office, although a few students had discussed questions about filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) with the student representative from Minority Student Recruitment who holds office hours in the career and technology classroom once a week. The high school guidance counselor had also not spoken to them in depth about the financial aid process, although several weeks later, she did come in to talk to them about remaining scholarships they could apply for.

I arranged to have officers from the university's financial aid office come in to talk to the class, and during their power point presentation, which they make available to all public schools and students in the state upon request, they helped answer students' specific questions about financial aid, scholarships, etc. I was quite surprised through all of this to find that even though these students were in a college-level class designed to help transition students to college, this sort of direct financial counseling had not happened yet. I talked this over with Miguel during our interview, and he mentioned that although college is part of his plan, he is just as eager to get a job to help pay for the upkeep of his car. The financial side of college seems to be his biggest obstacle in attending college:

Oh, college is definitely there. It's ... my dad said he'll help me out as much as he can, but I don't know where I'm going to go. I have to see who is going to give me more money, like, I guess you could say the money issue is it, but those people (university financial aid officers) came in and they helped so I'm going to

look at a lot of stuff. I have the websites and stuff, and I went through them, and I didn't really have a lot of time cuz I was working this weekend and stuff, but I'm going to look into that...

Up until the first day of the fall semester of college, Miguel was still trying to figure out how to pay for his education.

I tried to help Miguel find employment on campus so that he could focus on his studies. I provided contact information for an acquaintance at the university police department, thinking that a student job would have given Miguel experience in his future field, and he did go in to pick up an application. He never submitted it, however, for it turns out that the money was too good at his current job, and he couldn't really afford tuition, insurance, and car payments on a work-study hourly wage. He chose instead to maintain a full-time job at a busy car dealership while attending classes. He was unable to continue beyond his first year at the university and, from what I understand, is now taking classes at the local community college and working full time. He got derailed (perhaps temporarily) by an understandable inability to focus on his studies while having to holding down a full-time job. In Miguel's case, advance planning might have helped to keep him on his college pathway. For low-income students from schools that are not focused on college preparation in communities with fewer social support networks leading toward college, there must be an added dimension of financial planning built into any college access programming.

Thrown Off-Course: Curriculum

A social network or mediator can help students and families who are unfamiliar with the educational system navigate around some of its pitfalls. In my state, for example, the state-mandated graduation requirements for public high schools do not align with the minimum entrance requirements of the state universities. Students who barely satisfy graduation requirements at their high schools will remain deficient in mathematics, science, and English. It is up to students and their families to choose a college prep course-load, but this requires that schools and universities reach out to families early to give them enough information to become self-advocates and to make informed choices.

More often than not, schools push low-income, minoritized students into remedial courses, making it virtually impossible for them to graduate college-ready. In a review of literature since the 1960s about access to and persistence of low-income, minority, and nontraditional students in postsecondary education, Baker and Velez note that “low-income students are not nearly as likely as their more affluent counterparts to have completed college preparation curricula in high school—an experience that is positively linked to persistence in college” (91). Although Vista del Valle does not have an official tracking system, all roads do not lead equally toward college.

Further, because of the No Child Left Behind state mandated testing, most English teachers I talked to reported dejectedly that their teaching had been reduced to preparing students to take the exams. As Luis Moll explains in “Rethinking Resistance,” high stakes testing leads to a “pedagogy of control” designed to “obviate diversity” in favor of highly controlled, standardized forms of assessment in education (125). Instead

of providing incentives to schools to solve dropout rates among diverse student populations through an examination of institutional discrimination or by using a social justice lens, such as by considering students' home cultures, expectations, and strengths, schools are increasingly pressured to conform to federal mandates for state standardized testing.

In the state of Arizona, for example, statewide testing known as the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS), and schools' fears of being labeled "failing" have forced teachers to resort to rote teaching techniques such as drilling, rather than engaging students in dynamic projects and discussions about issues more in tune with the students' lived experiences. While standardization has a negative impact on schooling in general, it impacts Latinos/as in particular because Latinos/as and other minoritized students tend to under-perform on standardized tests (Valencia 20). Interestingly, grades and standardized tests are not found to be accurate predictors of minoritized students' performance in college, so an over-reliance on these scores as entrance criteria in universities is an improper measure of these students' potential (Vasquez 461). Further, the most "critical variable" in college preparation, according to William Tierney's *Preparing for College: Nine Elements of Effective Outreach* is a college preparation curriculum (4), not test preparation. Again, there is a mismatch between what we know and what we do, and when we do not follow the research or adopt best practices, we continue to perpetuate inequities in education.

Implementing a college preparation curriculum for all students seems like a good starting point. When I interviewed the high school English teacher in the dual enrollment

classroom where I did my fieldwork, I commented on what I observed as a curriculum very closely resembling a college composition classroom at the university where I taught, including the use of peer workshop, student conferences, and student-centered instruction, and she noted that indeed, to her, the freedom to adopt this pedagogy was what she felt would most effectively prepare her students for college. Besides the dual enrollment course, Ms. D. also teaches four sections of Sophomore English. When I asked if she used these principles in her standard sections (ie. not elective or college-prep) of English, she sighed and shook her head.

Because of the AIMS testing I am required to do, we are forced to move to a more teacher-centered pedagogy, where drills occupy the center of my teaching. I would love to dedicate the same amount of attention and care to the teaching of writing in those classes, but I have no choice.

Asked if her teaching philosophy is the same for all students, she admits,

I try to trickle that in, but the reality is that I have to deal with the stumbling block of AIMS. I absolutely must teach the format that will get them through it... the five paragraph essay.

The reading curriculum is also prescribed, although teachers do work together to choose texts. Still, reading techniques are emphasized over literary analysis, in order to prepare students to take tests as efficiently as possible.

It would be wonderful to take *To Kill a Mockingbird* and make it connect to their own lives...

Her voice trails off.

The answer is 'no.' The teaching approach is not the same, but whenever time does allow for a bit more creativity, their writing is so much better. I did teach one first-person assignment (with Sophomores), and those papers turned out so well, I used them as Christmas gifts at the end of the year to teachers the students had described. The teachers were all surprised I was able to get the students to write

so much! The bottom line, in my opinion, is getting students to buy into the assignment, which isn't easy when forced to teach to the test.

In other words, while her dual-enrollment students and the Advanced Placement students at the school were given the luxury of a college preparatory curriculum, the vast majority of students were not. Again, there were seventeen seniors in Ms. D's dual enrollment class, out of a graduating class of close to three hundred.

I would argue, then, that in terms of writing instruction, standardized testing is doing a direct disservice to students by robbing them of what we in composition studies generally agree to be the best practices in writing instruction in favor of de-contextualized drills, formulas, and endless worksheets. At Vista del Valle, even in classes taught by master teachers who know how to prepare students for college English, any room for actively engaging students in their learning had been relegated to those elective classes that students could sign up for only after passing the state proficiency exam. There, I was pleasantly surprised to find a mix of rigorous, interdisciplinary, and culturally-relevant offerings: Chicano/a Literature, Writing and History, AP Composition and AP Literature. Still, with class sizes in the standard sections (i.e. not college-prep) sometimes topping thirty-six, teachers and students seemed to be struggling to make meaningful learning experiences out of the fifty-minute class sessions.

Setting them on the Pathway: Teacher as Advocate

I will return now to the assumption that it is possible for individuals and communities to resist the negative impact of top-down educational policy and practices that unfairly disadvantage minoritized students (Moll "Rethinking" 126). One way is

through teacher activism. It *is possible* for teachers to play a role in neutralizing the negative impact of the “crowding out” and the “throwing off course” of students. I have seen it happen. Of course the onus should not fall exclusively on the shoulders of overworked and underpaid teachers, and my larger argument for change includes institutional reform as well, but I will address that in the subsequent chapters. Here, I will present a case study of one successful model for teaching that can contribute to a more equitable pathway to college for low-income Latino/a students.

I argue for a shift from the traditional, banking model of teacher as knowledge-bearer (Freire 72) to a more activist model of teacher as advocate. If those broader institutional barriers are to be overcome, if those walls, as Ralph Cintron described, heighten a certain kind of fantasy-making or desire, teachers and others who work in low-income, minoritized-majority schools must rethink their roles. The goal should not be containment, policing, or mere survival. The goal should be to clear pathways so that students don't have to merely fantasize about scaling walls. The possibility of success should be provided to each and every student. I saw this modeled in Ms. D's dual enrollment, Senior English class. In contrast to the foreboding exterior of the school buildings, what happens within the walls of the classroom I observed is refreshingly empowering. Everything from what the teacher chooses to display on her walls to how she addresses students points to one pathway: academic success.

1. Creating a Community of Learners

- Students sit in desks arranged in vaguely horseshoe formation so that they face one another as much as possible. Although the teacher sits at the front of the

room, not all students face her directly, gently disrupting the power structure within the room.

- A poster: “Language is power.”
- A collage behind the teacher’s desk of pictures of mostly Latino/a students of different ages, including many in graduation regalia, with the words, “A proud learning community.”
- Clippings from local newspapers of Vista del Valle students and grads with a banner that reads: “Congratulations!”
- A photo collage of students on a field trip.
- A large newspaper clipping of former Vista del Valle students who successfully participated in DECA (Delta Epsilon Chi Association for Students interested in studying marketing and entrepreneurship) state competitions in 2006.
- Paper chains in school colors, and banners celebrating school pride.

The story revealed here is of a celebration of a “community of learners.” There is evidence of students’ academic achievement everywhere. What these classroom artifacts say to me is that the teacher is heavily invested in promoting several things: students as the central figures in the story, literacy as power, and pride in academic achievement. The messages she chooses to display model for current students what is *attainable* by displaying the many positive accomplishments of past and current students. She is also creating a sense of continuity, of community, a value that her students may already possess, if we recall the student-designed library murals. This leads to the next component of teacher as advocate.

2. *Projecting Authentic Caring*

Ms. D. has been teaching for over twenty years and plans to continue teaching for the foreseeable future. The photos of students reveal her devotion to them, a devotion affirmed to me when she revealed that although she has enough “points” to retire with her pension, “I just can’t bear to leave the students.” This devotion is constantly affirmed, both in her interactions with students and in her choice of classroom texts. As a reward, she tells me that her former students frequently return to the school to visit her and to speak with her current students about their experiences after graduation. Indeed, several of Ms. D’s students have taken my FYC section at the university just so that they can continue to work with Ms. D and with students from Vista del Valle through the online writing exchange I began after that first visit in 2004. (I describe this program in depth in chapter five). I am reminded of that definition of “authentic caring,” a *sustained* relationship between students and teachers (Valenzuela 91). Valenzuela argues that for Latino/a students, and particularly for students who are recent immigrants to the United States from Mexico, this authentic caring is essential to students success. It provides a sense of security and trust that allows them to learn unimpeded by fear. I witness how her current students keep Ms. D. apprised of their own achievements and challenges, often remaining after class to proudly announce that they have received scholarships, raised their grades in other subjects, or met roadblocks on their paths to college. She is someone they go to for validation, and she displays her validation readily.

Field Notes

February 15, 2007.

Ms. D. is explaining that she nominated everyone in the class for “Outstanding Senior” for the school graduation awards. She wrote essays for each one and included all of their college application personal statements to let the students speak for themselves. Someone remarked that it must have taken Ms. D. a long time. She said, “Yes, and now I have a backache!” Laughter.

Ms. D’s reward for going the extra mile for her students is respect and devotion. She mentioned during an interview that on a field trip, students started calling her Mom. “I thought, oh dear! What has happened?” but then settled into the idea that students feel comfortable enough with her to do that, and that she has really come full circle, after having raised her own daughter in the district. She feels as though the school district is an extended family. In my view, this is because she chooses to recognize it as such. She values and validates the students’ assertion that “*el futuro comienza con la familia,*” and she weaves this premise into her pedagogy and into her persona. As an example, she invited the dual-enrollment students to visit her new, unfinished house because of her relationship with the students. She and her neighbors hosted a progressive dinner to celebrate the end of the year, as well as the students’ accomplishments. This has become an annual tradition, and Ms. D’s affluent neighbors in the western foothills continue to participate. I asked her what makes her so committed to the students.

Ms. D: You just want to do for these kids because they’re so charming. They’re so willing to go above and beyond. The students are so appreciative.

3. Being Committed to Setting High Expectations

The first assignment in Ms. D's dual-enrollment course is something she added: the college application essay to the local state university. She wants students to at least have an essay and to complete the application, even if they don't end up going. She also encourages them to submit their writing to multiple scholarship competitions. All but one of her current students was admitted to the local university in the year of my study.

I asked about the teaching methods of a former teacher many of the students referred to whose style seemed to differ greatly—was more critical of students' writing, didn't allow them to use "I," etc. Several students felt frustrated to the point of almost giving up. Others felt it helped push them harder. Ms. D. feels that perhaps this approach "stifles or stops students from writing through the criticism. In never allowing the first person, it makes it difficult for the voice to come out. It doesn't flow naturally for them, so they end up writing something they haven't bought into." She feels that the freedom of allowing the use of "I" allows them to develop voice and "allows their experiences—that what they think matters." She recognizes that student empowerment is important. This is reflected in the way that she conducts this class.

Her biggest challenge is to "maintain the integrity" of the dual-enrollment course. She strongly dislikes giving anything lower than a "B" on a paper because of how this will affect a student's college transcript. She thinks it could be devastating for a student to enter university with a "C" in a course. She has to work extra hard with each student, "coaxing, revising, giving conferences, and reworking writing with students" to get them to improve before she assigns a final grade. She feels a duty to "take students under her wing" rather than set them up for failure later on. So, it's not just about providing the

opportunity to succeed, but giving them extra attention early so that they learn the skills they'll need to succeed later on.

The teacher as advocate creates a community of learners, projects authentic caring, and commits to setting high expectations. A strong teacher advocate will weave all three of these components together as much as possible. Here are some observations from my field notes early in the semester during which I conducted my research.

Field Notes

March 1, 2007. 9 a.m.

Students still working on literacy narratives. One essay and freewrite are shared with the entire class. The theme of the essay is domestic violence. The student writer reads with a quavering voice and breaks down once. A student passes her the box of Kleenex from the teacher's desk. After she concludes, Ms. D begins:

Ms. D: I admit, I'm having a little bit of a difficult time, but we can't let this go." She wipes her eyes with a Kleenex. Students here don't raise their hands, they speak out when they have something to say.

A female student: "What she writes works because many of the people in this class have experienced it too, even if in different ways." There's a brief silence, with some sniffing around the room.

Ms. D makes a reference to one of the core texts the students have been referring to, an essay by Patricia Hampl about personal writing. "Hampl writes a story because it

needs to be told, so we don't forget. It needs to be spoken." More silence. "How did Yvonne get these words on paper?"

Someone says, "Her books helped her." Someone else says, "She wrote about her safe place."

Ms. D redirects the question, "How did she do this magic? I want to know too because I want to know how to do this."

A female student, "She added every single detail, like, about her room. Even the house has detail."

Ms. D brings in a specific example from the essay, "She uses that detail to get to that double-wide trailer," setting up this "classic time, place, and mood." She does so by "Placing this three-year old in the scene. As the rest of you are putting yours together, think about this."

Miguel speaks up for his friend, "I think what he (gestures to his neighbor with his thumb) has to say is really good."

The male student he indicates, who rarely speaks in class says, "It kind of reminds me of that movie, "Lemony-Snickett," everything's cool when the little kids are with other children, but when he's there, everything be dark and scary."

Several students nod and smile.

Another male student with a passion for filmmaking says, "I like the way she focuses on her point of view. When she was reading, it, I just focused on her... the other faces were blurring. I'm a filmmaker, so I think of things in angles. Everything is from a

low level—a low perspective. When the parents come into the room, they seem like huge monsters and she doesn't give them faces.”

Ms. D responds, “Very good analysis, Carlos.” She asks Yvonne, “Did you realize you were doing that?” Yvonne shakes her head. “But you had to go back to the mindset of a three-year old.” Yvonne nods.

Another female student says, “I have a problem with making things simple, but she uses simple words... like a three-year old, it's not in a bad way.

Someone raises the point that she was young to know how to use a phone to call 911 on her father, but other students recall knowing how to do that at a young age.

The female student who talked about the simple language brings the conversation back to the writing, “Do you know where you're going with this, cuz I have something written, but I don't know where I want to go with it.”

Ms D says, “I might be able to throw something your way if you're stuck. It is from Murray on revision.” So- she is giving students tools from Composition studies to help them with their college-level writing.

A couple of important points should be made. These students have been writing together and sharing writing for almost a year by now, so they are clearly comfortable doing so. Still, it is impressive to see how comfortable they HAVE become with this sort of writer's workshop format, a feat I attribute at least in part to the teachers' projection of authentic caring throughout. The rigor of the curriculum is also apparent here, indicative of the teacher's high expectations for her students. Several students refer to Hampl and Murray in their reflective pieces, so they are also adept at integrating writerly advice into

their writing processes. They are able to get beyond emotional responses to texts that deal with some fairly difficult experiences in order to focus on the writing style and strategies, and they do so with seemingly little direction from the teacher at this point. This is where we want students to be when they leave our FYC classes after a semester or two, and these students are fairly comfortable doing so in their high school English classroom.

Another important observation can be made. These students are working together as a community of learners. This raises the possibility that high school English classes can and perhaps should be modeled on the college composition classroom if they are going to better help ease the transition for students from high school to college. Why wait for them to show up? Why not equip them before they arrive to be able to analyze writing with the sophistication that will be required of them even in their content-area courses freshman year in college?

Although Ms. D. expressed to me at one point that for these students in her class, “writing as therapy is part of it,” the classroom discussions don’t become therapy sessions. As an observer, I had a hard time recovering from what had been read aloud—a three-year old girl hears horrendous noises and screams from the room next to hers but “had become immune to it. This routine had become nothing new.” She finds comfort in the sanctuary of her bedroom, in books, and in the arms of her Nana and Tata. I learned from these students about the power of respecting the writing of another enough to move beyond the personal and really focus on the writing itself. This is difficult for a seasoned

FYC instructor to do, so it is doubly impressive that these students do so with apparent ease.

What emerges is an environment, a curriculum, and an opportunity for learning that transcends the barriers to achievement for these Latino/a students and opens the door to a future that includes higher education. With their own written experiences at the center of the course, students participate with the teacher in a project of “mutual humanization,” and emerge better equipped for the future. Pamela reflects on this sense of empowerment in an essay written at the end of the semester:

I feel so vulnerable revealing such personal conflicts that I can't help but squirm and object from reading them out loud. But in the end, I was always denied my wish to keep them to myself. I read and read as fast as I could, I tripped over a few words but I didn't stop... I couldn't. I wanted to read as fast as possible to keep the class from realizing what I was saying. But all was in vain. They heard every word, every inhale, every quiver of my voice, every mistake, and heard every meaning and conflict behind them. They were intrigued to the point where they would ask to read my papers before I turned them in and to read a novel that I am currently finishing in my spare time. I never knew that my life was this interesting to people. I always felt that they would judge me and turn away from me and from what I am [...] Writing taught me not to fear the world or hide myself from it but instead to meet it head on and let my presence be known... as well as my thoughts on life.

Pamela and her classmates are pushed to confront their challenges in life and to transcend them through writing. Because they are a community of learners, they respect one another by really listening to one another's voices, as does Ms. D. I observed that the focus of the dual enrollment class was on *what is attainable*, which I feel is crucial to a true education. This raises a powerful question for educators committed to promoting a college-going culture: What messages do schools and teachers give their students, what

messages from students and families do the schools ignore, and what impact does this have on students' development of academic identity, goals, and college aspirations?

In an effort to address these emerging questions, I turn next to a consideration of ideology. I will analyze a theme that emerged in interviews and student writing: identity formation. I will connect this theme to a larger consideration of how ideology affects the intellectual and cultural scaffolding that are present or absent from the education of Latino/a students and describe how Latino/a Critical Pedagogy addresses this issue.

III. RECLAIMING THE PATHWAY: CONFRONTING IDEOLOGICAL CONTROL

As I move from my analysis of institutional to ideological factors affecting Latino/a education, I feel that it is important to reflect on the ideological stance that I myself am taking as a researcher and educator. As I mentioned in chapter one, I am operating under the premise that in an ideal democracy, individuals will work collectively to promote the common good, and that this project can be promoted through education. Unlike John Dewey, whose philosophy of education informs my work, however, I do not assume that all members of a democracy share a common culture or that we should work to ensure that they do.

Unfortunately, our educational system does tend to operate under this concept of common culture, and as such, differences are elided and inequities have become naturalized. In chapters one and two, I detailed some of the material inequities that I observed in my community, and in this chapter, I will examine the ways in which these inequities have come about and continue to be promoted. I will consider dominant ideologies regarding education in general and the education of Latinos/as in particular.

Otto Santa Ana analyzes common metaphors for education to analyze the assumptions we make about students and the privileging of certain methods over others. He critiques the “education as path” metaphor for the ways in which it has been used to naturalize certain assumptions and practices. For example, it tends to promote individualism by forwarding the notion that a student’s level of schooling and attainment is based solely on personal initiative. In the process, it ignores “unequal educational

opportunities, dissimilar socioeconomic factors, and institutional racism,” while promoting competition and precluding cooperation (181). He rightly points out the ways in which practices such as tracking and standardized testing fit nicely into this construct, helping to affirm notions that student performance on standard instruments of measurement predetermine whether they are destined for higher education or for the low-skilled labor pool.

In the previous chapter, I confronted such practices and suggested alternatives, for I feel that we can reclaim and redefine the pathway by unearthing those unequal educational opportunities, dissimilar socioeconomic factors, and institutional racism that unfairly disadvantage some students. In this chapter, I will explore assumptions that currently underlie the educational pathways of Latinos/a students in order to perhaps reclaim the pathway as a metaphor of opportunity and progress, rather than of competition and individualism.

The Idea of the Pathway: Ideology and Latino/a Education

In an essay she shared with her Senior English class, one of my research participants describes an incident she experienced in first grade in which a trusted teacher questioned the student’s academic ability as well as her integrity.

...every month, my teacher, Ms. G* gave us an at home assignment. We had about 30 days to read all 20 books in order to get a free pan pizza. I just happened to read all 20 books that night she assigned it. The next day at school, for doing this amazing deed, I figured Ms. G* would be proud that I took the entire night to read an entire one-month assignment. I showed her my paper with all the books I read, and she immediately dubbed me as a liar. I couldn’t believe it; my very own teacher thought I had lied about reading. To make matters worse, my mother’s

signature was on that form insuring (sic) that I did, in fact, read every single book cover to cover. She not only called me a liar, but also my own mother.

This student reveals an all-too common ideological assumption about the capabilities of Latino/a students. There is a racist undertone to this teacher's low expectations for her students and her immediate assumption that the student and her mother are liars. This is not a rare occurrence, unfortunately, and as the class discussion continued, most of the students in the class had stories to tell about times when they were second-guessed by teachers or when they had been told they should not or could not aspire to greatness. The students' reactions were interesting, however, in that rather than considering the root cause of the teachers' low expectations, which to me clearly signaled racism, students labeled the teachers "mean," or "burnt-out." I began to pay attention to the ways in which issues of difference were circumvented during class discussions, and I will return to this issue later in this chapter.

Recently, in my work as a writing specialist for a federally funded college access program, I met frequently with teachers, counselors, and administrators in public middle and high schools in our city. One of the mantras of our college access team was to set a tone of high expectations for the students and educators in our community. It was interesting to hear just how deeply imbedded the culture of low expectations had become. Invariably, some met our college-going messages with skepticism. "I'm sorry, but the reality is that these kids are just not college material," or "We would be doing most of these students a disservice by putting them in classes they wouldn't be able to handle," or my favorite, "We'll be setting them up for failure if we place them on a college track." Low expectations are a form of racist ideology, and as Chicano/a Studies scholar Gilbert

Gonzalez demonstrates, this institutional racism can be traced back to educational practices in the beginning of the twentieth century.

At that time, society was controlled by the belief in the cultural superiority of the dominant community. Gross stereotyping by educators ensued, and we hear echoes of some of the statements educators at the time made about Mexican students in the examples from today that I have given. For example, as Gonzalez discovers, an educator from Phoenix said in 1939:

Much more classroom time should be spent teaching the [Mexican] children clean habits and positive attitudes towards others, public property, and their community in general... [The Mexican child] can be taught to repeat the constitution forward and backward and still he will steal cars, break windows, wreck public recreational centers, etc., if he doesn't catch the idea of respect for human values and personalities. (163-4)

Again we encounter the notion that Latino/a students are deficient, and we see as well the root of the criminalization of Latino/a youth, as I described in the previous chapter.

Americanization programs at that time were the product of the dominant social theory developed at the time of industrialization, when it was believed that in order to promote industrial and economic progress, disparate immigrant groups in the United States needed to be brought under one unified and cohesive social order (161). In the early 1900s, Mexican immigration became the central focus of assimilation theory; Americanization programs for children and adults were deemed necessary for the political, social, and economic well being of the dominant social order, which depended upon the subordination of Mexican community. As Gonzalez explains, "Americanization merged smoothly with the general educational methodology developed to solve 'the Mexican education problem,' as it went hand in hand with testing, tracking, and the emphasis on

vocational education’” (158). Again, we see the ways in which institutional methods of control in education merged with the promotion of beliefs that would maintain the status quo.

As I argued in chapter one, our political economy today continues to rely on the social and political domination of some and the subordination of others. A bifurcated job market will continue to be fueled by the bifurcated educational system in which low-expectations of Latino/a youth justify unequal pathways. The ideology behind statements such as “these students just aren’t college material” must be challenged.

I take my understanding of the term “ideology” from a Marxist definition, as articulated by Louis Althusser: “the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group” (107). As Santa Ana points out, ideology “is usually taken for granted as individuals go about their everyday lives and fulfill their various tasks and habitual actions” (18). As it relates to political economy, as Louis Althusser explains, production depends on the ability and willingness of the people to reproduce the means of production. This includes reproducing material conditions as well as the conditions of labor. This system is so ingrained in society, in our “individual ‘consciousness’ that it is extremely hard, not to say almost impossible, to raise oneself to the point of view of reproduction” (85). In other words, for those of us who function within a social order maintained by dominant ideology, it is difficult to resist the tendency to take it for granted or to see that there are alternatives. This is a description of how ideology functions to preserve social conditions.

This system becomes so ingrained through State institutions (such as schools) that teach “know-how,” but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its ‘practice’ (89). Althusser calls these State institutions “Ideological State Apparatuses,” because their power is asserted not through violence but through ideology (96). The bifurcated educational system creates “a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class ‘in words,’ (89). Critical educators seek to disrupt the notions of schools as ideological state apparatuses and to use them, instead, to help raise students’ awareness of the ways in which they are being manipulated to maintain the status quo.

Critical Race Theory tells us that whatever the dominant society hands down in the form of ideology or curriculum is believed to be neutral, objective, and meritocratic, while in reality it masks its real purpose, which is to control (Yosso 95). Tara Yosso, echoing Min-Zhan Lu’s critique of Hirsch and “common culture,” which I presented earlier, reaffirms the need for educators to rethink pedagogy. It is not enough, she argues, to pursue pedagogies based on theories such as Hirsch’s cultural literacy, for they assume “the universality of a white, middle class epistemology,” homogenize culture, and rely on the banking method of education. Critical theorists have exposed how the work of the “Ideological State Apparatus,” under the guise of “traditional curricula,” which is often described as neutral or meritocratic, goes on—by promoting what Bourdieu calls a “hidden curriculum” (Yosso; Giroux).

For Latino/a students, this “hidden curriculum” and the homogenization of culture can have insidious effects, as evidenced by Richard Rodriguez’s famous literacy narrative, *Hunger for Memory*. In Rodriguez’s view, the choice for Latino/a students in this country is either to assimilate completely to the dominant culture at the risk of losing one’s home culture, or to preserve that culture at the risk of missing out on attaining an education and pursuing the American dream. This was the hidden curriculum at the heart of those Americanization programs described by Gilbert Gonzalez, and clearly the program has had long-lasting effects. Why has it become “natural,” Santa Ana asks, “that students have to disregard or deny their home world in order to be taught things by their teachers?” (18).

Two overlapping factors emerged in my research, revealing the extent to which the ideological legacy of Americanization programs persists in the education of Latinos/as today. First, students are indoctrinated through the official and unofficial messages they hear through schooling that naturalize the status quo. Secondly, students experience a lack of opportunity to critically engage with those messages. I will explore both in the sections that follow. I will also highlight points of resistance and suggest ways educators might assist students in rupturing the dominant ideologies that naturalize inequities in the students’ lives.

The Myth of a Raceless Society

As I mentioned in the previous section, when schools function as ideological state apparatuses, they promote messages that maintain the status quo. According to Richard

Delgado, “The principal cause of demoralization of marginal groups is self-condemnation” because they internalize the myths that oppress them (2437). For the students at Vista del Valle, a culture of low expectations is the result of unofficial and official messages passed along by educators and institutions. Perhaps less obvious is the way in which the school neutralizes difference, making invisible the inequitable educational experiences of its students. In describing the Americanization programs of the early twentieth-century, Gilbert Gonzalez asserts that these programs were trying to allay a fear that class-consciousness, political action, and ethnicity would destabilize the dominant social order to the point of collapse, and as Miguel’s account reveals, these fears are perhaps still at the root of steps schools are taking to neutralize these tendencies (161).

Miguel is one of the few males in the class and the only male whose voice I have included here at any length, mainly because he and I met several times throughout the year, so I was able to follow his experiences more closely than the other males. He was an athlete as well as a high-achieving scholar in high school. He was born and raised in the city. His parents divorced and while living with his father in a town well north of the city, his commute each way took at least forty minutes. To Miguel, it was worth it because he has always gone to school in the district, his parents both attended schools in the district, his father works for a school in the district, and he feels a strong sense of loyalty. I find out later that Ms. D. taught Miguel’s uncle when he was at Vista del Valle, so the sense of connectedness and of community is there. His dream is to become an F.B.I. agent, and he seems to have thought out how to prepare for that career:

Miguel: I'm going to transfer to Northern¹⁰ in like two years, cuz I want to be, like, an FBI agent, like criminal justice, they have a really good criminal justice program up there. I got on the website, and it was like, you've got to get an accounting degree, or something.

A: Well, a degree...

M: Yeah, I was talking to my tía, she's a detective here for the PD¹¹, and my tío is a detective too, and they were like, yeah, you should get an accounting degree for the F.B.I. They really need those, and I was like, oh, maybe I'll do that, cuz, I don't know, I want to do something in that field.

A: And you're strong in math?

M: Yeah, I'm strong.

Like Pamela, Miguel is strongly supported in his ambitions by his family, and within his social support network at home, he has role models who help steer him in the right direction. When it comes to identity, Miguel has recently had an experience at the school that has shifted his thinking, as he described as our interview continued. The seniors attended a school-sponsored assembly during which a motivational speaker apparently talked to them about this topic.

Anna: How do you define yourself to others?

Miguel: I don't know, like, ummm... I would say, Mexican-American, but then again, it comes back to that speech that guy gave on Friday. That opened up my eyes. I was like, dang! Wow!

A: What did he say?

M: I'm a human. Everyone's human. So I guess that's how you could say, like what he said-- I'm going to start identifying myself as human. Like he said, everyone comes in different colors, shapes and sizes, so that's kind of like... I'm going to try to start doing that. I think everyone, and he said too, everyone's prejudiced even when they don't mean to be. Before I was like, I'm Mexican-

¹⁰ One of the other state universities: name changed.

¹¹ police department

American. I'm a Mexican from America. I guess you could say, that's how peop...the Mexicans see Mexicans different. The Mexicans from Mexico and the Mexicans from America . I'm going to try to start just seeing everyone as human. It's going to be a hard start, cuz its like, hey, you're Caucasian, or like, you're Asian, like that.

A: Yeah, you know, when you leave here where the majority of students are...

M: Yeah, now I'm a minority.

A: Do you think about that?

M: No, I see myself as a pretty friendly guy—right now I'm cool with a lot of people. I have a lot of friends from being the different styles, from punk, goth, prep, I guess you could say normal. What's normal? So, I don't really see myself having a problem with going to the U. I have a lot of friends... My best friend, he's Caucasian, well, he went to a different school, so my best friend now, he's Mexican, he's (gives name), but the other guy, he was my best friend since like 6th grade, but we don't talk as much or see each other cuz he's there and I'm here, but I didn't really see myself as different from him.

The school has taken an ideological stance toward race and racism, suggesting to students that the “official” position regarding race is that we need to get past it and become a colorblind society-- ignore difference. If the students at the school adopt this stance as readily as it has been by Miguel at least initially, resistance to educational inequities will continue to be neutralized.

In an article advocating critical pedagogy, Teresa Mckenna explains this phenomenon:

The interaction among peoples in the United States traditionally has not been characterized by equality or common sharing of power and social control. It has been marked by a need to normalize, to reduce cultural hybridity into its lowest common denominator in order, many have believed, to effect a manageable idea of cultural and national identity. But that common culture—as West, Gomez-Pena, and Gates among others have pointed out—has been based on obfuscation, cultural destruction, and repression of difference. (129-30)

This, coupled with the perpetuation of what Antonia Darder calls “the myth of meritocracy,” will help maintain the status quo. Equity in education is impossible without resistance.

The Myth of Meritocracy

Traditional definitions of education in the United States contain an assumption that hard work is all that is required to achieve success in schooling. Wrapped up in this assumption is the notion that students across the country share a level playing field and have access to equal opportunities or that students are working hard for the same things and in the same way. Again, underlying this is the premise that we share a common culture with common values. This myth is central to the myth of the American Dream, and to the notion of “pulling one up by one’s bootstraps.” In reality, as I have already established, the State and the political economy depend upon the perpetuation of inequities in society. Marginalized students face greater challenges along their educational pathways than do students who are members of the dominant group in society. Latino/a Critical Theorists such as Antonia Darder challenge this myth in particular because of the ways it is used to perpetuate low expectations of Latino/a students by educators (338). Several of my female research participants seem to have at least partially internalized this myth, blaming any failures they have had on their own inadequacies, while at the same time revealing instances of institutional inequity that they or their families have experienced.

Veronica's parents immigrated to the city from northern Mexico before she was born. She has three older brothers. None of them finished high school. She comes from a large, trans-border extended family (some live here, others in Mexico)—each parent has eleven siblings. No one in her family has ever gone to a four-year college or university, although a second cousin is currently attending the local community college. When asked about any obstacles she may have faced along her educational pathway, Veronica takes on all of the responsibility for her own education.

Veronica: The only challenge in school is that I haven't pushed myself to where I could've. Cuz, like, I know that I could've, like, I have an, like, my GPA's 3.5, and it is good for like, cumulative, but I could've pushed myself harder to have a higher GPA right now, like, not done the minimum. Pushed myself more to be a better student and taken more accelerated courses so I can be better and more prepared for college.

Anna: What caused the turning point for you?

Veronica: Just realizing that I am going to go to college and I do need to prepare myself more than just being in the regular classes and slacking off with the rest of the kids, and I just needed to... This year has definitely been the most difficult year, and last year's seniors were like, "Yah, it's easy and yadayadayada," and it's just like, I have so much homework and I'm getting it all done, and in previous years, I haven't done. Like in math especially, I just never did the homework because I always understood everything, but now, like in precalc, It's getting challenging. I need to do the homework so I can understand what's going on the next day, and to get, like, good test scores. And then, those are skills that I need to develop in order to be successful in college.

Interestingly, when asked what or who helped motivate her, she points first to a negative experience, rather than a positive one:

Um, well, like, when I was growing up, my brothers never really, like, expressed liking going to school at all, and you know, like, when we would wake up to go to elementary, my older brothers were in high school and they didn't want to go, and like, I don't know, I just I've always wanted to be in the medical field, so to get there, you need to go to college, so I don't know. I just. My brothers never

wanted to go. I've just always wanted to go. And, my mom is, you know, she would like push us to, like, if that's what you want, then go for it.

Julio Cammarota argues that attitudes toward education (whether positive or negative) influence resistance and outcomes: achievement as resistance vs. cutting class or dropping out as resistance. These attitudes, he argues, “have much to do with the intertwining of multiple sociocultural forces defining their societal positions and thus the uniqueness of their struggles to impose their own definitions of identity and status” (54). Veronica resists the pathway taken by her older brothers—to either drop out or be pushed out of school—in order to avoid a similar outcome, so in a sense, her approach to education can be seen as positive resistance.

What is missing here, however, is a critical awareness of the oppressive conditions that led to three out of four children in one family dropping out of high school, despite positive encouragement at home. Cammarota argues that “an outward reflection on oppressive conditions, in addition to the inward perspective of ‘proving them wrong,’ would encourage students to take up a transformational resistance that challenges systemic inequalities” (56). I take up this issue with Veronica, and her response includes the quote I presented in chapter one:

A: What I'm interested in is to kind of shift some negative perceptions about Latino/a students. I know that in this city, there are misconceptions about the Southside schools, and so, what would you want people to know about you or about the Southside or about your community.

V: People say that the Southside is so dangerous. And like, I live in a really nice neighborhood. There's like a park on my street, and the neighbors they all get along with each other, and I have never once heard a gunshot and seen someone killed in front of my house like they say, and it's just, like, when I go to school, I'm not scared to come to school. I drive to school and everything and everything

is fine. And I know that there are misconceptions that they're¹² not smart and they're not getting educated well. I have really well qualified teachers. I've taken two community college courses and my sign language teacher teaches there as well, you know, she's a professor. And then, I have the other classes. I know I'm doing well, but the misconception would be like my brothers, they didn't do well, they dropped out, they quit, and some people do that, but others do excel and they learn well. It's just how you acquire your skills for learning and then that's how far you'll get. You know, and I'm sure it's the same everywhere. I'm sure it's not just that in the Southside everyone's dumb.

There is an uncertainty in those two "I'm sure" statements at the end of this exchange that trouble me. While she is able to offer a few examples as evidence that the misconceptions are not true, she thinks again of her brothers and notes vaguely that "some people do that, but others do excel and they learn well," without any critique of the relatively uneven odds. Like her brothers, over sixty percent of the students at her school will drop out before graduation. Less than ten percent will go on to a four-year institution of higher education. She can defend her school to a certain extent, but at the same time, while she argues that it's not that everyone is dumb, she doesn't turn the critique back on the system that is unable to nurture those students so that they all achieve as she has.

Monica, another student in the dual enrollment course, also reveals ambivalence about the myth of meritocracy. She has internalized it to a certain extent, but at the same time, she notices an opportunity gap. Monica wants to study journalism at the state university to the north. I asked her about some columns she has written in response to

¹² She means Latino/a students. It is interesting that she uses "they," not "we" here. All three students whose words I present here distance themselves from Latino/a students. They see themselves as not fitting the mould—as exceptions to any generalizations they and Others make about Latinos/as.

questions posed by the local newspaper in a monthly spot featuring student writers. She gives the following as an example of the sort of issues the paper has raised:

If you go to school on the Southside, you have less of a chance than students on the other side.” I never really thought that. My dad always said and I always believed him, “No matter where you go to school, you’re going to learn if you want to.” That’s why I always liked school so much.

In an effort to encourage Monica to succeed, her father helps to reinforce the myth of meritocracy. A few moments later, during the same interview, Monica reveals her own ambivalence about this myth:

I feel that, well, I can do this but I don’t have the chance to do it because they don’t give me that chance. Like, we need to be given more chances, but still, we need to go out there and get ‘em too.

Monica and Veronica’s responses reflect the confusion that can emerge when marginalized students confront conflicting messages—on one hand, they take for granted the dominant ideology that hard work will provide opportunity. On the other hand, their own experiences cast doubt over this dominant narrative, yet they are unable to clearly articulate the inequities they perceive. How does this contradiction affect students’ identity development? Does this in turn have an effect on their agency?

The Fear of Losing a Culture: Language and Identity

Pamela has lived the challenging experience of trying to figure out how to self-identify, feeling the inadequacy of “official” categories in describing how she chooses to self-identify:

It’s kind of difficult. To identify, to put myself in certain group like that because in so many tests we had to bubble in you know they have Hispanic or Latin or

“Other” but they don’t really have what I consider myself, which is Mexican American, so it is difficult.

She brings language together with identity:

P: Well, I just try not to think of the problems the Latinos are having right now here in America. I just use that more as motivation, because I look at that as people trying to keep us down, and so I really try to break from that and even though I speak English, they really don’t include me in that group, but I include myself in that group because my parents are in that group. So, I really, that’s another motivation besides my parents that I use, that being a minority here, I want to succeed.

Anna: They?

P: Other Latinos. Like, when I talk to them and like suddenly I say something in Spanish, they’re like, “Oh, wow, I didn’t know you speak Spanish.”

Pamela self-identifies as Latino/a because of her family background but feels that others might exclude her from that group because her English skills set her apart. For her, language is an identity marker that is imposed on her from outside but that she has also adopted. As was typical of our exchanges, I found Pamela’s reserve in face-to-face interactions to be stripped away when she took up similar topics in her writing:

Sigh... Ah yes, my father. He speaks to me in Spanish, I respond in English. I apologize 1000 times and say it’s a force of habit but he’s too quick and begins to attack. I can only stand there... I can’t get my mouth to form words or my feet to make their hurried descent toward my bedroom. In a matter of minutes, the slaughter is over. This is what occurs all the time... this is how our conversations always end up; Me staring at the floor and my father wailing his arms as if trying to fly. He wants me to speak. I feel the dreadful words begin to rise to the tip of my tongue, but he stops me in mid sentence; he has changed his mind. He orders me not to speak, just to listen. I just shrug my shoulders and calmly walk to my room [...] I don’t know why I can’t have a casual conversation with him. It’s so difficult to even get one started with him. Feeling the hard days work seep into his tired muscles, I ask how his day was in Spanish. I curse myself for letting the words escape my train of thought that in turn gives him the perfect chance of ignoring me until I get it right. I realize now that he does that because he is afraid of losing our culture. My first language is Spanish and he’s afraid that I’m going

to lose it soon. So this is his form of punishment for being so easily sucked into an environment that I have been exposed to.

Pamela raises a critical issue for educators—especially for educators who teach language arts in one form or another. As Beverly Tatum asserts, “language is inextricably bound to identity. Language is not only an instrumental tool for communication, but also the carrier of cultural values and attitudes. It is through language that the affect of *mi familia*, the emotions of family life, are expressed” (139). As I noted briefly in chapter one, Anzaldúa goes even further to describe the tension that is caused when all but monolingualism is part of one’s identity—when a mixing of languages, a bilingualism, an ability to code-switch, when these assets are seen as deficits:

Deslenguados. Somos los del español deficiente. We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic mestizaje, the subject of your burla. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically somos huérfanos—we speak an orphan tongue. (80)

Pamela’s essay reveals a generational tension tied to language and culture, and recognizes the fear of losing a culture. Tatum notes that for Latino/a students, “the resolution of their feelings about the Spanish language is a central dimension of the identity development process” (142), and that educators should address this directly by valuing bilingualism and biculturalism, rather than perpetuating the “alienating and emotionally disruptive idea that native language and culture need to be forgotten in order to be successful” (143). Pamela seems to be on the cusp of this realization here, but the tension she experiences around the issue of language and “losing culture” is still unresolved, not merely because her academic ambitions require that she excel in English, but also because of a sense of “*pena*,” or shame, as Anzaldúa describes it, which causes

inner-conflict (80). Being forced to choose, as Richard Rodriguez did, is what terrorizes in this case. Being seen as deficient either by family or by schools creates a tension that Pamela has yet to resolve.

Deficit thinking is a mind-set born from the melding of ideology and science that blames the victim, rather than holding oppressive and inequitable schooling arrangements culpable. It comes from a cultural deficit model, which is a construct derived from a combination of science and ideology, in which groups not seen as conforming to cultural “norms” are labeled as culturally inferior in some way to the dominant culture (Barrera 5). As an FYC instructor, I often invited students to share literacy narratives in which they explored the factors that have helped and hindered them throughout their educational careers. My Latino/a students often write of their resistance to the ways in which their communities are labeled, asserting that they are in college, trying not to become “just another Mexican stereotype,” detailing ways that they have struggled to prove themselves as serious students, often with support from parents and family members. Just as often, students write about those low expectation messages I heard from administrators and counselors, having been told by teachers somewhere along the line that they might as well join the military since they are not really college material, or that Mexican kids don’t do well in college, so beauty school or technical colleges will better provide them with careers where they can start providing for their families sooner.

Traces of those early twentieth-century Americanization programs continue to have an impact on the education of Latino/a students in our schools as students negotiate a culture of low expectations, myths surrounding race and meritocracy, and deficit-

thinking in schools. The fact that these students are still fighting against the types of messages that initially oppressed Mexicans and Mexican Americans during annexation is disheartening. For students like Pamela who grapple with a sense that there is something wrong with these messages, what opportunities exist for developing critical literacy? In the next section, I will explore this question and then wrap up this chapter with a discussion of the need for critical pedagogy in the education of Latinos/as.

Critical Awareness Without a Sense of Direction

Field Notes

February 2, 2007. 9:30 a.m.

One student's essay is used as an example because of the great "turn" it takes. Ms.D. invites her to read, then hands out copies of the drafts to all students. The students and teacher read the essay and comment on the "turn."

Next, a White, non-Latina student reads her essay about divorce. She cries throughout, and stops at several points to sob. Other students tear up, and Kleenex is passed around. Suddenly, the essay is no longer about the divorce, but about how as a result, she and her brother moved to the Southside in middle school, and it is revealed that the essay is really about becoming a minority and enduring discrimination at an early age.

Shortly after the divorce we moved to Tucson's south side where my older brother and I had to start a new school. We inevitably were the minority at this new school. In our classes we were the only Caucasian students, and we struggled to be accepted. My brother would come home crying sometimes because he was picked on for his race. P and I had never been subjected to this kind of hatred. I never went outside to play because I was fearful that a kid from school would*

start calling me a crybaby and other mean names I couldn't understand due to the language barrier. The only way for us to cope with the name calling and the teasing was to be each others (sic) best friend...

Several students are visibly shaken by this (hanging heads, eyes welling with tears, wiping tears away). She cries when she reveals that her brother dropped out of high school. At the conclusion of the narrative, one student goes to her and gives her a hug. Ms. D jokes about needing to go right then and there to the snack shop to buy some chocolate. Another student jokes, "Ice-cream is better." Several students continue to cry silently throughout the rest of the class period.

Still, the conversation returns to the academic task of revision. Students discuss this essay and the other one they read for today through the framework of an essay about drafting by Patricia Hample.

I was surprised that as the conversation continued, no discussion of the race/racism issue was raised. I am reminded of Jaime Mejía's assertion that when composition pedagogy is "situated in a social vacuum," and doesn't "include any analyses that dialectically challenge(s) students to examine the construction of their own identities," (46) an opportunity to help students develop critical literacy is missed. Do teachers and students at the school overtly discuss and deal with race/racism existing right here? In other words, outside of learning about the Civil Rights Movement, is there any discussion/inquiry into race/racism today? If not overtly in classes, how do students perceive it/theorize it/live it in other ways? Clearly students are cognizant of racism, but how do they know it?

Research shows that persistence and success in postsecondary education for marginalized students is connected to a strong, critical understanding of the factors that influence them along their educational pathways (Mehan, Hubbard, and Villanueva). With this comes an awareness of educational inequities created through institutional racism, classism, and other forms of oppression. *Lat./Crit.* invites an exploration of the nexus between race, gender, class, sexuality, legal status, and other factors that are part of identity politics in the United States. In the interviews I present here, I used what I saw happening in the writing classroom above to frame questions I posed about race and identity during interviews with students in the class. I will compare these responses to the students' writing. Overall, what I heard and read in my research participants' responses to direct questions about identity, as well as what is reflected more indirectly in their writing, is that despite being raised in a predominately Latino/a community, and despite attending a predominately Latino/a school, the ways in which they articulate the intersection of race/ racism, language, and identity are complex and almost amorphous.

When asked about how and when they discuss racism, class, and other social issues in school, students seem unsure of how to answer. They generally don't seem to have had many classroom discussions about social issues, except maybe in history class, but they allude to the fact that these are topics they might discuss among friends or family. Pamela's response in particular led me to believe that there is a disconnect in school between race as an intellectual category and race as a lived experience. I began by asking Pamela about her perception of myths about Latinos/as in education. To review, Pamela was born and raised in this city, and both parents emigrated from Mexico. Her

parents did not go to college, but all three siblings graduated from Vista del Valle and attended the local university. Pamela has a focused career path: forensic pathology. She eventually wants to apply to medical school.

In our conversation, I hoped to explore the identity issue further and to ask more directly about how Pamela experiences race in school:

Anna: It seems like there are often moments in class when people are... and it is hard in a writing class when people are writing about personal experiences to kind of know what to do after a person reads out loud and it is emotional, but I notice there are times when race is kind of brought up in a sort of casual way, but there isn't really a discussion about that in class, and I wonder if there are discussions like that in class and I'm just not seeing them?

Pamela: We hardly ever have discussions like that. There are some people who kind of bring it up, but we just move past that. We still think it's still kind of a touchy subject, so. We do discuss them sometimes, but only if it relates to the story, to the essay we read. If it is something that strays beyond that, we don't talk about it.

A: So if the author is overtly writing about racism or something like that...

P: And only if the writer feels comfortable about having us discuss that then we will, but if not, we won't. We still feel that is a touchy subject. (By "we," I assume she is speaking for herself here since she seems uncomfortable with this line of questioning).

A: Um hmmm... And how about in other classes?

P: In other classes that I've had besides Government... In Government we would talk about that every day, but in other classes, I feel that we haven't really touched on that. Other than other students trying to criticize other students. That's the only time... But as a class, we haven't talked about that. (Because she asserts that as a class they haven't talked about it, I assume this criticism has to do with racism and that it happens outside of the classroom).

A: So besides talking about that in historic terms, like the Civil Rights Movement, etc., there aren't discussions about current racism, etc., race and racism in this city?

P: Well, not, well, because one of our peers in our English class kind of wrote about that, we did have a discussion of that, but it was really not that in depth as we would have thought or as I would have liked, because we still feel that it is really touchy.

A: Are there places where students do talk about that?

P: I think it's mainly among their friends, like when I talk about that I either talk about that with my family or with some of my friends, but not in class. I never really thought about really speaking about it in class.

In schooling, it seems that for Pamela, race is an intellectual category, not an issue to be examined alongside identity formation, the lived experiences of the students and their communities, or institutional inequities. I would like to suggest that educators who allow these ambiguities to remain untested by theory or critique, or in other words, who fail to confront them and interrogate them in class discussions or within their curricula contribute to what Teresa McKenna (quoting Rich) calls passive collusion... the willingness to go along with the sorts of myths that serve to marginalize some people and privilege others (134). Inaction is a form of "hidden curriculum" as well." As Richard Delgado points out, "for many minority persons, the principal instrument of their subordination is [...] the prevailing mindset by means of which members of the dominant group justify the world as it is, that is, with whites on top and browns and blacks at the bottom" (2413). The implications of this ideology are extremely dangerous, in my view, for when difference becomes invisible to the oppressed, the cause of social justice is threatened.

Renata, who feels a bit defeated by the system because she was rejected from the local public university, is somewhat critical of some of the factors affecting her

educational path. I asked her about public perception of her school and community and how she would respond to this. Here is her response:

It's kind of hard, 'cause I do agree that we—it's a lot harder to be successful down here. The reason being, I don't know. It's so easy to fail here. It's so easy, and that's... You know, it's very rare that somebody comes out successful, and that's... when they do they're just glorified to the point where, "Did they ever come from the Southside?" You know. "No. Well, they went to the U." "Well then, they're not from the Southside anymore." You know? I don't know...

She seems to be expressing an awareness that there are institutional factors making it easier to fail in her part of town, although she doesn't identify these reasons specifically. The second part of her answer reflects both public low expectations of her community, as well, perhaps, as a sense that someone can't live in both worlds—that of the community, and that accessible through higher education. As Renata continues, her answer takes an interesting turn.

I don't know. It's hard to explain 'cause it's a good place. I believe the Southside does have more cultural, um, things about it. It has a history behind it. It has, you know, a lot more respect, and a more, um, like, it values things a lot more. Don't take things for granted... um, it's growing. And it's becoming better, but things that my friends have been talking about... I don't know if you've noticed this, but, um, when my friends and I started our freshman year, the "Cholo" look was in, you know, the "baggies," and the "locs," and the gangsters and everything. That was in, but it was dying down. And so, like, it totally shut off my sophomore year and junior year, and all of a sudden, it's back again. And we're like, "Why are all these little freshmen coming in with the cholo look and everything?" And um, the freshmen weren't like that last year. And the year before they weren't like that, and all of a sudden they're like that? We don't get it, but it's like, it repeats itself. And the graffiti came back. The graffiti wasn't that bad. And. I don't know.

She talks about the stereotype of the Mexican "cholo," or gangster—her interpretation of how the public perceives her school and community. From her answer, it sounds as if this is an issue that is discussed among friends, which is reminiscent of Pamela's hint that

race and racism are topics discussed among family and friends, but not in connection with their own identities in school.

This is why Jaime Mejia's assertion that composition pedagogies presented in a social vacuum do a disservice to Latino/a students. They perpetuate the notion that learning to manipulate language is a neutral activity—that it can be adopted by anyone as a skill. Again, this is what Luis Moll means when he says that educational practices are designed to “obviate diversity in favor of controlling the student population” (“Rethinking” 125). Latino/a Critical Theory requires that we foreground issues of racialization and other forms of oppression, and that in doing so, we challenge dominant ideologies.

Alternative Pathways: Latino/a Critical Pedagogy and Counter Narratives

The question, then, of whether social issues, especially when raised by students themselves, should be addressed and critically examined in the writing classroom is important. Indeed, the students in the Vista del Valle college preparatory class had succeeded so far in following a college pathway, seemingly without the critical tools that might have focused their responses to my questions about their experiences less on the ideal of meritocracy and more on the institutional structures through which they navigated. Still, I agree with Latino/a Critical theory that unless minoritized, racialized, and other marginalized students, families, and communities critically engage the issues of inequity in education, nothing will change for the better. Even though these students, four of whom have gone on to the four year university and seem to be progressing

through their coursework successfully, that doesn't change the fact that out of a class of 250, only twelve graduating seniors went on to a four-year institution of higher education that year. If the "Ideological State Apparatuses" are allowed to operate without challenge, the growing gap between minoritized and non-minoritized citizens in this country will continue to grow.

Further, research in college access affirms that a heightened awareness of institutional and ideological barriers has been proven to lead to a greater success rate for minoritized students in postsecondary education. In a study of students who participated in an untracking program called AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) in California, which placed low-income, low-achieving students in college prep classes with high-achieving peers, students developed a critical consciousness and a "healthy disrespect for the romantic tenets of achievement ideology" through class discussions, mentoring, guest speaker visits, and peer group work (Mehan 108). Those students did significantly better in postsecondary education than their tracked peers, who did not demonstrate the same level of skepticism about the myth of meritocracy and the like.

In order to better serve those students who may not be placed on the clear, straightforward pathway to college from birth but instead encounter obstacles because of educational and social inequities, we must help engender that "healthy disrespect for the romantic tenets of achievement ideology," which includes the myth of meritocracy (Mehan 108). We must help eradicate deficit thinking that leads students, teachers, and administrators to adopt deficit thinking and to question whether there is something inherently wrong with them and with their communities and instead help them learn to

critique institutional barriers. In this critical ethnography, my call to action is for educators to consider adopting a critical stance toward teaching, based on an appreciation of students' funds of knowledge.

Critical pedagogy comes from that Freirian notion that we must reject the notion of students as docile bodies—as “empty vessels” and instead assume that they each come to the room with valuable knowledge that should be mined for ways to create positive change in society. Students themselves can provide educators with the insights into their own experiences that we need to understand if we are to assist in bringing about that positive change. We must begin by listening to their stories, which is part of the teaching as advocate model, but we should push this further to help students challenge the institutional and ideological barriers they encounter on their educational pathways.

Tara Yosso bases what she calls “Latino/a Critical Pedagogy” on the five tenets of Latino/a Critical Theory outlined in Chapter 1, arguing that educators should:

1. acknowledge the central role of racism, classism, sexism, racialization, and other oppression or inequities in curricular structures, processes, and discourses.
2. challenge dominant social and cultural assumptions about culture, intelligence, language, capability, etc.
3. direct a formal curriculum toward social justice and a hidden curriculum toward Freirian critical consciousness.
4. develop counterdiscourses through storytelling, etc., to bring in people of color's lived experiences.
5. use interdisciplinary methods of historical and contemporary analysis to link educational and social inequities.

As teachers, we must exercise self-reflexivity about the implicit and explicit values in our overt and hidden curricula, such as the structure of class, texts, placement of students, discussions, whose writing is privileged, for what purpose, etc. The goal is to

undo the myth that educational decisions are somehow neutral and to reassess whose knowledge and epistemologies are considered valid. Latino/a Critical Pedagogy also examines discourses that mask inequities. It must acknowledge oppression in curricular structures, processes, and discourses; challenge dominant social and cultural assumptions about culture, intelligence, etc.; direct curriculum toward social justice and critical consciousness; develop counter-discourses through storytelling, etc., which I advocate here, and researchers who employ it should use interdisciplinary methods and information about history to consider Latino/a students and schooling in a contemporary context. I see this as a powerful model of praxis that could be used not only by teachers, but also in college access at the university level. For example, we might use it to reassess admissions practices, which unfairly penalize minoritized students whose grades and scores are not accurate indicators for how they will perform at the college level.

Examples of Latino/a Critical Pedagogy abound. Here is a sampling of current models that bear further consideration by compositionists and other college-level educators.

- *Critical Bicultural Pedagogy*

Antonia Darder describes this as an approach in which bicultural students, who are traditionally silenced and forced to choose between a primary home culture and the dominant culture that does not closely resemble their own, are provided with opportunities to move from the margins to the center of classes. Along with this critical approach comes a critique of the idea of meritocracy, an emphasis on cross-cultural dialogue, and a celebration of Latino students' cultural and individual assets. For

example, Latino students are adept at shifting between identities, demonstrating a resilience that should be prized in today's globalized society. This could become the focus of a course, perhaps by providing opportunities for students to critique identity constructs through personal experience writing. Darder emphasizes the need for middle class, White, Anglo teachers to critically examine their own privilege, and suggests that education for all students can be greatly enhanced through increased collaboration between teachers of color and Anglo teachers via cross-cultural dialogue. I feel that this model, along with whiteness studies, could be very easily applied through all levels of education-- from primary through higher education. For example, I can imagine teacher enrichment programs in which Latino Critical scholars dialogue with composition instructors about these very issues. Our composition classes benefit from such collaboration? If we agree that a college degree is increasingly important in the workforce today, what can we do to improve our praxis to contribute to positive learning experiences for all students—paying particular mind to retaining those students who might slip more easily through the cracks?

- *Transcultural Repositioning*

In the field of Rhetoric and Composition, Juan Guerra expresses a similar approach to empowering Latino/a students and to educating all students. He uses the term “transcultural repositioning” to describe a “critical and self-reflective attitude” that he feels can help students expand their intuitive horizons and to recognize this as a site of power and agency (15). Both concepts echo Freire’s “conscientização” in a new context, and it is a consistent theme in Latino/a critical theory. It consists of designing programs

to unearth policy discrepancies, tapping into knowledge bases of Latinos, and advocating equal education for Latinos. It proposes solutions to counteract a perceived movement designed to keep Latinos marginalized and disenfranchised through education and language policy. The first step, as Freire would also agree, is to identify and to educate community leaders to take on this task. In Latino/a critical education, Antonia Darder turns what she calls biculturalism into a source of strength for youth through critical bicultural pedagogy. Juan Guerra urges Compositionists to assist Latino/a students in developing skill in what he calls “transcultural repositioning” to turn the ambiguities that come with moving among cultures into a recognized asset.

- *Borderness Pedagogy*

Teresa McKenna advocates for an approach to teaching that assumes that “the classroom, like the border, is a transitory space. The transformation of culture is not secured; at best it can be activated” (136). It also rejects homogenizing effects of “traditional education” and instead assumes that the classroom is a politicized space, and that as such, students should be encouraged to critically engage with issues of difference that help make it so. Students’ learning is not separated from their subjectivity. “Their feelings of conflict, discomfort, excitement, moments of confusion and clarification, contradictions and solidarities placed them emphatically in the border zone” (136). Experience and content are equally valid—something that traditional education may reject, but which I advocate in my own teaching, and which might help to resolve the “race as intellectual category vs. race as lived experience” disconnect I found in the high school English class.

- *Counter Narrative*

Finally, I would like to invite composition instructors to consider “counter narrative,” as a vehicle for incorporating aspects of all three of these approaches in a FYC curriculum. In the field notes section of this chapter, I described a classroom exchange in which narrative was used as a vehicle through which to engage students in meaningful discussion about writing and about their future goals. I also see the potential to use these students’ own stories as a means to bring about critical analysis of the issues impacting students’ lives, and subsequently, shaping the cultural, linguistic, and social landscapes before us. What if these moments of revelation were used also to give students tools to interrogate the conditions that create their experiences? Would this help to alleviate some of the conflict that students seem to feel about issues of equity and racism, as revealed in our interviews? Could counter narrative writing be mined for topics to tackle in “academic” writing assignments? Perhaps we should create more opportunities to study and create counter narratives, validating them as critical, tactical tools. Helping students develop their voices through writing, as Henry Giroux asserts, is part of a critical project, as long as we link

the pedagogy of student voice to a project of possibility that allows students to affirm and celebrate the interplay of different voices and experience while at the same time recognizing that such voices must always be interrogated for the various ontological, epistemological, and ethical and political interests they represent. (“Literacy” 20)

Richard Delgado explores and advocates for the use of storytelling in his field of law. He argues that for members of “outgroups,” such as women and minorities, storytelling has always been used as a form of resistance, citing examples such as

Mexican-American corridos, African American liberation theology, and feminist coalition building. He writes that “stories create their own bonds, represent cohesion, shared understandings, and meanings. The cohesiveness that stories bring is part of the outgroup. An outgroup creates its own stories, which circulate within the group as a kind of counter-reality” (2412). As he points out, the “in-group,” which holds institutional and social power in the world, has its own stories as well, and these “remind it of its relation to the outgroup and provide it with a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural,” (2412) “like eyeglasses we’ve worn for a long time” (2413). Educational policies and practices are usually created through those lenses as well, without listening to the stories of “outgroups” in deciding how the realities of schooling will be shaped, or indeed, with the intention of further marginalizing those groups.

He contends that various forms of stories are a powerful means for destroying that mindset, for reminding us of our humanness and that social reality is constructed—that standards may purport to be meritocratic and fair but are nonetheless debatable and not inevitable. These stories must appear to be noncoercive—must be insinulative, not frontal. Teachers must be aware that promoting storytelling as a rhetorical tool will challenge “the prism of preexisting, well-agreed upon criteria of conventional scholarship and teaching” (2421). If, for example, we encounter the myth that Latinos/as don’t value education, and that this is seen to somehow explain away the racially polarized educational system and job market, we must counter that myth as Valencia and Black have done, through counter stories. These are important not only to shift public opinion,

but to raise the consciousness of Latino/a youth so that they do not internalize these myths.

The benefits of advocating for storytelling, for dialectic in teaching and in scholarship, in my estimation, are great. Like Dewey, and Giroux and Giroux, I believe in equipping students to be active, responsible citizens in the world, and it is through storytelling that we begin to rethink the definitions of active, responsible citizenry. Further, we bring lived experience into the intellectual sphere, which necessarily requires that sphere to expand and adapt as it invites these voices in. We also question and rethink the ways of measuring student success, which are usually constructed institutionally through the dominant mindset. We should be more cognizant of the ways in which we oppress outgroups in particular ways.

In a study advocating for the legitimacy of counter narratives in academic research, for example, Alyssa Garcia describes the struggles of Latina faculty members within the academy, citing a lack of mentoring and a lack of the cultural capital valued at their institutions, for high attrition rates. These factors, she argues, which are difficult to measure except through storytelling, lead to demoralization and help explain the low numbers of Latina academics in the United States. They also confront academic ethnocentrism, or a hierarchizing of knowledge that relegates Latino/a issues to the margins of their fields, double standards, tokenism, and so on. She echoes Delgado, noting that “testimonios can lead to transformation, equipping us to formulate interventions and mechanisms to confront and prevent discrimination” (Garcia 272).

For the listener, stories have the potential to attack complacency that is undoubtedly hindering reform. It can also help to overcome “otherness”, a very real challenge when there is a cultural or social disconnect between teachers and students. To avoid perpetuating “intellectual apartheid,” (Delgado 2421), such as that experienced by Garcia’s Latina research participants, teachers should listen to stories in order to encourage dialectic; which can, in turn, reshape the educational realities we take for granted. In our field of Composition and Rhetoric, Ann Green contends that storytelling is a way to understand how whiteness works and to unpack fluid terms such as race and class. Undertaking this project with students can help create spaces of trust in order to challenge dominant ideology and uncover inequities. Green quotes Suzanne Pharr:

When telling our stories we assert both our individuality and our connection to others, and we make others aware of our identity and history. What better way to counter gross stereotyping, demonizing, and dehumanization than by presenting a multiplicity of voices and experiences, each individualized, each unique, and each connected to a common history. (294)

The counter narrative should be taught as a powerful rhetorical tool, not only to create a “space of trust” in the classroom, as Green suggests, but also because it can help bring about the larger democratic project of nurturing a socially responsible citizenry made up of students from all walks of life.

By listening to students sharing their stories and then considering their stories in connection to others’ stories, there is the potential to “stop perpetrating (mental) violence on oneself,” (Delgado 2421) and to find liberation, healing, and empowerment. For my research participant, Pamela, these are sentiments she describes in her reflective writing. As an interviewee and student in class, Pamela’s answers were always measured, brief,

and wary. Her personal writing is another matter. In a reflective essay describing her process as a writer in the course, she writes:

- “With each paper a new passion was discovered that in turn strengthened my writing skills to the point of invincibility. Why not feel you are Superman? Why not feel that you can conquer the world?”
- Writing will “ensure my survival in the future.”
- “Writing taught me not to fear the world or hide myself from it but instead to meet it head on and let my presence be known;” “equipping me”
- “For so long I have wandered the earth like a wounded and unwanted animal, so long I have looked for a refuge and failed, so long have I lurked in the shadows and watched from afar”
- Writing is “the sanctuary I have found;”

After reading a chapter from Jimmy Santiago Baca’s literacy narrative, *Working in the Dark*, with which she strongly identifies, she concludes, “Baca writes that first hand experiences are the most important weapon that a writer could wield, and I hold that as truth.”

A rich tradition of “testimonio” exists in Latin America as a method of political praxis as “an artistic form and methodology to create politicized understandings of identity and community” (The Latina Feminist Group 3). Latino/a feminists in this country have leveraged the form as a means to bridge differences and to come to understand and appreciate one another’s’ experiences. In *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*,” a collective of Latina feminists presents a unified voice against oppression through narrative. In working together to come up with strategies for writing their personal stories, participants in this collective work wanted the writing to “name and understand the resources we were given as well as well as the pain that oppression produces for us” (14). In other words, they use *testimonio* both to celebrate their assets as well as to resist oppression. In order to resist, they tell us that, “reclaiming both memory

and human agency is critical in a process of change” (14). Pamela’s writing can be read as a form of *testimonio*, although she doesn’t recognize it as such, for through it she reclaims a sense of agency: “Writing taught me not to fear the world or hide myself from it but instead to meet it head on and let my presence be known.” Here is a golden opportunity for an educator to encourage Pamela in her use of counter narrative as an academic strategy, as well as to support her development of critical literacy and agency.

The telling of stories and counter stories is a central component of Latino/a Critical theory and practice. This seems to be a place where composition and Latino/a Critical Theory could potentially intersect. According to Lyotard, counter stories are “little stories of individuals and groups whose knowledges and histories have been marginalized, excluded, forgotten,” which “counter not merely (or necessarily) the grand narratives but also (or instead) the ‘official’ and ‘hegemonic’ narratives of everyday life: those legitimating stories propagated for specific political purposes to manipulate public consciousness by heralding a national set of common cultural ideals” (qtd. in Peters and Lankshear 2).

Chicano/a scholars and writers approach counter narrative in very different ways, as do Victor Villanueva, Richard Rodriguez, and Jimmy Santiago Baca, who each describe the ways in which they navigated identity, race, and class during their personal and educational journeys. Gloria Anzaldúa’s *testimonio* tells the story of a multiplicity of experiences of Chicana/o women that she calls a new “mestiza consciousness. By centralizing personal experience, Latino/a scholars foreground the ways in which identity formation for those who are subjugated by dominant ideology and historical

representation is complicated. The student voices that I have present in this chapter highlight the ways in which the young Latinos/as I worked with continue to grapple with the slipperiness of identity in The United States.

In order to actively promote “educational sovereignty,” which Moll and Ruiz describe as enabling communities to create their own infrastructures for development, including mechanisms for the education of their children that capitalize on rather than devalue their cultural resources, such as family and community support networks and linguistic funds of knowledge (362), students will need to be equipped with the ability to learn reflexively in order to develop critical literacy and to critique inequities in order to begin to affect positive change. Without this, or without at least moving toward this, social justice seems less feasible.

As I will argue in chapter four, schools should support programs designed to better understand and incorporate Latino/a students in classrooms, teachers should be more adequately educated to face a growing population of Latino/a students in our schools, and scholars should continue to provide research to uncover institutional biases, and unfair practices that continue to marginalize Latinos/as in society and in our schools. I will analyze the cultural scaffolding available to the students in my study. In general, research demonstrates a sizeable disconnect between public schools and Latino/a families and communities.

While this disconnect is often blamed on the students and families, Latino/a Critical theory flips the paradigm to consider the ways in which Latinos/as have historically been and continue to be alienated from the educational system. I will use this

lens to consider my research participants' experiences, and I focus in particular on Latinas, for I found during my research that the experience of culture among my research participants is deeply gendered. Finally, I will look once again at the teacher as the potential vehicle for creating "cultural congruence," and using what I observed in the dual enrollment classroom as a model even for Composition instructors at the university level.

IV. PERCEIVED PATHWAYS: LATINA FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE AS CULTURAL WEALTH FOR EDUCATION

In the previous chapters, I explored what I perceive to be a failure on the part of schools to actively engage low-income, Latino/a students in the critical examination of institutional and ideological barriers to postsecondary education. Although the students who participated in my research project certainly express an awareness of factors such as racism, their critiques do not seem to extend beyond individual lived experiences in order to attach a broader significance to the forms of oppression under which they and their fellow students make their way through the educational system. Although schools are faced with increasingly disempowering factors beyond their control, such as over-enrollment, English-only legislation, and No Child Left Behind mandates, I argue that positive changes can still be effected from within schools in order to reverse the opportunity gap for Latino/a students in The United States.

Through student advocacy and student-centered critical curricula and pedagogy, educators can begin to reverse the trend toward standardization, low-expectations, and narrowly defined pathways toward higher education. In this chapter, I offer a case study of sorts, in which I apply Latino/a Critical theory (Lat/Crit) to the research through a funds of knowledge approach. I focus on one sub-group of students in the dual enrollment English class, all of whom are second or third-generation Latinas. I employ an asset-based approach in which individual students' home knowledges and experiences are valued and validated.

In order to begin moving toward such an approach, the first step, as researchers in González, Moll, and Amanti's "Funds of Knowledge" study assert, is to get to know the participants' home and community knowledges and experiences in order to better inform one's practice. In their groundbreaking study, they worked with teachers to design a program in which teachers would visit students in their homes to learn more about the particular sources of knowledge that they might draw upon in their daily lives. The assumption the researchers were working under was that the public school classroom is an inadequate space in which to truly engage with students' home lives. These teacher researchers spent time with families in informal contexts and were able to theorize about their own practices in order to better serve their students.

What emerged from these studies was an affirmation of student-centered practices, and a strong argument that educators must consider each context in order to best serve students in the communities in which they work. I affirm a move toward "critical localism" in educational research, which I mentioned in chapter two. As I understand it, this approach calls for researchers to engage in situated critical analysis focusing at the community level on resistance to immediate concerns, which will foster change that can radiate outward to have an impact on the larger global economy and political world (Berger 725). This stands in stark contrast to current trends toward top-down policies and programs that promote standardization and homogenization in education. In each case, the students' life experiences became central to approaches to learning in the classroom.

What is useful, I think, for educators in general, and composition instructors in particular, is the recognition that students' ways of knowing may not correspond easily to the ways of knowing of institutions, including schools. Careful attention to this sort of discrepancy among instructors who meet students in their first semesters in college could make quite a difference in welcoming students into a new community.

What I learned in my work with the Latinas in my study is that attending to the cultural scaffolding mentioned by Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar in their book *Preparing for College: Nine Elements of Effective Outreach*, will indeed yield rich results for educators who are interested in rethinking and reforming not only the pathway to higher education, but what happens beyond the gates of institutions of higher learning as well. Cultural scaffolding refers to the integration of students' cultural backgrounds in the learning process and in college preparation. In particular, Tierney et al. and other researchers in this volume advocate for a "cultural integrity framework" in college preparation that will "call upon students' racial and ethnic backgrounds in a positive manner in the development of their pedagogies and learning activities" (211). They assume that "a child's cultural background is a critical tool to be channeled for promoting success (6). Approaching this through a funds of knowledge model means that a researcher must begin with the assumption that we all possess knowledge that we gain through our everyday experiences. With this in mind, I will present my findings here and this will lead into my final chapter, where I will lay out a program proposal built upon the wealth of information my research participants so generously provided.

Las Pensadoras: Finding their Own Way:

To begin building cultural scaffolding in college preparation, Villalpando and Solorzano propose that college preparatory programs for low-income, minoritized youth be built upon the concept of “cultural wealth” (17). This concept includes a redefinition of Bourdieu’s “cultural capital,” which he described as the skills, knowledge, and social ambitions that are shared by a group of people. His is a class-based theory, and he argues that low-income communities often lack the cultural capital privileged in the middle and upper classes, making it more difficult for them to ascend class-based structures. Education, in this model, has the potential to help students rise above material conditions in order to move up through the class system, but critics of this theory contend that students lacking the cultural capital currently required to succeed in schooling will need extra support to do so.

In Villalpando and Solorzano’s reconception of this theory, the traditional definitions of cultural capital are expanded to include forms of capital such as “parental value of education, awareness of parental sacrifices, hard work of the parents,” etc. (17). Cultural wealth also includes “other accumulated assets and resources such as students’ navigational capital, social capital, economic capital, experiential capital, educational capital, and aspirational capital,” many of which I will explore in this chapter (18). Also using a ‘cultural wealth’ framework, and building on Lat/Crit, Tara Yosso identifies six forms of cultural wealth that overlap to form a “community of cultural wealth:” familial capital, navigational capital, aspirational capital, social capital, linguistic capital, and

resistant capital. Of these, I focus most closely here on the following: familial, navigational, and aspirational (“Whose” 176).

Villalpando and Solorzano note that although they have not found much empirical work on gender and culture in college preparation research, they feel that this is a crucial area for further consideration. In this chapter, I wish to address this issue in particular; for it was obvious to me when I began my research that gender was going to form a central focus of inquiry. Seventeen of the twenty-three students in the dual-enrollment course were young women. I will focus here on the cultural wealth with which the young Latinas in my study build their pathways to college.

Nationally in the past decade or so, there has been an interesting shift in the levels of education achieved by Latinas versus that of their Latino counterparts. While the graduation rates for Latinas in the United States are improving, Latino males are more likely than females to drop out (Pew “Latino” 2). In contrast, however, in my state, the Latino population is growing faster than the Latina population due in part to immigration (Pew “Arizona” 6). Again, we see a demographic shift that is disproportionate to the educational outcomes. I explored this issue in my conversations with the students in the class, and I will present some of those conversations here. In particular, I focus on the young Latinas’ thoughts on the intersection of gender, culture, and education in their lives. I wish to present these young women as “*pensadoras*,” a term I borrow from Francisca Godínez, who defines it thus: the young women “are active thinkers who build on their cultural foundations to form political and practical meanings about learning, knowing, teaching, and power” (25).

Although I wouldn't necessarily go so far as to say that these women are political activists, the ways in which they thoughtfully negotiate their own identities and their own educational pathways amid the conditions I described in chapters one and two are a testament to this idea that they are actively thinking about how to use their cultural foundations in productive ways as they make sense of the world and of their futures. I turn to Chicana feminism to analyze these young women's responses, and again, I choose to read these young women's responses through the lens of Gloria Anzaldúa. If I return to the definition of *pensadora* that I am working from, I see Anzaldúa's work as a model for this process of building upon foundations to form meaning.

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/ La Frontera* layers history, culture, politics, the personal, and the critical in order to voice her experiences and convictions. Despite my previous assertion that the students in my study are not prepared through schooling for the critical task of dismantling oppressive ideologies and institutions, the young women whose words I will present here demonstrate their own understanding of how those forces--history, culture, politics, and the personal--are bound up in their lives. Anzaldúa describes the Chicana experience as "*mestiza* consciousness," a consciousness born out of borderness—conflicting demands of culture, of identity, and of oppression. For Anzaldúa and perhaps for her generation, the struggle is still raw:

These numerous possibilities leave *la mestiza* floundering in uncharted seas. In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these habits and patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically, (Anzaldúa 101)

Unlike Anzaldúa, and unlike their parents, they no longer personally struggle with the disempowering constraints faced by the recent immigrant, but at the same time, they are the products of that struggle, and they recognize this. One of the assets of those who possess this *mestiza* consciousness is an ability to remain flexible, and this is a trait I noticed over and over in my conversations with the young women of Ms. D's dual-enrollment course. To use the cultural wealth discourse, I would label this ability "navigational capital," for in remaining open and flexible, these Latinas have negotiated past the obstacles that they have faced in order to chart a course toward college.

In the sections that follow, I continue to analyze how these second generation Latinas navigate their pathways toward higher education, building on the foundations built by Anzaldúa and other Chicana feminists, by their mothers and families through what Dolores Delgado Bernal calls "pedagogies of the home," by what Tara Yosso calls "community cultural capital," and by their schooling. These young women are blazing their own pathways toward higher education, despite the disempowering forces in society and in the educational system that I described in chapters one and two. My goal here is to learn from these young Latinas in order to suggest approaches to education that value these students' epistemologies, experiences, and contributions—that honor them as *pensadoras*.

- *Life Chances*

In her seminal ethnography about the lives of recent immigrant families, Guadalupe Valdés analyzes her research participants' perceptions of "life chances," which is a combination of the choices made available within a social system to particular

groups and the ways in which the bonds of allegiance they feel toward their group influences the choices they perceive. For recent immigrants, Valdés finds, traditional values are still very much upheld. She says:

None of the families ever imagined that choices would need to be made between, for example, young people's responsibilities to their family and their own ambitions. It was simply assumed that a son's or daughter's ambitions and aspirations would primarily involve contributing to the welfare of the family and that they would spend a large part of their lives reciprocating the many sacrifices that their parents had already made for them. For families, then, being in favor of education, caring about education, and wanting their children to go to school in this country did not mean that they wanted their children's values to be different from what their own had been when they were the same age. (172)

Most of my research participants are children of immigrants, but in most cases, their parents were at least partially raised in the United States. In contrast to Guadalupe Valdés' research participants, therefore, many of them have had some personal experience in the United States public school system, whether they graduated or not. In some respects, some of what I heard from my research participants echoes what Valdés describes above. The theme of sacrifice emerges in many conversations and through the students' writing. Ever the voice of clarity, Pamela writes with reverence of the sacrifices her mother has made for her and her siblings:

She had never gone to college and tried to create the future she wanted through us... She wanted us to become someone in life. She has spent the last 36 years preparing me and my siblings for the harsh reality known as life [...] I look at her and can't help but smile at the little things that she does for me.

Here, the cultural wealth she draws upon includes a combination of aspirational capital and familial capital. In fact, in my conversations with these women, it was clear that the two are often interconnected. It is often with the support and encouragement of

family, often requiring sacrifices by these family members that these young women aspire to higher education.

Another theme Valdés describes is the expectation among her Latino/a immigrant families that the children will eventually reciprocate those sacrifices. Although this is not explicitly stated by any of the research participants, it is clear that most of them demonstrate a strong desire to succeed in order to honor their families' sacrifices. Again, Pamela captures that value in her essay about her mother:

She is the reason I breathe, laugh, cry, and endure the never ending reality that I'm going to encounter many hardships to make my future a successful one... to make OUR future a successful one.

She does not view her own achievements as individual, but as achievements to share with her mother and father. While she makes it clear that her academic achievement is extremely important to her family, you will recall that she also felt pressured by her father's desire for his children to hold on to their culture as manifested in language. Even though his apparent disapproval of her tendency to speak English in the home causes her some pain, toward the end of that essay, she writes:

I can't blame my father, watching how one of my previous siblings allowed the traditional values to die out over the years and give way to materialistic value can be very disappointing.

Pamela reveals here that she is far enough removed from the conflicts that their parents, who are more recent immigrants, may have faced that she is able to incorporate, process, and navigate the oppression she experiences in order to move forward. Pamela is able to take a critical step away from the tension she feels between home and school in order to understand its causes and to reconcile her own pathway with that of the past.

After a few months of research at Vista del Valle, I had a revealing conversation with Renata, in which she addresses the gendered nature of familial expectations. We were talking about her plans for the future when she said:

In my boyfriend's family... they value work and since he's a male and he's old enough, he has to work for his own stuff [...] and he gives his mom money 'cause she doesn't have money, and he pays for his car and everything, so they don't value school above work, so that kind of puts him... he still wants to graduate, and a lot of kids go through that too, and a lot of my friends would rather work and they work late hours and are so tired they can't come in first period and it's... it's hard. That sucks.

Anna: You were talking about how for your boyfriend, his family expects him to work to help support the family. Do you think that's more true for males than for females?

Renata: (emphatically) Yeah, I really do. Yeah, 'cause a male, regardless if they graduate or not, they can find a job working construction, working labor. Women... they can't. Nowadays they need to have a degree or at least a high school diploma in order to work in an office or, you know, anywhere, so I think women are held up more and pressured to do this, but then again, women can clean, women can, you know, take in kids, childcare you know, and that's also like, if you're not going to do that, then you're going to become a maid or something, you know? There's not many options that us girls, you know, growing up on the Southside have. Or that we see.

Notice how Renata qualifies her statement at the end: "There's not many options that us girls, you know, growing up on the Southside have. *Or that we see.*" She recognizes that it's not necessarily true that there aren't many options—but that they're not able to see those options, or "life chances." Clearly, she personally *does* anticipate a broader range of choices for herself, as do the other young women in Ms. D's class. Even though Renata will not be going to the local public university, her ambitions remain high. When I ask her what she will do now that she knows the "U" will not be an option, she says that perhaps she will go to the community college for a year while she applies to out-of-state

institutions, such as The University of Wisconsin or The University of Texas. Her dad played football in Texas, she explains, so she knows she would like it there. She seems undaunted by the idea of moving or of her chances of being accepted at these top tier universities as an out-of-state student. Her own perception of her life chances is not restricted to cleaning houses or caring for children. She possesses aspirational capital as a result of her experiences in her English class as well as because of high expectations from her family, a resource that might not be as readily available to all students in her community, according to the following statistics.

A Pew Hispanic Center study of Arizona employment numbers reveals that in my state, there were 1.2 million working age (between ages sixteen and older) Latinos in 2006, accounting for over 25% of the working age population in the state. Of those, over 70% hold less than a high school diploma, while fewer than 8% hold a college degree (7). It would not surprise Renata to see that the highest concentration of Latino workers are in construction—35%, the majority of whom are foreign-born Latinos, and the next highest concentration are in business and administrative support—26%, the majority of whom are native-born Latinos (Pew “Arizona” 27). Next for native-born and foreign-born Latinos in general is building and grounds maintenance at twenty-1%, then sales at 18% (Pew “Arizona” 27).

These numbers give a sense of the current state of affairs and the ways in which Renata’s lived experience matches the general trend. The world she lives in is circumscribed by these labor trends, and these trends do indeed influence how life chances are perceived in her community, which includes first, second, and third-

generation Latinos. Renata sees herself as an exception within her community, and my feeling is that in order for this to change, more must be done within schools to broaden the perception of life chances in order to make higher education desirable and attainable for more low-income Latino/a students—to make this pathway the norm, rather than the exception.

- *Gendered Work*

I decided to invite four of the young women in the class to meet me in the library one afternoon for a conversation specifically about gender. I have not previously introduced these participants, so I will do so now. Claudia was a student athlete, and unlike the other young women in this group, she does not wear make-up or very much jewelry. In her responses to questions as well as in her writing, she is direct, pragmatic, and open. Her goals are somewhat unclear, although she hopes to go to the other public state university. As of graduation, she hadn't decided for sure if she was going to go. Hilda was more guarded in her responses to my questions. During class discussions she was equally guarded, and in her writing, she reveals a fear of getting too personal, except with close family and friends. She was always neatly dressed and wore her straight honey-colored hair pulled tightly back in a ponytail. Plain wire-rimmed glasses framed her eye-lined eyes, and her dark JROTC uniform completed the look. The only contrast was a pair of gold hoop earrings with block lettering proudly spelling out her name. This personalized style of jewelry seemed to be fashionable among the young women at Vista del Valle, along with wearing multiple strands of gold necklaces bearing gold charms and crucifixes. Violet absolutely glittered under hers. Bold eye-makeup and upswept, dyed-

blonde hair framed her expressive, ever-smiling face, and her enthusiasm for school and for her college set her aglow whenever we talked about her future.

During our chat, they echoed Renata's sense that gender roles for males and females are separated to a certain extent *and* that in their experience, Latinas are pressured harder to achieve academically than male siblings. Claudia grew up in a very traditional household—meaning in her view that the males and females had clearly differentiated, traditional roles at home. She has two parents, three older brothers, and three younger sisters. They live on a ranch outside of the city limits. The girls were taught to cook, clean, and take care of the brothers. She explained that although it was never explicitly stated, her impression while growing up was that the males in the family were more privileged than the females.

For example, the guys are supposed to be fed before us. I eat after my brothers, and when we walk around too, I walk behind my brothers [...] My mom never told us really that the guys were better, there were just certain things we had to do because the guys wouldn't do it [...] my brothers basically worked outside when we worked inside [...] The boys got to stay out later.

I love Claudia's description here of a sort of silent understanding among the women in the family that they will defer to the men in practice, but in reality, they are merely picking up the slack for the men. They are aware that they are *playing* gender roles.

Interestingly, Claudia wrote about this in her college entrance essay, which was about defying stereotypes. She writes:

Some believe in an old fashioned manner that girls belong in the kitchen raising the kids and not getting an education past what is necessary to run a home. Yes, I was brought up to cook, clean, do laundry, and watch kids, but at the same time, my mother has taught me that I am inferior to no one "**not even a man**" (emphasis hers). She told me that the reason I have learned the traditional role is

so that I can survive on my own. I love the fact that my mother brought me up in the traditional manner: minus brain washing me into being a baby machine.

I will return to the theme Claudia raises here of the influence of her mother in her life, for in each case, my research participants attribute their successes in school at least in part to their mothers' influence, even if they are not modeling their lives on the pathways their mothers chose for themselves. I would like to highlight the fact that Claudia's perception of her family's expectations for males and females regarding education counters one of the prevailing myths about Latino families—that women are expected to stay at home and become mothers. She spoke about this again in our group interview:

They pushed me and my sisters to do better in school more than they pushed my brothers, and I got pushed more than my brothers did, like especially by my own brothers, who would tell me to get good grades [...] They (parents) were just happy my brothers graduated—they were smart, they just didn't want to do their work [...] I push myself to exceed. I don't think my siblings feel that way. They just do what's necessary to get by. They don't push themselves to the limit [...] I went to college without anybody telling me.

This *pensadora* is able to negotiate a seemingly contradictory set of expectations for her behavior and education with strength and willpower. Although the family apparently doesn't explicitly push Claudia to go to college, she is expected to achieve academically in order to become successful and independent. Again, we see here a combination of familial, aspirational, and navigational capital.

The same holds true for Hilda, who was raised in a non-traditional household.

She said:

I admire all the women in my family; my mom had eight sisters and there aren't any boys, and the women always took charge, and I think that's the way I am, and a lot, like four of them didn't graduate high school, but they all went back to school and they got their graduating credits that they were missing, and now

they're all... Two of 'em work for a law office, one of them works for an insurance company, and a few of 'em are teachers, and they all got their lives together, and I think that's my biggest... I admire them the most. Their parents weren't much help. My *Tata* dropped out of high school and my *Nana* never graduated and so they pushed themselves to expand more, and like, even though they didn't graduate, still their lives are going good for them. They're my biggest role models.

Unlike Claudia, Hilda comes from a family dominated by women. Again, although Hilda is not following in her mothers' and aunts' pathways, she is able to extract life lessons from their experiences and to translate the value of their achievements into her own choices in life. She admires her aunts for their determination to finish school in order to find good jobs, and she admires her grandparents even more for their successes despite their lack of education. Hard work, for the young women in my study, is a family value that they venerate and emulate, and they honor that by recognizing that their families expect them to work hard through the education that they are being provided.

Like Pamela and Claudia, Hilda has a clear understanding and appreciation for the history of her family and is able to build upon that foundation to achieve success in her life according to her own standards. During our conversation, she also revealed that her family pushed her more with her grades than they did her brother. He joined the Marines when he graduated to avoid the question of higher education, in her opinion, whereas she always felt that she was destined for college. Again, the theme of positive female family role models emerges here. Like Pamela, Hilda admires women in her family and leads her life by their example.

- *Consejos and Modeling*

One of the prevailing notions about Latinos/as in education is that their families simply don't value education. As Valencia and Black demonstrate in their excellent study, in reality, Latino/a and other "minoritized" families *highly* value education. This is affirmed in the testimonies of my research participants, as in this statement by Pamela:

They have never gone to college and they told me the best thing you can have in this world is education. That gets you places. And they basically pushed all of us to the point where we kind of want to give up and not keep going but they remind us you don't want to be in the situation that we are in. We have so little and we have to make so much of it. We never want you guys to need something. We want you guys to have the resources in order to have what you want.

Here, we see families using their own lives as examples of why education is important. In Pamela's case, it has to do with economic status and social possibilities, perhaps—aspirational capital. In the discussion I had with the four young women, another theme emerges. They note that in particular, their mothers have often used themselves as examples of what not to do. There is a strong sense that the sacrifices their mothers have made for them are expected to be repaid by the children taking a very different path. Claudia first raised this issue:

They're like, 'don't be like me, don't be like me!' cuz my mom got pregnant at a really young age, and she's always telling me, 'Go to college, do this, do that. You could do so much more than I did.' That's what my mom says, cuz she dropped out sophomore year because she was pregnant, so she's like, really, that's why she doesn't want me to have a boyfriend, cuz she doesn't want me to ruin my future."

Anna: And you? (To Violet, who was nodding her head)

Violet: "Um, like her. Yeah."

The other young women giggle and nod. Again, the myth of Latinos/as not valuing education—in particular for girls—is proven false by these counternarratives. As I

mentioned earlier, there is a social misconception that Latina women are steered toward marriage and children. In fact, the marriage rate for Latina and non-Latina women in the United States is equal, 54%. The fertility rate for native-born Latina women is a bit higher than for non-Latinas, and although the educational attainment levels are much different, with 36% of Latina women (including immigrant women) earning less than a high school diploma, compared with 10% of non-Latina women, 46% of native-born Latinas have at least some college (Gonzales 2). There is a trend toward higher education among younger, native-born Latinas. I will not pretend that the research I am presenting here can be generalized in the least, but I did gain a sense that these second or third generation Mexican-American women have chosen a much different pathway than the generation before and that they perceive their life chances much differently than their mothers before them.

A value that these young women admire in their parents is the value of hard work. The world of work, as they seem to understand it, is not separated into public and private spheres. Our conversations on this topic ranged from within the home to outside, to school, and home again. Claudia talks about hard work within the home:

That my mom never gives up. She works hard. She's had seven kids, and just like, well for the first fifteen years, she stayed home and did the cooking and cleaning, and that's more of a fulltime job than the job she has now. It's harder work and stuff to have to take care of all seven of us, to go to school with all seven of us and to control us all, cuz we're always fighting, and we'd get in fights in the middle of the store and we'd throw each other out of the *careta* it was really bad when we were little, so I admire my mother the most because she tries her best and she does a good job for like, dropping out of high school and stuff. She does a good job.

Violet admires hard work outside of the home:

I know my dad's dad had twenty-three kids, and like, so when they were old enough to work they'd make 'em work, like go sell newspapers and stuff, cuz, God, that's a lot of kids.

For these students, the public and private spheres are both arenas where hard work and sacrifice are expected and appreciated in order to sustain a family. Family members take on multiple roles within the family, and as Violet reports, these roles are not fixed:

When I was seven, my Dad died, so my mom had to raise me and my two brothers, but then, like, it was weird 'cause after awhile, like after my dad died, I don't know, my mom like, went out of the picture for awhile, so then my brother would take care of me, like he, was like maybe a Junior or Senior in high school and he was, like raising me. So, I admire him.

It is not surprising, then, to see how adept these young women are at moving from one sphere to the other in their own lives, filling multiple roles inside and outside of the home, although for my own part, I deeply admire this navigational capital, and I feel that this is a powerful asset to consider in the development of college preparatory programs.

In trying to understand the young women's daily experiences, I asked them each to describe a typical day. There were common themes among them, including caring for other family members both before and after school, fulfilling additional household chores, carving out time for homework, and participating in several activities after school. All of these young women said that they typically go to bed after midnight and wake up at five o'clock in the morning. Here is a compilation of their daily responsibilities:

In the home:

- Get siblings ready for school and help them with homework
- Drive siblings, cousins to school
- Nurse a sick mother
- Cook

- Clean
- Homework
- Babysit nieces and siblings

Outside the home:

- Classes
- After school club meetings: most participants belong to five or six clubs each
- Sports
- Work
- Volunteer work at a hospital
- Youth club meetings outside of school

Add to this the complication that most of these young women don't have cars and must work out how to get rides from friends or family members. As Violet noted, they learn how to juggle and feel pretty good at it by Senior year. I am struck, however by the difference in tone between their words and the words of Anzaldúa:

So don't give me your tenets and your laws. Don't give me your lukewarm gods. What I want is an accounting with all three cultures—white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture—una cultura mestiza—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar, and my own feminist architecture (44).

As I reflect on the young women in Ms. D's class, I realize that like Anzaldúa, they encounter gender just as they encounter race—as a lived experience rather than as a category. Although they are not the Chicanas of Gloria Anzaldúa's generation—these young Latinas are her daughters. They do not rail against the tyranny of culture, rather they negotiate between the conflicting messages they hear and between the contradictory expectations they experience, and then they calmly move forward. I do not know if and when familial expectations for work in the home will supercede expectations for

academic achievement and career, and it would be fascinating to follow these young women through college and beyond. Some of them already have ambitions to go on to graduate school, but as far as domesticity is concerned, we did not discuss the women's perceptions of where potential marriage, motherhood, and family would come in to the equation.

As an educator, I considered these funds of knowledge--life chances, gender roles and work, *consejos*, and modeling--and I gained a deeper appreciation for the cultural wealth that these *pensadoras* possess. These young women's perceptions of life chances are strongly influenced by their first generation parents' desire for their children to surpass their own education, social status, class, and achievements. Role models and pedagogies of the home, or "the communication, practices, and learning that occur in the home and community" (Bernal "Learning" 113) have taught them skills such as resilience, perseverance, hard work, the ability to multi-task, the value of collective well being over individual attainment, as well as an ability to think critically about history and to move forward.

I feel that we can better incorporate the knowledge we gain about Latino/a students and their experiences to transform the pathway to higher education for more students. Furthermore, as these young Latinas demonstrate, they are already critically aware of the challenges they face, of the myths they defy or *resist* (Bernal; Cammarota), and of the cultural shift they are propelling, which seems to indicate that the pathway toward educational reform and social justice is ready if only educators will come forward with a willingness to listen and to change. They deftly negotiate the ambiguities

Anzaldúa describes as part of a new *mestiza* consciousness. Their actions defy the myths about Latinas that continue to circulate in society, and it is time for educators to take notice, and to privilege these young women's assets, intellect, willpower, and potential. Perhaps this would help move communities toward a renewal of community advocacy and educational sovereignty. I will discuss this further in chapter five, but in the following section, I will describe the ways in which a classroom teacher can help create scaffolding to help support these students' cultural foundations as they grow and learn.

In part because of my own gender, perhaps, I was able to gain the trust of my Latina research subjects enough for them to open up about personal matters, including their thoughts on gendered experiences. Because there were so few males in the class, I did not feel comfortable asking them to join me in a similar group discussion. Perhaps they would have felt comfortable discussing these issues with me, but I didn't pursue the same line of questioning with the males as I did with the females.

In previous chapters, I focused on Miguel because out of the three second-generation Latinos in the class, he was the only one who met with me for a one-on-one interview. I followed up with him several times during his first semester at the university as well, but I never explicitly asked him to discuss gender roles. I alluded earlier to the fact that Miguel's main concern upon entering the university was how he was going to be able to afford to pay tuition. I advised him to pursue work study or at least to apply for campus jobs that would allow him to maintain his focus on school. He ended up maintaining what he felt was a good job with one of the larger car dealerships in town but soon found that his work schedule couldn't always accommodate his school schedule,

and his financial responsibilities (car payments, gas, etc.) outweighed his academic responsibilities. One of his former classmates recently told me that he left school.

Although I have only briefly touched on the gendered experiences of the male participants in this study, I feel that an important question to pursue in further research would be why are Latino males experiencing a negative educational trend while their sisters are advancing in education? Statistics suggest that immigration is a factor. There are more young male first-generation immigrants entering the United States each year than females, and generally their motive is to work. They enter the labor force, rather than enrolling in schools (Pew “Latino” 1). Still, school dropout rates for Latinos are higher than for Latinas, and further research is needed to address this negative trend and to continue to promote equity for the Latino/a communities in our country.

Understanding Cultural Wealth to Develop Confianza

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, a cultural integrity framework for building cultural scaffolding in college preparation includes an appreciation for students’ varied cultural experiences and backgrounds. Recognizing the cultural wealth of our students requires that school officials and teachers get to know their students, families, and communities. As I described in chapter three, this is called critical localism. For teachers who are not members of the communities in which we teach, this requires extra attention. Ideally, teachers would be given ample opportunities to begin learning about the students and communities they serve while they are still in pre-service at their universities, but in the case of the university where I study, these opportunities are slim-

to-none. Here, I will focus on what educators might do to begin to create cultural scaffolding from the foundations the students bring with them to school.

On a visit to Northern Mexico, fellow graduate students and I traveled through the Sonoran desert, across which the United States government builds and patrols an increasingly complex network of actual and virtual fences, walls, alarms, and traps. We left the Sonoran desert in Arizona and entered Sonora, México in order to compare the public educational system there with ours. During our visit to an *escuela normal*, or a teacher-training school, I was surprised to learn that in terms of applying a “funds of knowledge” approach to incorporating local knowledge, culture, and practices into the school curriculum, the Mexican system is far ahead of us in this regard. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I feel that even when mandates are handed down to local institutions from on high, those affected by the mandates can still exercise power in order to solve the problems they face as a result of those mandates. Carlos Fuentes argues that “solving basic local problems is the best way to exercise responsible global power” (173), and as I understand it, the Mexican government’s drive toward economic independence has apparently led the government to re-examine some of the standardized systems that have perhaps impeded growth and development. One of these has to do with the centralized system of education in Mexico.

As we learned at the “normal school,” teachers-in-training are sent out into schools from the very first year of their education. They are expected to visit and observe classrooms in the three types of schools: urban, rural, and indigenous. There, they are expected to pay attention to the students’ socio-economic circumstances, customs,

beliefs, and values. They visit with parents, spend time absorbing the culture of the communities in which the students live, and even think about the spaces these students inhabit. Educational theorists whose works our education students read talk about these factors, but in Mexico, the theory is put into practice early in a teacher's training. The value of this sort of in-depth observation of funds of knowledge is that the teachers will graduate from their program with a strong sense of how to manipulate the government's basic educational framework to suit the needs of the various student populations they will work among.

I find this approach to be quite Freirian. It is a form of critical pedagogy that I think can't be taught any other way than through first-hand experience. Teachers are forced to consider the material and social conditions of their pupils in order to tap into their funds of knowledge and to use their assets to enhance learning. In the case of Vista del Valle High, in contrast, most teachers do not live where their students live. They commute many miles each day to the Southside school and leave the district each night. At the local public university, teachers-in-training generally spend one semester working in a single classroom to gain practical experience, rather than experiencing an array of campuses and classrooms. Some have never set foot in a school in their district until they begin their first teaching job. I can only imagine the disconnect this creates between teachers and their students. Again, this helps explain the high teacher turnover rate I mentioned in chapter one.

As I have suggested, it is often up to the teacher to find ways to create cultural congruence between students and schooling. One way to do so is to create opportunities

for students' funds of knowledge to be present in the classroom, both in curriculum and in praxis. This approach absolutely contradicts the banking model of education, which only privileges the knowledge the teacher holds as representative of the institution and the dominant society. This theory moves us away from understanding culture as monolithic and toward understanding the textured nature of social life. Face-to-face interaction and one-on-one dialogue is the only way to cross constructions of difference. Teachers engage with the lived experiences of students through research in students' homes, with families, etc., because the classroom is an insufficient context for understanding students. Their research, formal or informal, can become applied knowledge, meaning that it can be used to put what they learn into practice within their specific contexts. This requires a significant commitment from teachers, but one way to at least begin to move toward this model is easily within the grasp of English teachers. They can invite students' home knowledge into the fabric of the classroom and then into the intellectual life of the school or college through writing. In this model, experiential knowledge leads to theoretical knowledge, which has the potential to positively change practice in order to build on the cultural resources of communities.

What is invited into the classroom in the exchange between teachers and students is crucial. Antonio Gramsci, writing against the policies and practices of Fascist Italy, sketched out his interpretation of the educational crisis he perceived. He wrote at a time when the educational system was being reformed to create two separate pathways: a classical education for an elite class, and a vocational education for a working class. I find his observations useful in thinking about the schooling of Latino/a students in this

country today, for although the political circumstances are obviously quite different, I do notice some resonance with current conversations around the crisis of education for Latino/as in light of political economy theory, as discussed earlier.

As Gramsci contended, in a traditional system of education controlled by the dominant class, “the individual consciousness of the overwhelming majority of children reflects social and cultural relations which are different from and antagonistic to those which are represented in the school curricula” (35). In our time, high stakes testing and prescribed curricula distance students from the learning that is supposed to be taking place in schools because these factors create social and cultural vacuums that deny students the opportunity to make connections between learning and their own experiences. Gramsci turns to teachers to help shut off this vacuum:

There is no unity between school and life, and so there is no automatic unity between instruction and education. In the school, the nexus between instruction and education can only be realized by the living work of the teacher. For this he must be aware of the type of contrast between the type of culture and society which he represents and the type of culture and society represented by his pupils, and conscious of his obligation to accelerate and regulate the child’s formation in conformity with the former and in conflict with the latter. (36)

This is especially important when, as is the case in the majority of classrooms across the country, the social and cultural background of the teacher does not reflect that of his or her students. More often than not, the instructor comes from a more privileged ethnic and socio-economic background, while, as in the case of Vista del Valle, a growing number of minoritized students in low-income communities attend schools where they are the majority. A study measuring public school demographics from 1996-2006 shows that the number of public schools serving 90% or more minoritized students

doubled in that decade. In my southwestern state, that number doubled for Latinos in particular (Pew Hispanic Center 13). I have already discussed the defacto segregation of minoritized and low-income students in my city, which unfortunately corresponds to inequitable school funding and disproportionately low levels of academic achievement for those students. To be clear, the fact that the students in my study attend a Latino/a majority high school is not the problem. What I take issue with here, besides inequities in funding between the Latino/a majority and White majority schools, is that the curricula and policies under which these schools operate don't necessarily value the students' cultural and individual assets, which in many cases contributes to cultural dissonance.

To return to Villalpando and Solorzano's concept of "cultural wealth," I would like to emphasize that this cultural dissonance must be avoided and the cultural wealth of low-income Latino/a youth must be valued in order to build cultural scaffolding for college preparation. A comprehensive study of students' perceived barriers to postsecondary education shows that "interventions that assist Mexican American students in identifying and pursuing their educational goals in a manner that *respects and enhances their familial and community ties*" (emphasis added) may be essential to building a successful pathway to college (McWhirter 135).

For example, a new program at Vista del Valle initiated by federal GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) funds uses the cultural tradition of *la quinceañera*, or a young woman's fifteenth birthday party to engage freshman girls in a year-long, fifteen step service project designed to help them learn college knowledge and to spread this information throughout their schools and their

communities. This is an after school club, and to earn an end-of-year celebration, the young women work in groups to plan and fulfill fifteen college-focused activities, including hosting college nights at their schools, creating college knowledge posters to display in hallways, and generally to raise campus and community-wide awareness about the college-going process. The *quinceañera* is a highly valued rite of passage in many Latin cultures, and in the Mexican and Mexican American community, it is especially significant. This program borrows the concept and transforms it into an opportunity for young women not only to shine for a day but also to spend a year developing personal educational goals, leadership skills, and a commitment to service¹³.

When I worked for this program and we discussed this idea, I could imagine ways that this project might be incorporated into content-area subjects. There is a reflective writing component, for example, suggesting possibilities for an interesting unit in an English class. Therefore I feel that this sort of program need not be relegated to extra-curricular status, for it could easily be incorporated into a high school curriculum as well.

One result of integrating cultural wealth into the schooling of Latino/a students is the establishment of mutual trust between Latino/a students, their families, and their schools. Stanton-Salazar describes the Mexican-origin social construct of “*confianza*.” This is translated roughly to “trust experienced within a particular interpersonal relationship” (27). This includes a willingness to show vulnerability to another person without fear of being hurt or used. Too often, Stanton-Salazar argues, “*confianza*”

¹³ For more information on this program and on others that value students’ personal and cultural assets as well as community ties, please visit the program website: <http://www.tucsongearup.arizona.edu>

between Latino/a students and families and their schools is betrayed, for even if students are shown caring, their experiences, values, and assets are not always recognized and integrated into the school culture or curricula. Rather, it is usually the students who are expected to conform.

If we think about the gate keeping that takes place at the university, what are students expected to leave behind them at those gates in order to proceed on a pathway toward success as defined by dominant society? In composition courses, for example, how does an emphasis on conformity to norms and standards in writing continue to colonize minoritized students, as Jaime Mejía suggests? According to Baker and Velez, for minoritized students who enter postsecondary institutions, “withdrawal is usually a voluntary decision, reached after a student fails to become integrated into the intellectual life of his or her college [...] The more a student is integrated into the fabric of a college, the lower the probability that he or she will leave the school.” This requires “cultural congruence,” however, and since the dominant culture in the U.S. and of the university is White (hear the echoes of Gramsci), “minority students are likely to have a disruptive cultural experience in college,” thereby hindering their process (93).

I would argue that the university should do more to integrate the students’ values, cultures, and experiences in order to transform the institution, rather than expecting the students to conform to the establishment. We should come to rely less on safeguarding traditions and more on promoting dynamism, “a process of continuous change and progress”¹⁴. As an example of how to apply the knowledge we gain from research, I have

¹⁴ The American Heritage College Dictionary, 3rd ed.

learned from my research participants the value of flexibility. I believe that this is the value that Anzaldúa identifies when she says, “Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically” (101). The students in my study share this quality, and it is my belief that it should be emulated by institutions of education. Perhaps one of the reasons the current administration at my university does not believe that it will be feasible to reach 25% Latino/a enrollment in a decade is because, like the public education system as a whole, it is slow to shift and to react to the demographic shifts in this country. “Rigidity means death.” It is imperative that we move more quickly toward progress and that we view students’ pathways to education as dynamic, not fixed. I will make some proposals toward this end in chapter five.

Making the Pathway Familiar: Creating Cultural Congruence

Villalpando and Solorzano’s study finds that most college preparation programs designed for low-income students of color focus on academic preparation without attending to cultural identity, needs, or assets. They ask, “Why would programs designed to enhance the college readiness of low-income youth of color not include an emphasis on their culture or cultural identity as a formal programmatic focus?” Villalpando and Solorzano build their concept of cultural wealth through a “cultural integrity framework,” which I mentioned earlier. This framework “emphasizes the importance of affirming students’ cultural identities” (16). It is premised on the assumption that educators’ beliefs about the students’ identities and about the role of education in influencing those

identities are essential to the college access process. In other words, educators who devalue students' identities in the educational process can disable low-income minoritized students' college intentions (Villalpando 16).

A common assumption among educators is that in order to assist low-income minoritized youth, we should do what we can to help them assimilate into the dominant educational culture. Stanton-Salazar cautions against a recent body of seemingly progressive research based on "social integration" in education, which places some of the blame for high failure rates of minoritized youth on schools' failures to adequately socialize the students into the cultures and social fabric of the institutions. This approach often advocates building relations between school personnel, families, and peers and treating students in a caring manner to help students "identify with, and conform to, the established order; now integrated, students experience a heightened degree of motivation and make the necessary efforts to meet academic demands" (13). This sounds positive and well meaning, but in this approach, not only are students' ideologies controlled through education by the dominant society, but their cultures are also subordinated in the name of progress. Further, it is a unidirectional approach rather than a reciprocal, dynamic one.

So what would it look like for a teacher whose own background does not match those of her students to create cultural congruence in the classroom in a way that affirms the students' cultural identities and builds *confianza*? In the dual-enrollment course, the teacher's purported duty was to introduce students to the discourse community of college English. I was inspired by her ability to do so while at the same time valuing and

nurturing the students' own confidence in their experiences and knowledges. I return again to my re-affirmation of Latino/a Critical Theory's privileging of storytelling.

Field Notes

February 1, 2007. 9:30 a.m.

Class had begun when I entered the room, and students were listening with apparent interest to Ms. D, who was telling a story about her adolescence in Iowa, where she attended high school with a graduating class of 25. Students laughed over this inconceivable number. They would be graduating among three hundred other students—far fewer than they began with, but still a large number.

A male student asked her what kids did for fun around there. Ms. D. described her town and said that other than a few seedy bars, there wasn't much to it, and that except for going to strip clubs, there wasn't much to do. She continued that they used to write things on the icehouse.

"Icehouse, Miss?" several students asked.

"Yes, you know, you have icehouses, don't you?" Ms. D, with irony. Students looked outside at the barren desert landscape and laughed.

"We have freezers," one young man answered. Again, there was laughter throughout the room.

Ms.D. proceeded to tell a story about how she and her friend once wrote "Free ice today" all over the icehouse where people came to buy ice. She said they had a great time watching people approach the icehouse, delight rising to their faces when they read the signs. The students laughed appreciatively.

Ms. D. transitioned from there to talking about a short story the students had read. The discussion is about “The Piano Player.” Students are asked whether they think this is a “finished essay,” according to an analysis of writing they had read. Students concluded that the story isn’t finished. Students were then asked to compare the writer’s discussion of the unfinished piece, which was apparently included in the handout they read, to their own writing. Students were asked to review some writing they did and to recall what they discovered through the experience of revision and by re-thinking their purpose for writing.

One girl expressed the experience of beginning to write a story about cheerleading, but that at the end, “the story turned on me,” and she discovered she was really writing about a coach’s influence in her life. They have a fairly complex conversation about how much is accomplished through revision.

The central ingredient to creating cultural congruence in this case was through the sharing of stories. Time and again, I observed how this teacher carefully wove her own personal stories with stories of academic success, stories about writing, and most importantly, with the students’ own stories, creating a space in which student empowerment thrived and learning happened. The personal was mined in order to further broader understandings of literacy, of college access, and of personal empowerment. In the classroom I observed, although the teacher is White, she has lived and taught in the same school district for over twenty years. Her daughter attended school in the district. Because of her involvement in the community in which she teaches, her connection to her students is clear.

I observed a deep trust among students and between students and teacher in the classroom, so much so that when students shared personal writing out loud, they often consoled one another, cried together, and laughed together over shared memories. They were comfortable enough to read their own stories about divorce, abuse, and other painful family secrets to the class, and this demonstrated their shared sense of *confianza*. A respectful exchange of stories here helped to create cultural congruence as well as to achieve a student-centered pedagogy. I am once again affirming the power of narrative and counternarrative in the educational process of Latino/a students. In the curriculum I observed, student essays formed the central focus of the course, thus the students' experiential knowledge lead to the development of theoretical knowledge as students moved from the personal to the academic in their class discussions and in their writing. The next step, for critical pedagogues, is to move from the theoretical to applied knowledge.

The counternarrative is a central tool of Chicano/a activism, as evidenced by the many volumes of collected Chicano/a counternarratives (Yosso; The Latina Feminist Group). Gloria Anzaldúa's enormously influential *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* derives much of its strength from the writer's ability to make the personal political and vice versa. These works could provide powerful models for composition students and would validate and empower Pamela, Claudia, and other young Latinas who are currently finding their own pathways to college. As I mentioned in chapter three, the personal literacy narrative by Jimmy Santiago Baca had a strong impact on these students' sense of their own potential as writers and as students. Reading and writing

counternarratives has the potential to both engage Latino/a students in schools and to empower them to become more critically aware agents as they negotiate their educational pathways, as I discussed in chapter three. In fact, rhetorician Walter Fisher posits that “to consider that public-social knowledge is to be found in the stories that we tell one another would enable us to observe not only our differences, but also our commonalities, and in such observation we might be able to reform the notion of the “public.” He wishes to give public knowledge a form of being, rather than continuing to privilege expert knowledge, as defined by dominant society.

Validating the cultural wealth of our students and their communities through a rethinking of curriculum, a shift in ideology, teacher advocacy, and an attempt at creating *confianza* in classrooms and indeed in the educational system in general, would be a positive step toward social justice in education for Latino/a students.

In chapter five, I will submit a proposal to my readers that will begin to address all of these avenues. In this proposal, I ask us to assume that education, like society, should be dynamic. It is time for an overhaul of the ways in which we segregate and divide the responsibilities for education our youth. In my proposal, I advocate for a holistic re-evaluation of education in which educators at all levels dedicate themselves to the task of working from the beginning of the educational pathway to the gateway to higher education in order to ensure that that pathway is as unobstructed and as inviting as possible for all students—for our student body is not the same as those upon which our institutions of higher education were founded.

Our student body will soon be comprised of a majority of minority, low-income youth, and our colleges and universities should join in the cause of re-evaluating whose culture we privilege, which ideologies we espouse, and why we exist in our communities. If we continue along the same pathways, will we continue to colonize students, as Jaime Mejía asks? Will we continue to build walls that are scaled only in students' imaginations, as Cintron describes? How can we change what we do and how we do what we do in order to transform the educational pathways of Latino/a and other minoritized youth? In the final chapter of this ethnography, I apply the knowledge I have gained through this research process to offer several approaches.

V. REBUILDING THE PATHWAY: UNIVERSITY AND PUBLIC SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Using Latino/a Critical Theory as a framework, I have attempted in the first four chapters of this dissertation to address through a qualitative, funds of knowledge approach, one of my central research questions: “What factors influence these Latino/a students’ college pathways?” I have written about some of the negative factors contributing to an equitable educational pathway for low-income Latino/a youth in my community, such as institutional and ideological impediments, and I have also highlighted some of the positive factors that have been influential in the lives and educational pathways of the research participants. I have focused on ways in which asset-based teaching philosophies and student-centered pedagogies can help to counteract some of the institutional and ideological barriers, and now it remains for me to demonstrate the implications of my research for my field of composition as I address my second research question: “What might the university’s role be in promoting equitable educational pathways for incoming Latino/a students?”

In this dissertation, I address both a social justice imperative as well as an economic exigency for educators to take action. We know that Latinos/as represent the largest ethnic minority group in the United States and that they are also the least likely to pursue and complete a degree in higher education. Recall that in my state, for example, fewer than 8% of Latinos hold a college degree (Pew “Arizona” 7). We also know that this educational opportunity gap leads to an opportunity gap in terms of earning power. We know that in general, students who drop out of school or choose not to go to college

make what college access advocates call the “million-dollar mistake,” alluding to the estimated difference in lifetime earnings between a high school dropout and a bachelor’s degree recipient¹⁵. Educational and economic inequities feed a political economy dependant on a large pool of cheap labor controlled by a relatively small pool of white-collar workers.

Foucault describes the way in which power relations like this become normalized to the point of invisibility, so that “docile bodies [...] do what one wishes [...] they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed, and the efficiency that one determines” (138). I agree with Paulo Freire, who asserts that those crippled by political and social oppression will inevitably struggle against their oppressors, and that educators have an obligation to take part in the process of liberation by partnering with the oppressed in a process of mutual humanization (75). For all of these reasons, I take the position in this dissertation that it is time for educators at all levels to find ways to better serve a rapidly growing population of low-income Latino students in our communities.

As I argued in the first chapter of this dissertation, power and education are inextricably linked, and in our country, our democratic tenets are also ostensibly carried out through our educational system. Economic forces have shifted political priorities away from democratic values such as inclusiveness, justice, and responsibility and toward feeding individualism, consumerism, and market values. In the meantime, the ideal of civic engagement is broken (Giroux and Giroux 1). As I discussed in chapter

¹⁵Quoted in the America’s Promise Alliance graduation guidebook: *Grad Nation*: <http://www.americaspromise.org/uploadedFiles/AmericasPromiseAlliance/Grad_Nation/GradNation_020509.pdf> (p. 11). Accessed 3/7/2009. Published February 2009.

two, this shift affects the public education system negatively by helping to solidify institutional practices and policies that unfairly disadvantage marginalized communities.

In chapter three, I demonstrated how ideological control works alongside institutional control by neutralizing and naturalizing inequitable policies and practices, so as to preserve the current power structure. Low-income schools serving a majority of Latino/a students in my city, therefore, are expected to simply do what they can with less quantity and quality of resources, teachers, space, and so forth than schools in areas with higher property values. An inevitable result I have seen at Vista del Valle is that a small number of students are tracked into classes for high achievers with the majority of the schools' efforts and resources go toward nurturing these students and simply controlling the rest.

To break this cycle, it is important, as Luis Moll and Richard Ruiz argue, to promote educational sovereignty, which means that positive action must be taken at some level in order to unmask those inequities, to assist in the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressive system that holds them, and to change the educational pathways for all low-income Latino youth, not just for the few who have figured out how to negotiate the educational pathway that exists.

In this chapter, I will move beyond the public schooling system and into the realm of higher education. I will join Henry and Susan Giroux in advocating that public universities become spaces in which the private and the public merge-- sites where citizens and "engaged intellectuals" take on the issues that affect the "public good" (56). They call this space the *agora*, borrowing from Greek history and the foundation of

democracy. Like Giroux and Giroux, I urge academics to “create linkages with alternate sites outside of the university in ways that engage the pedagogical force of an entire culture” (49). To begin the chapter, I will place my arguments within a larger discussion about our national educational, political, and economic crisis as a sort of case study for how power relations among these arenas are influencing each other as they shift during a state of crisis. I will then offer some practical remedies. Finally, I will bring this concept of the university as *agora* into my discussion of potential remedies to some of the factors negatively affecting the education for Latinos/as in my community. In particular, I will focus on the gateway courses of First-Year Composition.

I am proposing that educators in higher education partner with their communities and public schools to rethink the educational pathway to higher education. There are precedents for this type of work in the fields of education and anthropology, for example, and my university boasts many “engaged intellectuals” whose teaching and research extends beyond the walls of the university and into the public schools in the name of social justice¹⁶. I wish to honor the work of these academics by presenting potential remedies to some of the factors affecting the educational pathway of Latino/a youth in my community that can be undertaken by members of my field of Composition. As long

¹⁶ For example, Julio Cammarota, professor of Anthropology and Mexican and Mexican-American Studies, works in several schools in the area to lay the groundwork for this type of vision. He provides expertise in ethnographic research to empower marginalized students in several of the city’s minority-majority high schools. He teaches ethnographic methods and critical theory to enable students to become activists on behalf of their fellow students. They expose and document problems within their schools, taking their complaints before school boards in order to demand action. After they voice their concerns through careful research, schools often agree to make changes. The students feel empowered to stand up for themselves and to demand equitable treatment. For information on the Social Justice Education Project, see <http://socialjusticeproject.org/SJEP/SOCIAL_JUSTICE_EDUCATION_PROJECT.html>. Accessed 3/8/09.

as departments and programs are being forced to make changes, I propose that we turn our attention to the pathways our students take to come to us to see if there might not be ways to create a more streamlined educational system that will be built upon a greater understanding along the levels of education, as well as a greater understanding of students' and families' experiences, histories, and knowledges.

I will demonstrate the ways in which this approach might work in composition courses through online exchange. I will also make a case for vertical alignment, wherein educators at all levels create intellectual and cultural scaffolding in major content areas through vertical conversations. I rely upon the college access and Latino/a Critical Theory frameworks to guide my argument, which is contextualized through the experiences of my research participants, as well as through the addition of my personal experience in university/ public school partnerships, both in programs I developed for the university writing program and through the federally-funded GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) project.

Finally, I will end with a discussion of where I would like to go from here. Specifically, I will bring all of my theoretical arguments together in a call for the inclusion of qualitative research methods, including Participatory Action Research (PAR) in FYC. If educators can shift the focus of higher education from individual aspirations to community empowerment, perhaps we will move closer to fulfilling our obligation to support the development of responsible, engaged citizens.

Social Justice and the *Agora*: Re-igniting the Conversation

Critical theorists such as Henry Giroux have long warned of the political and economic crisis that is upon us, and a compelling component of the crisis that has long been ignored is the argument for social justice in education. Writing during the height of our previous presidential administration's power (2004), Giroux and Giroux warned that a commercially driven society and educational system would yield disastrous results:

For many people today, citizenship is about the act of buying and selling commodities (including political candidates), rather than broadening the scope of their freedom and rights in order to expand the opportunities of a substantive democracy. Market values, coupled with a resurgent bigotry, undercut the possibility of a language in which vital social institutions can be defended as a public good. (1)

Now that their predictions have come true and our market has driven the nation to crisis, we find that those vital social institutions that we need to help alleviate the current situation, including schools, have been severely denigrated.

I fear that for the schools that are already under funded, this will mean even fewer opportunities for low-income, minoritized students to become college-ready. This provides further impetus for educators at all levels to find ways to streamline the educational pathways by working together, sharing information and ideas, and perhaps even by rebuilding an educational system in the spirit of cooperation and reciprocity. It is imperative that public universities, and in particular programs in the Humanities think about our greater purpose at this time, for as a New York Times headline warns, "In Tough Times, the Humanities Must Justify Their Worth" (Cohen C1). Rather than simply repeat the traditional justification, which is that a liberal arts education helps contribute to students' civic and intellectual development, I think that it is time to do

more. The article notes that a recent report issued by the American Association of Colleges and Universities calls for the Humanities to abandon an “Ivory Tower” mentality and to emphasize the practical and economic benefits of a liberal arts education.

I feel that this is a critical time for universities and public schools to come together to solve the mutually significant educational inequities within the entire educational system. In my own context, for example, both the public schools and the public universities have been handed a fresh round of draconian budget cuts, and all departments at all levels have been asked to propose ways to restructure and to rethink how they do what they do. I see this as a wonderful opportunity to promote a new mission—one that will contribute to a renewed commitment to service and to community.

Henry and Susan Giroux critiqued the American educational system for becoming disinterested and for allowing the link between democracy and education to slacken, resulting in the impotence of civic engagement and a growing skepticism of public education (1). They critique universities for following a corporate model of professionalization, which they feel allows academics to retreat into insular worlds of specialization where power relations are reproduced, rather than challenged. They issue a call for academics to become active participants critical of current affairs (45). As I mentioned, they call for a reconceptualization of the university as an *agora*, a classical Greek space in which the private and the public merge as citizens decide on issues for the common good (43). Rather than viewing the university as a place of cultivation (as we heard from the Harvard administrators who created the concept of First-Year

Composition), or of maintaining order (as described by Foucault and Althusser), a new sense of community must emerge, along with a renewal of the notion of “public good.”

What will this look like? They argue that academics, as “engaged intellectuals,” must create “linkages with alternate sites outside the university in ways that engage the pedagogical force of the entire culture” (49), that they must connect their work to the larger public conversation and assume a measure of responsibility in naming, struggling against, and alleviating human suffering (56). This is reminiscent of Freire’s assertion that teachers are instrumental in helping the oppressed to name their oppression and to struggle against their oppressors for liberation. I argue here that academics in my field can connect their work with students at the gateway to college (FYC classes) to the struggles students face along the educational pathways toward college in an effort to engage with and participate in the larger public conversation about inequities in education and in society as a whole.

As I see it, a university and community partnership designed to help close the opportunity gap for low-income Latino/a students in our educational system must begin with the assumption that a college education should be optional for all students. This means creating college-going cultures within all schools, and not just in the schools serving high-income, highly educated communities. Arguing that “these kids just aren’t college material” and settling for a 10% or fewer college-going rate among graduates is simply unacceptable. Lowering standards so that a high school student taking the minimum requirements for graduation will not be eligible to apply for college because they will lack core requirements is unacceptable. College advocacy should become the

priority of all educators. I will offer two examples of programs that begin with this assumption and attempt to bridge the public school to university experience for low-income Latino/a students in my community.

21st Century Pen Pals: Students Opening the Gates

April 2007. 9 a.m.

Right on schedule, a school bus turns west toward one of the most picturesque vistas of the university. Architectural-award-winning buildings and multi-million dollar sports complexes flank either side of the roadway. Lanky, alien palm trees line the mall, denying even the slightest bit of shade to the thousands of students and workers who criss-cross these lawns, beating pathways into the dry grass. I try to see this place as a stranger might see it, wondering what the students are thinking as the bus draws up in front of the designated drop-off point. The students and teachers who disembark noisily are not here for a typical teacher-led field trip. They are here to meet the college students they have corresponded with for two semesters. My own research participants are among the throng, as well as a group of junior and senior high school students whose teacher arranged for them to spend the day on campus visiting places such as the multicultural center, the Mexican American Studies department, and other culturally-oriented havens. I escort the students to their first stop, the student union, where they will be led by university student “ambassadors” through residence halls, lecture halls, and other points of interest for their first hour on campus. The students who walk next to me ask nervously about some of the buildings we pass. One student says, “I’ve been here

lots of times. My mother works here—she’s in food service at the union.” I take a quick poll to see how many students have toured campus before. Most indicate that this is their first time. Some have come here to attend football games. None have seen classrooms or dorms.

As always, I am reminded of how insular this campus can be. How is it that so many of these students have grown up in the shadows of these university buildings but never set foot here before? I know from my work with middle school parents in the community that the campus seems somewhat impenetrable. Even the mere fact that parking around the university is limited and expensive deters many from visiting for special events that are free and open to the public. The university is the size of a small city, with over 36,000 students and thousands of faculty and staff. It is large enough, in fact, to require its own police force, in addition to campus security patrols. I wonder about the intimidation-factor this institution might exude toward strangers.

When we reach our destination, cheerful blonde co-eds greet our group, which becomes instantly silent and attentive. I arrange for the students to meet me in an hour so that they can finally meet their college writing partners, who have become sort of like “e-pals.” Over the course of the past school year, one First-Year Composition class has been corresponding with Ms. D’s dual-enrollment course, exchanging drafts, discussing college access-related texts, and exchanging information about the college experience. At the designated time, the undergraduates begin to appear before me in a grove of fruit trees tucked between two buildings on the university mall. They seem more nervous than the high school students did this morning, and several of them ask me what they are

supposed to do or say. I ask them to please just make the high school students feel welcome and to ask and answer questions as naturally as they have been through their writing. When the Vista del Valle group arrives, there is some confusion as I try to coordinate the pairing off of undergraduate and high school partners. When everyone is finally settled, the pairs find shady places to sit in the grove, and timid conversations begin. I circulate among them to prod along those who seem shy or tentative, and when it is time for the students to separate again, voices are louder and the students seem more relaxed. Some of the college students remark as they are leaving that they are really impressed with the high schoolers. One even exclaims, "My girl is so much smarter than me! She should be here already."

The high school students seem pleased as well, and as we are walking toward the union for lunch, Ms. D. catches up to me and says, "Well, this has been a really eye-opening experience for these kids. I want you to know that Emma, the class salutatorian, has just decided to come here to college instead of going out of state. She is amazed that she didn't know before what a wonderful place this is."

Several things came together here, which I would like to address more carefully now. First I will describe the partnership program in more detail, and then I will return to this reflection, which I based on my field notes from that day. As I mentioned in my introduction, the result of my meeting with the English department chair at Vista del Valle in May of 2004 was the creation of an outreach program between the university's writing program and the high school English department. Initially, I was the only university teacher participating, and after my initial yearlong pilot, I began to bring in

other FYC teachers, with the support of the writing program administration. My section of FYC followed the same sequence of assignments as all other FYC classes of the same level, but our focus each semester was on college access, social justice in education, and outreach.

I chose texts around these themes, and students were encouraged to write research papers dealing with some of the issues we discussed. I paired each writing student with at least one high school English student. In the spirit of partnership, I emphasized the importance of reciprocity. Both sets of students would gain from and share with one another equally, as would my partner teacher and I. I did not create this program alone but rather co-created it with input and feedback from high school English teachers at Vista del Valle, including Ms. D. What we came up with seems extremely simple in its aims: for the college students to develop a sense of purpose for writing and to encourage outreach among college students; for the high school students to demystify the college experience and the university itself.

Our students emailed one another, beginning with a brief autobiography, then moving into sharing drafts of a literacy narrative, usually modeled on Jimmy Santiago Baca's "Coming Into Language," from *Writing in the Dark*, and then exchanging questions and information about one another and about college access. Many of the FYC students gained ideas for their research papers from their conversations with the high school students, addressing such topics as inequitable educational funding in the city, high school dropout rates, dispelling myths about the southside of town, and critiquing No Child Left Behind. The high school students were free to ask the college students

questions about their college experiences--how they got to college, how they were managing to pay for college, etc. I will address some of the difficulties that have arisen in the four years that I participated in this program of exchange, and then offer some perspectives from the high school students.

In the first year or so of the pilot, the students who enrolled in my FYC sections were unaware that they were going to become e-pals with the high school students. For the most part, as long as students were not required to do more work than their counterparts in other sections of FYC, they participated readily. Inevitably, however, one or two students per semester felt uncommitted, and their high school partners were let down when their emails went unanswered. The high school teacher and I would have to scramble to compensate. Today the writing program designates certain sections of FYC as outreach courses so that students who enroll in them know what to expect and are willing to commit to the partnership. Another issue that arose was that on one or two occasions we discovered that students were sending inappropriate posts to one another, such as a college student inviting his high school e-pal to a weekend party, but we found ways to minimize the potential for this by setting strict e-guidelines beforehand and having all correspondence first sent to the instructors before messages were then forwarded on to the partners. I also assigned students to working groups within my class, and students were held accountable by other members of their group for responding as quickly as possible to their partners.

I soon found that although many of the FYC students may have felt initially that they were unqualified to speak with any authority about college since they were

newcomers themselves, they quickly rose to the challenge, and many took on the responsibility of representing themselves, our class, and the university well to the high school students. I recall that on the day when one of my FYC classes was to meet its high school partners for the first time, many of my students, unbidden by me, wore university gear and colors to show their school spirit. One student even painted the university letters on her face. They considered themselves to be unofficial representatives of the university and played the role of a sort of welcoming committee to make the younger students feel at ease. Not only were they assuming the role of college advocates, but they had also become college recruiters for our institution!

The benefits to the college students are difficult to quantify, but in general, I have observed that by sharing writing with an audience other than their fellow classmates, FYC students often report in their end-of-semester essays that they feel a greater sense of responsibility for writing with purpose. In the partnership program, they are often sharing drafts with high school students. They develop a keener sense of audience awareness if they know that they are not merely writing to please their own teacher. They are also asked to respond to high school student writing, and I found that this added responsibility helped them to develop stronger editing and workshopping skills. They were more careful in their responses to the high school students, knowing that in a sense, their advice would be looked up to differently than in their usual in-class workshops among peers.

Perhaps more importantly to me, throughout the course of the semester, my FYC students compared and contrasted their educational experiences with one another and

with the high school students, and this had the potential to help raise awareness about differences and inequities in education of which it is too easy to become complacent. I have heard from former students of this program, and several have told me that they continue to participate in outreach activities throughout their four years of college as a result of the experience. This consciousness-raising is an essential part of a democratic education, and a return to a sense of civic responsibility through service is where Participatory Action Research might serve as a useful vehicle to combine academic rigor with a new approach to teaching composition. I will return to this point later.

Benefits to the high school students from this partnership include a more in-depth introduction to the university than they are likely to gain through their high school guidance counselors and teachers, as I established in chapter one. For at least one semester, students gain a social support network to help guide them along one leg of the college pathway, and as I quoted in that chapter, “relationships with individuals with institutional know-how or with people who can provide socioemotional support become instrumental in aiding students in negotiating the college-going process” (Tierney 7).

I have adapted this program to work with students in all four levels of high school, and at each level, this partnership helps direct the students’ focus toward college, assisting in the development of a college-going culture within the classroom, if not beyond. The ninth grade year is crucial, for that is where the college-going foundation must be built. Students who do not pass ninth grade mathematics and English will be at a disadvantage. At the tenth grade level, students may or may not begin electing to take honors and advanced placement classes to help prepare them for college. In eleventh

grade, students begin collecting college applications, and in twelfth grade, students apply. At each level, college student partners can help advise students to take their academics seriously, to participate in activities, to take college entrance exams, to revise application essays, to apply for scholarships, etc. Students can empower other students to take ownership of their educational pathways by sharing insider information about how to pay for college, how to choose classes that will prepare them for college, and how to get help. More simply, the high school students' exposure to the experiences of real college students might allow them to see themselves as college students as well. In Emma's case, as I mentioned in my field notes above, and for others, the college visit is a crucial part of this final realization that they are indeed college-material and that they do belong on campus.

As Henry Giroux argues, critical democracy in education should be empowering both to students AND to teachers. This is an essential component of the programs I propose in this chapter. Throughout this ethnography, in fact, I have attempted to foreground the role of teachers as "transformative intellectuals," and I continue to do so here (Giroux "Literacy" 24). Benefits from the e-mentoring program for the instructors include an increased appreciation of where the students come from and where they are going, as well as a greater understanding of what students are learning in school, and what they need to learn in order to be better prepared. For my part, I tried to learn as much as I could from Ms. D. and the other teachers with whom I worked on this project. The experience taught me to rethink some of my own assumptions about knowledge, such as that it is my job to help students assimilate to college, and to rethink the design of

my courses. I became more dedicated to critical pedagogy and to integrating students' strengths, stories, and knowledges into the coursework. I consciously designed courses to protect the cultural scaffolding with which students entered the classroom, and then listened to students along the way to see how to meet their needs, while shoring up that scaffolding. I have already mentioned some of the benefits to the high school English teachers, including understanding what the university expects of its incoming freshmen and rethinking some of their curricula accordingly, creating a college-going culture in their classrooms, and becoming better-informed college advocates for their students.

One of the keys to success for creating college preparation programs is for students to have grounded experiences with college information. This program provides first-hand exposure to the college experience, both through current college students, and through the campus visit. By experiencing college and the college campus, it becomes a place where they can see themselves. Summer bridge programs are proven to be effective in preparing low-income, first-generation, minoritized students for college for this same reason, and the only drawback there is that, at least in the case of my institution, only a few hundred students can participate each year, which severely limits the potential impact. By involving gateway courses in similar approaches to college bridging, more students will be served.

The responsibility for educating youth in this nation should not be doled out among educators in discreet sectors, with little or no conversation between the levels. A partnership program such as the one I have described helps to widen the gateway to college by promoting understanding between the public university and its neighboring

public schools. I recognize that this program was relatively easy to initiate at my university because of its proximity to a large number of underserved public schools. I also know that this type of partnership program is not inconceivable in less urban communities. In Kentucky, for example, a GEAR UP grant has allowed several universities and colleges to band together to create an e-mentoring project that serves low-income, underserved public schools across the state, including in remote, rural communities¹⁷.

In the next section, I will take my argument for university to public school partnerships a step further to propose an even broader conversation along the educational pipeline. I feel that if the pathway to college becomes more transparent, it will also become more equitable. This will require that educators at all levels work together to reconstruct the scaffolding that students will need along the way.

Vertical Teaming to Rebuild the Pipeline

As I mentioned in chapter one, there are far too many disconnects between what students are expected to know when they arrive in their college classes, and what high school teachers teach. In a recent conversation with a group of high school English teachers, we were surprised to find that even the ways we teach are dissimilar enough to cause concern that the scaffolding we are supposed to be providing is insufficient. While the schools' primary assessment tool in English classes in our public schools is the timed test, timed tests are rarely if ever used in First-Year Composition classes at the university.

¹⁷ For a complete description of this project, see http://www.education.eku.edu/gearup/GEARUP_STAFF.php. Accessed 3/7/2009.

This disconnect between how students are being prepared and how they might be better prepared to enter and succeed in college could be corrected with some open dialogue between teachers at all levels of education. Vertically aligning curricula and assessment from pre-K to college to create a smooth transition along the pipeline is one agenda I believe we should pursue, and indeed, several states have begun to do so, including Texas and Mississippi¹⁸ (sites). Luis Moll and other Latino/a critical scholars propose pedagogies founded on community activism that focus on helping students uncover and counteract inequitable policies and practices, grounded in a strong sense of history. This will require that teachers become trained to be cognizant and sensitive to “glaring issues of educational inequities and social justice” (“Rethinking” 126). Here, I will invite educators to act to bring about positive changes in schools so that the pathways to college become smoother for all students.

I believe that a useful focal point for discussions in the *agora* between universities and their local schools would be the need to provide the scaffolding necessary for all students to become college-ready. The construction of that scaffolding must be undertaken in a spirit of inclusiveness, understanding, and advocacy. As I described in chapters one through three, current college preparation for some students is insufficient and must be rethought in order to promote positive change. For example, if we can agree with Freire that what he called the banking model of education is ineffective (in which students are viewed as empty vessels to be filled by knowledge in the classroom while

¹⁸ For information about educational reform based on vertical alignment, visit these websites: Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) program: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us>, Mississippi curriculum frameworks: <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us>

teachers are viewed as the holders of knowledge), there must be a shift from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction (72). If we don't make this change, we will continue to perpetuate school failure.

We know that a contributing factor to schools failing Latinos is overt and covert rejection of students' cultural and linguistic assets by the school administrators, curricula, and staff. Angela Valenzuela calls this "subtractive schooling" because it minimizes the potential for student empowerment and growth. If we are to construct scaffolding, we must reverse this trend—scaffolding by definition is meant to assist in building from solid foundations. We should not assume that those foundations are all the same—rather we should begin with the assumption that individual students bring with them experiences, cultural traditions, histories, goals, and values that can enrich our institutions as we learn new ways to help provide scaffolding. Teacher preparation is a key component, and I do feel that a more hands-on pre-service experience similar to that of the normal school in Mexico, as described in chapter four, would be an excellent approach. This would help address the pedagogical issues I have described. Before that happens, however, I think that a more fundamental re-thinking of the curricular sequence in core subject areas is necessary.

I began a program through GEAR UP to involve middle and high school teachers in the construction of a six-year plan for reading and writing. The goal was to assess current practices in the teaching of the subjects and to collaborate to come up with goals to align these with college entrance requirements and expectations. Work on this project is ongoing, so at this time I am unable to provide concrete details, but I would like to

advocate for the type of vertical discussion among educators in content areas along all levels of the educational pipeline that we began. This conversation can begin organically, I found, without waiting for federal or state legislators to make a move. As I mentioned in the introduction, two states have begun this sort of conversation, (Texas and Mississippi), and the practice of vertical alignment already takes place within schools. I know, for example, that one of the middle schools that feeds Vista del Valle has taken the initiative to form inter-content area subject working groups. Teachers from grades six to eight work together to create assignments and benchmark tests to help create a logical progression of learning for students as they move through the grade levels and participate in state standardized tests. Teachers benefit from a better understanding of what their students are learning in other subject areas each week, and students benefit from a more streamlined curriculum in which connections can be made in learning from one class period to the next.

In the GEAR UP vertical alignment program, I worked with English teachers in grades six through twelve, as well as university writing program administrators, to begin a similar process. First, we established the goal of creating a seamless transition for students throughout the grade levels so that by grade twelve, students would be eligible and prepared to enter First-Year Composition (FYC) at the university. I would like to emphasize that we began with the assumption that ALL students should be provided the best opportunity possible to become college-ready. The first negative factor we addressed by beginning with this assumption is the culture of low expectations surrounding the education of Latinos/as. We agreed to immediately reject the low

standards set by the public schools whose minimal graduation requirements do not match state college entrance requirements. We adopted what the GEAR UP project in our city calls the “Sweet Sixteen,” the number of credits in English, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Foreign Language required for admission to our state universities.

Next, we analyzed the mission statement of the university writing program, and then we analyzed the objectives of the FYC courses, as well as university-wide writing objectives. We then learned about the course sequence and goals of the different FYC courses at the university. We mined each of these for key terms and created a synthesis from which we drafted a set of goals for incoming FYC students. Next we looked at the goals and objectives for each of the grade levels in middle and high school. These were based mainly on the six traits of the state standardized test, but approaches to teaching and assessment tools varied widely from school to school and from district to district. Two significant findings that I will mention had to do with assessment and writing assignments.

First, we found that because of state-mandated testing, most middle and high schools assess student progress in reading and writing through timed exams. Writing students are expected to demonstrate what they have learned at the end of each quarter through benchmark essay exams. Students learn a wide range of essay styles each year, but because of the relatively little time they spend learning each one; they do not learn to revise extensively. In contrast, our university FYC program emphasizes the writing process, including extensive revision, and students are assessed through the holistic grading of three or four essays each semester, including the demonstrated ability to revise

through several drafts. The transition from one mode of assessment to another could understandably create disconnect for students as they begin their college coursework. The necessity for this academic adjustment could be eliminated through vertical alignment of assessment methods.

The second major disparity we discovered between the public school preparation and the preparation needed for incoming college students was in the types of writing assigned at each level. We found a relatively superficial treatment of research skills at the middle and high school levels, rather than a gradual building of skills needed to prepare students for the rigors of college-level research. In the second semester of FYC, the major writing assignment is a documented argument essay, in which extensive academic research is required. This is understandably overwhelming to many FYC students, and instructors in FYC find that they must spend a significant amount of time teaching students how to conduct online and library research, differentiating among legitimate and illegitimate web sources, documenting sources, and so on.

Our vertical team immediately put a plan in place to build scaffolding to prepare students for rigorous research by introducing it as early as grade six and adding skills and assignments each year so that by the end of twelfth grade, students will have written at least one lengthy researched argument in preparation for college. In essence, our work revealed gaps and suggested ways to bridge those gaps in order to make students as college-ready as possible by the end of twelfth grade.

I feel that this model could be adopted at the school district level, with working teams of teachers across grade levels from K-12 working together to put together the

pieces of an educational puzzle that at the moment seems fragmented and confusing. Elementary schooling is conducted in isolation from middle schooling, which is conducted in isolation from high schooling, so when students transition along this pathway, there are inconsistencies, which lead to missteps, misunderstanding, and an incomplete process. Imagine instead the possibilities of beginning a conversation among educators at all levels, including post-secondary, with college entrance as the end goal for every student. Educators could work backwards to rebuild scaffolding that is secure from the ground up.

From our findings about the lack of high school research preparation, for example, we discussed introducing research principles and methods to students in increasingly rigorous increments from sixth grade through twelfth. By twelfth grade, students would have become fully prepared to engage in the type of scholarly research that they will encounter in their college courses, making that particular aspect of academic transition easier.

Besides addressing academic preparation, which the college access research demonstrates to be a significant barrier to postsecondary education for low-income, marginalized students, I also believe that a discussion along the educational pipeline should include a plan for removing institutional barriers and support for students along the pathway to college. Educators must work together to examine ideological barriers and re-imagine our expectations for Latino/a students. Finally, to address cultural scaffolding, we must collaborate to refocus our efforts toward engaging students through asset-based thinking, culturally relevant schooling, and college preparation. For example,

in the data I have gathered about my research participants, I discovered an already strong orientation toward sharing individual academic successes with families and communities. I believe that this spirit of communal achievement would lend itself well to writing projects that would somehow give back to those communities. This is where my call for compositionists to consider teaching participatory action research over traditional library research was born.

I would like to be clear that I am not merely calling for change within public schools. I feel that vertical conversations should be generated among educators from K-16 in order to create a smooth, seamless transition for students as they move up the educational pipeline and enter post-secondary education. The crucial piece of this will be for educators at all levels, and perhaps in particular for academics within universities, whose access to research gives them a privileged set of resources, to do what ethnographers are bound to do—to take a critical look at ourselves—at our assumptions, at our values, and at our goals as educators.

Building cultural scaffolding is a crucial piece of the college access framework, and understanding how to build this will require a fundamental shift in perspective toward asset-based approaches to integration, rather than expecting all students to merely assimilate to the culture of schooling and of the university. As Villenas and Deyhle report, the literature tells us that for low-income, minoritized students, “withdrawal [...] is usually a voluntary decision, reached after a student fails to become integrated into the intellectual life of his or her college” (92). This is particularly interesting when one considers the lack of congruence between public schools and home cultures, as

researched by González, Moll, and Amanti. “The more a student is integrated into the fabric of a college, the lower the probability that he or she will leave the school,” and this requires integration into the culture of the institution (Villenas and Deyhle 93). If we are willing to look carefully at the assumptions we make at the university about who belongs there and who we are as academics, the term “*ivory tower*” takes on new resonance.

More specifically, we need to be cognizant of the fact that “since dominant culture in the United States is white, minority students are likely to have a disruptive cultural experience in college,” further hindering their chances of persistence (Villenas and Deyhle 93). One suggested remedy is to “encourage the strongest faculty and most committed administrative staff to be fully involved in the education of non-traditional students so that this effort is not considered marginal within the institutions (98-99). So, if for example, the effort of setting minimal goals such as to increase enrollment of Latinos/as to twenty-five percent is considered of marginal importance at an institution in a community with over thirty-seven percent Latinos/as, students will not be fully integrated into that fabric of a college. The e-mentoring program I described in the previous section was developed by a graduate student, piloted by graduate students, and is now being run and taught exclusively by graduate students. The Writing Program Director has been instrumental in supporting these efforts, but perhaps it is time for faculty members in our field to take on this approach to FYC in order to make these efforts sustainable and to rethink the role of FYC in the larger scheme of things.

Re-orienting FYC Research in Service of *Comunidad*

I have mentioned that this research experience has led me to consider alternative approaches to teaching composition at the university level. Beyond e-mentoring, for which I will continue to advocate, especially as the ever-changing world of technology brings exciting new resources to our finger tips every day, I am considering the potential of re-thinking the orientation of FYC even further. Rather than simply providing students with the necessary tools to succeed in college writing assignments, why not re-define what can be valued through research in higher education.

Writing during the Cold War era, Henry Giroux summarized the exigency for radically rethinking literacy. Although the political context has changed, many of the issues at the root of his argument, social and inequity, neoliberal attacks on democratic education, and a general devaluing of the concept of the public good, remain. He eloquently expresses why critical democracy is important and why this should concern educators, and I extend his argument here to make a specific call to compositionists:

What is important to recognize here is the need to reconstitute a radical view of literacy that revolves around the importance of naming and transforming those ideological and social conditions that undermine the possibility for forms of community and public life organized around the imperatives of a critical democracy. *This is not merely a problem associated with the poor and minority groups*, it is also a problem for those members of the middle and upper classes who have withdrawn from public life into a world of sweeping privatization, pessimism, and greed. (“Literacy” 5)

I italicized a line here that I have been trying to emphasize throughout this ethnography. The changes that I am advocating here are important not only for the empowerment of low-income Latino/a students, but they are intended as well to transform the educational system as a whole for the greater public good. As Giroux predicted in the 1980’s, the

path our nation was taking toward “privatization, pessimism, and greed,” has resulted in economic disaster. The nation’s infrastructure is in a shambles, including naturally its schools and universities, and suffering is widespread. Change is necessary.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a qualitative approach to research that goes beyond critical ethnography in terms of its engagement with the research participants. In this model, researchers partner as reciprocally as possible with research participants to illuminate issues that bear attention and action. Together, they devise and implement a project to effect change. As I detail the characteristics of this form of research, I will explain how I feel that each will help re-orient FYC toward the goals that I advocate for in this ethnography: valuing non-traditional funds of knowledge in education, building collaborative partnerships to work for social justice, and participating in a critical process of mutual humanization for the public good.

I use Alice McIntyre’s excellent framework to summarize the key characteristics of P.A.R, which include:

1. The active participation of researchers and participants in the co-construction of knowledge.
2. The promotion of self and a critical awareness that leads to individual, collective, and/or social change.
3. The building of alliances between researchers and participants in the planning, implementation, and dissemination of the research process. (ix)

In academic research as it is most commonly taught in composition courses at my university, individual students pursue inquiry-based research to craft documented arguments surrounding a wide range of issues. Typically, students rely on academic journals, newspapers, magazines, and online sources to support their arguments. While these projects may help prepare students for the most common form of research they will

engage in college classes, they tend to reify the dominant value of individualism and the dominant educational model of constructing knowledge through the solitary pursuit of knowledge that has already been validated. Introducing P.A.R. as a research method, in contrast, re-orientes a student's understanding of how knowledge is gained toward the creation of knowledge in cooperation with others. Already this seems to revive a spirit of true democracy in that there is less reliance on a hierarchy of knowledge production.

Further, the goal of academic research tasks is for students to develop individual skills and consciousness. P.A.R. takes this a step further to promote change. If we consider the current state of affairs in our nation, we might agree that the status quo is no longer working for us. In P.A.R., students are given the opportunity to challenge the status quo, and to do so not in a social vacuum, but by engaging critically with issues affecting the self, the community, and society in general. Typical academic research would stop there. In P.A.R., however, that critical engagement moves beyond analysis and toward action, giving students the experience of applying the knowledge that they co-create through the research process.

Finally, P.A.R. mobilizes university members in the pursuit of social justice by eliminating barriers between the university and communities. The possibility of the university as *agora* is revived, and the concept of critical democracy is invigorated. Students and educators work in concert with community members to promote the public good, and the alliances formed help to destabilize inequitable power structures that seek to maintain the status quo.

These seem like lofty goals, but if educators undertake their work in the spirit of fostering critical democracy, positive change is possible. I call upon my colleagues in composition to consider community-based and social justice-oriented approaches to teaching writing in our university gateway courses, as I have begun to do here, not only for the good of marginalized students, but as Giroux contends, in ways that will have a positive impact on the public good.

Education as Symbiosis

In this final chapter, I have proposed some solutions to the factors I observed that negatively affect Latino/a students along their educational pathways, and I would like to reflect a bit here on what I have personally gained through the education I have received through this process. Most importantly, I feel an even greater urgency to enhance my pedagogy in order to better serve my Latino/a FYC students. One way to do this will be to help equip students to negotiate the discrepancies they feel between their own personal responsibility for learning and the institutional and ideological impediments that they may face. This sentiment was expressed succinctly by a student named Monica, who said: “we need to be given more chances, but still, we need to go out there and get ‘em too.” Without equipping individual students with the means to name their own oppression, their agency may feel limited. To reverse current trends of education and employment, in which the majority of Latino/a members of society are relegated to the low skilled, low wage employment sector, educators at all levels must advocate for these students.

We must set our expectations high and present infinite possibilities for success. I cannot ignore Renata's observation that "there's not many options that us girls, you know, growing up on the Southside have. Or that we see." This is where the importance of teachers connecting with communities is key. It is important for us to understand these students' perceptions and experiences and to be able to work with families and communities to see how we can work together to help students imagine what is attainable—without the walls Ralph Cintron describes. Ms. D. does this through visual representations of success, positive feedback, and setting high expectations in her teaching.

The good work of Latino/a critical scholars should inform the practices of teachers at all levels in order to help us learn how to shift Latino/a students' self-perceptions enough that they all have an opportunity to internalize the asset-based model of identity-formation that the young women I interviewed have been able to achieve. Examples of Latino/a Critical Pedagogy are given in chapter three, and in my own teaching, I strive to incorporate elements of each. Like Ms. D., I also value storytelling in my teaching, and especially when my students work with high school students through our electronic partnership, we value and validate experiential knowledge as a central component of our critical explorations of factors such as race, gender, income, as they relate to opportunities in education.

I have mentioned issues I encountered through this process that I hope will be addressed in future research. First, I feel that it is imperative that as more and more Latino students are being pushed out of schooling, we look for ways to bring about

changes that will focus on this population in particular. Secondly, I advocate using a cultural wealth structure of analysis as I have done for Latinas, to compare the challenges and assets of *pensadores* alongside those of the *pensadoras*. Finally, I would like to follow up further on the issue of labor as it intersects with aspirational capital for Latinos and Latinas.

I have gained a sense from my research thus far that the gendered expectations for work for Latinos has much to do with political economy, and it would be interesting to pursue this line of questioning among male students. Finally, I would wish to explore further whether the forms of cultural wealth I focus on here continue to operate or change for Latinas as they move further along the educational pipeline and beyond. It would be interesting to follow these students or to identify other groups of second-generation Latinas to pursue some of the assumptions I have made here about navigational, familial, and aspirational capital to see what happens as young women move beyond education and into the world of work.

Questions about noticeable inequities in schooling led me to undertake a five-year learning process. The field research I present here is just a sample of the abundance of information one can learn by forging partnerships with community members outside of the university. I have been fortunate in my relationships with educators in the public schools to be given access to experiences and knowledge I would not otherwise have known. My research participants and colleagues in the schools have generously provided me with a rich education so that I might improve my own practice and scholarship, and I am indebted to them. If education is a path, as it is commonly represented to be, the

entire length of it should be conceived with a clear goal that is equally available to all students, and as free from barriers as possible. This requires symbiosis between students, communities, and educational institutions. My hope is that as the political, economic, and educational fields are shifting in this difficult time in history, educators will take on a renewed commitment to rebuilding education from the foundations upward to create a more equitable system for all students.

Reflection

June, 2008.

On a typical, devastatingly hot summer morning on campus, I led a group of fifteen ninth-grade students participating in a GEAR UP summer writing camp to meet a colleague's summer bridge program students. As we approached the group of mostly minoritized eighteen-year olds, my ninth-graders shrank behind me, intimidated at this first encounter with college students. The instructor came forward and greeted us warmly, and with her came her undergraduate assistant, a young woman wearing a college t-shirt and jeans, tightly curled hair pulled back in a ponytail, and a wide, welcoming grin.

It took me a moment to recognize that this young woman was Pamela. We hugged briefly, and as soon as I introduced the ninth graders to their college partners for the morning, we sat down to talk. Just as I had suspected, Pamela had a strong desire to serve her community and to encourage other young Latino/a students to successfully transition to college. She had applied to work for this summer bridge program, a

program she attended herself in the summer after my research project ended, in order to continue working with students from schools similar to hers, and she seemed thrilled to be doing so. The self-confidence she projected in her writing had worked its way outward, and instead of the careful reserve she displayed as a high school senior, college undergraduate Pamela fairly glowed with contentment, purpose, and openness.

Clearly she belonged there, claiming for herself the university colors, the academic buildings, the student union, and the courtyard where we sat and then turning around to help broaden the gateway to this place for others.

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