

EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES REGARDING THE IMPACT OF A COLLEGE
READINESS PROGRAM ON LATINX STUDENTS IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

by
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Abstract

Background: *College Readiness for All: The Challenge for Urban High Schools*, focuses on the importance of improving college readiness for minority students in schools.

College admission standards discussed include coursework, achievement test scores, and grade point averages. One of the many resources that the United States has not utilized in education reform movements is the power educators have in their schools and

surrounding communities. Reforms originated by educators working in marginalized communities are at the forefront of creating successful college programs. **Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of teachers building a competitive college readiness program at Huerta High School. Educators who participated in the program will respond to the research question: What are educators' perspectives

regarding the impact of a college readiness program on Latinx students in an urban high school? In this study, common themes were assessed and evaluated to reflect the core effectiveness of the program, possibly replicating the model to other schools with similar demographics. These themes focus on core components of the program's vision,

academics, work ethic, and identity. **Methods:** This qualitative research study involves a convenience sample using Creswell's approach for case studies as the primary research methodology to triangulate data about the dynamics and value analysis educators have with the college readiness program, archival data of documents from the program, and my personal experience as a Latinx alumna of Huerta High School, an urban setting with majority Latinx population. This case study involves a college readiness program developed here. The four participants were educators who worked and designed the College Readiness Program. Participants engaged in two one-on-one interviews with

questions that included their involvement in the program. Both interviews were approximately 20-30 minutes and transcribed with common themes emerging on the effectiveness of the program. This study was both low-level coding and evolved into high-level coding focused on the common themes generated from the participants as well as the themes of focus from the program itself. To ensure the validity of the study, member checks were included in interviews and documented the research process. **Results:** Findings in this case study showed the emergence of four themes: (1) Vision and mission of the College Readiness Program, an important attribute that participants expressed to focus on a common goal and based their decisions moving forward. (2) Organic relationships between teachers in their respective cohorts working on cross-curricular projects strengthened relationships with students. (3) Educators felt the merchandise and marketing created program identity for student ownership of the program and their education. (4) Participants made it clear, teacher empowerment was the driving force for a successful program focused on the Latinx community and other marginalized students. **Conclusion:** This study reinforces the importance of teachers as masters in their curriculum, experts in program development, and understand its community and resources that would allow marginalized students to thrive. By seeking the perspectives of the College Readiness Program's success, participants expressed decisions for students should begin as a grassroots movement by educators collaborating.

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Chapter I

Introduction

On May 30, 2015, I parked outside of Reliant Arena for the first graduation ceremony that I volunteered to sign up for since I started teaching 5 years prior. In the years before that, I never really felt the desire to ever chaperone graduation or prom, but this year was different. There was something special about this graduation. My colleague and I decided to attend our first graduation together. We had a previous College Readiness Program class graduate the year before, but they were sophomores when the program started, and I did not teach them even though I established a good connection over the years with those students. These graduates, the College Readiness Program class of 2015, were my kids. I had them since they were freshmen in my social studies class. In the program, we kept track of them, and they were more than just students to me. I saw them develop and grow from socially awkward teenagers to these incredible young adults.

I paced around looking for my co-worker Minerva, the English I teacher with whom I built a solid interdisciplinary and spotted her already with her cap and gown. We decided to walk around to our former students and congratulate them as we passed before the ceremony took place. As we walked around, we reflected with each student and with each other. Throughout the entire four years, we always asked ourselves if our experiment would pay off. We had wondered if the time and effort that we have invested in this program was worth it. We did agree that it gave us a connection to our students and each other that before we have never felt. As we moved around speaking to each student and hugging them, we approached the first group that would be presented in the

ceremony in the top 5% of their class. All of them were moving off to college, most with full scholarships. This was the first time in Huerta High School history to have students going to Ivy League colleges and many other universities that we could not even count. Some of these prestigious universities that the students were accepted to included Harvard, Brown, Connecticut, Brandeis, University of Texas, University of Houston, Boston University, and so many others. Then these students took notice of us and they started clapping and smiling in our direction. It was the most emotionally and fulfilling moment I have ever experienced. Everything we worked for, our overtime hours we plugged in, the block parties, Dutch dates, movie nights all of it came and went. The countless number of times the College Readiness Program kids would tease me about crying when the time came for them to graduate. I would casually respond that I would not deny them that satisfaction despite the fact, I knew I would. That moment broke me. Minerva and I looked at each other, with tears in both of our eyes, and in solid realization, we did it. When the kids realized we were crying, you just heard one of them yell out “NOT YET!” and they all charged at us and embraced us with all the gratitude that they had for us. It brings me tears of joy every single moment I think about it.

Fast forward to today, large portions of these students went to college, graduated, and have become young professionals in the world. Some of them are even moving forward toward graduate school. Many of them still stay connected with us and, at times, still request we meet with them for coffee as they see us as mentors. It was unknown that in the summer of 2011 when we first began diving into the development of the program, it would influence us and the community of Huerta High School.

Statement of the Problem

When one grows up in a predominately low-income community, and does not venture outside one's neighborhood, let alone their own block, often life around their silo becomes the norm. This was life and it was normal. One is seeing their future before their eyes in their family and neighborhood. I am a first-generation Mexican American who grew up in the Southeast area of Houston. Growing up in a large family consisting of seven girls, my mom stayed at home and raised us all while my father worked for the city cutting lawns making a maximum wage of \$24,000 a year until his retirement in 2004. Despite the low-income with a large family, my parents wanted to make sure we grew up in a friendly neighborhood and managed to purchase a home in the southeast part of Houston in the mid-1980s in an area that was shifting from mostly white neighbors to Latinx families. The family trips we could afford to take were trips to visit my grandparents in Mexico during holidays and an occasional trip to Six Flags Astroworld. I never felt poor, underrepresented, nor angry at society. I had a caring family, great friends, and maintained pretty good grades in school as long as I finished my homework and stayed out of trouble. I was a model student. My mom mentioned before that my sister and I were anomalies in the family since we would come home from school and place ourselves in the kitchen table to do homework without being told. My parents expected all their children to get a diploma as they felt it would help us and it wasn't something they had themselves. Once we received our diploma, we were able to find work. I didn't realize then, but I had a large advantage of being the youngest in my family than my sisters did. Their experiences in school and life choices have paved the way for the decisions I would make for myself as I grew older. My five older sisters

graduated from high school, found jobs and most married in their early twenties. I observed my siblings and absorbing their lives which allowed me to figure out what I wanted as a kid without realizing I was learning from them. For some time, I saw my future in my sisters and that is what I expected of myself. However, I did not realize that my sisters had the opportunity to graduate high school, but the opportunities when they were in school were still very limited and oppressing Latinxs. Looking back and the way the school system and policies implemented in the 90s, most of the opportunities they mentioned to me were taking vocational courses. Their honors or advanced courses were never challenging and lead them nowhere concerning opportunities presented beyond the classroom. I went to school at a perfect time when organizations started to focus on low-income minorities and programs as well as organizations were introduced to Huerta High School. Higher Education wasn't part of our vocabulary.

Many of my former classmates followed the cycle of expectations like my sisters that were set for their future while I moved forward along a different avenue. Being a model student, I was in school my teachers recommended me to a program called Upward Bound that exposed me to the possibility of doing something more and chose to be different. I never really realized until now that I was in a different trajectory than my family had ever expected. I also never realized how isolated and sheltered students like me were regarding lack of opportunities and college readiness even when given a chance. It was not until I was enrolled at the University of Houston obtaining my masters and working at the same campus I graduated from when I realized that I was an outlier of my community and why. The different factors that lead to the continuing cycle of poverty

and social structure in predominately Latinx communities lead many of my former peers to live the life their parents and families have.

A 2007 article on the Houston Chronicle showcased that, in Texas forty-two of the one hundred eighty-five high schools in Texas were known as “dropout factory” high schools were in the Houston area (Scharrer, 42 Houston-area schools 'dropout factories', 2007). A high school that is deemed a “dropout factory” when their high school senior enrollment is 40% less than that of when they were freshmen. These sorts of outcomes in education would lead to an economic downturn for the area if they were not addressed. It is also reported that Latinxs make up the largest percentage of students enrolled in the public-school system but have the highest dropout rate with some claimed reports of up to 45% (Scharrer, 42 Houston-area schools 'dropout factories', 2007). What sort of factors contributes to the perpetual state of repetition within Latinx communities that remain low on the socioeconomic scale?

Houston is the most diverse city in the United States and is the third most populated city (Mejia, 2017). Its largest school district is [Sol] ISD with almost a quarter of a million students matriculated in their campus base. Of the population, 74.93% are economically disadvantaged and 61.84% of these students identified primarily as Latinx (HISD, 2019). Many contributions, such as my continuing education and experience as a teacher going back, led me to find out the reason why my campus was stuck in a cycle that it could not break until the issue was not only presented through news articles and research studies but also addressed.

Latinxs have always struggled with attaining equal education and opportunities for higher education (Gandara & Contreras , 2009). According to the United. States.

Census Bureau, between 1994-2015, the percentage of the population of both foreign-born Latinxs and native Latinxs was drastically less than that of other races in the United States (Bauman & Ryan, 2016). The Bachelor's Degree by Population, available in appendix A, displays the percentage of individuals who are 25 years of age or older that have obtained at least a bachelor's degree or higher between 1988 to 2015 by race. Asians represent the most educated population, followed by the white, non-Latinxs, and further down blacks and Latinxs which is visibly showcased by how large the educational gaps are.

During the 1980s, Houston experienced an economic boom and many Latinxs migrated to seek job opportunities (Klineberg, 2008). With the rise of the population of immigrants, the enrollment for these first-generation Latinx students also rose. How would the education system be any different for the first generation Latinx Americans in an urban school system? What would some factors contribute to making a positive impact on low-income urban schools whose demographics are predominately Latinx for our present community?

My parents have always mentioned to me and my sisters the reason why they left Chicago in the 1980s, was because of the surge of gang members and activities that were taking place and they wanted to make sure that none of their children to get influenced by them. Growing up with six older sisters and most of them raised during the 1990s gave me the insight of how there was a lack of opportunities that they were receiving. Many of them did not take advanced courses as there weren't many offered to them and their local high schools only program was a program certified for a vocation of welding that targeted the males of their high school. A high school diploma was an achievement for my family

and that is the anthem my parents preached to all of us. “Consiguen so diploma, y luego pueden ser lo que usted quieren en la vida.” Which is what I remember hearing growing up to my sisters while they were in school. All of them did receive their diploma with a few struggles and they went on to start working for department stores as well as get employed in the education system as paraprofessionals. Any other form of the higher-level job was out of reach for them.

My mom was always insisting that my sister who was a little over a year older than me and myself were an anomaly. We would come home and get our homework done without being told to do so. In the early 2000s, we were always one of the first people considered when an organization visited that wanted to expose marginalized students to opportunities and even to think about college. This is something I did not start taking seriously until my 10th-grade year in school as I did not know anything past what my siblings have done or any of my relatives. Organizations that reach out to low-income and first-generation students were starting to reach out to my community. However, despite this outreach, there were still struggles from the school itself to provide these opportunities for college readiness on their merit.

Purpose of the Study

As expectations in society evolve, public education must rethink different methods to be able to cater to the ever-changing needs and build it into school systems. Not only are we required to think of what the demands are in their society, but we also must think of how we can create productive and active members of society in their students. By this, we must understand our students more. The expectations of society would not be met if the needs of the students were not met in the first place.

Unfortunately, many of these school districts still follow the old instruments of education and have broad expectations for all their students as if they were not diverse or come from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Within the first year of the program, there was a high number of students that had an extremely difficult time adjusting to the high school rigor that developed in the College Readiness Program. We experienced a lot of pushback from the students enrolled in the program as they argued they never signed up for it or would request to be removed from the program completely. The standards and expectations were raised in the program for both the teachers and the students. The teachers, feeling empowered through the development of the program, were already bought in and building the momentum with each other. However, students were not accustomed to the challenge, rigor, or critical curriculum that was presented to them. This sort of higher expectation is something I can identify within my educational experience.

The purpose of this study is to focus on Huerta High School's college readiness program between 2010-2017 within the perspective of the educators involved including myself. Huerta High School is a school in the Southeast part of Houston that is predominately Latinx and was built in the early 2000s to alleviate the ever-growing population of high school students in the neighboring community. Huerta High School was stabilized in graduation rates; however, they lost many talented students to other schools because there was no focus on students who wanted to further their education. A group of classroom teachers and administrators created a high achieving academic program for low-income first-generation college-bound students. They gathered in the

summer of 2010 to create a mission statement, rules, and rigorous standards that we were going to develop.

The creation of the program was to facilitate, track, and foster students throughout their high school career and lead them to graduate from their choice of college and universities. One of the main goals of the program was to be competitive in the college access and readiness amongst other high schools that had already been deemed more successful to which Latinx High had lost enrollment to in previous years. By 2015, the first class from the College Readiness Program graduated high school. This single case study will be qualitative and will interview educators from the program to grasp their viewpoints on central components of the program, experiences, and motivations to be part of the program. In analyzing their perspectives, I would hope to be able to reveal the necessity for teacher empowerment and the capability of creating a College Readiness Program that is teacher-driven to build a community of students and teachers who strive for and are prepared for higher education.

It has been over 8 years since the creation of the program, the class of 2015 soon has become the class of 2019, and many have graduated from their respected colleges. The program evolved over this time to meet the needs of the students and revisions that were needed to make it successful for other students to obtain the same level of college readiness as any other class before. I will be interviewing educators who took part in the program and assess their opinions on the program and its effectiveness on the students, school, and community. I will also be investigating to what capacity they feel empowered as educators to organize and sustain the College Readiness Program as well the effectiveness they felt the program had on Latinx students and the community.

Research Question

What are educators' perspectives regarding the impact of a college readiness program on Latinx students in an urban high school?

This is a qualitative case study that has an overarching question that will primarily be focused on educators' experiences in the College Readiness Program utilizing three main components or themes that we developed to recruit students. These components are vision, community building, strong identity, and teacher empowerment. Each component will begin with a leadoff question that allows the educators to be interviewed to express themselves with their responses. If needed to facilitate the interview, I have created a list of follow-up questions for the participants. In addition to the lead-off question, I will be analyzing their responses with covert categories.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to focus directly on the successes of a college readiness program that was created by educators for students. I was part of Huerta High School and the resources for bridging students to be college-ready were not available during my time as a student. This case study is unique as I want to dissect the successes of the program from the eyes of the educators as well as my own. The history of the school, the perspectives of the educators, and my own experiences as a student and educator would serve as a significant part of the study to find the success threads of the college readiness program. By the end of the research, I would like to present members of the public school system the possibility of creating a college access readiness program that would promote academic growth, rigor, and flexibility by empowering educators from within their campuses who are familiar with their students and community.

Since the “A Nation at Risk” report was published in 1983, there have been extra measures to hold districts accountable for schools and teachers in the classroom. At that point, stakeholders and families became concerned about the lack of growth or achievement that students were having in the United States compared to other countries. Countless education reforms have been circulated within the last 35 years since and many other studies have been conducted to try to bridge the education gap between low-income minority students in urban schools and districts with predominately white students. These measures required standardized testing that did more harm than good since the majority of urban schools are not similar to each other and lack many resources (Ravitch, Reign of Error, 2013). However, standardizing content and curriculum does not resolve the issue. As more research is made on public education, particularly in urban schools, there is more push for differentiated instruction including the checking of the educators’ own bias and the cultural understanding of their students (Gorski, 2008). Students that come from different socioeconomic backgrounds have required different needs, and which affect these students and their learning.

To be able to make urban schools more successful, school districts must deviate away from the formalized curriculum and standardized testing that has been implemented since the beginning of public education. Most of the curriculum and tests are very much based on maintaining the status quo and not allowing the economic mobility of these minority communities. Certain approaches to these reforms that would make these urban schools with large Latinx and black populations focus specifically on the students and the communities they are part of. This also includes actions that can be taken that would empower the students to take action in their education.

By providing schools the blueprint of a college readiness program that advocates for students' academic growth, empowerment, the neighborhood, and community may also experience a positive impact. The College Readiness Program also gives a large role to the teachers that are in the classroom and focuses on the teachers as the experts. Most teachers are unaware of the power they have within the curriculum and their classroom because of the various policies that come out from the top, but the transfer of knowledge takes place in the classroom with the control of the teacher. To be able to realize the expertise and experience of their students- teachers can create a stronger relationship with students, the school, and families.

Besides, having a strong curriculum-based program that utilizes critical pedagogy and teacher empowerment, schools can retain students as well as teachers within their community rather than losing them to a neighboring community that takes away funds and additional resources. As many districts and schools that are suffering from high attrition attempt to find solutions to be able to maintain their numbers, the focus must be set forth at not only the bubble students or failing students but moreover the students that can bring additional resources and funding to the school. A school's attendance is one of the primary sources of funding. By allowing, the stronger components of this program and the adjustments or revisions that can be made in different campuses' schools can experience a program similar to the College Readiness Program in this study and experience the positive outcomes that come from it. These sorts of programs, however, do still require much time and investment to be successful, particularly the buy-in of the faculty. If there is a lack of motivation or drive from the staff members, there will be a lack of growth or buy-in from the students themselves. Finding the right staff members

who are willing to invest their time in such a program is crucial to a fledgling program, especially when the teachers are at the forefront of the entire enterprise.

Researching the successes of a program by interviewing these key players and having them assess the components that made a program successful can make it possible for other programs that are developed by teachers to be created. These key players are the educators who were behind the creation and revisions of the college readiness program. Much like curriculum, these types of programs are not lockstep solutions. They require constant revisions and adjustments per the community it is serving as well as the change of times. Being able to utilize the key aspects of a successful program, there is a chance to be able to provide opportunities for students in low-income areas to attain higher education levels as well as improve the community's conditions over time.

Definitions of Terms

- *Latinx* is the gender-neutral term and alternative phrase for Latino or Latina who identifies themselves from Latin American ethnicity or cultural identity in the United States.
- *Education Gap* in this paper is primarily the inequities that marginalized students have in comparison to their more white and privileged classmates. This includes educational attainment, resources, networking, funding, etc.
- *White Flight* is usually defined as a result of mostly white middle-class families that leave urban schools and urban settings and their diversity for a more homogenous and exclusive setting. This mostly results in increasing segregation and decreases property values, school funding, and access to resources in these urban settings. (Holmes, Massey, & Warrington, 2014)

- *Neoliberal* in the context of education and reform is the attempt of improving schooling by utilizing policies of a school of choice and holding accountability but instead continue to lead race inequities and segregation in public education.
- *Critical Pedagogy* refers to the practices of teachers that go against traditional curriculum and approaches to encourage students in multicultural readings to find commonalities within texts and to start making a connection from these alternative texts. It is a process to deconstruct, educate, and empower the students who are historically underserved in problem-solving by presenting them the challenges they face in society.
- *School-to-Prison-Pipeline* is a term coined for children who are funneled and targeted in public schools by policies such as “Zero-tolerance” to criminalize vulnerable populations of students who have been historically marginalized for minor infractions which lead them eventually to the criminal justice system.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

There have been different programs and organizations in Houston that have the last few decades whose focus is to enhance college and career readiness in marginalized students. Many of these programs are created to bridging the education gap among low-income minorities. Some of them were created to meet the demand for college-educated positions that were opening up but mostly to combat the education gap that had increased since the public education system was created in the United States. Low-income minorities received far fewer opportunities to grow from their economic status and it has been an issue that has never been addressed until the United States began to compare themselves to other countries with education attainability to their population (Education, 1983). However, one thing that is underreported when it comes down to presenting comparative analysis with two different countries is the factors that contribute to the lack of higher education for low-income minorities (Apple, 2001). Policies are then created, and accountability measures are set at a standard for all the areas of the U.S. without measuring the factors that attribute to why certain areas have become more successful than others have (Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, 2010). These policies such as No Child Left Behind or Race to the Top with their Common Core Standards target curriculum and promote competitions resulting in these reform movements for charter schools (Holmes, Massey, & Warrington, 2014) These ideologies blame the students and the teachers whereas a different approach would seek to address the systematic inequities that are occurring in these communities.

Different factors would contribute to the lack of academic growth for low-income minorities. Such factors would include urban education to which this case study takes place in. Living in larger populated cities brings in a large amount of diversity and different backgrounds from and they are all zoned in different areas. People who are in public education in any way need to consider these different backgrounds to be able to understand the variety of communities that they have to deal with regarding developing a measure to increase minority students in higher education. Other factors that contribute to the success and failures of education are looking at alternatives to public education. We have had different waves of new methods to education that can either continue to hurt the population such as, the privatization movement with charter schools. Charters can defund public education which exacerbates the growing divide between impoverished communities and other social classes (Ravitch, *Reign of Error*, 2013). Whether this privatization movement is well-intended or not, it often brings out consequences over time by stripping away from the community the talent that would help them to grow, such as magnet school systems. Alternatively, some programs allow the population it targets to flourish such as school within a school concept, which roots itself with the feeling of private/magnet type of schooling inside a public campus. It all depends on how these new methods are presented and sold to the families in the community.

Two areas of focus for the improvement of low-income minorities that can combat the education gap for low-income minorities are the 1. focus in the classroom and 2. educator's empowerment. The contribution, potential, and dedication that come from educators need to be at the forefront of any educational movement. Educators can be at the forefront of the student's life. Teachers may know their students better than they

know anyone in public education. Having teachers become the curriculum specialists would allow for differentiated instruction for each student in their classroom. It would also bring about the culturally responsive pedagogy that is necessary for us to understand the community and the students in this community. It would also allow the students to critically engage in their education to become self-advocates and advocates for others.

Urban Education

In the early 1900s, high schools were institutionalized in the public-school system, but there were separate but equal laws even in the public education for Latinx and black students (Holmes, Massey, & Warrington, 2014). Many urban schools were highly accredited for being positive and moving toward a very progressive outcome for much of white society. Many urban schools were highly accredited for being positive and moving toward a very progressive outcome for much of white society. However, once schools desegregated because of *Brown v. Board of education* (1954) many minority students were allowed to attend schools in their local communities, which were predominately white-only schools.

In the 1970s, [Sol] Independent School District was in a lawsuit because they attempted to classify Mexican American students as white so they can integrate them with black students while still being able to keep white students separated from minority students. Mexican American community organizers felt disadvantages and fought against discrimination in schools (San Miguel, 2005). Many white parents who did not want these changes to occur because it would impact the schools and reduce their effectiveness with their students started taking their students to different schools outside of the city, and even creating policies like “school of choice” that would be either private or selective

schools. During this period, not only did desegregation change society and social issues but white flight reaffirmed segregation and racial inequity in the education system (Tolbert & Theobald, P, 2006). It reinforced religious, racial, and class privilege for the dominant white class and maintained the status quo as many of the white families would leave their communities schools and in doing so, would also take away the resources and opportunities with them. Urban environments then became affected disproportionately by the institutional changes from a white flight where resources and economic conditions shifted. Lower value in a community also creates lower income for the school in general and provided limited resources for the minority students that stayed in the community schools. As a result, it took less than a century for urban education to go from extremely positive for white families to a negative when they rushed away from desegregation and bombarded the low-income minority families with issues and lack of resources that we see today (Holmes, Massey, & Warrington, 2014).

Equity & Social Justice. The term “urban” is designated to a city, suburb, or high-populated area (Holmes, Massey, & Warrington, 2014). Urban or metropolitan areas are generally very diverse in population because cities have access to multiple numbers of opportunities for families, such as a vast network of jobs available. Families flock to these urban areas and bring their children. The increase in children in the area brings the demand for educational opportunities. However, the educational system presented is not created equal for every student. Urban areas present a diverse population, which includes race, sex, social-economic status (SES), culture, etc., all of which present a challenge to urban school districts and their approach to educational standards and curriculum to be able to create opportunities for low-income students to be academically successful.

Demographics fluctuate from different urban settings, but low SES will always create issues for students learning if they are not addressed since so many of these students lack resources and opportunities, to begin with. When analyzing the way wealth is distributed in an urban environment, particularly that of Houston, one can notice the different opportunities that are available within those diverse areas. Some areas are far wealthier than others are, while many do not have sufficient resources available to them (Achinstein, Ogawa, & Speigleman, 2004). To be part of the education system is similar to having to play the game of life. Individuals have preconceived notions about their demographic background and social class that already gives a barrier of the different opportunities that would be available to them. The higher the social income level that you are in, the more opportunity for access that you have and you can move around the board more freely than the rest of the population (Bowles & Gintis, 2002). Individuals with this advantage in the game then try to stay with the advantage and opportunities and create

policies and laws that would prevent those who do not have them from ever having the chance to gain the same advantages. These particular individuals attempt to convince the general population that they are playing in the same game as everyone else is, however, they have been granting themselves these unfair advantages for the longest time. This is the same thing within the education system that then filters in the larger society (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

This is where issues arise when it comes down to providing for urban education. Urban school districts have extremely diverse populations and they generally fluctuate between areas. Appendix Item B shows the diverse ethnicities during 2017 and is representing the enrollment of [Sol] Independent School District. Most of the population in an urban district are minority students from low-income families. The socioeconomic background of each child can be extremely different and can be straining on the child's education. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) when there are issues such as lack of food, money, or other scarcity of other resources going on at home or in the general environment, the child cannot learn unless they are addressed. There have been different studies that justify the child's academic success to that of their family income. According to Bowels and Gintis' (2007), *Schooling in Capitalist America* demonstrated that the families' status of wealth and income is more of a determinant on the student's future economic success compared to their parents. The economic advantage of the family presents different types of opportunities that are made available to them as more wealthy individuals have a larger network of connections than those who are from poorer families. Regardless of the students' intelligence and the amount of schooling they receive, in capitalist America, their fate has already been set by their families' wealth. If

students do not have resources or connections, their opportunities to move up in the socioeconomic status are nonexistent (Bowles & Gintis, 2002).

Many students in low-income families have poor health and little to no transportation that prevents them from having many absences in school. A potential effect could be the child get behind in school and possibly drop out (Jenson, 2009). In many cases, there is a huge educational gap between the rich and the poor. Those children who are born into poverty remain there while those who are born into wealthy communities remain wealthy, thus creating a larger gap as generations pass (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). This by any means is no accident.

Some of the federal policies that are mandated maintain the cycle of poverty. The arrangements of the distribution of resources are spread unequally around the regions/district, including funding, that many of the low socioeconomic areas get fewer resources than their wealthy neighbors. The justification for this is because many of the wealthy communities tend to be deemed more 'successful' than their poor counterparts (Anyon, 2014). As it turns out, the individuals who benefit the most from these resources have historically been the same homogenous group throughout history - those who have power remain in power. In most cases, minorities would not be able to break into these successful groups unless they choose to assimilate to the dominant group's expectations. It is a rarity when low-income minorities can push through these barriers with their own cultural identity intact, but it is not impossible (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). However, these groups in power have already systemized ways in which low-income, non-white children become a product of their environment and end up occupying positions that are the least desirable and with limited mobility. These positions include

prison, service industry, labor industry, and low-ranking military positions (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Teaching in an urban high school classroom and the need to be engaging for both the student and the teacher can be very difficult. Having an active and culturally rich school is required to be able to address issues from around the world to have the students make a connection and becoming more aware of their surroundings, especially their community. Unfortunately, there has been a systematic cycle of teaching that has not been shaken off and has been enforced over the past few decades that require students to not think critically and become disengaged with their surroundings and their environment (Saltman, 2014). Policy holders have created students to be comfortable and numb in their school setting. This obsession with making schools into businesses could be seen by the way schoolwork and testing has invaded the student's childhood. Children seem to always must be kept busy at all the time. As a result, they are become worn out, overscheduled, and we are creating a cohort of children that would not be able to think on their own. These children then become a generation of passive, non-risk takers, and numb citizens with no imagination or self-reliance. (Watson, 2008)

Another aspect to consider within the urban school systems and districts that support diverse students from various low socioeconomic backgrounds, or SES backgrounds, is the ongoing engagement of test-taking and comparison to others. In most cases, urban school districts tend to fall behind suburban districts, which are very much similar in demographics. The U.S. even compares their schools to other countries and considers these urban districts as failing. According to Noddings' (2013), one of the problems with urban education is the notion that public schools are deemed failures

because of the standardized tests that they are given. The reason why this is not a valid argument to make about the American school system is that there is a comparison made within other countries and many of these other countries have homogenous populations and having very many different educational policies (Noddings, 2013). The countries are even much smaller compared to the United States has a larger landscape with diverse populations of urban and rural areas results would differ even within itself. Even in some of these countries, children can be separated by their families and are funneled through different education programs which isn't part of the education in the U.S. Within some capacity, much like America, some of these students do not make it all the way and drop out (Noddings, 2013). The accountability of dropout rates is never compared when comparing test scores. Each urban area holds pockets of diversity within itself. Results do not show true if such diverse groups from different backgrounds are held to the same standards and expectations if they are from different regions, backgrounds, and even hold a different history. The main note of all of this is that urban education and the public school system in these urban districts have been under attack by politics.

Politicizing Public Schools. There has been a political debate where scholars and intellectual curriculum professionals have little access to policies and play little to no roll in the creation of school curriculum because the United States is paranoid in a test-driven society. According to Connelly and Xu's (2008), *The Landscape of Curriculum and Instruction: Diversity and Continuity*, the concept of curriculum theory is an intellectual debate. Connelly himself, a well-known critic on the policies that the U.S. government has placed in public education, expressed that public education is being used against the specialization of educators and politicizing the school system and the education of the youth (Connelly & Xu, 2008). Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), criticized the current education system for being a banking system where the teacher 'deposits' knowledge and the students get 'filled' by this knowledge and memorize it. There is no back and forth dialogue of communication or actual learning occurring (Freire, 1970). This is problematic because critical conversations allow students to analyze their place in society. Particularly themes are consistent for minority students from low-income communities (Egan, 2008). This sort of indoctrination from the status quo does not allow critical engagement for the students who are educated. It also refuses to use multicultural education, as those in power do not want the oppressed group to gain knowledge, identity, power, and self-advocacy (Egan, 2008).

When the education system first began during the Greek era, it was primarily to make sure children were raised to the way they meet the expectations that society requires them to be functioning adults (Egan, 2008). However, when the idea of school systems continued to the United States, much of the Eurocentric curriculum was also carried over. Horace Mann, also known as Father of the Common Education, actually

was a primary advocate for all universal education when he was selected as a secretary in Massachusetts' Board of Education (Taylor, 2010). He brought the importance to educate the masses to bring harmony and balance to society and the government (Warder, 2015). Mann was advocating for more access and equity in education to allow some to have an advantage while allowing others to continue with the cycle of poverty and indoctrination of having society be the way it is. Many of these students are low-income students, and roughly, all of them are students of color, including Latinxs and blacks. Students of color were still struggling to be part of the education system and most public school systems never were considerate of the perpetual system of oppression they continued to engage in for these groups. We have come a long way since the days of Horace Mann, however, the outcomes and effects of the past still transcend in society today.

How do we combat the public policies for education so that low-income minority students can be more successful in society? Not only can we make them advocates for their education, but we can also educate them to allow their communities to thrive. Our public schools need to reflect and understand what exactly engages to students to be active in their education, Noddings believed the mind frame of educators or administrators believing indoctrination is what public school systems are built for should be tossed out. We have to start thinking of educating the whole individual. This would include pushing for civics courses that would bring in a sense of community for the students. The sense of community and civic engagement would have the individual educated to have a sense of understanding of the importance of being a global (Noddings, 2013). These ideas for education and curriculum are not particularly new.

They have been in circulation with education philosophers like Paulo Freire and John Dewey (Dewey, 1916).

The way we can understand curriculum studies is to look at it through history starting from John Dewey. Dewey's curriculum concept has been a staple in educational concepts since the early 20th century. Its primary focus is the curriculum and the child. In Dewey's *Democracy and Education* (1916), the curriculum comes from the students and their own experiences. The community, faculty, staff, and students are all involved in the development of curriculum in one form or another (Dewey, 1916). Dewey coined the term democratic education which does not follow the same concepts or ideas that most political policies that are implemented in the public school system, it is the direct opposite. Democratic education realizes that students are not passively taking in knowledge, but that they are more likely to learn when they become actively engaged in the learning process (Hongisfeld, 2013). Curriculum for these sort of democratic schools, or even classrooms, allow the teachers to become a larger part in the development in curriculum because they are aware of what actively gets their students engaged. This in turn also allows students to become more receptive to the curriculum that is being taught in the classroom and allows a voice for parents and the community. Dewey believed that in a democratic society, democracy was more than just government (Dewey, 1916). According to Dewey, democracy is the way the people in that society are participants and in turn, need to be educated to be the most proactive citizens to be able to fulfill their role. He believed teaching these students to be critical about their education would lead to increased engagement in their civil duties. Dewey trusted that fluid communication and interactive curriculum of both teachers and students would enable groups to work

together for a more coexisting society and it would allow students to break down the barriers of class, race, and territory that have kept many of them from reaching their full potential (Noddings, 2013).

The community has the right to express their concern over the child's education and an overview of policies (Anyon, 2014). Parents have all the justification to be aware of the child's school and the standards that are required. This has not been the case in the most recent years. Many schools have pushed away from the community base that unifies the student, teacher, and parent relationships. This causes a strain and mistrust of the parents. When this bond breaks, it creates suspicions that can lead to many different legislations implemented on the schools with parental approval (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Different policies that have been implemented in the last two decades have caused a rift in the public-school system and its surrounding communities.

We are consistently referring to accountability, rankings, competition, effectiveness, and although these terms are not useless, they do tend to deviate away from the community vision and direct it to the business model and mind-frame (Noddings, 2013). This, in turn, makes policies that are funded through corporations more appealing. Since the report of *Nation at Risk* was published in the 1980s, there have been many policies that have been implemented on the federal and state levels to try to fix this so-called "endangerment of mediocrity" by having lower international scores than other countries (Ravitch, *Reign of Error*, 2013). It was during this time that many corporate leaders influenced the political agendas and developed templates that would raise the standards by using assessments and high-stakes tests that would pave the way for policies that we are experiencing today (Anyon, 2014). A few examples of these business model

policies are parents usually afraid that their children would not make wise decisions when it comes to their education and it would hinder their progress in school and their chance at becoming much more successful adults than they ever were (Noddings, 2013). Parents are usually misguided by these different legislations and they become policies in the school's systems that target certain schools to be deemed "failures".

When schools are considered "failures", parents in these communities flock to a different outlet for their child's future which often leads families to charter or privatized schools, leaving their home school to crumble. The school then becomes a shell of what it once was and, over time, the neighborhood around it begins to erode as well. The different schools that they gravitate to are usually for-profit charter or privatized schools that are endorsed by policymakers (Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, 2010). Reformers claim to care about the poverty rates in urban schools but they never address these issues. Rather they insist that private management in the school system is the answer and ignore the social and racial segregation within (Ravitch, *Reign of Error*, 2013).

For all children to thrive and have equal educational opportunities, the public-school system must be preserved and strengthened. Students usually leave public education because their parents are concerned with their "failing" school to a private or charter school system that provides vouchers or lottery system for the student's enrollment. However, because of this, the student takes with them the funding for this school and it weakens the school, community, and the concept of public education. There is no need for us to focus on alternatives such as private schools, vouchers, or charter schools when we have not even found ways to improve the public schools themselves

(Noddings, 2013). The effects of students leaving their public school are further impacted by the community to which they belong, as it would not allow the community to flourish because the talent is being outsourced to other communities (Scott, Pyne, & Means, 2014). Regardless of politics, both conservatives and liberals argue for a more effective public-school system that includes practices that are from the past, but more rigorous accountability measures for schoolteachers for a better job of teaching the youth. Policymakers make these arguments but fail to avoid overemphasis on testing and privatization and choose to ignore an important topic to be able to create more active and engaged citizens and that is including cultural politics in education (Saltman, 2014).

However, these neoliberal reformers call to make sure districts treat these public schools as if they were businesses by injecting corporate concepts of the school of choice, competition, and deregulation (Egan, 2008). These p pits students against one another rather than having them united together in a common goal of success and rising together to build their community. These reforms directly affect the working class and poor communities and thus increasingly repress many of these students. This leads to the perpetual cycle of poverty in their communities and leaves them vulnerable to be targeted for low wage jobs, the school to prison pipeline and low-ranking military positions (Elias, 2013).

The pedagogical approaches to these new popular corporate-driven school reforms are usually very rigid, competitive and very much scripted and allow no agency for the students and the educators in the classroom to create critical thoughts of their own (Egan, 2008). These schools also have a primary focus on keeping their appeal to their target parents and focus on standardized testing throughout the school year to keep their

scores high. Certain corporate non-profit examples that are supported by these neoliberals would be a corporate non-profit charter school such as KIPP being managed by a for-profit business called Edison Learning (Egan, 2008). Thus, this proceeds to the systemic cycle of regurgitation of information just to meet standards and no critical pedagogy being emphasized for the identity and empowerment of the student. Educators will get approaches that are more repressive to teaching and learning that give more emphasis on controlling the student's minds. Any form of deviation from these norms in the classroom calls for punishment and in some cases the students to be released (Saltman, 2014). Once the student is released from these rigid school systems, they go back to their community schools.

Alternatives to Public Education and Examples

Accountability measurements in public education have been, at some points, the forefront to approach the educational gap with new alternative methods in public education. Alternative routes can also hold dire consequences for public education. Some of these alternatives include the privatization movement that gears public-school funds into charter school systems that do not have the proper training or accountability measures themselves. Alternatively, to keep students matriculated into the public schools they are zoned too, districts began to create magnet programs that would cater to the interest of families and would allow the students to gain knowledge and skills in a chosen profession they were interested in. Each public school that participated in it would have their specialized profession and students would be able to apply to them like a school of choice. Another alternative for the public education is schools creating programs

themselves by administrators and teachers called ‘school within a school’ as they are within a public school but run within their cohorts (Nehring, 1998).

Charter Schools. The privatization movement for charter schools in the education system began because many people argued that the school system is broken. There was a strive to end the broken school system by letting the students choose where they wanted to go to school because their neighborhood school was failing. Al Shanker, a charter school advocate, and pioneer felt that charter schools would be able to reinvigorate the promise of the American dream and promote social mobility for children of working-class families and cohesions for America’s diversity (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). As a result, there was a formation of policies that allowed charter schools to develop in some low-income areas where many of these charter schools would engage with the community as being the best alternative to their child’s designated home school. Since there were many politicians and so-called education ‘professionals’ that would deem these schools as failing to the public, many of these low-income families did not truly question their analysis. Many parents took these policymakers’ word for it and attempted to matriculate their children into these charter schools who were being praised as a better alternative to public education for their community.

There is no such thing as a perfect school system or a 100% educational structure. Diane Ravitch (2013), pointed out that education has actually been increasing and improving rather than it is decreasing. The United States has had more students enrolled in school, a higher graduation rate, higher college admissions and even students from backgrounds that have been previously considered as a struggling group have improved.

Of course, it is not at the best point, but education for all has progressed dramatically compared to 50 years ago. The truth is,

Our urban schools are in trouble because of concentrated poverty and racial segregation (Ravitch, *Reign of Error*, 2013).

The fact that we try to utilize accountability measures for these public schools but don't question why they would have low graduation rates or low scores for a standardized test is what will continue to keep these schools from improving. Instead, we attempt to solve this problem by putting a Band-Aid, which results in displacing the students from their community to let them know they do not belong in such a community, and they deserve better than the teachers do in that school and their peers do. The truth is, they do deserve better and to pinpoint these public schools as the enemy to these parents prevents the growth of the community and takes away the potential talent.

Charter schools take away funding for the public-school districts when they take students away that are zoned directly to their local campus (Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, 2010). The more students that leave the school, the fewer funds the school has for resources. These resources are not only items like pencils, papers, and pens- these resources would include funds for another teacher, paraprofessional, or administrator, which would bring more of a positive impact for the school. The results of this create a perpetual cycle of poverty for these families in the area as taking away the resources available to the school would take away the opportunity to alleviate the educational gap for the entire community. If these issues are not addressed, the schools that lose their funding will be at risk of being taken over by the state if their scores do not increase and politicizing these public schools as failures bring many policy

stakeholders to look at charter schools as the answer. There have been cases in which policyholders took the opportunity to privatize the entire state and turn them into charter schools.

This situation happened in Louisiana after countless measures that deemed the schools as “failures” without actually creating policies that would focus on the socioeconomic struggles of the communities in these schools (Schneider, 2016). Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005 and devastated the entire state that was already suffering from poverty and the lack of support and mistakes that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), created more problems for the residents of New Orleans. As a result, Katrina was the catalyst for the education reforms in Louisiana and the charter advocates such as Arne Duncan, who was CEO of Chicago Public Schools at the time but later became Secretary of Education under Barack Obama’s Presidency, took advantage of the opportunity of the poor state it was in and made it clear that the public school system was a failure (Klein, 2008). Policymakers pushed for vouchers and charter schools as the answer to break the cycle of these failing communities and their children can choose the schools, they want their children to attend. Thus, making education into a profitable business for these charter schools and businesses that invest in them.

However, certain facets of a charter school and the privatization movement could be researched and/or utilized to be included into public schools to make them more successful, while still being able to raise the community. Charter schools can create a feeling of a small community within the school generating a sense of community. A potential problem with the charter school method is they utilize themselves as the only

beacon of hope to the students' education, which creates the unity of the students to their school. This sort of method is problematic, as the students would believe that their communities and the public school system were out to diminish their credibility and opportunities. There is an opportunity to utilize this method of unity and duplicated to the public-school system without criminalizing public education. There can be a stronger form of unity when the students can understand their community and feel a large sense of belonging to their public school. However, this method must start as a grassroots movement through the school and teachers. The students must also be exposed to their relevance to their community and society to be able to strengthen their desire to make their communities and their peers rise (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Rose that Grew in Concrete School. In his book, Duncan-Andrade does an analysis of hope within the education system and which transform into the various types of teachers that you find within every school. There has been a history of social movements of hope and he especially accentuated with the civil rights movement and clarifies it with the election of President Obama to have a false hope because of political influence and jargon. If it happens to one person (the exception) then it happens to everyone, right? Society and social justice advocated should not need to keep 'complaining'. He argues that we need to build critical hope within ourselves and our students for them to be able to analyze the social discrepancies that are going on out there, but still being able to do something about it.

Andrade strains that there are many caring educators and to have critical hope in our drive as teachers to help our minority students succeed. However, we must be cautious of these types of hopes as they can be good hopes and bad hopes and for us to have the

capability of pushing our students to succeed and form their own identity, we must reflect on our own lives and identity. Andrade brings out examples of bad and good hopes, but also which educators should strive to be.

As educators, it is our job to understand what are the things that are influencing our young people's young view than dismiss youth culture as a phase. How can we that compelling to our kids as much as popular culture? The legacy of struggle. Community and justice. Our kids are the roses. Society is concrete. We focus too much on the dysfunction (damaged petals) of our students. The difference is in the response between the reaction of the dysfunction with urban kids and wealthy kids. Wealthy (teen anxiety that gets help). Poor kids get imprisoned. We as educators need to stop asking why young people are not engaging in this way and see their resilience.

To be able to engage and have students become proactive citizens presently and as adults, teachers must turn themselves into a support system for our students to gain their individuality and form their idea for success. We give ourselves to our children and we guide them along the way. We show them support past what we teach. Teaching is secondary, caring and guidance are primary. Especially for urban education where many students are at or below the poverty level and fall into the cracks of the education system where they are forgotten (Valenzuela, 1999). Critical Hope is needed when it seems that everyone out there feels that the education system is faltering. There need to be those teachers that try to change the way most society perceives teachers. There shouldn't be a huge rally of teachers suddenly in uproar and rioting, although that wouldn't be an option, within the classroom, teachers should be able to feel that they are not tied down or watched constantly with their job on the line. When you do those such things within your

classrooms and have no boundaries that could limit the potential of student engagement, learning, and interaction with their teacher. There could be a guarantee that teachers will find others like themselves to be able to form a bond and be part of the struggle to not let their title be stigmatized by politicians and social media (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Duncan-Andrade puts his theories into practice and began a school program that became a school itself called Roses in Concrete Community School where the curriculum is focused on urban education and resources for the community for sustainability. His primary focus is to utilize critical hope, not just for students, but their families and the surrounding communities. Duncan refers to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and emphasizes that learning or growth will not develop if the student's primary needs are not being met. We are taught this theory as teachers, but as a society, we do not practice educating and nurturing the students on a holistic level (Schwartz, 2018).

Magnet Schools. With the publication of "A Nation at Risk" (National Center for Excellence in Education, 1983) many stakeholders in the education field had expressed concern for the public-school system and accountability to teachers towards the education of the students and their low achievement. The public even expressed concern for the lack of college readiness, high dropout rates, and economic disparities throughout the districts and expressed the need for educational reforms. Policymakers and for profit-driven entrepreneurs pushed for charter and voucher movements for a school of choice that would be the answer parents are looking for regarding school reforms that would be a better alternative compared to the public school system.

School districts faced a dilemma when many parents and students were convinced that charter schools along with their lottery systems and voucher programs. These charter schools were very appealing because it brought in a certain value for students and families who wanted the opportunity to rise from their low-income status and they were very much convincing and unconventional enough to be appealing. To be able to keep students in the public school system before they all gravitate to various other charter or private schools, districts developed magnet schools within their community schools. This means that these public schools would specialize in certain college and career readiness courses for certain educational fields. Some primary examples would be engineering, business, political science, law enforcement, etc. Students would be able to apply to these high schools in their school districts and once enrolled, they would be enrolled in courses that reflected that magnet school program to gain knowledge and skills of their respective magnet selection. These courses also include advanced coursework such as advanced placement classes from College Board.

The magnet school system did bring a more positive outlook for the public-school system to the public. However, it did bring another degree of segregation within the school system and communities around. Magnet schools brought a higher degree of racial segregation to districts that create pockets of low socioeconomic neighborhoods with failing schools while families that understand the way the system works would send their children off to a magnet school rather than their neighborhood school taking that funding with them. Those who attend a school of choice within the magnet program, and even charter schools, are less likely to be low-income and their parents more educated than the students who remain in their “zoned” school (Neild, 2004). In return, the students who

attend magnet schools that have a higher socioeconomic status experience a higher chance for achievement regardless of the student's income level compared to their peers in their "home" school (Cier, 2003).

Magnet schools have the capability of improving the economic mobility for a certain criterion of students and does bring in a positive outcome for them. However, it does not provide the necessary outcomes the community and populations need holistically. Magnet schools and even charter schools provide case-by-case upward mobility and it does not affect the broader outlook for black and Latinx students in their home community to rise (Neild, 2004). In most cases of magnet and charter programs, the students are transferred to another school that is not their "zoned" school where the majority of their peers from their community attend. Thus, taking the funding, resources, and possible talent that can transgress within the school to the community and allow it to flourish. Magnet school programs not only have the capacity of taking the students who can build higher test scores or college readiness talent, but they also have the capacity of taking talented teachers as well. In most struggling urban schools, there is a high set standard of expectation from teachers regarding standardized test scores. It hinders the capacity for teachers to be able to grow and improve their own experiences as curriculum developers and educators. Much of their time is consumed in attempting to not bridge the education gap for minorities, but to bridge the gap of test scores for students that are in "the bubble" that doesn't allow for any true learning experience for either party. The student is then left with no transferred knowledge of relevance or guidance to utilize for the future.

Additionally, even when the school is an urban school and has a magnet program, many of the students that are placed there, and the entire program become isolated within their peers and becomes extremely exclusive to the students specifically in the program. There is no avenue to be able to be fluid with the general population. In most cases, the students that are served in these magnet programs within these schools are usually students that are not in the low-income minority groups. Most of these students are the white students or minority students whose families have a strong economy means that understand the avenues and the system of schools.

The School Within Us: The Creation of an Innovative Public School.

In the summer of 1998, a school in Brooklyn, New York had an innovative idea to begin a program that would cater to their community. The book written by Nehring gives the account of how teachers, administrators, students, and the community became part of an in-school reform movement that established itself to be a large part of the school. They call this program the “lab school”. It is still currently running strong and still very much functioning at a small scale in the campus it originally came from.

The school and those involved in the program reflected on political and institutional issues as well as focused on philosophical and curricular components to put into practice (Nehring, 1998). The program rotates on the teachers and administrators as the chief resources to reinvent the school system. An argument that was given for the success of the school was because those teachers and administrators were leaders by design for the lab school. The program and the school itself were very democratic when making decisions and even went to the extent of including faculty that was not part of the lab school but was part of the school.

Nehring argued that there needed to be flexible for the school and campus for the lab school to be effective to the students and the community. It must evolve and change over time. The lab school was used for developments and research for possible replication in other campuses. There were a few key components Nehring stated that would make a program similar to lab school successful, they are the following:

- Faith & optimism toward the program, but don't make promises.
- Sell both program and staff and choose on the strengths of the teachers
- The curriculum should be developed by the teachers
- Be aware of local politics surrounding issues of student recruitment and any other politics in education.
- Be sensitive toward the concerns of your students.
- Promote the whole educational package. (holistic overview)
- Don't give up.

Nehring and the faculty of the school believed these were important aspects to stress in the program because it allows for growth in a program on its merit. For faculty and staff to have faith and be optimistic, but you can't make promises to stakeholders because of the many variables that can prevent certain expectations from occurring. Rather make sure you confident in selling the program by stressing the strengths of the staff and the values of the program (Nehring, 1998). Curriculum & Instruction should always be developed by the teachers as they can cater to their community and population of students. When recruiting students, be aware of the politics and policies that surround the students and community at a local, state, and national level (Assaf, Garza, & Battle, 2010). When building a relationship with students, be sensitive to the concerns of the students. To be

able to showcase the students that you care for them will strengthen the relationship of the students and will allow them to push themselves further in their interests. If you are going to promote the program, you must promote the program in its entirety. This includes teachers, administrators, students, curriculum, school, and community. There can be moments where it can be stressful and educators in the program may feel helpless and in the beginning, the students may push back, but never give up. Many new models of program expect short term turnover, but educating the youth is a long-term investment and it takes time for a program to build their results. Even then there are so many learning moments that must evolve as time changes, the program must also be flexible with its changes (Nehring, 1998).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

One of the bigger issues in education is how to engage students. How are we able to teach these students if, for the majority of the time, the curriculum itself does not generate any meaning for them? To be able to not only teach content but knowledge and skills that they can transfer over to the student's own lives. The curriculum of relevance is a form of curriculum that collaborates what the knowledge and skills that standards and objectives enforce in the school system but utilizes the students' world that is around them (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

Curriculum of Relevance. Cultural relevance goes hand in hand with Dewey's vision in democratic education that builds a foundation for teachers to be able to reach out to students as far as curriculum is concerned. Students can relate to the content more than usual and connect with it as the instructor or teacher implements. A teacher should need to know the type of environment and interests their students have to have an enriching learning environment within their classroom (Valenzuela, 1999). When instructing, many teachers would feel that they have full liberty of their subject matter, however, in many cases, and school districts, other entities dictate and manage the curriculum that is being taught and the instruction. It is very unfortunate when the educator is not able to utilize their curricular strengths and content knowledge in their classrooms.

Allowing cultural studies to be relevant to curriculum & instruction is extremely important, and a way this can be possible is empowering teachers as curriculum makers (Craig C. , 2008). Emphasizing the important role teachers are as curriculum makers create the opportunity for growth within the curriculum itself because teachers start referring to each other and their strengths to build a stronger curriculum framework to engage the students within the classroom. There are a variety of studies that talk about the importance of relevance in curriculum and the crucial role that teachers play in the process of critical pedagogy. The critical pedagogy of relevance is only achieved with the opportunity for teachers to be the center of the development in the curriculum (Giroux & McLaren, 1989). This allows the teachers to utilize their knowledge in content, their narratives, the community of their schools, and influences by their colleagues to create cross-curricular lessons that will be relevant to the students, engage them in a deeper

understanding of the content, inquire about other aspects of the curriculum, and even find develop a respectful kinship with their teacher and their knowledge. Many educational theorists such as Dewey, Freire, and Giroux believed that the formation of identity is important, and it is formed because of social and political struggles that individuals experience in their lives. However, within the education system, we are miseducated in the sense of feeling helpless and incapable of emitting change to the realities around us (Saltman, 2014). This is, in fact, false. We can cater to our students to advocate for themselves and for changes in educational policies that would be able to help them and their communities flourish over time.

It is important to not only form one's identity but also understand the identity to make it meaningful for the individual. The school becomes an important environment in a child and teenager's life because they spend a large amount of their time there. They are constantly interacting with their peers, teachers, and other staff members. The environment of a student is always an important factor to consider when developing a curriculum because every child's environment and life is going to be completely different from their peers (Noddings, 2013). In Patrick Roberts's, *Cultural Studies in Relation to Curriculum Studies*, the environment is an important formation for one's own identity and one forms their identity as they grow up (Roberts, 2010).

According to Roberts (2010), critical thinking skills are extremely important to nurture in students, particularly student should become critical about mainstream culture. Being able to be critical about popular culture or anything that is, occurring in current media brings a large amount of relevance to current events and event popular culture toward students and their education. They would become more aware of the current state

of things that it transcends as they grow older, possibly become more involved in their society, and challenge the political culture of the world. In this case, the eventual goal is to become global citizens (Roberts, 2010). This is also relevant for students to even become active in their school community. Critical pedagogy with political orientations within the curriculum can create an analysis of their own identity. In many instances, the curriculum is developed by the state without any reference to the environment in which the student is raised. This promotes critical thinking, autonomy, and problem-solving all while creating a curriculum that the students can relate to.

Certain other scholars such as Giroux and Simon (1988) referenced that cultural studies are a necessary framework to evoke contradictions with schools and real-world experiences for the youth so that they can become more critical about what they see in their everyday life and be more critical in what is being presented to them. Giroux and Simon published their analysis in their 1988 book, *Critical Pedagogy, the State, and Cultural Struggle*. Critical pedagogy itself teaches students to challenge their society and what is around them. It is presented as in nearly the same way curriculum we've learned to present, but it also questions the necessity of it. It teaches students to read what is happening within their own culture, their schooling and teaches them to analyze the dominance of what is presented to them (Giroux & McLaren, 1989).

Praxis & Critical Pedagogy. One of the forefront issues of modern curriculum & instruction is building a curriculum that brings in a research base that would allow students to assess and analyze their communities and issues and find ways to resolve them (Egan, 2008). Many urban schools and districts have higher dropout rates and lower scores than their dominant white counterparts in the suburbs. With that, comes the expectation that any school that is predominantly black or Latinx will most likely be a failing school with fewer academic pipelines and resources. Unfortunately, as educators, we can do our best to push for policy changes with funding and resources, but most of those decisions are made outside our capabilities. How can we make our students more successful once we have them understand the relevance of their education?

In Jeff Duncan-Andrade's (2008) *The Art of Critical Pedagogy*, it is important to note how important teachers are to students' lives and in their critical thinking and analysis of the world. Educators have to allow them to see the social injustices and issues that are presented to them, especially urban schools and be able to feel like they are empowered to disrupt the status quo. We are critical pedagogues and teachers have to connect with their students through popular culture or literature that they can understand how it all connects and what are the underlying issues (Assaf, Garza, & Battle, 2010). If educators allow students to have a voice and an opportunity to express their concerns about their education, the system, as well as many other issues that are addressed in their young lives. Educators should also be accessible to their students and not create a barrier to block them from knowing who their teachers are but build a bridge for them to cross and become part of us. Every student is an important asset for his or her community and

they must be made aware of it. Giving students the proper tools and knowledge so the society around them can also see how strong and impactful they can be.

Critical praxis expects continuous calls for social justice and reflections of the actions that have been taken so it can make sure they deal with the social issue or problem effectively. This is a unique form of pedagogy, as it brings a collaboration of students and teachers to think critically on issues and bring on resolutions that offset the more traditional avenue of teaching. This endorses the students to become critical researchers and has them understanding what value their schools can bring and even how schools and society can be systematic with race, gender, class and all its divisions (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). This form of critical pedagogy promotes the students to be able to formulate questions about their experiences, teacher's ideologies, texts they come across, and school policies that would have not been accessible to them or even exposed to them in the first place. According to Paulo Freire (1970), critical pedagogy is the best model of education for those populations that have been oppressed for a long period, as it would empower the students with an educational weapon and prepare them to understand why things are the way they are and learn to adapt and play the game. The weapon of knowledge and the understanding of tools that can get them to become members of the global community and advocate for their neighbors and peers. This endorses college readiness skills with student-researchers and increases their cognitive understanding of their academic and personal habits that challenge their everyday life (Scott, Pyne, & Means, 2014).

Literacy becomes a strong frontrunner of this form of critical pedagogy. The students are having to become research experts and read various context on the issues

they are investigating (Assaf, Garza, & Battle, 2010). This then creates a newer and more engaging form of learning rather than the mechanical lessons that have the students regurgitating information. Literacy becomes the forefront of understanding and it allows the students to have a much broader and better understanding of the world that is around them. Once students analyze and create their hypotheses on their research, they can apply it to their issue and create real-world solutions (Giroux & McLaren, 1989). This is a form of learning to be free and to advocate against their oppressors, the systematic cycle of poverty in the school system or the school to prison pipeline. However, this may take a while to develop and adjust and teachers must understand that students, once they've learned to be resistant, would possibly cause a stir of resistance in the classroom. This should not dissuade them as it should be a part of the learning. It is then that teachers need to learn how to redirect the students' form of resistance into a powerful tool that they would be able to utilize beyond the classroom and not be afraid of resistant students (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). They should never revert to the old form of teaching just because it is easier and more comfortable with the least amount of resistance from students.

The various individuals that are part of the class can provide a variety of perspectives. Critical praxis is not just about content in education and progress, it's more on social, political, and economic dynamics that affect the students and what historically took place that place them where they are now. Dedicated teachers need to build up the culture and communication in their classroom for this change in education to happen and this ripple effect can start taking place by enabling students to research and understand the way the social, political, and economic system work. Empowering students to create

authentic relationships with adults in their lives to guide them in their personal growth, and the constant room for improvement for progress is what is important for teachers (Valenzuela, 1999). *Critical Pedagogy and Praxis* advocates to listen to the voices of the people that have been marginalized and create spaces where they can not only be heard, but also understand the tools on what to do about it to advocate (Scott, Pyne, & Means, 2014).

Critical Pedagogy. Certain other scholars such as Giroux and Simon referenced that cultural studies are a necessary framework to evoke contradictions with schools and real-world experiences for the youth so that they can become more critical about what they see their everyday life and be more critical in what is being presented to them. Giroux and Simon published their analysis in their 1988 book, *Critical Pedagogy, the State, and Cultural Struggle*. Critical pedagogy itself teaches students to challenge their society and what is around them. It is presented as any other way curriculum is presented, but it is also questioning the necessity of it. It teaches students to read what is happening within their own culture, their schooling and teaches them to analyze the dominance of what is presented to them (Giroux & McLaren, 1989).

Since much of the curriculum that is created is designed for a wider range of students as a systematic approach to developing neutral citizens, it is imperative to have students counter this hegemonic approach. Many times, citizens succumb to political systems, media, and the school system without being critical of what they are taught. The public-school base has been created to be just that and the curriculum is designed by the political entities that are in power in that current period or even within regions. Unfortunately, this does not allow the student to form their own identity; rather they are given an identity and

are taught not to challenge it. In many cases, the critical pedagogy creates a challenge to the hegemonic approach of teaching and cultural studies itself becomes a vehicle to be able to critique the power structures and those that are oppressed within their society.

In a society where we find many differences in opinions and perspectives, there are also different ideas to approach curriculum and instruction. Conservatives feel the need to make sure the curriculum is very Eurocentric and driven by core values in every student in the United States. It is a very traditional approach to curriculum and instruction, which leaves little to no room for critical analysis of the content. This, in turn, brings about different standards for the curriculum that every school district is required to teach their students. A way to challenge such Eurocentric ideals, Roberts presents, is curriculum scholar Susan Edgerton's 1996 book, *Translating the Curriculum from Multiculturalism to Cultural Studies*. Edgerton's argument is to present these traditional perspectives, which are usually cultural literacy that is Eurocentric, bring about approaches to multicultural perspective, and see what these lessons fail to represent (Edgerton, 1996). This brings about cultural studies in the form of critical literacy and allows the students to identify with what they feel about what is presented to them. This allows conversation of race, ethnic, and gender identity to be presented within the classroom while maintaining the context of instructing the given standard objective.

Curriculum & Instruction with Teacher Empowerment

It is possible one of the most important part of a child's education is what is specifically being taught to the students and what needs to be transferred knowledge and skills The students would be able to understand society and think critically around them with this acquired knowledge and how they can resolve issues or overcome barriers. A

larger take of this is also how this information will be transferred. The curriculum is the content that is expected for the students to learn within the course of the school year based on the objectives that are required for the students to learn. Curriculum varies depending on the course that the student is taking and consists of different goals & objectives the teacher has for their course content. Most of the decisions on these goals and objectives are made on the federal and/or state level.

Even if teachers are unable to change the goals and objectives of certain content, they have the capability of interpreting the content and create the curriculum. They also determine how to best implement it in the classroom. This is primarily what instruction is. Creating curriculum and instruction is a skill set that is taught, but more so, is acquired over time and teachers continue to specialize in this art form. Teachers would gain knowledge of overtime and learn about the populations they are using. Multicultural education brings in a form of critical pedagogy in alternative texts that goes away from the traditional curriculum. The capability of creating a curriculum from objectives and how to instruct in a classroom is a strong skill that many teachers do not realize is important (Doubet & Southall, 2018). Once the teacher can create and implement a curriculum, they can freely modify their lessons to make it more relevant, critical, multidimensional, and empowering for students. Schools must understand that empowering the students also means empowering the teachers by having them as curriculum specialists and allowing for collaboration in cross-curricular opportunities and professional developments.

Teachers as Curriculum Specialist. One of the many resources that the United States has not utilized in the movement of education reform that is taken for granted is the educators influence their classrooms (Assaf, Garza, & Battle, 2010). Many policymakers regard educators as just a tool to assemble the type of citizen that they want to shape while the United States government provides the curriculum, but many educators get a largely negative force enveloped over them within policy and media. What these policymakers fail to see is that the profession of the teachers should be noble and well-regarded because they are the ones present in the classroom. A large portion of teachers succumbs to the pressures of society in regards to how the government sets and implements much of the curriculum, Craig's, *Teachers as Curriculum Makers* (2008), dives into a traditional viewpoint as teachers being regarded as extremely gifted professionals who can develop curriculum from their content and implement and instruct it into their classroom. It is something that not many districts allow for their teachers and it something that needs to change because many of the other countries and nations with a stronger education system are that way because they view teaching as a noble profession and allow a lot of teachers to focus on their curriculum with unlimited resources (Craig C. , 2008). If a teacher were to utilize critical pedagogy into their classroom, they must not write off the education system they are in as self-serving and bourgeois (Giroux & McLaren, 1989). If they do that, they would not allow themselves the opportunity to make an impact and change the curriculum from the grassroots movements.

It all starts with the educators because they know their students. They must understand the environment and the system that is against their students, particularly

minority students and struggle with them and their families to create a pathway of academic success. Educators must also make sure they do not relinquish the cultural identity of their students or project too much of themselves into these systems, as it would defeat the purpose of critical pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). By allowing students the agency to figure out their own identity and think critically of the content that is presented to them, they would be able to engage more in civic duties and become advocates for their communities. The teachers as this curriculum specialist thus become a facilitator and can provide an opportunity to close the achievement gap that these minority students experience, even the slightest.

The problem of the achievement gap that is attributed to Latinxs and black minority students never reflects that it denies the cultural difference when it comes down to curriculum and instruction, pedagogy, and cultural politics of knowledge (Egan, 2008). Dewey believed teachers need to choose a curriculum that is focused on the lived experiences of the student rather than the classic curriculum that perpetuates the status quo. This puts a lot of emphasis on the teachers to take a larger role in their students' education (Dewey, 1916). Teachers as curriculum developers is not a new innovative idea; it is derived from the profession itself. However, Clandinin and Connelly (1992) referred to John Dewey's *educational philosophy* to post teachers as mediators within the curriculum and instruction. Joseph Schwab's educational thoughts of the teacher being the central element for deliberations in curriculum first officially published it into the educational field (Craig C. J., 2008). Research of Clandinin and Connelly shows the important role a teacher's knowledge has regarding designing and developing curriculum

(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Craig emphasized that there must be a central medium between the curriculum being taught and the students. Teachers are the central medium.

Craig also argued that having teachers as curriculum makers gives them the opportunities to also be influenced by outside forces of the classroom (Craig C. , 2008). Every teacher and the school they work are not created equal. Some teachers work in the suburbs, while others work in urban districts. The socioeconomic environments that their students are from are different even within the same region. When teachers have the power to develop the curriculum, they can refine it to accommodate their students based on their own experiences (Scott, Pyne, & Means, 2014). Teachers also become very much influenced by other teachers, faculty, staff, and parents that are within their radar. This is extremely important because when their student and population inspire educators, they can build a foundation of curriculum that is strong and relevant to their students and community. As teachers continue to be advocates and create their curriculum in their classroom, they must also make sure they understand how their curriculum influences their students and their relationship with them. Educators must become a strong ally for students who are usually underrepresented and underserved (Freire, 1970).

For policymakers to conceptualize the idea of teachers as curriculum makers, they must first accept the idea of the teacher being the organizer, planner, and lesson maker for their curriculum to be executed in their classroom. When teachers can build their curriculum, they begin to build relevance to their students in their lessons (Assaf, Garza, & Battle, 2010). This results in organic connections between curriculum and life. This all leads growth for both the teachers and the students, and it forms relationships between the two parties. This results in organic connections between curriculum and life. This all

leads to growth for both the teachers and the students, and it forms relationships between the two parties. This sort of relationship builds organically over time and it is not forced. Teachers can find relevance in the curriculum to the students for them to connect and therefore their students see the investment that the teachers have made to their profession and start forming relationships between each other.

The world is in a constant state of change, educators are aware of this and when they have the capacity to be able to develop or be involved in the process of curriculum, they can revise it as they see fit. As the world is changing around us and we should change with the world and solve the issue of that world using our classrooms. The schools are not simply to reproduce accepted and approved culture and knowledge to students, but schools should present to students real-world issues (social, economic, political, and environmental) and encourage them to solve these types of issues so that they can know that they are capable of changing society for the better (Bramfield, 1965). Educators must be considerate of the learners to have their consciousness in the classroom and therefore the educator must acknowledge their hopes and desires and strive to help as a guide rather than utilizing a prescribed curriculum to them.

“Education is not a product to be learned, but a process that continues as long as one lives.” (Dewey, 1916). Creating a strong curriculum that involves student-centered learning as well as building individual character is important for any lesson plan.

Students require social interaction, media, and collaborative learning among each other to be able to be successful in their future within the global community. Certain modern critical pedagogy educators such as Jeff Duncan-Andrade, Rita Pierson, Curtis Acosta, and many others talk about building certain relationships with students and how

important it is to be able to communicate to them and have been become aware of how important they are in society. If educators can reflect on their theory and practice in their classrooms, they can emit a better understanding of what students should expect from them.

Cross-Curriculum. Allowing teachers to skills to be a more proactive educator with curriculum and instruction in social studies, not only educates students but also allows other instructors who share visions in teaching and develop a cross-curricular pedagogy that can transcend within curriculum over time. Educators are responsible for the growth and development of students as individuals, critical thinkers, leaders, and activists in an ever-changing global community. There has been much focus on the data-driven instruction that does not allow the students to think critically and has led many students not to pursue higher education. The instruction has also been a bit problematic. Much of the instruction within the social studies department has been traditional and has not been changed much like Harold Benjamin satire of the education system calling it a saber-tooth curriculum (Benjamin, 1972). This represents how we do not examine the way we teach in schools and therefore when changes are necessary, there is resistance. Many of the instructors do not seem to try to take on the role and challenge this sort of instruction. The reasoning behind this is most likely because there has not been a true establishment on how important the core subject of social studies is to the students.

Like professional learning communities, teachers as a curriculum specialist, and critical pedagogy, teachers collaborating through different content areas can create a solidified learning community. Particularly making learning through multicultural education and culturally responsive. However, this form of 21st-century teaching that can

create a skill base for students. Creating a cohort of teachers from different contents can reinforced objectives and goals that are similar between these subjects. Teachers rarely have the ability to be able to collaborate and transfer knowledge to its others, but if they experience a professional learning community, cross-curricular opportunities arise. Collaboration through these learning communities into cross-curricular develops strong relationships with teachers and it emphasizes how much knowledge and skills are transferable from courses in school to potentially real life. This also allows the teachers to have a continuous exploration of the teaching and learning process for their students in the most effective way they learn (Morrissey, 2000).

The success of these collaborations varies over time, setting, and personalities. Certain factors play a key role in the success and development of cross-curricular opportunities. According to Nehring, from *A School Within Us*, a successful cross-curricular program involves key factors for development (Nehring, 1998).

- Talent, energy, and devotion of the team
- Faculty buy-in amongst those collaborating
- Administrative support
- A knowledge base of professional experience between all stakeholders
- School Observations for best practices
- Cohorts collaborating
- Relevance in cross-curricular lessons to entice students
- Mission and vision on the objectives and goals of students for cross-development
- Teachers become the specialist and lead professional development

(Nehring, 1998)

Being able to collaborate through vertical and horizontal alignment requires the teachers to stay focused and consistent meetings to make sure they can develop more effective and differentiated lessons. Nehring even stated that in much of this cross-curricular project, many of the teachers and administrators became leaders of a larger base and were able to effectively have the students buy-in and began to conduct professional development because of their collaborations.

Professional Development. The strongest form of teacher leadership development is utilizing experienced teachers with their best teaching strategies. Utilizing teachers as expert practitioners is important in the development of those who are in the profession as well as building future leaders in administration and education. However, the seniority of teachers in practice should not be taken into full account. It should just be a small part of their credibility. Years of experience are important, but the practice and strategies these teachers emulate in the classroom are just as important (Egan, 2008). Besides, it should also display a means of the constant evolution of curriculum designed for teachers. It takes teachers who devote themselves to continuous education to engage students in the classroom also be as dedicated to sharing their best practices with their peers.

Certain behaviors are associated with specific educational leaders that are transparent for instructional leadership (Cier, 2003):

- The teacher must demonstrate a commitment to academic goals
- Create a climate of high expectations
- Being a dynamic leader

- Consulting effectively with students, staff, parents, and administration
- Creating order and discipline
- Maintaining resources
- Has effective time management skills
- Tracks data and can cite sources and utilize them.

Professional development can create highly effective and engaged teachers if there is an investment made for displaying the leadership these teachers have. Many dedicated teachers who do not get the support or appreciation of their growth and capacity to bring strong leaders usually become dissuaded and/or burned out much more quickly than others. Effective teachers lead professional development that has a high impact on other teacher practitioners. As these teachers would make these professional developments more intensive, sustainable, relevant to the work that the teachers do on a day-to-day basis, and best practice methods are exchanged (Hongisfeld, 2013). Teachers who lead professional development understand the effectiveness of engaging lessons that are relevant to the teacher's everyday experiences in the classroom.

When engaging in effective professional development, teachers must understand that they must engage in the pedagogy themselves, especially when it is transferring best-practice knowledge to one another. Just like bell hooks emphasizes that when teaching, educators must actively commit to becoming part of the teaching experience and be there with their students along the way to display a holistic approach to teaching (hooks, 1994). Teachers also need to feel the same way when they are taking part in professional development with the individual who is leading the training. Teachers are at the forefront of education and are doing the work that is, in most cases, not always appreciated but

necessary. To empower the students as much as we speak about it in research and social context, we must first allow ourselves to empower the teachers. When teachers realize how potentially influential, they are, especially teachers that exhibit the characteristics of a holistic leader, then the development of programs and curriculum that benefits the minority communities can start taking place.

Professional Learning Communities. Rather than investing in policies, vouchers, and charter, schools the primary focus would be focusing on the development of the teachers and their understanding of the communities they are working in. In many cases, educators are usually fatigued with a large number of training and professional developments that they do not feel would be resourceful for them in the end. Many feel they would not be able to transfer any of these training to be able to find it relevant or suitable for their students, especially if they do not feel any learning took place on their part. Why would they feel they could be more teachers that are adequate if the training and developments they attend serve no value in their eyes? However, instead of having training that requires the teachers to sit down and listen, why not have them be able to collaborate and learn from each other?

Among all the training and professional developments offered to the teachers, the most valuable the teachers believe are observations of colleagues and being able to share each other's theories and practices (Hongisfeld, 2013). Once teachers have the agency to collaborate and their own experiences, they can develop and best practice lessons both vertically and horizontally. This also opens the capacity to exchange learning contexts on the communities and the students the teachers are educating. These advocates for professional learning communities that focus on the demographics of students in the

school. These are considered school reform projects because the school takes measures upon themselves to develop teacher advocates to improve educational issues they find within their schools. The professional learning communities vary greatly from school to school because they are created and revised because of the community and expectations of societal standards (Nehring, 1998). This is the form of alternative to public education creates critically aware students, maintains student population, raises standardized test scores, and manages to raise communities that are struggling.

There are factors that contribute to the success of schools that focus on professional learning communities. In a qualitative study conducted in 2013 on professional learning, communities stated that many teachers felt there was so much value added to be able to take the time they had shared with their peers (Hongisfeld, 2013). They can evaluate and build curriculum and instruction as a group in a way that would allow them to share their experiences and knowledge to make their lessons strong and sustainable (Hongisfeld, 2013). To be able to create these learning communities, would allow a flow of new information and long-lasting relationships with both their colleagues and students. Exploring the different perspectives of educators and their learning experiences with students and understanding of these students allows the refinement of more concrete lessons suitable for students learning. The continuous PLC meetings throughout the year would implement data-driven decisions, student learning, creation or revision of curriculum & instruction, and a more positive culture within the school that would build strong relationships with teachers, students, and administrators.

According to *Professional Learning Communities: An Ongoing Exploration*, there are five different dimensions that mark PLC's effectively (Morrissey, 2000).

- Supportive and Shared Leadership
- Shared Values and Visions
- Collective Learning and Application of Learning
- Supportive Conditions
- Shared personal practice

Supporting and Shared Leadership gives agency to the teachers and administrators to collaborate (Nehring, 1998). Having teachers become effective leaders and decision-makers when it comes to students, learning allows expectations for the students to be fluid as the teacher is the one setting the bar for student achievement as the expert. When collaborating with colleagues the values and visions of each educator start taking precedence and sometimes the method of teaching or viewpoints may be different but finding a common ground of the long-term goals and visions that the teachers can align with is important when working in collaboration with each other. Once these visions and values are shared, decisions for approaching student learning can take place, particularly when data is being presented. During this process of sharing values, teachers express what they have learned through their classroom experiences and reflect off each other to be able to find new approaches or learn different avenues. If they have supportive conditions from the school and resources provided, they would be able to form best practices and share these resources and continued commitment to the school and curriculum. However, urban schools that do not have a magnet program most likely lack the number of resources and investment and it is usually not because they choose not to, but mostly because they are unable to.

Student-Teacher relationships in Accordance to Angela Valenzuela. In the mid-1990s, Angela Valenzuela focused on a school very much in the same area and the same demographics of Huerta High School. In her book, Valenzuela goes through the history of Houston and the Southeast area to set up the premise of how politics and society have impacted the Mexican youth of Houston. Her research focus was a high school with the pseudonym of Seguin High School in the southeast part of Houston and part of the [Sol] ISD school district. Throughout her study, she conducted that Mexican youth in [Sol] ISD and any urban school have more struggle to find equal educational opportunities that prevent them from furthering their education. She emphasized the segregation that Houston struggles with and the attempt to try to integrate school from [Sol] ISD by creating Magnet School Programs as they were meant to be a mirror to the diversity that Houston is (Valenzuela, 1999). Although the integration of students in the magnet program was meant for all demographics, only minority students seem to integrate with schools and create diverse populations in schools that were predominately white. The issue that consisted was that the white students were not coming into the schools that were in minority communities.

One of the major components of Valenzuela's study was focusing on the impact and perspectives of students & teacher relationships. She noticed the interrelationships between students and their teachers were very traditional and rigid. Many of the teachers seemed very distant from their students and even students felt a disregard for them or their own experiences at the school. The students often felt their needs were not being met and the school itself was not being supportive which furthered their disillusionment from any form of educational attainment.

Valenzuela felt that many of these Mexican youth conflicted with their own identity in their family, school, and community. As public education gears towards *subtractive schooling* by forcing students to assimilate into the American classroom, they subtract the necessary resources from the students that would provide any engagement or motivation since they do not identify with any of the curriculum introduced or policies are against them. As the school was stripping the students and their own experiences, students would disregard the school itself as not caring and the feeling becomes mutual with the teachers. The students weren't against furthering their education, they just did not feel supported or engaged with the school system. It was not working for them. This also brings in to light the social and political variables that cause such strain in a school's relationship with their students, particularly schools that have a high population of Latinxs who the first generation are.

The points that Valenzuela argued for was expanding the curriculum for students to understand, not only their culture but the vast amount of diversity that there is. Also, providing support for the students and not to discredit or dismiss the student's own identity and experience. They become discouraged because there is no relevance in the curriculum that would keep them engaged, identify with, or motivated to pursue higher education. The politics of caring for the school and teachers are extremely important for minority students who already feel that they are at a disadvantage.

Case Study

The main premise of this literature review upon this project is understanding the aspects of Urban Education as it regards history and how it connects to Huerta High Schools' background. It also includes the thought frame that educators for the College

Readiness Program had when they were in the development of the program itself and the reasoning behind creating it. We explored many alternatives to figure out what has worked effectively for building a sense of community with high expectations and rigorous curriculum. This all resulted in us understanding critical pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching. Our empowerment as teachers discussion and implementing a program that directly targeted students with higher expectations and college readiness organically grew our relationship with students and with each other. Without truly understanding the breakthroughs we made have already been established by previous literature, articles, and studies that can be enforced for any campus wanting to do the same. Utilizing relevant and multicultural curriculum, we learned to develop cross-curricular lessons and interact with the students to allow them to think critically of their own education and environment. While doing so, we also developed a long-term relationship of community that is worthy of research to understand how much these educators feel they were able to accomplish what we initially set out to do in the first place.

Chapter III

Methodology

Qualitative research usually starts with the analysis and interpretations of one's theories and framed into a research problem. This research problem is utilized to address the meanings of an individual or group to this problem. My analysis and theories come from my own previous experience working for the College Readiness Program and finding those who have also experienced the same from the program who would be my participants. Within this study, I utilized John W. Creswell's qualitative research methods of a case study. A case study research involves studying a phenomenon or real-life situation that occurs in either one specific site or multiple sites (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In my study, I only used one site and interviewing educators from this program. We were a culture sharing group as we all had a common thread of being involved as educators in the college readiness program as we would be considered to have developed our cultural group overtime which would have included the students in the College Readiness Program. This study helps present the relationship between the participants and the social structure to which is being studied. The research participants in this qualitative case study believed that having a college readiness program at the school would increase college enrollment for the school and the data showcases that college acceptances increased once the first set of students graduated since the program's inception. This, therefore, justifies to the teachers for their belief even though there is no possible way to make data analysis for their belief, but can analyze data and results to find this truth. Thus, the possibility that the college readiness programs can increase college acceptance is justifiable.

This study has lent itself to a qualitative approach and was a case study of convenience for several reasons. Utilizing qualitative methods allows value-added to the way individuals feel about what they are experiencing as well as it gives a correlation between experiences and results of studies. Qualitative methods usually are more descriptive like events and interpretation of experiences. Research questions are traditional in the beginning answering “how” or “what” so that more in-depth analysis and relationships are constructed or generated (Patton, 1987). This sort of study was helpful for a case study of convenience because it reflected upon and analyzed the perspectives of teachers who experienced the academic program from its inception, its evolution, and what they felt the results were. These experiences included my own as a former student and educator.

First, we must acknowledge the broad assumptions and what we identify ourselves in this study with an overall analysis and primary record of Huerta High School to understand the background, demographics, and history of the school. It also takes note of the different supports that were available at the time regarding college readiness programs. By then we determined the research problem or issues being addressed were needed to be brought into a literature review. This included a historical record of the study that enacted a preliminary reconstructive analysis of Huerta High School before the inception of the program. This stage was important because it articulated system factors, patterns of relationships, intersubjective structures, power relations that were not visible or observable to the participants or anyone outside of the program. The researcher then allowed for open dialogue with the participants and the data was generated via interviews. When interviews were transcribed, the researcher then was able to move to

stage four and describe the system relations between the educators and students and how it impacts them. Once the system relations were explained, we explored the holistic relationship between the College Readiness Program and understanding the perspectives of the educators related to the findings. We were able to unfold a story in the process of all these phases.

Also, it was important to understand the surrounding variables that are out of the control of the program itself and would impact the way decisions would be made regarding implementation and revisions toward the program. Underlying variables participants believed are expressed in chapter 4 to hopefully maintain a better understanding of what may have led to the development of the program or even the outside influences that the program would have to conflict with to break away from the status quo. These outside influences or variables would include education policies, history, and the status quo that would then blend itself with the school districts and schools themselves and their backgrounds and history. Once the College Readiness Program developed with its key foundations it maintained a subconscious awareness from the educators that allowed them to evolve the program to create global citizens and break away from the status quo.

This study is based on the perspectives of educators that include teachers, administrators, and coordinators who were involved in the College Readiness Program and how effective it was to Latinx students involved in the program. This consisted the involvement of the participants in the program and were able to engage its successes for future studies.

Context

Graduating from Huerta High School in May of 2003, I always felt this semi-injustice that circulated in my subconscious that never made me feel Huerta High School was a home to me. I graduated at the top ten of my class and was accepted to other universities outside of Houston. However, despite my acceptance, the traditional family dynamics and lack of scholarships restricted me from even attending a university in Houston despite my credentials. I always had it embedded in my mind that once I graduated, I would never want to step foot into Huerta High School again. I felt dissatisfied with the school but didn't understand why. I went on to community college to earn my associate degree and transferring to the University of Houston in 2005. This is when I began to struggle with my history courses and writing. I never felt challenged to my writing, studying, or research skills until I took my first history courses that demanded more structured essays than I had ever done. I managed to graduate in May 2008 with my bachelor's in history with a very low G.P.A. and went on to get my alternative certification in teaching. My goal was to teach high school social studies since I loved the subject and felt I would have a good disciplinary balance with high school students since I have been working in public education since I graduated in the first place.

I was in a job fair for [Sol] ISD and found a table with my alma mater, Huerta High School was looking for social studies teachers. At the time I was living with my parents and was very much open to having a short commute to the school. The principal took a liking to me because I was an alumnus and hired me within my first formal interview. I didn't realize what seemed to be a convenient decision would be the start of my changing conception of education and my life work.

Huerta High School is a title one school in the southeast part of Houston. It has been open since August of 2000 to alleviate the growing number of students from the previous high school whose student enrollment and classroom sizes have increased substantially in the last few years. Over 90% of the students enrolled in Huerta High School are Latinxs from low-income families and on free and reduced lunch. Huerta High School began with grade levels 9 – 11th-grade students its first year with low numbers for each class. It's numbered gradually increased between 2005 to the present day. However, as the student numbers increased, so did the dropout rate. The school was scrutinized and put on a growth plan. By 2006, Huerta High School had experienced almost 4 principals in 6 years until David Delagarza became the principal of the school and started focusing on school's growth and making sure it was taken out of their growth plan. By the time I became a teacher at the school under Delagarza, the graduation rate increased, and the school was no longer considered a drop out of school. Despite the stabilization of the school, other issues became more apparent to administrators and educators themselves. Huerta High School has established a reputation that prevented many families and students who wanted to focus to get into college from enrolling in the school and utilized the magnet school system to opt to go to another school they applied for rather than attend their home school.

In March 2011, school leaders, teachers, and administrators decided to try to change the image of Huerta High School and try to attract students and families by creating a college readiness program. Thus, I started a series of events that lead to the creation of the College Readiness Program that began with students in August of 2011. The College Readiness Program's foundation and establishment would last about six

years, but it would make a lasting impact. No educator or administrator knew the impression this program would create for the school, students, community, and most of all their teachers.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this case study can be multilayered and can branch out to a variety of different other studies for the future. However, in this research, I sought out what type of impact, if any, on the teachers who were involved in a cohort system that promoted academic rigor and development of culture and community. Another significance is to see the different effects such a program did to promote the culture of the school and community around it during its tenure.

The study addresses the development, concept, and descriptions of an urban school program as well as within its inoculation among former teachers and current teachers. Although the impact itself is very dense with a variety of themes to choose from, we will only focus on just one question.

What are educators' perspectives regarding the impact of a college readiness program on Latinx students in an urban high school?

This is a case study that urban school face challenges in the aspect of opportunities for minority students from low-income communities. This also emphasizes how teachers themselves are curriculum professionals and being able to allow them to develop their curriculum & instruction through the pedagogy of relevance would allow students to become more engaged with learning. Thus, there is a relationship between empowering teachers to become their curriculum specialists and the development of a program that allows minority students to prosper in higher education.

Justification

Low income urban high schools have a high volume of disadvantaged students for many socioeconomic factors. The public-school system primarily focuses on meeting the needs of some marginalized groups, but usually disregards or adds another disadvantage for students who attempt to be the higher educational or achieving attainment. The school of choice through magnet program in a public-school district often hurt the public schools within the community because many of these students and their families opt out of their home school to go to a school that allegedly has more resources. Developing a school within a school that caters to high achieving students, builds a solid reputation, and culture allows the school to flourish as well as becomes just as competitive and successful as schools that are in high-income areas.

Philosophical Foundations

Qualitative research is based on philosophical theories that aren't quantified by numbers but rather from the conscious, unconscious and theoretical perspectives of participants and those who are engaging in the study (Broido & Manning, 2002). It allows the study of social behavior, knowledge, and attitudes of individuals or groups (Babikir, Ali, & elWahab). Qualitative research focuses on the investigations of humans and the phenomenon of their choices, thoughts, and viewpoints. For case studies, the research is based on a group in ethnography who share a type of culture that develops around them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There would be moments where the researcher is also taken in part of the research as they were involved in this culture and setting. The researcher situates themselves in the study to reflect their history, culture, and personal experiences. A case study is to reconstruct the events and interpretations of each

participant and is bounded by time and place as a bound system (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a result, these concepts and responses form an analysis that is similar in themes when they are compared together. Methodological theories provide a foundation for researchers to design a study for a project, interpretation of data, or develop additional field techniques (Carspecken, 1996). Researchers choose to view case study research as a methodology in qualitative research as it would be an object of study or inquiry that is current and up to date with our evolving world (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Design

The methodology of this research was a single qualitative case study of convenience sampling. Qualitative research is used to find answers to a question that cannot be investigated through quantifiable data for culturally specific information, values, opinions, social contexts, and behaviors or certain populations (Family Health International, 2005). Therefore, certain procedures needed to be defined before we were able to begin the research process to make sure it can be replicated in the future. Researchers collect evidence through various data collection methods to produce findings that future research would be able to build from the study being conducted.

There are positive and negative attributes regarding these types of studies. The advantage of a qualitative study is that it is flexible for the researcher to update and revise as the study is conducted. Besides, it can be reach and meaningful for the participants to be comfortable enough to interview with. However, this can also have a disadvantage regarding the perspectives and variables outside of the control of the researcher can take precedence and it is very much unexpected.

I have utilized a convenience sampling when selecting participants in this case study. The inclusion criteria for this qualitative study were that of educators who were part of the College Readiness Program. Their demographic backgrounds such as age, race, gender, etc. were not a criterion for this study, but it was utilized to be able to have a better understanding of the participant and their personalities. As the researcher, I reached out to former colleagues and sought least six participants in this study to conduct an initial interview and then a follow-up interview.

Working with human subjects in any form of research, quantitative or qualitative, researchers must be aware of following a code of ethics and conduct for the safety of the subjects/participants. An International Review Board (IRB) is required for approval with any research study that has human subjects or participants to ensure their safety. This case study was a low risk qualitative research and I have provided consent forms and verbal acknowledgement from my participants upon interviews. My submission for IRB approval was submitted on February 12, 2020 and approval was granted on March 6, 2020.

After IRB was approved, I reached out to the participants and had them to set up the initial interviews that were done during the month of March. Follow-up interviews were also be conducted immediately all through March and transcription of interviews were also be done simultaneously. The total duration for each participant was approximately one hour in the form of two interviews. An initial interview and a follow-up interview. The number, frequency, and length of study visits were two interviews (an initial interview as well as a follow-up) that will be approximately 20-30 minutes each. Recruitment and enrollment for the participants took less than a week. The estimated date

for the investigation to have been completed in this study was to be conducted during March with IRB approval and all criteria and deadlines were met. Any follow-up or member check that were needed were done in this period. Analysis of the data was also done during this period and was completed by late March and results, summary, and analysis of this case study were completed by early April to be presented for the final defense in late April.

Participants

This was a qualitative case study so all those who were studied are defined as participants. Reaching out to these participants was simple, as I have continued to keep in contact with them even if they do not work at Huerta High School and may have moved on to other cities. The College Readiness Program has evolved into a different form of the program with a new management; however, my key interest was to reach out to the trailblazers of the program regarding its development while they were part of it. Chances that all these participants were still at Huerta High School were low and are mostly in other parts of the education world. However, being able to reach them via email or text message was served as initial access points to build interest and set up future meetings. A formulated recruitment message that was sent to the participants is provided in Appendix C.

No participants were expected to be enrolled and screened, nor needed to complete the research procedures. Participants in this qualitative case study of the College Readiness program were all adults over the age of 18 years to 64 years of age. These were former or current teachers and administrators and part of the College Readiness Program. There were twelve former College Readiness Program teachers and

administrators as well as over five hundred former students since its inoculation in the fall of 2011. Not every teacher was available to participate in the study however, I did anticipate five participants to give consent and these participants agreed to be interviewed. To particularly focus on the subject at hand and insights, the focus was the experiences and thoughts of the educators who were part of the College Readiness Program. This included one administrator, two coordinators who were also teachers, and two teachers who taught full time in the program. This study did not include populations listed as vulnerable to coercion or undue influence and all are adults able to grant consent. Participants who were recruited were given the consent form, research purposes, expectations as participants, and signatures will be given via the “SOP: Informed Consent Process for Research (HRP-090).” (See Appendix D)

Since the participants are no longer in Huerta High School, the site for the interviews were mostly at local coffee shops, offices, zoom chats online, or any location of convenience for the comfort of participants during their interviews. Some interviews were conducted via zoom because some of the participants were not living within convenient proximity to have a face to face interview or in immediate accessibility. In addition, COVID-19 also played a major factor for the follow-up interviews when we were mandated to a “work from home” status and interviews were conducted online via zoom. However, this did follow the same protocol as the face to face with consent requested from before the interview began recording along with a debriefing of what the research is consisting of and any risks that the participants have which is minimal risk assessment. To maintain the privacy and integrity of the participants, their names are changed into pseudonyms and codenames based on their role in the College Readiness

program. There is no benefit for the participants, they were interviewed at their own free will, and were given the opportunity to opt-out of the study at any time. This was a minimal risk study, so there were no safety endpoints given because there were no safety risks associated to it.

Data Collection Methods

A recruitment message and initial email provided a quick measure of the different areas that were focused on based on the professional experience and background that many of these educators had from the program as well as give an insight. Followed by this, there were two different interviews provided. One initial one on one interview with the educator that was recorded with the participant's permission. After the analysis of the first interview, common themes were created, and a follow-up interview was done. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with the permission of the participants. There were also notes that were taken by the researcher on all occasions to find the common themes and see the interaction and responses linked to the subjects and behaviors recorded.

Initial interviews also included the background of the participants concerning their professionalism, demographic background, years of experience in teaching, education level, their involvement in the program, and a brief written response of their experiences and perspectives of the College Readiness Program. The hope of these questions was used as a background information and an informed consent to let the participants know the purpose of the study, the objective, timeline, expectations from the participants. The recruitment message also included possible dates for a face to face interview and a setting to which the participants were comfortable enough to interview.

From the themes focused on all participants, responses were then created to emphasize more context within the participant's experiences.

By 2015, the College Readiness Program had established a core foundation with visions and themes that were utilized as data points. Focuses on the following data points were crucial for this study as it was emphasized as the core foundation of the program. However, understanding how these core themes became part of the foundation were also very important to analyze for each participant. Also, new questions were created regarding how the participant responded to their involvement in the program as follow-up questions. For example, one question that was created for the participants who were teachers was omitted from the administrators but not from the coordinator since they were teachers themselves.

Interviews

In-depth interviews were necessary to conduct in this qualitative research to collect data because I was able to utilize the experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives regarding this case study. When the time came to conduct interviews, a solid foundation of trust had been taken into accord. When the participants are at their most relaxed stage, they were able to be their most true selves and feel confident enough, to be honest with their responses. Face to face interviews were conducted and a follow-up that took place online were all between 20 to 30 minutes. These interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants and also recorded in notes by me, the researcher. Locations for the interviews were anticipated to be conducted in public spaces such as coffee shops for the convenience and comfort of the participants. In case the participants were unable to meet face to face, such as it were for the “stay at home” order given during March,

there was a scheduled interview online to which the researcher took notes of the interview, but also audio recorded with the permission of the participants. Procedures and interview protocols were performed before the interview was conducted. The participants were already given the “SOP: Written Documentation of Consent (HRP-091).” After the initial interview, I made sure to make it aware to each of the participants that I would be scheduling a follow-up interview. Once these interviews were transcribed and analyzed, more follow-up questions were created regarding the covert categories regarding the experiences and the development of the College Readiness Program. In case the participants were unable to meet face to face during the first interview, there were scheduled to interview online which the researcher had taken notes of the interview, but also audio recorded with the permission of the participant. This was the case for the follow-up interview as a result of the pandemic.

The follow-up interview was a one on one interview with each participant utilizing the same procedure as before, all given the same questions since it pertained to all of them, and the same protocol. This interview was recorded in an audio recording and note-taking by the researcher was conducted with the permission of all the participants. Since this was a more of a facilitated interview, it allowed the participants to respond at their own free will. In the beginning of each interview I had a lead question to start with, however, I needed to be careful with making sure the interview did not veer off-topic with the participants. I also had to make sure there are certain key components I would ask the participants to reflect on. Therefore, I had created a series of interview protocols (See Appendix E) to keep the integrity of the interview and to allow for the flow to be as genuine as possible.

Transcribing interviews began immediately after the first interviews were conducted. To ensure the transcriptions were accurate I will utilized a transcribing tool online such as Google transcribe, had assistance to help me listen for accuracy, and I also ran through the transcriptions myself multiple times and made the proper edits.

Archival Records

Archival records are documents that would be able to indicate certain data that can reaffirm what the participants expressed in this study. As a previous coordinator of the program, I have access to all the data and documents that we had created from the beginning of the program to the very last document that was developed that was intended to showcase the growth of the program. There are hundreds of different sources and documents for the program, but I only have focused on certain documents that contributed to the themes and responses that the participants serve.

The following six documents were procured for the purpose of this case study:

- First meeting agenda (Appendix F)
- Campus Observations (Appendix G)
- Student Intervention Plan (Appendix H)
- Open House Handout to Parents (Appendix I)
- Academy Awards Flyer (Appendix J)
- T-shirt Design (Appendix K)
- Last meeting agenda (Appendix L)

These documents reflected the evolution of the College Readiness Program along with the aspects showcase how empowered the teachers were in building the vision, community & work ethic, and identity of the program. They will be presented as such for

each theme to strengthen the results of this study. All names, logos, locations, or any information that would otherwise allow identities revealed have been omitted.

Data Analysis

A qualitative case study has many variables that would impact the perspectives of each participant and we must be able to utilize a holistic approach with these variables. As humans we can understand other individuals through our thoughts of them, the way we speak to each other, and what we know about each other which would be both conflicting but also helpful to synthesize their experiences and responses to the study itself (Carspecken, 1996). I have used both low-level coding for the initial interview but eventually utilized high-level coding to be able to find common themes within each participant and during the group interview. The titles of the subjects would consist of pseudonyms that reflect their role in the College Readiness Program. Deductive coding involved having a codebook to guide me through the coding process, especially once I started my interviews with the participants. Inductive coding is the data analysis and common themes that were present in all interviews I analyzed and found how the participants' experience was to their environment in the College Readiness Program.

Also, participants utilized reconstructive analysis to describe their own experiences in the program during the interview. I highlighted and took note of their body postures, volume, and tone of their responses once they began engaging in conversation. These fields have allowed the research for clues to further analyze their experiences for their meaning reconstruction. Being able to capitalize on the research with gestures, tone of voice provided more holistic clues of the participants.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of any study is very important, especially in a qualitative research study when most of the data that is collected were interviews and responses. It is even more important when the researcher would be the one that would conduct the interviews, transcribe the data, as well as analyze all information that was collected. To make sure there was trustworthiness in my research, local procedures for maintenance of confidentiality were utilizing identifiers such as audio recordings and given pseudonyms as codes to each participant during transcriptions and the coding process. The key to the code has been stored separately from the consent forms and study data. No one outside the researcher, myself, have access to the identifiers. The key to the study code has been destroyed following data collection. Audiotaping was conducted the recordings were destroyed upon transcription. Following the completion of the research, all other necessary data was uploaded and submitted on a USB drive. This data included interview protocols, transcripts, signed consent forms, etc. Only myself and my advisor will be able to have access to this data as they will be maintained in one area of the campus. Data will be managed and stored in the College of Education Department at the Farish Hall Building located at the University of Houston in room number 412. The individual that will be keeping the data stored for a minimum of 3 years will be my faculty sponsor and advisor Dr. Cameron White and will maintain this data for 3 years. The data will NOT be banked for future use.

Reliability

Reliability in social sciences can be challenging in a qualitative study as the reliability of a study measures the capability of a phenomenon to occur or replicate itself

with the same results over and over. Reliability in a study needs to focus on the consistency and application of the research and results. Whereas, human behaviors and interactions can be widely different and have different outcomes. To ensure this case study is reliable I have made sure I kept the themes utilized for future studies to focus on as well. Measurements and interview protocols were the same for all participants even if responses varied. However, with the use of low-level coding and high-level coding, I was able to find similar themes among all the interviews to be analyzed.

Validity

This was a case study of the convenience of a program that I was part of, and I understand that there would be a questionable aspect of it and its validity that I am not projecting my thoughts and beliefs onto the results nor to my participants. To make sure that the data and interpretation of data are accurate and non-bias my questions were utilized more as facilitation of conversation. Since one of my data collection methods would be interviewing one on one, I also utilized Michael Agar's *Strip Analysis* when analyzing data to find common themes and ideas from the participants (Carspecken, 1996). If there are any issues or discrepancies between all my interviews, I reached out to the participant(s) during the follow-up interview who would then clarify some of these transcripts and analysis. I also maintained all recorded log, interview recordings, notes, consent forms, etc. to make sure the validity and integrity of the research is kept. Other validity requirements that were utilized were the use of more than one recording devices which was of my taking notes.

In addition, I was able to make a comparative analysis with Huerta High School College readiness program documents as archival data. This would also include the types

meetings, forms, agendas that the program had built during its time. Much of this information can also be found in the appendix located at the end of this document.

Researcher Personality

It is important to understand the researcher's background and personality to separate any bias judgments or analyses. It is much more imperative when done in a qualitative study that requires the analysis of interviews and individual thoughts and ideas. This also puts much responsibility for the researcher to check their own bias and background which may limit their judgments when collecting information, interviewing, or interpreting. Therefore, for the integrity of this study and to the best of my ability to make sure this study is accurate and true, I will outline my character, background, and personality traits that are relevant to my experiences in this form of research and this study.

I am a first-generation Mexican American who is the first and only in her family to graduate from the university and continue to pursue higher education as the youngest in the family of seven girls. My father whom I hold with utmost respect never made it past third grade. As a dark-skinned Mexican immigrant living in Texas as early as the mid-1940s, he was fully aware of the lack of opportunities, racism, and discrimination that were in society and the education system. While working as a teacher at Huerta High School and pursuing my master's degree in education in the Social Education, my interest in my background as a Latina and opportunities for low-income minority students began to take precedence as I worked in the school to which I graduated from with the same demographic background as myself. I then began to study education policies while

continuing to hear my father talk about his own experiences and learning about the experiences of my older sisters before me.

I began to involve myself more in the curriculum, program development, and leadership roles as I felt a desire to improve the condition of the school. It was also motivating to find colleagues and peers that were just as insightful and driven as myself. Within the time we built curriculum, presented the program in multiple conferences, and built relationships with the students that are still strong to this very day.

By 2015, after being the leader of the freshman team for four years, the original coordinator of the program was stepping down to move to graduate school back to her hometown in the Northeast and many of my colleagues were endorsing me to become the new program coordinator. The Dean of the school agreed and for two years, I continued to develop the program, present at conferences, recruit students, create curriculum, and continue to teach. As the program evolved throughout its inception, I evolved alongside it.

Much of my own identity as an educator and professional has been driven by my background and education. I am from the community and I live with the audacity to hope that my community and my students will do much more and go much further than I have. When asked with my thoughts of the education system and my passion and desire to move further in my education, I continue to use Jeff Duncan Andrade's interpretation of his influence of Tupac Shakur in "The Rose That Grew from Concrete" (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Wherein, when we walk in concrete and society sees a rose grow from an impossible area, they then decide the rose did not belong in the concrete as it belonged with other roses and would move them with these other roses (Duncan-

Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Moving the rose meant it prevented the growth of other roses from breaking the concrete. In this metaphor, the rose would be the students being able to break away from the barriers and status quo of society and it is our responsibility to be able to support these roses and let them continue to break the barriers of oppression that were created to prevent them from having these opportunities.

Limitations

The primary concern for a qualitative study is the ethics and the involvement of human subjects. Submitting the research and study to the Institutional Review Board to be approved was the first step before being able to reach out to the participants. This way it ensured that all safety measurements were considered and do not violate any code of ethics that are implemented by the board at the University of Houston. It was also important to maintain the privacy of each participant as well as the name of the school, so therefore all participants and the school were given pseudonyms to protect the integrity and identity. To make sure the participants were also fully aware of the intention of the study, they were given consent forms as well as expectations of the study so they can understand what the extent of their involvement would be. I also allowed the participants to do member checks on their interviews to make sure there is clear communication between myself and the participant.

A few other limitations included the (1) bias of the researcher considering that I do have a large involvement in the program so I would have to make sure with peer review of my analysis of my data and coding methods; (2) The experiences of the participants may vary and the account of their education and professional background is very much different from one another. As a result, there may be a variety of different

analysis on the program; (3) it has been a couple of years since I have been involved with the program and much longer for other teachers so experiences and reflections may be distorted because of time, however with the comparison with other teachers with certain topics to find similarities will be crucial to make sure statements and accounts are reliable and valid.

Another larger limitation was also the analysis of other outside forces that were occurring outside of the program. This includes the teachers' dedication to the program and how much of a relationship they built within the program and the students. There have also been many other programs that have evolved and created much like the College Readiness Program that also targeted the population that we were working with as well and we would not be sure what the correlation or relationship these outside forces of programs had on the successes and influence on the students as well as the teachers. Even so, students successes varied along with their personalities and their motivation to be involved and not all students moved forward to the programs. Other policies in [Sol] ISD and the education system is also something to take into consideration as referenced in the table within the context.

Summary

In this study, I anticipated getting a better insight into how the educators' perspectives were within the College Readiness Program and what part of the program was effective in encouraging students to further themselves in higher education. I also sought to bring in their own experiences to showcase how much further students can be driven to higher education when teachers are empowered with their curriculum and program.

Chapter IV

Results

The purpose of this case study was to be able to see an educator's perspective of a college readiness program that was developed, implemented, and sustained by teachers for students in a predominately low-income Latinx high school in Houston. Particularly the high school that I have graduated from. This program was developed from the need for a gap that was present in this community once Huerta High School opens its doors to alleviate populations from another high school. This case study is also significant for me, the researcher, as I have graduated from Huerta High School itself and took part in the process of the College Readiness Program because I had felt the necessity of it even when I was in school. The College Readiness Program was built to make sure our population of high performing students does not leave their community schools for other alternative schools in the magnet system of [Sol] ISD or charter schools. There seemed to have been many successes in the program during the eight-year reign and the ability to find components of it and its effectiveness through the individuals who were the primary executioners is something that needed to be explored.

The following research question informed this case study:

What are educators' perspectives regarding the impact of a college readiness program on Latinx students in an urban high school?

Within the context of this broad question, there was a question developed to focus on the different components that the College Readiness Program utilized as their strengths where questions were formulated to ask the participants and the results will be used as part of the effectiveness of the program. (See Appendix E)

The research findings this chapter reports of the effectiveness of this program was made possible through the triangulation of in-depth interviews, archival documentation, as well as my own experience entangled in the research. The common themes of focus Vision, Community Building & Work Ethic, Strong Identity, and Teacher Empowerment and the responses of the participants focused on much of the ability to create an effective program in an urban Latinx high school that replicates some aspects of alternative thinking as a “school within a school” and utilize culturally responsive pedagogy with cross-curricular instruction that was driven by teachers for the students in their community.

Background of School

Huerta High School is a [Sol] ISD school in the southeast area of Houston that has a high population of Latinx students and most being first-generation students. The school opened in August of 2000 to relieve the surge of students enrolled in the already existing high school. I was one of those students that were moved to Huerta High School during my sophomore year because I was zoned to it. From the beginning, even before getting to the school I never really had thoughts of continuing my education. I loved participating in other activities that kept me occupied and had been recommended to me by my sister or other friends. The main trigger for motivation was always the drive to hang out with my friends.

Huerta High School did not seem prepared for the number of students that were entering the school as much of our educators were coming from our former middle school as well as having long term substitutes for core courses like English, math, science, and social studies. There was a college dean, but there was no college advisor on campus.

Huerta High School students would generally go to the college den to play with the foosball and check out the pamphlets that would have been made available.

Background of Participants

Participant 1: Miss Minerva. Currently, a librarian at Huerta High School and has worked in education for over 21 years. She was one of the first individuals who took part in the program development process. She has become familiar with marginalized communities such as Latinx because she is a minority herself. Minerva who is currently in her late 30s grew up in the smaller suburb of Pasadena and had very similar experiences as many young women of Latinx background have in the late 90s and early 2000. “I grew up knowing that things were not there for me at first. I would have to go look for it. I am Latina, first-generation, and getting access to college-level information was not an easy task for me. Everything was something I had to fight for and continuously ask for help. It was never something that was just given to me.”

Miss Minerva has always advocated for students and was the former English 1 teacher in the College Readiness Program. She could also be considered one of the primary drivers and motivators for the evolution of the program as we will learn in this study regarding the various initiatives and has taught six years of English, which included Pre-AP English which she reflected a lot of her lessons from the College Readiness Program and experiences since the population of students were similar to each other. She first heard of the College Readiness Program idea in development by an assistant principal and a dean of instruction who was recruiting experienced teachers within Huerta High School to be part of this initiative and was part of the program between the summer of 2010-2016. “Even though I was part of the school already, I still had to apply to be a

part of this additional College Readiness Program. And then they let me know that I got it, and that was it.”

Participant 2: Miss Ninjaem. Miss Ninjaem is currently in her early 30s and is of Anglo descent and has familiarity with her father’s struggles as a first-generation student himself. She utilized a lot of her father’s experiences to her own as an educator when she first began Huerta High School. She has been in education for the last 10 years and is currently a director for a school in Hong Kong. During her tenure at Huerta High School, Ninjaem was part of the College Readiness Program for 4 years before leaving in the Spring of 2015. She held two different roles in the program. For two of those years, she held as an English 2 teacher in the sophomore cohort team and then became the first Academic Coordinator to the Program between 2013-2015. She would teach half the amount of course load as any teacher but the other half of the time she would be managing and coordinating the program itself.

When Ninjaem first heard of the program she became familiar with the graduation rates for Huerta High School were very low and knew the school was around for 10 years before her employment. “I’ve seen this kind of gap for marginalized students across a wide array, whether it’s based on race or ethnicity or based on again, a kind of neurodiversity or ability-grouping type of marginalization.”

Participant 3: Mr. Prepling. Mr. Prepling is male in his early 40s and currently an assistant principal at the high school that was overflowing with students and the reason behind why Huerta High School was built. He has been in the education system for over fifteen years and was involved as the Dean of Instruction/Assistant Principal in the College Readiness Program for over six years before leaving in 2017 to pursue other

opportunities. He is a Mexican American first-generation individual who grew up in Pasadena, Texas and has been very familiar with the marginalization of the Latinx communities in that particular area. This is where he understood there was a huge divide between himself and other students who would be labeled as white. He felt the need to fight much more for opportunities and avenues for his community. “Having experienced and have been very aware of the racial, the historical situation that we were in, as Latino students or Latino people, in a community that was, for lack of a better term, is racist. I mean, there was a KKK there in Pasadena. As a matter of fact, I grew up right in that time in the 80s, during that. So, we were aware, when I was going to high school that it was different, that there was a difference between me, a Mexican American, and other students who were just Anglo-Saxon American”

Mr. Prepling was one of the initial trailblazers of the program and when he began Huerta High School mentioned he expressed concerns over some of the educational standards that were not rigorous or promoted within the community of the school. “We were sending our top 10 % kids into, a lot automatically accepted into Texas colleges and universities. They were coming back after one semester in college in academic probation.” Mr. Prepling felt many of the students would then enroll in their community college or not even continue their education. It was not because they didn’t have the capability or talent to do so, but because they were not prepared, and the expectations were not there. He began to express that actions needed to take place for a few years before finally being heard shortly after becoming an administrator to the school and called to the office by the principal of the school. He mentioned the principal becoming as ambitious as he was and the principal said to him, “I need you to recruit teachers ...

there's going to be a whole cohort of students. There's going to be like, 150 students per grade level and they're going to have the same core teachers starting their freshmen year." Thus, beginning the development and recruitment of the appropriate teachers that were just as driven and motivated as he felt.

Participant 4: Ms. Jessica. Formerly in public education for four years, Ms. Jessica currently is in research and grant writing at one of the major Houston hospitals. She worked for the College Readiness Program for a year but worked within the Huerta High School community for much longer. She had previously worked for the Oil & Gas industry but began teaching night classes for GED students through the United Way and in doing so, sparked a desire to move into education. Her familiarity with marginalized communities comes about her experience in Huerta High School. She said much of her understanding of Latinx communities have much to do more with observations because she is not a person of color. She mentioned an experience she had at a restaurant where she became aware that it was full of white patrons and she had a fearful feeling inside her. Much of it was the empathy and understanding that there is this sense of "otherness" that many marginalized communities feel when in a room that has no representation of their own. "The majority of students that I taught and spent hours and hours with, grew close with, got to know entire families, had dinner with, and even made friends with teachers who were Latinx at the school, as well. I would definitely say that I, an outsider, not entirely a part of the community, was familiar enough and definitely felt taken in and loved by them."

Ms. Jessica received multiple offers to teach but chose to work at Huerta High School because one of her friends who was also a teacher at the school recommended and

she enjoyed the familiarity. She taught at Huerta for about two years and heard of the College Readiness Program and applied for it her second year being interviewed by the teachers of the program, but the position had been given to another teacher. Despite the rejection, she continued to work passionately and even began to develop relationships with the teachers of the program. The next year, the English 2 position of the program was opened once again, and she was encouraged to interview for the second time and was offered the position.

Participant 5: Mr. Albus. Mr. Albus is currently a principal for an elementary school in the southwest part of Houston. He is in his eleventh year in education and worked at Huerta High School for three years; two of them for the College Readiness Program as a biology teacher for the freshman cohort. As a Latinx individual, he was aware of some differences that he had compared to the dominant groups he was in school with. He grew up in a single-parent household with his mother. He mentioned about moving from school to school living in different households while his mother worked to maintain them and never really finding a teacher that represented his background. In high school, Mr. Albus was able to settle permanently once his mother married but felt very different than his peers because a large portion of his peers knew each other for years but they were also second, third, or fourth-generation Latinx/Texan and their parents were very much familiar with the education system in Texas. Being exposed to his peers in his high school pushing towards college, he took it upon himself to push through all odds and inform himself about the opportunities and working towards higher education.

Mr. Albus was very excited when he started working for Huerta High School because he saw Latinx leadership and representation that he has not seen in his previous

experiences as a student in high school, college, or professional career. He then befriended another teacher who taught biology and took various initiatives to learn more about curriculum & instruction to push himself to be a better educator. He mentioned being able to identify with the students and finding ways to be relatable to them to enhance their engagement that was effective. He moved on to teach advanced sections of biology and was noticed by one of his biology colleagues as well as Ms. Minerva he befriended who was part of the College Readiness Program who expressed to him that he would be a great fit for the coming year when she left. “<Mr. Prepling> invited me to this - you guys had a meeting after school and then <Science Colleague> also kind of mentioned that, so I was like, alright. Well, I’ll go. And so I saw that structure. I think we had an agenda, and you could only talk about the items on the agenda. You know, it wasn’t like where someone could just hog up the airtime and just talk the whole time and nothing would get done. This was like, this is our goal. These are the topics.” With this nostalgic reflection of the meeting observation, Mr. Albus’s face seemed to glow and know right away that he wanted to be part of this program.

Theme One: Vision

The experiences between all the participants varied by qualifications and background. Two of the participants were hired after the program was going. However, three of the participants, as well as myself, were all part of the building and development of the program and the processes. Mr. Prepling, who was the administrator, remembers working with another colleague as he was recruited by the principal to find qualified teachers that would meet the standard of the program itself. He stated,

I was trying to get the teachers that were going to be in it for a while, I wasn't just yeah, we'd like to try it out. We needed teachers that we knew could be committed to this program, who were committed to these kids because one thing that that school had lacked for a long time was a lot of continuity. There were a lot of turnovers.

He emphasized why it was very important to find certain qualities and qualifications of teachers and continued,

We're not putting our kids in this rigorous, advanced courses, most of our kids belong at [Huerta], aren't coming to [Huerta]. Our top kids are going to [other Sol ISD schools], they're going to the charter schools that were popping up. They were going to just somewhere other than [Huerta], because of the magnet program, etcetera. But not [Huerta], some other place. And you know, also try to stop that brain drain, you know, like, our community, this neighborhood, could produce the kids that are going to shine. They're just going somewhere else because we're not offering them something here, not giving them the academic challenges that they're pursuing. So, on that level, kind of recruiting teachers to let them know we're going to increase the rigor by really focusing on the ninth, the pre-AP years.

In her interview, Minerva echoed much of what Mr. Prepling expressed with the need of having a more rigorous and effective program:

When we first started, what I remember was that the vision or the objective was to help our students, who were Title I students, majority

Latinos, into a college. That was it. Let's get them into college, let's get them ready for college. And so that was the main focus, was that we wanted to provide a program in which we can not only prepare them with their academics but also assist them with additional help to get there. Like, helping them figure out what college they want to apply, how to - what kinds of things they should write on their statements. It was that kind of mentorship that we provided after hours. It wasn't just something that we did. We didn't just teach them.

In the coming few months of the Spring semester of 2010 teachers were interviewed in the process by Mr. Prepling and another former administrator to find the best educational personalities. The initial vision was to start with the incoming freshman and rising sophomore students for the fall of 2010 and develop core cohorts where the students would all have the same teachers that were chosen in the program.

Ms. Ninjaem reflected her thoughts on the cohorts noting,

When I started at [Huerta] my first year I had, you know, around 180 English students and when they left my classroom they'd be going to one of six other History teachers or Science teachers and so whatever community that we worked to build in our individual classrooms kind of dissipated as the day went on and kids really could get lost in a school that size so I think the cohort model was really designed to create a small community where students would feel a part of something that if they left my class and they did something in a different class that we would be talking about it and we joked that it was like co-parenting and

that you had people that were watching them all the time and when you talked to the kids who went through the program for the first time, they talked a lot about the attention that they got relative to their peers and I think the cohort model was really one way that we made sure that those kids felt like they were a part of a community that cared.

“The cohort system. That was the game-changer.” Mr. Prepling expressed. This became an emphasis of the research as it seems that creating this cohort system laid a structure that would allow the program to evolve organically because the teachers were very much communicating with each other every day.

“Working with the [Huerta’s College Readiness Program] cohort system was probably one of my favorite ways to work with anything.” Ms. Jessica, who came into the program a few years after mentioned similar feelings about the cohort system,

Even though you didn’t necessarily know who you were going to be paired up with, a really nice part of the cohort system was that it felt like co-parenting. And so, there was, at least within our group, very honest about what we were good at, very honest about what we weren’t so good at. And we definitely tried to pick up the slack for one another. So, it was just a nice means of support that made it even easier to contribute to our vision.

From choosing these core teachers, it was necessary to have these teachers build the foundation of the program. In the archival document labeled *First Meeting Agenda* that took place on May 31st, 2010 (Appendix F) the major components and expectations of the program to be developed were already beginning for the teachers to

begin brainstorming and discussing. “What is our vision for the students in CP [College Program]?” as well as other things to reflect on at what the College Readiness Program would look like. This agenda did not only extend for this day. This particular agenda was ongoing and revisited in the duration of the summer and school year once the program began. It was in constant revising, reflection, and development.

Ms. Minerva reflected on these first meetings that took place when she joined in during the Fall of 2010:

What I feel that was accomplished during that time period was a lot of the foundation stuff that we used to guide us through the rest of the program. And for one, that was something very basic. Our meeting protocols. We had our rules on when we could speak, and just sort of those things. And we had an agenda, most of the time we would receive it beforehand so that if we had any research to do or anything to do on our own, we would be ready for the meeting. And that was also the time we figured out - when I was there it was the time, we figured out our mission statement, which is what carried us over for everything.

Meeting in “the storage” closet became a large nostalgic reference between Ms. Minerva, Mr. Prepling, Ms. Ninjaem, and me. It was a time where we were all getting to know each other and what we all envision an effective program would be. This moment may not have made us extremely close at the moment as multiple personalities were trying to bring a program to life, but it seemed that it became a bridge for each of these original team members to cross with each other and the uniqueness of “all in this together” mindset. As Ninjaem reflected:

So, one of the Math teachers had a closet off of his room that we sort of appropriated and turned into a mini-conference room with a table and a fridge. It was very close quarters. When you had all ten of us in there at one time it was very cozy. And those meetings were really just to start normalizing the idea of what we were all doing there. This was one guy's really loose idea that hadn't taken any shape. So, this was really about coming around what the vision was, what the mission statement should be. But also, a lot of us didn't know each other that well. The school was huge. So even if we'd been at the school for a year or several years, it was really easy never to have met or never to have interacted [Loud noise] intimate journey it turned out to be.

The development of the mission statement was very much an important component for the program to create and all the participants expressed the mission statement is what tied everything together. It is what made every decision once it was established. The mission statement would set the expectations for both the students and the teachers. Even coming to a couple of years after the development of the program, Mr. Albus remembers our meetings as a cohort,

What [the mission statement] should look like based on what we were doing. And so, definitely it was about having kids preparing for that college level experience. It was creating a pathway that, by the time they graduated, were applying to the top tier schools. They were applying to scholarships and grants. I knew that that was the ultimate goal.

There came a long journey during the summer of 2010 attempting to create this verse that would connect students, teachers, administrators, and parents to this one program. It was worked on countless times in meetings. We wanted to make sure it was done before and there was a lot of discussion going on about it as Mr. Prepling responded:

So, we met and there was a lot of talk about we need to set the Mission Statement, we need to set the vision and there was a lot of conversation. I gave them the very broad things that look, this is what we want to do. We're going to build an academic program that's going to be giving them success at the AP courses and when they're done with this, they will be truly college ready... There was a lot of back and forth on the verbiage and everything. I think at the end, they developed something that stayed. I mean, to the, even our mission statement was actually printed and posted in every classroom. Something that the rest of the campus didn't do with the school's mission statement.

By the summer of 2010, the mission statement was created and it became an important source to reflect on for the Huerta High School College Readiness Program, the participants, the students, and eventually extended to being known to the school. The mission statement became a part of our decision routine for the next seven years.

"Our mission is to cultivate conscious, self-aware individuals who can communicate at the collegiate level—creating a generation of Huerta High School citizens that improve the world."

Theme Two: Curriculum of Relationships

The task to implement a rigorous program with high expectations was given to the teachers to determine. We all wanted the students to be successful and we wanted to also let them understand that we were serious about the curriculum and program we were building. Most of the teachers seemed to be bought into the program, even the participants expressed how excited it was to begin working in the program. However, the other challenge would be finding a way to make the students buy-in. It was decided for us to visit campuses that seemed to have both students, teachers, and parental buy-in and see what areas we would be able to transfer into our program. We observed other schools and had wrote notes in a document we all used (see Appendix G) what we thought would be good components we can effectively use and would be affordable. Mr. Prepling articulated,

People talk about the KIPPS and the YES Preps and that sort of thing and like, what do they have that we don't have? And we realized, nothing.

They don't have - they have a lot more culture, traditions, in terms of very purposeful culture building.

However, it was also in that context where we also came to the realization that our student demographics and our resources were not very much similar to these other places, so Mr. Prepling continued:

We're not trying to be those schools; we're going to be our school. We're a new program. But let's take the best from - what we know would work best here. So, we developed this program. It came from the same things that they liked and disliked, like, we are never going to do that what they

were doing at some of the charter schools. We're never gonna do that because we can't afford it with some of the things that they did at the private schools. We're realistic.

As we observed and developed, listening to the participants speaking on the academic rigor and the building of the work ethic, it seems to connect very much with creating a community for the students in the program. Ms. Jessica also reiterated,

So, in the College Readiness Program there were multiple enhancements to try and give teachers and students a better foundation for learning. A funner foundation for learning. And a lot of freedom that I don't think you necessarily would get elsewhere. One thing that we wanted to do for our students, or something I liked to do and I would try to talk about with my cohort, was I really like to make it more fun. I would literally, we would talk about this in our meetings, about how can we get the kids to touch things more. To move things more. Whatever it is. And new ways to try to learn.

These enhancements that the College Readiness Program desired to make were all wanting to have the students relate to the curriculum which is an important component in education as stated in the literature review. Ms. Minerva,

We set the expectation that this is what we're going to do. And so, they were on board. And I think that's what kind of bonded not only the students, but they saw this project in every single one of their classes and they realized the importance of it. And then they learned something really

good. They learned something relevant that they could take home and in their lives. You know?

Mr. Albus also seemed to echo Ms. Minerva's sentiment on relevant curriculum:

[The Curriculum] only made sense to tie what the students were learning into the real world experiences so that it was more relevant to them. They would buy into it. And so, it only made sense to look for common themes. To look for skills that we wanted to teach kids and then have them experience that. Where, if they went to Social Studies, and then to English, and then to Science, and then to Math, that there were things that were related, overall.

Having higher expectations for the students individually as teachers were challenging enough. The participants felt there was such a need for making their curriculum more critically relevant to them. Cross-Curricular projects became a focal aspect of the entire program and an expectation for students to work on even before they were enrolled on campus. Making curriculum relevant but also emphasizing the need to make it critically engaging to the student came in naturally and without thought and it first began with Ms. Minerva in the summer after the College Readiness Program first began. She reflected,

The second year, at the end of the first year, my colleague, who at the time was the History teacher in my cohort, I approached her about collaborating on a cross-curricular project... and I said, 'Hey, what do you think about doing this thing together? And, the kids have to read it over the summer and then when we get back we have to work on this together, and

implement it in part of our curriculum?’ And she, you said, ‘Yeah! Let’s do it!’

This conversation seemed to become the pivotal moment in which the cross-curricular projects began and seemed to shift an emotional change from the culture of the program to make it much more connected. As Ms. Minerva continued:

So, they had something that they can talk about with each other, like, ‘Oh, we have this project to do for both of our classes and, you know, they’re talking about it in both of our classes.’ And so that was not only instilling that community building, but their work ethic was coming from two different teachers, and it was something that they shared, it was a kind of shared experience that meant something to them.

The Hunger Games project was the very first project that Ms. Minerva and I set across and it seemed to have influenced our colleagues within our cohort and the sophomore cohort to start participating and creating their cross-curricular project. It brought in political, social, economic, literature that we threaded into our required curriculum. Mr. Albus who was the Science teacher also reflected:

Where, if they went to Social Studies, and then to English, and then to Science, and then to Math, that there were things that were related, overall. And so, an example was The Hunger Games project. In ELA they were talking about the different themes in the writing. In History, it was the social, economic, governments. The way those things were running. And English classes you could make an argument. And then in ELA, you could argue what it was about. And when it came to Science you were learning

about the details of the conditions. Like, some people had to eat plants. And they were talking about mutations. And in Science, those are real-world things that interest students. And, so if you put it in a concept that they understand - and in this case, The Hunger Games books which was a super popular teen novel - and you relate it to Biology, which some people might not be so into it. It just brings it home. So that's something I saw was really impactful because the kids were going from one class to another and their learning was not disconnected. It's like if they were employees in our cohort, and their jobs were to learn about the Hunger Games things and write the essays and the arguments, and even in Math, you could see the trends. Whatever they were tracking, they could make those relationships. And again, it was relevant. It was fun.

One component that our cohort as expressed by the participants and myself was the reason why this project was very well known and effective was because it was from a popular book that the students knew which had become movies, there would be movie outings that we would make as a social incentive for the students, which seemed to build a tighter bond with the students and the staff. Ms. Minerva,

It was something that the kids connected to because it wasn't that they were reading Shakespeare, but they were still analyzing at a deeper level. So, every time the movie would come out we would go out and watch the movie, whoever could come meet up. Again, it was something very informal. Meet up for a showing on Saturday morning, whoever was there we would watch it together and it became a thing that even after the kids

moved up to the next grade level, they would still join us. And so that was always fun to see them come back and it wasn't just the ninth graders, it would be, every year we would add another grade level because they would be like, oh, we want to see the movie with you guys.

By that point, cross-curricular projects began taking precedence between the freshman and sophomore cohorts. Ninjaem being the sophomore English teacher explained:

I gave an example of that team that did something with The Hunger Games. So, they used the concept of The Hunger Games as a narrative too, first of all, engage kids because it was something of interest to them. So, they built relevance around this narrative. Then also, by looping everything back to The Hunger Games across core classes, it contextualized the learning for students. So, students are starting to see, I'm not just learning to read because reading is important. I'm learning to read to understand these concepts better so I can make sense of these other subject areas better. And so, I think we realized quickly it had that same compounding effect on their learning that the conversations in the cohorts had on their behavior and their feelings at school. It's something that I think a lot of teachers suspect, but they don't really have the opportunity to try. The more and more we tried it, the more we saw the engagement and the academic progress of the students increase. And that's when we also started seeing people try to do that vertically. So, building off of what a cohort would do one year in the next year and making reference to learning that had happened the previous year. Because otherwise this stuff

was just happening in a vacuum and there wasn't a lot of retention or a lot of engagement in the academics.

Jessica also felt there were stronger ties for the students not only academically, but culturally for the program as students would hold themselves accountable because of their teachers, despite different subjects, engaged in the curriculum with each other. They knew what the expectations were for their students within each other's class. Jessica said of these experiences:

It definitely increased engagement across classes because you could ... the ability to make quick connections and put things together. I think it was important for us for our students to really challenge ourselves how are we going to In this non-traditional way and including an entirely new person to help you. Because I know me and [colleague] worked together a lot, we were good teammates, but we did not think alike. And we definitely had different strengths and weaknesses. But it was good to have to come together and see the level of engagement that both of us would have. And I also thought that it was good for students to see, too... humanizing, in a way.... Realizing that, oh my god, they're friends! They talk about us when we're not around. And it just opened up their world that way.

Even within the context of our cross-curricular assignments, Mr. Prepling even mentioned how these projects through the cohorts created a system of expectations with effective interventions:

So, those types of projects that they did, whether it was reading *The Omnivore's Dilemma* or whether it was whatever major project - they had to do it or else they would get penalized in all four classes, so now they knew they had to do the work, but it was like, you do this big project, you get credit in four classes. If you don't do it, you're screwed. That's when we started making calls and making parenting and that cohort system, when we had the same four teachers expecting this big project, and they aren't seeing any work from you, that's when we, it's RTI (See Appendix H)... And, we did it our way. Where, we weren't focusing on discipline. We were focusing on academics.”

Our intervention forms as Mr. Prepling emphasized above (See Appendix H) were developed to have meetings with the students on their academic struggles and streamline communication between teacher and student that would build a relationship of trust and responsibility for both parties. The meeting would begin with the teachers sitting as a round table for discussion with the students present. For any extreme circumstances regarding behavior or multiple interventions, their parents would be present along with the administrator if the teachers requested his presence. However, on most occasions, the teachers were leading the meeting. Students would be asked what they felt the reason for their meeting with their teachers. Then we discuss with the student what their performance is in the classroom. Once all this is presented on the table, we would ask the student, “How can we help you to pick up your grade?” continuing with what we are willing to do for them and having that same expectation for them with the follow-up, “What could you do to make this happen?”. This became a basis of a social contract more

than just an intervention. We wanted to make sure the student felt they had control of their actions and they had the power to push themselves further. We were willing to make this happen with them, but they first, had to make sure they are willing to drive and motivation themselves. One of my primary phrases during these interventions would always be,

We can't help you if you are not willing to help yourself. You must meet us halfway.

The evolution of the intervention methods the teachers had become a large part of the College Readiness Program and expectations for teachers that would get recruited in. This was made possible with the strength of the cohort system. Each core teacher having the same students and meeting every week to discuss performance and action items to make sure we adhered to the mission statement actually brought the students closer to the teachers, but also the teachers closer to each other. The relationship of the teachers became very much intertwined with the program they started planning and building just more than interventions.

The cohorts did also create a system of expectations with its curriculum within each subject, but it also allowed for ongoing communication for the students to the parents. One of the main focuses is to make sure parents understood the expectations that we had for students and allowed us to have an open-door policy for them and our students. One specific example of these streamlined communications would be the archived document for Open House (see Appendix I) where we handed much information to the parents as well as expectations for the school year and the cross-curricular projects we would be working with their children. That form of collaboration made it possible for

the teachers to become engaged and bond with the students as much as they have with each other. Within the next couple of years, the College Readiness Program no longer struggled to find students to be part of the program, they faced the opposite type of issue, which was having too many students and their parents wanting to participate. To identify as a College Readiness student, was to have a prestigious title for the students in the program.

Theme Three: Components to a Strong Identity

The enrollment of the students into the College Readiness Program at first was looking at the standardized test scores of the students that were enrolling in Huerta High School and filtering them into the program. It was the first year of implementation and the program was unknown to everyone outside of the educators that were developing it and the principal. So, high performing students were allocated to the program regardless of consent or information on what teachers they were getting themselves into. There was much push back the first year attempting to put in rigorous curriculum and interventions with the students to set the precedence of things to come in the next few years of their high school careers. However, by the end of the first year when parents and even students them self were starting to request to be part of the program, it became apparent to the case study participants that they were truly creating something that would linger on for these students, their families, and themselves for years to come. Ms. Nijaem commented, “I think we were sort of stunned by just how much they craved that identification with the program, especially because a lot of them, at first, tried to distance themselves from the idea of being in that special program.” One reason for this was possible because the

College Readiness Program became a brand of identity in such a large school. Ms. Minerva expressed this sentiment,

I think the branding was really important because we're in such a large school. We had at least 3000 students at that time... We have a staff of over 200 people and so there is no sense of community in a school this large unless you are a part of something, like band or football. And so, the branding in our program was just about - I don't even remember how that happened - I think it was probably the one year we decided hey, we should have a t-shirt as a grade level. And that just kind of happened from there, that developed into a hoodie and that was like, a sense of pride when you would wear your hoodie. And that was the year you became a ninth-grade student and you were wearing your Class of whatever [College Readiness Program] hoodie. And I think it was important to give our students that identity because they owned the program - they felt like they were a part of the program. They felt like they're a part of something bigger.

Ms. Jessica also seemed to have expressed similar thoughts and went on to even make a lesson of it within her classroom on the sense of identity and self. As she stated,

We studied identity at the very beginning of my class and what it really was, was a segment into symbolism and to go off of that, people look to symbols of things to represent themselves. It's completely natural. It's a way of self-expression. Some people do it more than others. But what [the College Readiness Program] did was allow these kids something symbolic or totem to hold, whatever it was. So, we had our specific colors. We had

our specific shapes. We had hand signs. We had t-shirts. Everything. Award ceremonies. More award ceremonies. Different types of competitions. And things became, in this own little way, institutional. Which is something that was definitely not happening across the board at the school that it was that we worked at.

Mr. Albus also identified with this belief because the students and teachers were all part of something with the same experiences,

[The students] were all a part of the same experiences, the same struggles, the same having to revise their essays in Ms. [Minerva's] class over and over and over. And they would all talk about all those things. And you do need that, so the kids don't get lost in the big school. So, they know where they belong.

The community building and bonding of the program became a symbol for the students in Huerta High School. It became an identity and way of life for each of them and their peers to have a sense of empowerment themselves. Their teachers initiated much of the program and development, but the students became a large part of why the program evolved the way it did. There was a student advisory board where students became elected officials and representatives to speak to teachers and administrators. The students that were part of the advisory board not only were the voices of the program, but they also did outreach. T-shirts and hoodies were made by teachers at first but then given the responsibility to the students (see Appendix K). "I think that the way they responded with the sweatshirts and the merchandise, the way they pushed to be able to design their merchandise, and the way whenever we had academy-wide events they showed up en

masse to do things or just to be there and be a part of it,” Ms. Nijaem expressed. Events that the freshman team came up with became yearly activities that the students would create and engage in (see Appendix J for example). Many other students took on initiatives of their own when they felt there was something that needed to be done. Mr. Prepling reflected on moments where the students took control of situations,

So, you saw an influx of organizations and clubs being started by Prep students. Among them is the infamous anime club, which is probably the largest organization on campus and that was started by a [College Readiness Program student]. And he was a freshman. When we tell them you can do whatever you want, if we don’t have it you can create it.... And it was because they thought, this is my school and I can do this. And they felt that empowerment.

It was this sense of drive and justice that had the students start taking risks and actions. Instead of filing grievances for issues they felt the school or administration had, they would start taking initiatives to finding solutions and some of these would be made possible because of the cross-curricular projects that were allowing the students to understand things in a more critical manner. Ms. Minerva gave an example of how the freshman teams curricular project had the students go up against the principal himself to make their voices heard,

The World Geography teacher and I taught Animal Farm together. And so, I would teach the literary aspects. She would teach the political, socio economic aspects of the differences between socialism, communism, the Russian Revolution. So, that was a big cross-curricular activity that we

would do that actually and it came up later in an incident with our students. So we were taking them on a field trip to the Museum of Fine Arts and we had a new principal who was very strict about dress code, and they had to wear, you know our dress code at that time was they had to wear pants, I think, no matter what. And we had told our students they needed to dress professionally. That was our thing. If you're going to go to the museum, we want you to dress professionally. And so, they were looking forward to wearing professional wear, but in a skirt or dress format. And so, they took it upon themselves, these girls, to write a letter and present it to the principal. And in the letter, they made allusions to Animal Farm and made allusions to the principal being a dictator. And, I had no idea they were doing this, but it came back to me with the principal, he was like, hey, are you guys teaching Animal Farm? And I said yes, why? And he said, well, your students just came up to me, very polite, it was during lunch, and they asked me to read a letter. It was a group of about, I don't know, eight to ten girls, explaining why they should be allowed to wear professional wear and in it they made an allusion to the dictator and alluded that to me, he said. So, I thought that was classic. We laughed about it, obviously, but definitely through these cross-curricular projects, and curriculum, and planning, we were able to really reinforce what we were teaching. And allow our students to really understand what they were learning and use it in a real-life situation. So, that was pretty awesome.

It became apparent to us that the curriculum we were utilizing was working along with the branding so they can identify with the College Readiness Program. “The people within that organization, the teachers and whatnot, we're empowering students to do more, we're giving them a voice, a platform, just because the way they were learning was different. And so, you could see students really start taking leadership roles,” Mr. Albus expressed. This showcased to the participants that the students were utilizing their learning and making it relevant to engage in their own lives.

Theme Four: Teacher Empowerment

It was apparent by the interviews with the participants that they held a very appreciative connection with the College Readiness Program. Much of the responses given were reflections of their involvement and their relationships with the students and themselves. This program was created by teachers for the Latinx students in Huerta High School to become successful. Speaking to Mr. Prepling who was the administrator of the program expressed his desire to let the teachers take the platform. Once he vetted and interviewed them for the program gave them free rein on decisions that were made and developing the program from the ground up. He gave all the appreciation for making his and their vision possible.

I give most of the credit to the teachers that participated in that program. I mean, from the inception, in terms of once we - all I can take credit for is selecting the teachers. Once the teachers were selected and put in a room together to figure it out, they made the magic work. They're the ones making phone calls. They're the ones being creative about how to go about and how to intervene with students so that it wasn't so much

administrator trickles down to the kids. No. It was the people directly working with the kids empowered to make some decisions.

Ms. Minerva acknowledged the administration allowing the teachers to take control. “He was not micromanaging us, and our AP lead, like, our Program Director, he was kind of the same way.” As well as Mr. Albus also expressed appreciation that the administration allowed a lot of empowerment given to the teachers for the College Readiness Program.

Your teachers are the ones doing the heavy lifting for this program. Your students do the heavier lifting learning the content, but the teachers are the ones that set the standard on what we’re going to do. And the only way that that was going to happen, and I realized this before I joined this program, was that we had a leader that would remove those mental roadblocks.

Even when presenting the program or endorsing the effectiveness of the program, Ms. Ninjaem expressed that many other educators would be impressed by this program that was being presented by teachers themselves. She reflected on a conference that she as well as a couple of the other participants presented in Florida and her realization at how that was able to encourage her to do more.

So, we presented in the third year of the program to a school district in Florida on what we were doing and one of the administrators came up and asked me after the - he was like, ‘you’ve been a teacher for how long?’ And I said four years and he said it’s kind of ridiculous that you’ve been able to do all these kinds of things. Like, he was right. The experience I got in entrepreneurship and program management and design and

collaboration and all these things were just way outside the realm in terms of skill sets of like, people who have been teachers for four years that you're traditionally exposed to. And it put my whole education career on a whole different trajectory than it would have been otherwise.

The presence of empowerment for the educators was there and the teachers were very much aware of their own power within the program. Since the very beginning with the participants Ms. Minerva, Ninjaem, and myself; to those that came in after like Mr. Albus and Ms. Jessica all expressed their understanding that this program empowered them to be a driving force for their students and would make decisions with the team on what the best approaches would be. Ms. Jessica reflected on her own experiences when she first started as well as what she expected as a College Readiness Program teacher or even as an educator.

There was definitely a strong presence of teacher empowerment within the program. The entire thing was in - it was teacher driven. And you had a lot of teachers that were incredibly focused on students so in that way it was teachers with interests in students that were driven... I will admit that even before I started teaching at [The College Readiness Program], I had a sense of empowerment that I think just kind of comes from within. I was doing a lot of what I wanted to... What was nice about joining [the College Readiness Program] was it felt like I had more freedom to do so because the expectations for [the College Readiness Program] teachers were so different by students, and by administrators and by other teachers, that there was almost a centric nature... I remember when I first started

teaching, I was told that I had to have a plan that was going to be the exact same as every single person around me and we had to do the same pacing... I don't think that I would have experienced the successes that I did as a teacher or would have my students experienced the successes that they did as students if I'd had to have kept to this idea that I had to stay the same as everybody else around me. And that doesn't even make sense because everyone has their own specific needs.

An important take away from all the participants was the need for this teacher empowerment within the classroom and the program. The students were the main reason for the programs creation. The teachers may have been the driving force, but the students were the reason behind this driving force. As Ms. Jessica continued to express, “[Teacher empowerment] is depending on your students, what type of involvement is needed and also what that involvement means for both you as a teacher and then as a student in your community.”. There is a stark difference between the first meeting agenda (see Appendix F) to the very last meeting agenda (see Appendix L) Where you notice an evolution occurs. It was the first trying to figure out what we were trying to develop showcasing how are we going to evolve. In the latter meeting agendas showcases a breakdown of subjects and aspects of how we are going to empower the students further. It even showcases a democratic aspect of having the educators take turns on speaking their mind or when they felt there was something important to present, they would be given a platform to discuss.

When asked if teacher empowerment is necessary to be a driving force to develop programs such as the College Readiness Program, all the participants did not hesitate in

their responses. Mr. Albus felt the importance of it within the marginalized community as a Latinx individual himself and his own learning experiences engaging with his colleagues,

Everyone operated under that same vision and that same mission, we were all able to unite. And then we were empowering each other. We were sharing skills, we were sharing our work habits, our personalities. And there were pieces that I picked up from other colleagues that I wouldn't have picked up if I had still been in that isolated role of just a teacher in this big, comprehensive high school. Being so focused, I was able to see examples of what to do, how to do it better, and that just grew me as an individual, as a person. So, it's definitely important to give people in marginalized communities an opportunity to experience that because then you create a cascade effect. Now, I don't know what impact that had on students there, but those students had an opportunity to see someone like them, or someone that they knew, someone that they could relate to me and the things that I was doing in the program.

Ms. Minerva also echoed this same sentiment lending her own experiences as a marginalized Latinx student growing up,

I think, in communities such as ours, where the majority of our parents are working full time or overtime, that they are living in a sense of, I just need to work to make sure there is food on the table. And while I know that education is a big part of why they're here in this country and why we came to this country, it's not something they know how to push. And so, I

think in programs such as ours where we have a lot of students who are on Title I, free and reduced lunch, the teachers are the ones that have to be driving certain programs, whether it's this one or encouraging them to apply to college, or leading them in curriculum that will help prepare them for college. Because they won't have that at home, unfortunately. And so, the teachers really have to step up and do more. It can't just be I'm just here to teach. They have to be there before school, they have to be there during lunch, they have to be there after school, on the weekends. They have to plan for additional enrichment for the students to feel like this is a program that matters. This is something that's important to them. It's something that, for myself, as a former student like the students I taught, I didn't have that growing up. I didn't have the teachers going above and beyond saying I think you need to look into this school, I think you qualify for this, that's not something I grew up with.

Being able to reflect on one's own experiences as students, many of the participants' who were Latinx' drive was to enforce what they would have liked to see in their youth and the services and opportunities that could have been. They understood what the students were experiencing because they experienced it themselves. Which is why it made it easier and more effective for the program to be much more impactful. Students saw representation and were able to identify with the teachers. However, it is important for all educators regardless of background to understand where their students are coming from. "What [the College Readiness Program] did and what our teachers started to see, really early on, especially when you're intervening with students, that you

have to have a big awareness of what's going on, what's the circumstances, the socioeconomic status of the community," Mr. Prepling expressed. Many of the non-Latinx teachers had this insight and understanding that they must know of the situation their students were going through and had a desire to empower them. Especially when most of the time teachers are put into a system that will not prepare them nor support them in the measures that should be to cater to the needs of their students. Ms. Ninjaem expressed,

The teachers in [low income and marginalized] environments are asked to do things that are completely not setting them up to be successful. But, it's important to them and they'll fight like heck to do it most of the time. It's very easy for them to become focused on just their classroom and just making their classroom work. At [the College Readiness Program], the compound effort of the team in that kind of environment is huge. When four teachers are focused on 180 kids or 150 kids and six teachers are focused on 300 kids, and we have this level of team - we called it the co-parenting thing - when you have this team wrapped around these students, so many fewer things fall through the cracks and very small efforts go much, much farther.

These efforts for the teachers to become the leaders of this program in the area were also given much respect and appreciation from not only the students but their parents. Ms. Jessica remembered the impact this made on her,

Something that I always thought was really strange - that never occurred to me until I worked with marginalized communities, is that the amount of

respect that you would get from the majority of the parents for what you were doing for their child. And for the kids to see that - it was totally different. I think it was important for them to see that, too. That they have this network. And without teacher involvement, that network and that safety net to catch them would have never been there and there's no - basically, it was a reversal of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Teacher Reflection

Programs for schools, when taken seriously and effectively, are an ongoing machine of reflections and change. This is something that the College Readiness Program attempted to keep up with. They were constantly changing and revising their program to other action items that would make their students more successful. When asked what component of the College Readiness Program worked well for them, a few of them reflected that having a mission, vision, and goal setting in mind was a beacon to the teachers to drive the successes. "In [the College Readiness Program], there was something special about [the College Readiness Program] itself and I think part of it was having a common goal that was reinforced by community and branding as well," Ms. Jessica expressed.

Mr. Albus felt the same way,

Looking back at the program, what really worked were the fact that we had a mission, a vision, and that you were able to place students in cohorts together. And, we kept having meetings every week and the meetings were about the mission and the vision. The questions were always posed open-endedly, so that we were then able to think independently and come

up with ideas. And so, that right there is a big piece of how it allowed us all to grow and become instructional leaders on our own. Eventually, in the ninth-grade cohort, for example, we went from meeting every week to almost every day. And it was because we were revisiting what were the goals, what was the vision.

This sentiment was also expressed by Ms. Minerva,

There's the mission statement, and that kind of drills everything; we kept going back to that. When we wanted to create something new, we wanted to make sure that it fell under the mission statement. The other thing is the fact that for me I was in a cohort with three other individuals who were very willing to just try new things, who were incredibly resourceful, would easily adapt to any kind of school change that we might have.

"I think the most effective part of the program was the teacher empowerment that really led to the students," Mr. Prepling mentioned. All participants expressed empowering the teachers was the most successful component who was influenced and motivated by each other in their cohort systems and as a group, which was interwoven within their responses in this entire case study. Ms. Ninjaem stated,

I think it's safe to say that while we tried to approach things strategically, a lot of what worked we sort of stumbled upon. I think some of the things that were super effective were the way the program was run by teachers, the way that we had administrators who were willing to block

and tackle for us as opposed to just telling us what to do to get obstacles out of our way. I think it was a big deal that we had these cohorts.

“It was the continuity of the program that was one of its biggest strengths which is why it was important that it was teacher-led versus administration-led,” Jessica said. To which she also tied in the need for cohorts and goals for the program. “And I think that the way the cohort system was set up, alongside the branding and alongside the continuity of thought, message, and purpose - you found people who wanted to stick to it.”

Programs often do need reflections and revisions and as stated previously, it was something the entire group of education participants were always aware and understanding of when part of the college readiness program. They were asked to think about a component that they would probably change if they can go back and revise knowing what they have experienced and know now. Ninjaem reflected on the negative push back that the program would get at times and expressed how she would want to redirect that,

I would want to think from very early on how we were going to make the whole high school a part of that process. Because we talked about how there were moments where there was a lot of unnecessary antagonism and fighting to fight just based on peoples’ perceptions that weren’t even necessarily the reality.

Mr. Prepling expressed similar views,

I think for the future I think there needs to be assurances that say this program is integrated into the fabric of the entire school to the point where, when an educator is in that program they realize, okay, I’m in it for

the long run, I'm here to teach these types of courses, with these types of students, and the expectations are high, but they have faith in me to do my best and get there. And I think that's what we didn't do enough of. We didn't solidify that or make that - I don't want to say - a guarantee, because in public education, as we see right now, things can go haywire. But at least to make it articulated within the school's vision. I think that that would be more important, so it's good to have your own vision as a program in and of itself, but have it really incorporated in the fabric of the entire school.

Often, many educators and students who were not involved in the program gave a negative review or would attempt to push back against it. Many of these individuals had the assumption that the program was exclusive and only favored smarter students. This is something that the College Readiness Program knew very well of and always attempted to combat these false narratives. However, in reflection, educators felt they should have given more of a push to engage the rest of the school and the community to feel just as empowered and included as the students in the program have.

Summary

This chapter discussed the beginnings of Huerta High School and its background in history and demographics and the development of the College Readiness Program. The main component that was discussed was the analysis of participants on the perceptions toward the components of the College Readiness Program by educators that took part in it. These findings are based on analysis from transcriptions in interviews as well as archival data that was still from my database that supported the responses of each

participant. Each component was discussed with each participant at different moments and utilized as themes for this chapter's analysis. The initial themes that were reflected in can be found in the interview protocol (see Appendix E).

In addition, other common themes emerged from the discussions to which I added as part of this chapter. Such additions were the discussion of relationships that were built in the program between the teachers but also with the students. Another additional component that was followed up on was the reflections of the teachers and what components of the College Readiness program were more effective for them and what could have used more revisions.

Chapter V

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to analyze the perspectives of educators who were involved in the College Readiness Program at Huerta High School. Huerta High School is a low-income school with a large population of Latinx students whose history had high levels of drop-outs as well as low turnouts of college readiness. Parents would generally opt-out of attending the school to another school or choice in the magnet program or students who would leave for higher ed, would usually return because they had struggled academically. These issues were a call to action for administration and teachers within the school to develop this program that involved teacher empowerment, critical pedagogy, and cross-curricular developments. This study attempted to find common themes that were rooted within the program during its inception as well as the development. Utilizing triangulation by collecting the data from participants' interviews, archival documents that were part of the program, as well as my own experiences as an educator in this program common elements were presented.

The research was conducted through one to one interview with each participant individually with five educators that were involved in the College Readiness Program. Interviews were made in person at public coffee shops. Follow-up interviews were done via online with permission and for the health and safety of participants in the duration of March as a result of the CODIV-19 virus. This chapter will review, analyze, and discuss the findings of this study regarding my own experiences as an educator within the program. It will also articulate the impact the college readiness program not only made on the students but the teachers as well. This chapter will make it clearer the impact the

College Readiness Program had on students at Huerta High School because it was lead and run by educators themselves.

The fundamental research question that was pursued through the course of this case study is:

- I. What are educators' perspectives regarding the impact of a college readiness program on Latinx students in an urban high school?

This question was answered through open-ended discussion questions with participants and followed components of the College Readiness Program that later emerged as themes.

Theme One: Vision

One of the pivotal moments that was discussed and even brought up as a very important component of the program was developing a mission and goal for what we envisioned as a successful program. It was one of the very first things that were a priority on the first meeting agenda (see Appendix F). All the participants spoke of having a common goal and the importance that we all circled back to this during decisions in our meetings as a cohort. It was one of the major aspects that involved the investment of the teachers to brainstorm and discuss with each other what their values were as well as what was important to them regarding educating student.

Organizations make mission and vision a fundamental aspect for developing successful businesses, nonprofits, and programs because there is a common goal to what the outcome should be. It was key for the teachers to be the ones to have developed a vision for the team the entire College Readiness Program because it was made their own with their effort and ideals. Therefore, it was possible to have them bought-in and

invested in the programs since the very beginning. Having a common vision allowed the teachers to collaborate and work together to build the program. If the teachers showed they were invested it would eventually trickle down to the students and their investment as well. Investment and ownership of the program is something all the participants felt happening. This study also showcased the need for a vision in the form of a mission because it allowed longevity of the program even when the founding members of the program were no longer there. Three of the five participants in this study were all founding members as well as myself that took part in creating the mission and vision of the College Readiness Program. However, two of the participants came after the mission and vision were developed but also mentioned it was very important for them during the interview as it allowed them to connect with their cohorts and their fellow teachers.

Theme Two: Curriculum of Relationships

A theme that emerged during the interviews was the development of relationships through the curriculum. The participants all spoke at ease about being in an ideal situation to develop their curriculum because it allowed them to be able to be master curriculum developers within their content. However, when asked about cross-curricular lessons and projects, all spoke eagerly on having the ability to work and collaborate with each other. Their tones in expressing their appreciation to have someone who had their personality and feedback allowed the creation of critical pedagogy in their classroom by utilizing each other as enforcers of the curriculum and expectations. In addition, the importance of finding a curriculum the students would find relevant and engaging was something that all the educators appreciated because of their cohort. Having the same

students to build lessons for, but also similar experiences with each other that blossomed into respect and mutual friendships with one another.

Those common bonds between the educators were apparent for the students and the participants also reflected that their relationships with the students also strengthened as a result. Conversations between some teachers would be carried over between classrooms because the students were able to connect with their teachers through multiple thread lines because of these cross-curricular activities. When asked about their cross-curricular projects with their colleagues, many of the participants would reflect on their developing relationships with their cohort team and then moving to their relationships with their students. It was clear there were long-lasting relationships that were created, and many participants did mention holding relationships with their former colleagues as well as former students to this very day.

Theme Three: Components to a Strong Identity

Identity is important to students and the participants all agreed within their interviews that every student is seeking something to identify with. The College Readiness Program became a pillar for the identity of these kids that made it ok for them to be the “smart” kids in the school. It made it ok to strive for more in their education. The setup of the program was congruent with other private and charter schools’ cultural aspects to build a relationship with the student so they can feel they identify with and want to be part of. Then mixing this type of identity with the expectation of college readiness brought in a level of academic rigor and empowerment to the students that the participants were surprised came so quickly.

For the first year, the participants agreed there was a massive push back against the academic rigor of the program, but many of them, including myself argued because the students never had that expectation before. For teachers in this program to identify these as potentially gifted to engage with more and expect more was life-changing for them, especially freshman students coming from middle school. Push back was extensive the first year with students who were not expecting or identifying with the program, but many of them realized their capabilities and became active and engaging within the entire school. Enrollment increased as any student who felt they identified with the academic expectations of the program would be able to take part in the program if they desired. This showcased that they had a voice within their education, and they were experiencing this with other peers who felt the same way. Participants noted that the students learned how this was a strength for them and wielded this power on many occasions to push back against the administration or even demand more as mentioned by the participants in the previous chapter.

Theme Four: Teacher Empowerment

The biggest theme that seemed to transcend this entire study was the activism and the power the teachers had with the entire program. Since the very beginning participants spoke of the actions, they or their peers took with making decisions of the program and even having administrative support. Furthermore, this case study showcases the necessity to empower the teacher. Participants were vocal about understanding the demographics of students they were working with and even some reflecting on their own experiences as Latinx students growing up themselves.

Placing the teachers in a room to develop a program for the students in their community was an important move for the school administration to make and it made other aspects of the program to evolve organically. Allowing the teacher to be the developers of their program and curriculum within the same cohorts transitioned to building a curriculum together that was relevant and engaging for the students. Participants even expressed going above and beyond for their students by creating events or “asking for forgiveness later” as they felt the decisions they would make, while not illegal but were out of norms of the public-school expectations were all for the betterment of the students. Empowering the teacher allowed the evolution of student empowerment that then became the driving force of the entire program.

The last theme that was made apparent was needed for a follow-up was finding out and engaging with the participants on what they felt was the most effective part of the College Readiness Program and what they felt could have needed more development. Some responses varied for the need for development that went to maintaining the teachers to be the ones to hire other teachers to be part of the program to focusing more on the development of college readiness for teachers to be faculty advisors. However, this all involved teacher empowerment and the effectiveness of the program is a reflection of how empowered the teachers feel when in development. Teacher empowerment was a strong force of the College Readiness Program from the very beginning to the very end. Even at its weaker moments, the need to enforce more avenues and support for teachers was the main concept that the participants felt, especially within marginalized communities like Latinx ones. Which as it would seem that any school that is in plans of wanting to develop a college readiness program much like the one that was created in

Huerta High School would have to make sure their teachers are in the front line making all the decisions.

Recommendation as a Result of this Study

In the duration of this case study, there were ongoing challenges and successes. However, the main purpose of this study remained consistent to find the perspectives of the College Readiness Program for Huerta High School. The program provided much-needed access for Latinx and other low-income students in a high school that was struggling to retain students within the community and prepare them to be ready for higher education. Unfortunately, with the change of administration, the program was not taken into regard to flourishing the way it could have. There was much more turnover within the school and teachers in the program lost support from the new management and prevented many of them from continuing the engagement as they once had.

The cohort system became very influential toward the school and it was implemented throughout the entire campus by the 3rd year. However, the quality of the cohorts outside of the College Readiness Program varied among each group. There were cohorts that were engaging into a replicate and create identical relationships and forms of support for their students which seemed very promising, but the process into putting the teachers into the system was not present nor the buy-in for the reason behind the cohort system itself. This left many teachers frustrated at the lack of support or personality clashes with their team. Although the College Readiness Program did experience dysfunctional moments with each other at points, our end goal was always tying in and gravitating towards the mission statement that was created. We were purposefully put together because we aligned with each other's visions and our system was created

organically with our relationships. We were not randomly selected and placed into a system with others.

The program eventually evolved to become an IB program within the school, but still maintains the events and participation of students and maintains a new mission and vision utilizing the IB standards. As a result of interviews with participants, it became clear that active teacher support for managing the program and program development was very much important. Having a program that seemed to have been effective, should have continued to gain traction and support from an administration that would share the same ideology as the mission statement as the program developed. There would most likely be less engagement and buy-in from a new alternative program to which the teachers nor students have a form of agency or input. If a program is attempted as such, there should be a collection of teachers at the forefront to run, monitor, and engage the entire implementation of it from the very beginning with full support and confidence from the administration.

Researcher-Participant Interaction

A key element to this qualitative case study is that the researcher was a participant of the program as well as the interviewer toward the other participants. Having the researcher as a participant allowed more of a trustful and engaging and honest discussion with the participants when asked for their perspectives. It also allowed the researcher to connect more themes that threaded with each other between all the interviews. While I played a large role in the College Readiness Program, my desire was attempting to triangulate the effective components of the program by using perspectives with other participants, documented archival evidence of activities or events that were presented

during these interviews or the evolution of the program, as well as my understanding of these themes that were considered. Had I not been part of the program, it would have taken more time in understanding the history of the program as well as the inner workings.

Having been part of the College Readiness Program and even a former alumnus of Huerta High School, I was understanding of the educational needs that were not being met and in the duration of the program, understand the components that I wanted more perspectives on. I do feel that relationships in the program between colleagues were very strong from the very beginning and evolved as a curriculum specialist. I noticed teachers taking more action and allowing their students to use their voices to speak up. This was not present within the school 10-15 years ago. At least not as effectively as it was during the time of this program was running.

The identification of teachers to manage programming is necessary. There were at least two participants that I became extremely close friends to and the others I have not been able to effectively maintain a close kinship with but still hold conversations on occasion and high regard for. This was to my advantage for convenience in this research to be able to get a hold of them immediately. Although, it could also be held to a disadvantage if one adds in the personal relationships that were developed since we all have the same insights and visions. I could have attempted to extend to reach out to other potential participants in the program as well, but due to the short window of this case study, the recruitment was made rather quickly. Despite the selection process for participants, I do feel that many of the responses would have been very similar to the ones of all the participants that took the time to be interviewed. All participants were

selected because of their ideals and their personality fitting the mission statement before and after the development of the program. Having similar expectations and ideals was an important quality to the program and therefore there would have been a possibility that the interviews would have still had similar analysis regardless of the educators that were being interviewed from the program.

Limitations

There were a few limitations for the effectiveness of the program that did not involve the participants' perspectives, however, could have been a variable for the successes of the college rates with the students. From the inception of the College Readiness Program, [Sol] ISD, as well as other organizations were also implementing and creating programs that took part in our students' lives while they were in our program as well. It was Mr. Prepling who also noted the possible correlation to success within our program during our interview but also the underlying demographics of the Lift Program which he made mention,

The other cool thing, among other things, was the fact that we were even more purposefully building that college readiness component. I mentioned, that right around the time College Readiness Program was starting, the Lift Program was starting. The Lift Program though only benefited the top 1%. I was on campus, and we had a lot of people on campus, and we decided to build our College Readiness because we knew that not every kid wanted or could do the Lift Program... But, it's undeniable for those of us that were there to know that because of the Huerta High School College Readiness Program, that those Lift Program

scholars were able to go to these highly selective universities because not everyone was sending them to the types of universities that we were sending them to, and the Lift people by themselves would talk to us about, yeah, you [College Readiness Program students] are a lot more prepared than those [other campuses].

The College Readiness Program in Huerta High School was open enrollment for any student who was willing to push themselves to be prepared for college and have selective core teachers to be there to build that bridge. They opted to be in the program no matter what their academic background was. This was not the case for them participating in other programs that had at times a very selective vetting source for that program's success.

Recommendation for Future Research

Much like the School Within Us program, it is highly recommended that other programs such as these are studied as a multi-case study to find any correlation with any of the components that is similar to this qualitative case study. It is important to know new research emerges about low-income, Latinx, and other marginalized communities and it can become rather daunting. However, to find other programs that are built from the ground up from teachers themselves can be studied and possibly compared to each other regarding the similarities and successes. It is even likely for schools that would like to develop a program themselves to use this case study as a resource for some information to build and implement programming that is driven by teachers.

It is important to also note the limitations of this research as well as the need to further evolve the development of the program. Not all aspects of the program that was

presented would work for all schools. So it is possible to grasp the components to which cater to the school. Most educators have an understanding of differentiated instruction in the classroom for their students as not all students are the same. This also pertains to the creating of programming in schools. Not all schools should be the same regarding a program and programs should evolve to cater to the need and demands of the communities, students, and parents of the schools. This case study is important to note the components that can be adopted with the schools and allow their programs to evolve from there.

Conclusion

A very large takeaway from this entire research study was the affirmation of experiences and perspectives that I had myself from the program. There was an extensive amount of collaboration within the cohort system with the teachers and it allowed a more motivating force for the students to engage in. It is the empowerment component that the participants expressed that allowed the program to be as successful as it was. It was also something that I felt myself, but it became more apparent when speaking to the participants, I was not the only one. As a Latinx educator that is the first generation that was a product of Huerta High School, I came with a deeper appreciation and understanding of how the public school system can be an agent of empowerment of change, not only for the students but also for the teacher. Especially if the teacher was that of their community and demographic background.

I would like to also note how the College Readiness Program was a source of influence and inspiration toward the teachers themselves. The teachers came into the program with the expectations to influence and motivate students to become college-

ready and ended up also pushing them to move forward in their education and professional attainment. For example, Mr. Albus took note of this and mentioned it in his interview:

So, do you need teacher empowerment to make a program work? Of course... Do you need to see other Latinos doing great things? Yes, you do. They influenced me to take the next step. And after [the College Readiness Program], I wasn't afraid of anything. I left [the College Readiness Program] and I went to [Anonymous] High School which at the time was one of the lower performing high schools. Super rough. But that's how empowered I was that no matter where I went, I had a vision, I had what we were going to do, and everywhere I've gone that's what I've done.

Mr. Albus went further on to obtain his master's in leadership and is now a principal at a public elementary school. He as well as the other participants, including myself, moved on to do other work because they desired to make more of an impact. Mr. Prepling left and worked as a principal for a local charter school when he left Huerta High School. Ms. Minerva obtained her master's degree and is now an accomplished librarian at Huerta High School and has been requested to present the many activities that she does in the library at a national level. Ms. Ninjaem went on to an ivy league and is now a director for a school in China. Ms. Jessica pushed forward and motivated herself to go into the medical sector and is currently doing research for one of the major hospitals in Houston. I am working to obtain a higher degree of education to break barriers for my own family and cultural background, but also be a driver of change for my community.

This experience in the program and this research study is very unique as it showcases that the line of influence and academics is not one streamline thread going towards the students, but it also one of the students driving and motivating the teachers. Teacher empowerment played a large role in the achievements that were made in the College Readiness Program at Huerta High School. The perspective of the teachers showcases much successes with the motivation they had to be part of this program. The other account is the teachers motivating each other. Through this unique program, we were able to influence at least seven years of high school students and fifteen or so teachers to become advocates for themselves, their education, and their communities. It is only hopeful that other programs that would be similar to this one exists and the future for Latinx students and other marginalized communities can be bright with educators that have similar goals like the ones that came together in a storage closet almost 10 years ago.

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Appendix A

Bachelor's Degree by Population

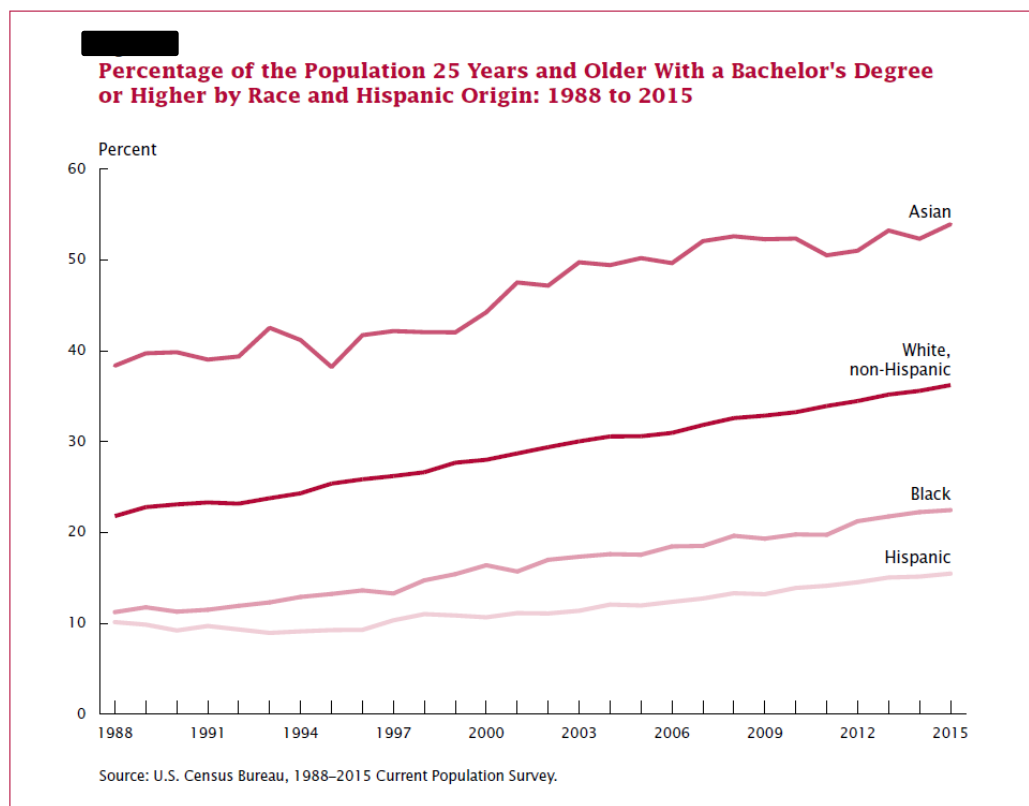


Figure A1. Bachelor's Degree by Population. Percentage of the population 25 years and older with a bachelor's degree or higher by race and Hispanic origin between 1988 and 2015.

Appendix B**[Sol] Tracks Ethnicity 2017**

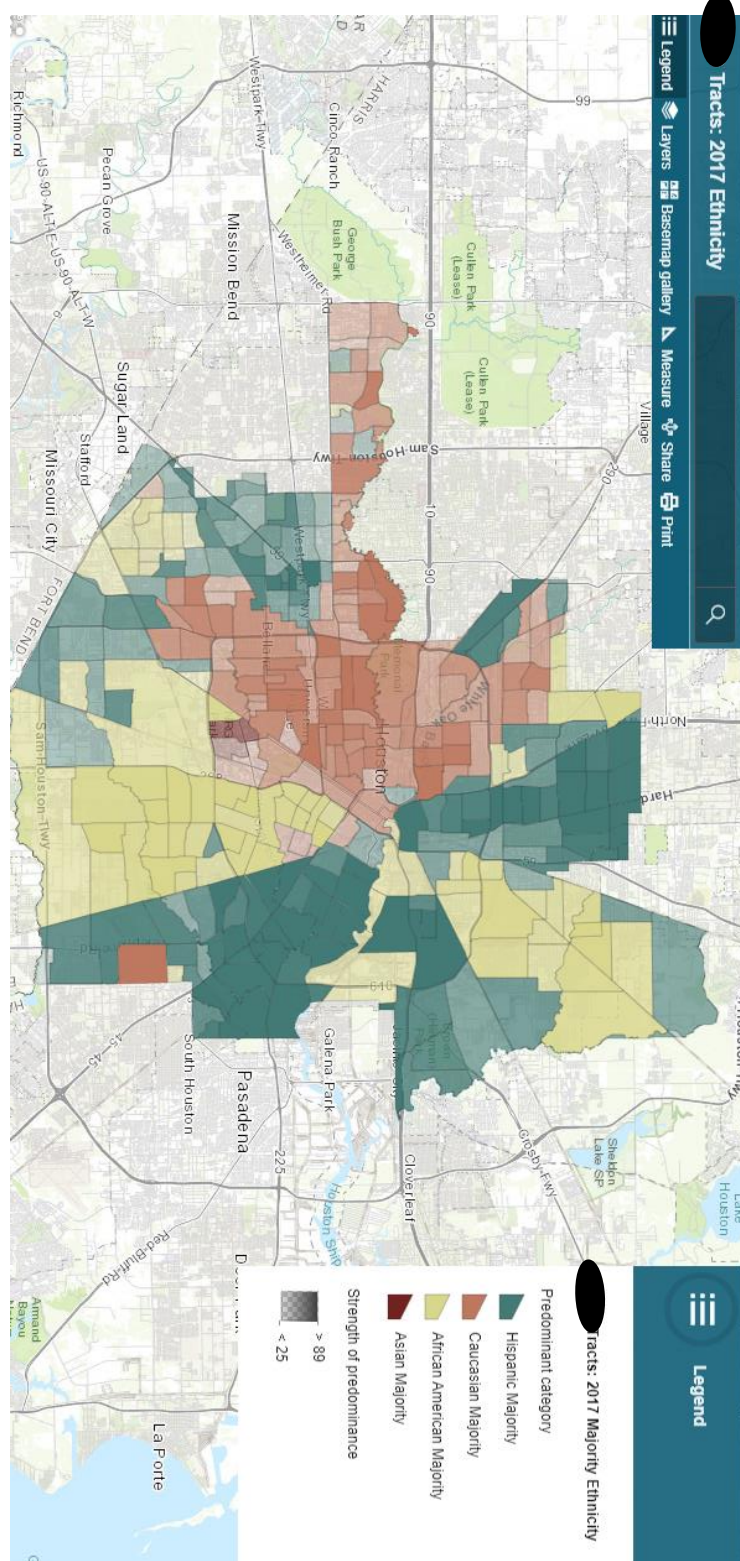


Figure B1. [Sol] Tracts Ethnicity 2017. Distribution of major ethnicities within the Houston area based off [Sol] Independent School Districts information in 2017.

Appendix C

Recruitment Message for Participants

Greetings!

This is Marisela Martinez and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Houston. I am conducting a research study about the College Readiness Program that we all were involved in at [Huerta] High School anytime between 2011-2017. I am emailing/texting to ask if you would like to participate in this study as I know you were an educator in the program, and I wanted to gain an insight on its effectiveness through your perspective. Participation is completely voluntary. I will be conducted an initial interview as well as a follow-up that last about 20-30 minutes each interview. We can meet at a local coffee shop or any other public facility you feel comfortable in. This research project has been reviewed by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board.

If you are interested, please email/text me back to receive additional information regarding expectations, protocols, and consent forms. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me Marisela.

Much appreciated,

Marisela Martinez

Doctoral Candidate
University of Houston

Appendix D

Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study



Consent to Take Part in a Human Research Study

Title of research study: EDUCATOR’S PERSPECTIVES REGARDING THE IMPACT OF A COLLEGE READINESS PROGRAM ON LATINX STUDENTS IN AN URBAN LATINO HIGH SCHOOL

Investigator: **Marisela Martinez**, a student which this case study project is part of thesis or dissertation being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Cameron White from the College of Education.

Key Information:

The following focused information is being presented to assist you in understanding the key elements of this study, as well as the basic reasons why you may or may not wish to consider taking part. This section is only a summary; more detailed information, including how to contact the research team for additional information or questions, follows within the remainder of this document under the “Detailed Information” heading.

What should I know about a research study?

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Taking part in the research is voluntary; whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide and can ask questions at any time during the study.

This is a case study based on the college readiness program that we were involved in during its inception and development. Minority students from low-income families are disproportionately represented in urban school districts across the United States. Houston

is currently the most diverse and one of the largest metropolitan urban centers in the country. However, the opportunities for Latino students to receive a higher education significantly less than other minority groups. The current curriculum in our public schools, which is data-driven and Eurocentric, does not allow Latino students to focus on their identity and personal growth, which can rob them from the opportunity to pursue a higher education degree. The publication *College Readiness for All: The Challenge for Urban High Schools*, stresses the importance for schools to focus on improving college readiness for minority students (Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009). The authors emphasized standards for campuses to focus on in order to turn aspirations to attainment. These standards are: coursework required for college admission, achievement test scores, and grade point averages. Education reform movements often focus on initiatives that are from the state, district, and administrator levels. One of the many resources that the United States has not utilized in education reform movements is the power educators have in their schools and surrounding community. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of allowing teachers to create a college readiness program in a predominately Huerta high school with regards to its development and curriculum. In this study, common themes will be assessed and evaluated that reflect the core effectiveness of the program which can be replicated to other schools with low-income students. These themes will focus on core components of the program's vision, academics, work ethic, and identity in hopes of duplicating the program for other schools with similar demographics.

We invite you to take part in a research study about educator's perspectives on the college readiness program from an urban Latino high school because you meet the following criteria of being involved as an educator in the program between 2011 to 2017.

In general, your participation in the research involves two separate interviews that will be conducted where you feel comfortable and will be asked a series of open-ended questions that will last about 20-30 minutes each.

There are no primary risk to you in taking part of this study **and which you will have no personal benefit, however the possible benefit to society may be having the ability to replicate the successes of this program in other urban schools.** You will NOT receive compensation for participation **in this study.**

Detailed Information:

The following is more detailed information about this study, in addition to the information listed above.

Why is this research being done?

Providing schools with high populations of minority students the blueprint and teacher assessments of this college readiness program which advocates for students' academic growth, empowerment, the neighborhood and community may also experience a positive impact. The College Readiness Program also gives a large role to the teachers that are in the classroom and focuses on the teachers as the experts.

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for 20-30 minutes in two separate interviews within March that will be scheduled at your convenience.

How many people will be studied?

We expect to enroll about FIVE people in this research study.

What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

- ***You will be interviewed TWO separate times. An initial interview as well as a follow up within a month.***
- ***The length and duration of visits will be 20-30 minutes for each, and procedures will have me going over the purpose, procedures, and consent from you before I begin recording and asking question pertaining only to the college readiness program.***
- ***You will be only interacting with me as the researcher and interviewer.***
- ***The research will be done in any public location that you feel comfortable such as coffee shops or library.***
- ***The research will be done in the duration of March and I will schedule at anytime you are available and comfortable to be interviewed.***
- ***You will be asked a series of questions that begin as an open-ended question regarding your thoughts and knowledge of the college readiness program, your experience, and its effectiveness for the Latino student community of the school.***
- ***There are NO parts of the study that are experimental***
- ***If surveys or interviews are conducted, there are NO sensitive subject matter involved. However, if you feel any discomfort with a question you may skip questions that may make you uncomfortable.***

Audio will be included as part of the research project. This research study includes the following component(s) where we plan to audio record you as the research subject:

- ☐ ***I agree*** to be audio recorded during the research study.
 - ☐ I agree that the audio recording/photographs can be used in publication/presentations.
 - ☐ I do not agree that the audio recording/photographs can be used in publication/presentations.
- ☐ ***I do not agree*** to be audio recorded during the research study.

The subject may NOT participate if they do not agree to be audio recorded.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

You can choose not to take part in the research, and it will not be held against you. Choosing not to take part will involve no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

If you stop or decide to no longer take part of the research, already collected data that still includes your name or other personal information WILL NOT be removed from the study record with your consent. Otherwise, we will destroy all necessary files.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

We do not expect any risks related to the research activities. If you choose to take part and undergo a negative event you feel is related to the study, please contact Marisela Martinez.

Will I receive anything for being in this study?

There is NO compensation or payment that the you as the participant can expect to receive for your participation.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

There are NO benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include duplication and creation of programs similar to the college readiness program for other urban high schools to allow marginalized students the opportunity and support within higher education.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information private, including research study **records**, to people who have a need to review this information. Each subject's name will be paired with a code name, which will appear on all written study materials. The list pairing the participant's name to the code name will be kept separate from these materials. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and other representatives of this organization, as well as collaborating institutions and federal agencies that oversee our research.

We may share and/or publish the results of this research. However, unless otherwise detailed in this document, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

Can I be removed from the research without my OK?

The person in charge of the research study can remove you from the research study without your approval. However, there are no possible reasons for removal/

What else do I need to know?

This is NOT a clinically relevant research therefore there is minimal risks involved in this case study.

Who can I talk to?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, you should talk to the research team at Marisela Martinez or Dr. Cameron White at cswwhite@central.uh.edu or 713-743-8678.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also talk to them at (713) 743-9204 or cphs@central.uh.edu if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

May we contact you regarding future research opportunities?

In the future, our research team may be interested in contacting you for other research studies we undertake, or to conduct a follow-up study to this one. There is never any obligation to take part in additional research. Do we have permission to contact you to provide additional information?

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol for College Readiness Program

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Years in Education:

Years involved in the College Readiness Program:

What is your familiarity with marginalized groups such as Latinos in Education? (2 min)

Brief Background history of the yourself before coming to the program and how you came to be part of the program. (2 min)

Project description: Participants will be interviewed within the three core components that have been presented to be part of the success of the College Readiness Program, what it meant for them and their professional development, and to what extent they felt was successful for the Latino community for higher education.

Topic Domain 1: Vision (5 minute response max)

Start-off (Lead-off) Question: What can you tell me about your experience in the College Readiness Program? You could include what the objective and vision of the program was.

Covert Categories:

1. Figuring out the investment of the educator/administrator/coordinator towards the program.
2. What their own insights were on the objective of the program.
3. Do they feel the necessity to understand the type of students that he is dealing with?
4. How aware are they of the issues with Latino students pursuing higher education?

Follow-up Questions (if necessary):

5. Do you feel it is necessary to have developed a mission statement?
6. Can you tell me the development of the cohort system?
7. How effective do you feel the program was to prepare Latino students to be college ready when moving to higher education?

Topic Domain 2: Worth Ethic – Community Building (5 minute response max)

Start-off (Lead-off) Question: What sort of enhancements do you feel were to build community but kept focus on student work ethic in for the College Readiness Program? You could include both student and teacher focused community building.

Covert Categories:

8. Figuring out if the teacher/administrator/coordinator felt that building relationships is an important component for students and educators alike.
9. What level did the teacher/administrator/coordinator feel they had on decision making for the College Readiness Program.
10. What sort of influence did the teacher/administrator/coordinator have on community building?
11. How does the teacher/administrator/coordinator feel regarding the community building of the College Readiness Program?

Follow-up Questions (if necessary):

12. What are your thoughts on cross-curricular projects?
13. Do you feel there was a sense of community with the students and teachers?

Topic Domain 3: Strong Identity (5 minute response max)

Start-off (Lead-off) Question: I notice there was a lot of sense of branding such as merchandising, block parties, ceremonies, student led events to build the College Readiness Program. Can you explain why these would be important regarding the identity of the program as well as the students?

Covert Categories:

1. The relationship between the students and the program.
2. Identifying if the teacher/administrator/coordinator had a strong sense of identity in the program.
3. Does it allow him to address the entire class together?

Follow-up Question (if necessary):

4. There are moments where I notice a lot of disgruntled students who were not part of the program, what sorts of accommodations did the College Readiness Program do in order to make these students feel involved?

Topic Domain 4: Teacher Empowerment (5 minute response max)

Start-off (Lead-off) Question: To what extent do you feel that there was a strong presence of teacher empowerment in the college readiness program?

Covert Categories:

1. How they feel about their own involvement of the program.
2. What they feel the importance of teachers having a voice with program development.

Follow-up Questions (if necessary):

3. What do you feel the effectiveness was of the program?
4. To what extent do you feel empowering the teacher would help these marginalized groups?

Thank the individual for participating in this interview. Assure him or her confidentiality of responses and schedule future follow-up interview.

Appendix F

First Meeting Agenda

Huerta Teacher Working Meeting Agenda

May 31, 2010, 3:30-5:30

Professional Development Room (Library)

- Casting Vision for us and for students – what is our vision for students in CP?
 - *Self-Advocacy (an internal drive to learn)*
 - *Grow Intrapersonally* (personal study/research habits, writing/reflection)
 - *Interact Interpersonally* (group projects, working well with peers)
 - *Communicate professionally* (presentations, discussions)
- Strengths and Weaknesses
- Curriculum
 - Progress in developing curriculum
 - Needed support
 - Cross-curricular planning
- Classroom management
 - Developing common discipline and behavior management systems
 - Creating a different culture in regards to tardies
 - Note-taking commonality (Cornell notes?) – defer to English teachers
- Huerta Norms
 - Common sections of course syllabi?
 - Dress code enforcement
 - Electronics use
 - Class rules/Keys to Success
 - Tardy/skipping consequences
 - Others?
 - Dress for teachers
 - Teaching first day of school?/what does first week look like?
- Summer orientation
 - Planning and structure
- Grant-writing/obtaining resources
 - Initiatives and resources in the works
 - Graphing calculators
 - I-Pads
 - Field Trips
- Summer planning
 - Contact exchange
 - Dedicated Huerta planning times
- Next Steps

Huerta Teachers Meeting Notes
May 31, 2011

CASTING VISION

HUERTA NORMS

STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

SUMMER ORIENTATION

CURRICULUM

GRANT-WRITING/OBTAINING RESOURCES

SUMMER PLANNING

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

NEXT STEPS

Appendix G

Off Campus Observations

Huerta Off-Campus Teacher Observation Form

Teacher _____ Subject _____ Campus _____

Observing teacher _____ Date _____ Period _____

Indicators	Evidence from observation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lessons are based on clear measurable learning objectives ■ Lesson and objective fit into a long term plan ■ Lesson openings are engaging ■ Explanations of new material are clear and include student involvement ■ Guided and independent practice are relevant and effective ■ Closing reiterates key points and connects to student's broader goals ■ Teacher checks for understanding and mastery of objectives ■ Teacher re-teaches if necessary ■ Considers student- learning styles in lesson design ■ Engages students at appropriate levels ■ Addresses academic needs by modifying lessons when necessary ■ Relates objectives to other subjects in meaningful way 	

Classroom Competition

Indicators	Evidence from observation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Obvious goal and vision for student achievement ■ Teacher employs effective strategies to invest students in ambitious goals ■ There is evidence of goals in daily routines and lessons ■ Teacher questions students assertively and consistently ■ Questions are higher level and open ended ■ Class material applied to real life situations 	

Classroom Culture

Indicators	Evidence from observation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Asserts authority effectively ■ Uses a firm but respectful tone with students ■ Teaches and enforces established rules ■ Uses praise and positive reinforcement ■ Customizes response to student misbehavior ■ Time- conscious in management and instruction ■ Students and teacher operate with a sense of urgency ■ Executes smooth transitions ■ Gives clear directions and modifications to ensure student success ■ Classroom is managed efficiently ■ Classroom operates according to a set schedule/ agenda and students are well informed ■ Teacher communicates high expectations for student work ■ Students are engaged and support each other's learning ■ Students are willing to take risks and feel safe ■ Teacher knows students well 	

Curriculum Notes (Cross curricular materials? Speed of material, special resources, etc.)

Competition Notes (Projects/presentations? Rigor of material, Real life examples?)

Culture Notes (Common phrases/expectations/goals? Other assemblies, after school activities mentioned?)

Anything extra in the classroom or the school in general:

Appendix H
Intervention Document

Improvement Action Plan

Huerta 9th Grade

Dear student,

Your CYCLE 1 grade in Mr. [REDACTED] class was below 70 percent. You are currently at risk of failing my class. In order to bring your grade to passing by the end of the semester we must work as a STUDENT-TEACHER-PARENT team. Below are some suggested steps that I, you, and your parents may take to help improve your grade.

Cycle 1 Grade: _____ Current Cycle 2 Grade: _____ End of Semester Date: 12/16/11

Teacher Interventions:

- ☐ Lunch Tutorials available Monday through Friday from 11:45-12:15
- ☐ After-School tutorials available Monday and Wednesday from 3:30-5:00
- ☐ Submit missing homework assignments for up to 70% of the original credit
- ☐ Option to re-take quizzes and exams for full credit
- ☐ Other: _____

Student Interventions:

- ☐ Attend lunch tutorials on _____ (pick a day of the week)
- ☐ Attend after-school tutorials on _____ (pick a day of the week)
- ☐ Get a list of missing assignments from Mr. Falls and complete those assignments for a late grade
- ☐ Study class notes and other material for at least 30 minutes two times a week outside of school
- ☐ Other: _____

Parent Interventions:

- ☐ Ensure student attends school regularly
- ☐ Monitor student's study habits
- ☐ Contact teacher [REDACTED] or call school at [REDACTED]
- ☐ Other: _____

Student Signature	_____	Date	_____
Parent Signature	_____	Date	_____
Teacher Signature	_____	Date	_____

Figure H1. Intervention Document. The Intervention document created by the College Readiness Cohorts for interventions with the students.

Appendix I

Open House Handout to Parents

2014—2015 Huerta
Parent Reference Guide
Open House—September 4, 2014

Subject	Pre-AP English I	Pre-AP World Geography	Pre AP Biology	Pre-AP Algebra or Pre-AP Geometry
Teacher	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
Email Address	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

Common Conference Period: 5th period, 12:45 pm—1:40 pm

Tutorial Schedule Room Numbers	Mondays—Fridays 3:30 pm—4:30 pm	Wednesday & Thursday 3:30 pm—4:30 pm	Tuesday, Wednesday, & Friday 3:30 pm—4:30 pm	Everyday 6:30 am-7:30 am
	C101	B103	C205	C102

PRE-AP English I

These are books we will read and those books in **BOLD**, students will need to purchase/check-out from the library on their own.

FIRST SEMESTER:

The Hunger Games, Catching Fire, & Mockingjay (Winter Reading), by Suzanne

Collins

- Excerpts from *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, W Shakespeare
- Excerpts from *The Odyssey*, Homer
- *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles

SECOND SEMESTER:

- **Animal Farm**, by George Orwell
- **To Kill a Mockingbird**, Harper Lee
- **Of Mice and Men**, John Steinbeck (Spring Reading)

Essays/Projects/Presentations	2+ per grading period *** (Essays will be written at home, and checked during class to revised and edit—all year.)***	20%
Exams	2+ per grading period	20%
Quizzes	3-6 per grading period	20%
Daily Work & Participation	This includes any note-taking, writing practice, reading, participation, answering & asking questions, etc. (8+ per grading period)	30%
Family Assignment	Students will be assigned a family assignment that correlates with the unit. Family members are encouraged to participate.	10%

Projects/Presentations Exams	Your child may be assessed in a variety of ways throughout the year. These may include unit exams, presentations, or projects.	40%
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News of the World – N.O.W	12 N.O.W. articles are due every 3 weeks and will be checked for progress and completion via a rubric, commented on, and given back in a timely manner. Students will also be giving weekly readings based on the Unit that is being worked on and will be due within the next week.	20%
Daily Work & Participation and GeoBinder Grade./Reading Homeworks	Faithful and timely completion of all in class assignments is necessary in order to maintain a passing grade. These include but are not limited to quick writing assignments, partner work/team assignments, reading/discussion questions, and participation. Students are expected to maintain their GeoBinder throughout the year that will be checked periodically for a grade.	40%

PRE-AP World Geography

- Binders are organized at all times, News of the World (NOWs) due every 3 weeks, Reading Homework every Friday (due a week later) in addition to a key term quiz

PRE-AP Biology

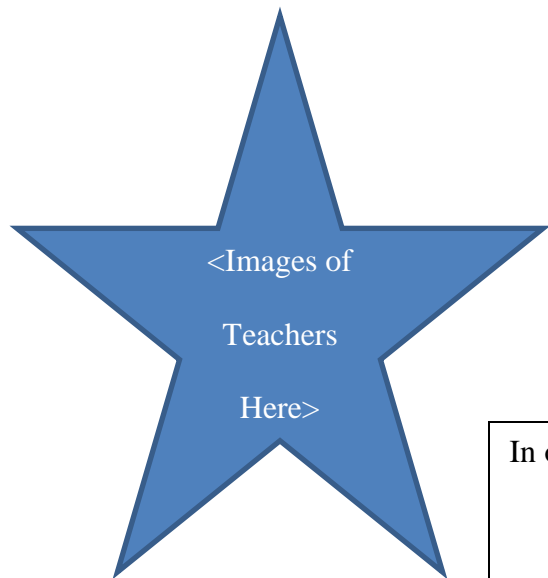
- Read at home to prepare for the next day's (weeks') lesson.
- Bring required supplies to class everyday (including their planner).
- Use their Biology Textbook as a reference.
- Be aware and active in the digital online platforms.
 - Edmodo, BrainPop, Youtube, Turnitin.com, Gizmos.
- Science News of World (Coming Soon)

Essays/Projects/Presentations	3+ per grading period	20%
Exams	1+ per grading period	30%
Quizzes	3-6 per grading period	20%
Daily Work & Participation	This includes any note-taking, writing practice, reading, participation, answering & asking questions, etc. (8+ per grading period)	20%
Homework	5+ per grading period	10%

PRE-AP Algebra I & Geometry

- Students need one subject spiral notebook and three folders with pockets and brides for each semester.
- Students will have a project every six weeks and it will be graded as a test grade.

Classwork	Folders and note checking	25%
Quizzes	Every week on Thursdays	30%
Tests/Project	One test and one project Every six weeks	30%
Homework	Almost Every day students have homework	15%



Important Dates for Huerta

Freshmen Group:

Homecoming Game—Oct. 24 (Fri), starts at 7 pm

Pre-AP English PREP SESSION—November 22 from 9 am to 12 pm.

Mockingjay Part 1, Movie Social—November 22, @ AMC Theatre (location here) @ 1pm

Holiday Block Party—Date to be determined later in December.

In order of appearance:

- Mr. [REDACTED] (Math),
- Ms [REDACTED] (English),
- Ms [REDACTED] (Biology),
- Ms [REDACTED] (World Geography).

Appendix J

Awards Flyer Sample



May 17 2016
6 p.m.-8 p.m.

Event will be in the auditorium, Bring your family and friends!
Dress code is formal.

There will be an after party at [REDACTED] on [REDACTED]. If you
wish to join, take \$7 and make sure you have a ride! :)



Figure J1. Awards Flyer Sample. Flyer that was made by the College Readiness Students for a community and academic event.

Appendix K

Merchandising



Figure K1. Merchandising Hoodie. A sample of the clothes the College Readiness Program marketed to students to embrace their rigorous academic identity.

This is computer proof
Actual product, color & design size may vary.

Please check all spelling and grammatical mistakes.
Once you approve the design, Texas screen is not
responsible for any mishaps and you are liable to pay
for the entire amount of the order.

T-shirt color: Royal blue
Print color: Lemon, Brite Red, Black



Figure K2. Merchandising T-shirt. A sample of the clothes the College Readiness Program marketed to students to embrace their rigorous academic identity by cohort.

Appendix L

Last Meeting Agenda



Team Meeting Agenda

9 December 2016 | 2nd | C100

Full Group | ♣ = Pre-Planning Necessary

Meeting Norms

1. Be here and be on time
2. Use technology respectfully
3. Monitor air time



Agenda Item	Facilitator	Goal/Description	Time	Notes
I. Welcome/ Introductions	██████	Welcome back! Sign B-day Card for Ms. ██████ ☺	5 mins	
II.	██████	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ██████ 2017 Inaugural Meeting • List of student for removal • Students who have had interventions that we would need to meet with. 	10 min	
III.	██████	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWAG (1/11) • Biztown student nominations (2/7) 	10 min	
IV.	Cohort Leads	Updates & Concerns <u>Freshman:</u> FT updates <u>Sophomores:</u>	5 min	
Next Meeting	Date: 23 rd January 2017		Ideas for Future Agenda Items? Email me at ██████ to get your thoughts on the agenda!	

Figure L1. Last Meeting Agenda. Each cohort in the College Readiness Program would have their own agenda which involved much more structure by the end of the program.