

Insider Perspectives on the School Dropout Crisis

Paul D. Nichols

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Reading Committee:

Geneva Gay, Chair

Stephen Kerr

Mark Windschitl

Juan Guerra

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Paul D. Nichols

University of Washington

**Abstract**

**Insider Perspectives on the School Dropout Crisis**

Paul D. Nichols

Chairperson of the Supervisory Committee

Professor Geneva Gay

College of Education

The major purpose of this study was to examine the dropout crisis in the U. S. and to examine it through the experiences and perspectives of three African American, three Native American and three Latino American males. This study sought to investigate the causes of dropping out and to consider viable alternative means of educating dropouts. Through having high school male dropouts re-imagine and reflect on their school experiences, the study attempted to get to the root of the dilemma for its participants.

The questions the participants answered were: How do African American, Native American and Latino males who dropped out of high school, account for their lack of academic success in the school environment? To what extent and in what ways do they locate their school failure in their own efforts and actions, or in other forces and

conditions, such as the nature of the school, the curriculum, and the instructional process, their socio-economic status and other conditions of their lives?

There is a second set of questions that re-focuses the line of questioning on the dropouts experiences. These questions attempt to uncover what they perceive could have gone differently in their schooling with a more successful outcome. Some of the questions explore, what do they think could have changed their academic outcomes in high school? How much of their success would they attribute to their teachers and the instruction they received? How much do they attribute to their own initiative? What do they perceive would have been effective methods of instruction for them?

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. These interviews were 45-minutes to one hour in length. Embedded in these questions were prompts to get the participants to share their perceptions of what could have been done differently to have changed their academic outcomes in high school. The types of data analysis were descriptive, explanatory and conceptual. Relationships amongst issues of interest were noted, their influence on outcomes was observed and conceptual and theoretical conclusions were drawn.

The summary and findings suggest that participants have a strong desire to learn. They need instruction that is differentiated, one-on-one and more culturally responsive and relevant to their lives. Additionally, they need alternatives to their traditional schooling and more instructional support.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Every nine seconds, a student in the United States drops out of high school (Heinrich, Hickman, Bartholomew & Mathwig, 2008). In considering the potential loss of GDP these students represent, this phenomenon must be considered as a crisis (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Yet, what is a dropout is still not clearly defined. This study attempted to answer several questions concerning this issue as it relates to African American, Latino American, and Native American males. It examined why they are not persisting in their schooling and what educational alternatives might be viable for them, from their own perspective,

The dropout crisis is a peculiar phenomenon about which much is unknown but, there is one certainty: dropouts are being condemned to a life of drudgery and servitude. Because of where they live and are forced to go to school, some students are receiving a substandard education. In a time when standardized testing data are being used as a measure of a quality education, and teachers are being blamed for and being held accountable for the (poor) performance of their students, it is important to hear from the students themselves to get a sense of whether or not the pressures brought to bear from NCLB and other mandates are changing the nature of their instruction in a way that it might not be working for them (Tough, 2008). Are teachers to blame? Is this a one-dimensional linear issue or are there more insidious dynamics at work?

When one considers that 50 percent of African American students, 40 percent of its Latino students and 11 percent of White students attend high schools where graduation is not normative, the phenomenon of separate and unequal schools is persistent and is a crisis in the United States (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Orfield, 2005). These schools are concentrated in areas inhabited by poor and minority communities. Youth in these communities suffer low test scores, are not demonstrating AYP, are isolated from middle class peers, and are being denied access to a decent education (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Orfield, 2005), seemingly as a matter of course and without large-scale protest.

Typically, students do not make the choice to drop out upon entering school. Relatively few students, if any, attend school with the expressed purpose to fail. Many previous educational researchers and practitioners tended to place the blame and credit on students and their families. There may be a need to look at other dimensions and sources of responsibility.

Although there is a core set of factors that often precedes a student's dropping out; yet, its influences and configurations differ for each individual. One cannot predict with certainty who will drop out. The scope, dimensions and triggers of dropping out have not been fully grasped. There is no universal definition of a dropout (Rumberger & Rodriguez, 2002). As a result, obtaining accurate information about this phenomenon is quite challenging, especially since it very rarely has come from the perspectives of dropouts themselves. Technically, a dropout is a person who is not enrolled in a school and who does not possess a high school diploma or an equivalent certificate (Rumberger & Rodriguez, 2002; Orfield, 2004). This would be an adequate definition,

provided all students left school in the same manner. Unfortunately, not all students who leave school are dropping out. Some are being pushed out by school structures, policies, practices, and personnel (Orfield, 2004 & 2005). This study identified some of the reasons why students have dropped out of school from the perspectives of dropouts themselves

***Purpose of the Study:***

The purpose of this study was to investigate causes of dropping out of school, and to consider viable alternative means of educating dropouts. It was pursued by examining these issues from the perspectives of a small group of African, Latino, and Native American males. These young men had attended school in a large urban metropolitan area, and had dropped out three to twelve years before the time of the study. This population was the target of interest because they are members of the ethnic and gender groups with the highest dropout rates, both within the community where the study took place and nationally. Typically, the voices not heard in this debate are students who are most affected by the crisis. These students may require different approaches from the traditional educational practices of most schools (Berliner, 2009). In this regard, students' own views may provide a better direction for addressing the problem.

## ***Statement of the Problem***

According to Apple (1989), dropping out is structurally generated. It is a by-product of the economic, political, and cultural inequities that are at the foundation of U.S. society. This is a reality that some live daily. Solving the dropout problem may require grappling with these structural realities. Brown and Rodriguez, (2009) view dropping out of school as a socially mediated phenomenon, one that results from a confluence of factors.

National data confirm that two of the most reliable predictors of dropping out are social class and poverty (Weiss, Farrar & Petrie, 1989; Lehr, McComas, 2005). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), Latinos at one time comprised approximately 34% of all high school dropouts, now they comprise 13%. The NCES claims also, that the Status Dropout rate representing Blacks ages 16-24 has declined as well, from 13%-8%. How could these numbers be accurate when many, including a 2006 National Public Radio report (Gordon, 2006) indicated that, as a result of their uncovering suspect reporting procedures, the African American dropout rate is, in actuality, 50%. The broadcast reported also, that Native American high school students also drop out at approximately 50%, and in many cases, prior to 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

There may be two explanations. The first is: when data are disaggregated by race, nearly half of Latino, African American and Native American students who begin secondary school do not finish and never receive a diploma (Peterson, 2005; Orfield, 2004). Labaree (1997) referred to these trends as “bargain basement educational

conditions" (pp. 68). According to McKinsey (2007) this crisis, rather than being limited to the United States, is international.

The second possible discrepancy might be a product of the data collection process itself. The Status Dropout rate represents the percentage of 16-24 year olds not enrolled in school and who have not earned a high school diploma or an equivalency diploma. The data used to determine this rate were derived from the civilian non-institutionalized population. This number therefore does not include persons in prisons, the military, persons not living in households; it might not be fully representative of all those who have dropped out of school (National Center for Education Statistics, (2014)). For example, 48.8% of Active Duty enlisted personnel are 25 or younger. There are 3.6 million military personnel, 16.2% of whom are Black—again, approximately 50% of these enlisted recruits are within the 16-25 years of age bracket (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, (2014)). Additionally, the Federal Bureau of Prisons (2014), indicates that Hispanics comprise 34.5% of all inmates and Blacks comprise 37.4% of all inmates—the majority of whom are males without high school diplomas. Further, there is virtually no telling how many youth ages 16-24 are not living in households. For these reasons, the current data on dropouts, which does not include these critical populations, may be inaccurate.

Ladson-Billings (2006), in her presidential address to the American Educational Research Association remarked that researchers are always studying the poor and rarely are they providing them with workable or reasonable solutions to their problems. Analyses of dropout rates usually focus on external factors that cause students not to persist in their schooling. But how do they promote their agency? This

study will add to this explanation the possibility that pedagogical processes also contribute to the dropout crisis. Among these processes is the preparation preservice teachers receive. Often they are ill-equipped to handle the diverse students they encounter in classrooms (Sleeter, 2001).

An additional factor that contributes to the dropout crisis is the Achievement Gap. Many school personnel are so concerned about test scores (Berliner, 2009; Ravitch, 2011) that they do not engage in culturally relevant teaching, or use differentiated instructional methods with their marginalized student populations. According to Fullan (2001), teachers are unsure about their influence and efficacy with certain students. As Conant (1961) said over 50 years ago, if a child who comes from poverty does poorly on an aptitude test, the issue is more about the unfairness of social circumstances rather than the test itself. It was true then and it appears to be true now. If one is truly interested in improving the performance of marginalized students, then the quality of educational opportunity they receive must be improved. If students are provided equal opportunities (which translates into good schools, homes, income, health, and communities) and resources such as well-trained personnel, adequate facilities, and classroom materials, this crisis might be averted. To get to the source of the dropout crisis, it is important to find out if it intersects with instruction (Conant, 1961).

Individual cases of students dropping out of schools are associated with personal values, attitudes, behaviors and student-related risk factors, such as *pregnancy*, *substance abuse*, *disabilities* (California Dropout Research Project, 2008). However, poor academic performance is considered the single most-powerful *individual-related*

predictor of dropping out (Woods, 2001). Students who repeat a grade are twice as likely to drop out than those who do not. Those who repeat more than one grade are four times as likely to drop out before completing high school (Woods, 2001).

Institutional causes of dropping out of school include the settings or contexts in which students operate. These include families, schools, and community-related structures and interactions that influence students' behaviors and subsequent outcomes. For example, the community-related issue of poverty is a strong predictor of dropping out across all ethnicities, contexts and other influences (Woods, 2001). Another factor is family circumstances and influences. Parents play a crucial role in keeping students in school. The ability of a family to support their children is determined by factors such as stress, socioeconomic status, and psychological stability. Working can also contribute to a student's dropping out. If students work more than 14-20 hours per week on a regular basis, there is a strong likelihood of them dropping out (Woods, 2001).

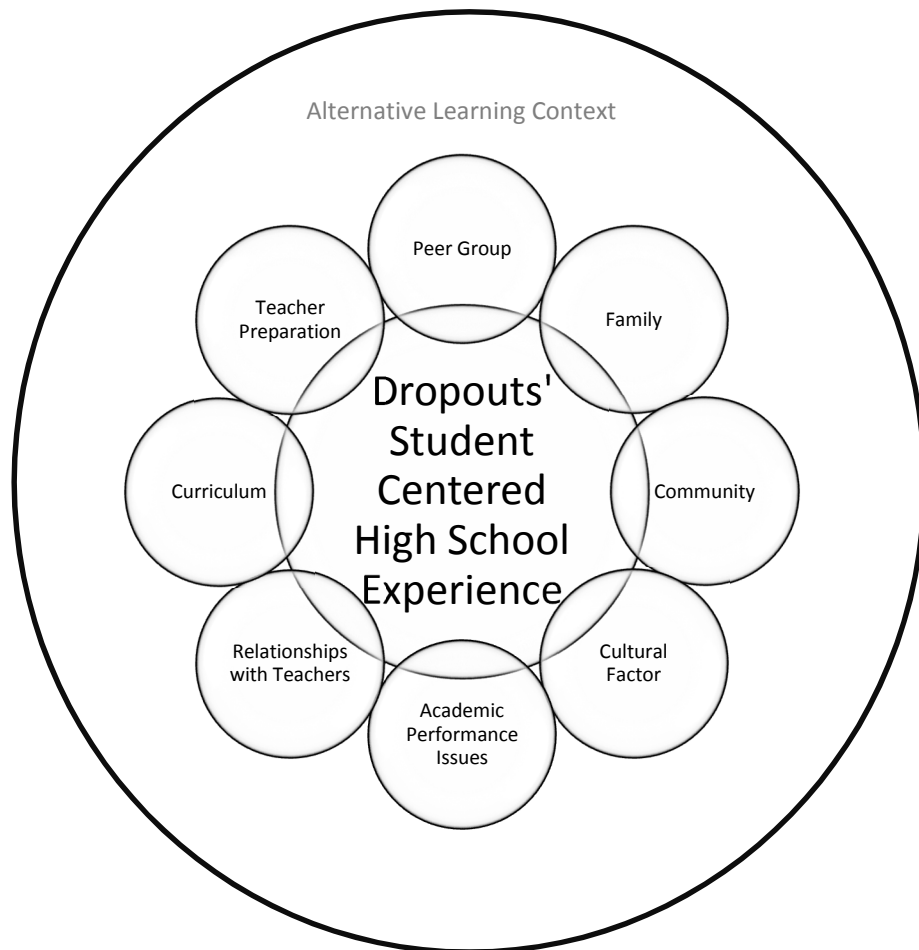
The fiscal, social and political health of American society may be tied to the skill level of its future workforce (Faircloth & Tippeconnick, 2010). Should American schools be unable to produce a skilled and competitive, professional workforce, then the United States might not be able to produce a competitive economy in the global marketplace of the future (Heckman & Fontaine 2007). Although there may be many measures of the performance of U. S. schools, one incontrovertible performance measure is represented by the decline in high school graduation rates—a by-product of which is the dropout crisis (Heckman & Fontaine, 2007).

Males typically are under-represented on college campuses. Most recent statistics indicate that the percentage of 18-24 year old females enrolled in college has surpassed the percentage of males of the same age enrolled in college (54% to 46%, with more females (61%) than males (56%) earning degrees (Scommagna, 2013). These males are not opting for construction sites vs. academic campuses. Many are failing to graduate. This study hopes to hear from them, their reasons, which may help to increase the skill levels of America's future workforce.

### ***Conceptual Framework***

The Conceptual Framework for this study is depicted visually in Figure 1, below. It is influenced primarily by the ideas and explanations of Fashola (2005) and Noguera (2009) about the modern day socio-psychological conditioning of contemporary youth. The overlapping circles in the diagram are intended to suggest that factors contributing to dropping out of school are multiple, complex, interrelated, and interactive. Each one is explained briefly. Another purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which these conceptual claims were or were not verified by the experiences and perspectives of the participating males of color.

**FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**



**Alternative Learning Context**—The potential for learning in alternative contexts for high school dropouts is impacted by pre-existing learning conditions which create a lack of desire to return to a learning environment where they have experienced failure (Fostering Education Program, 2008). Any alternative learning contexts to be considered will have to take these factors into account. These contexts may constitute the student's final opportunity to learn in a school-based context.

**Dropouts' Student-Centered High School Experience**—A dropout's high school experience is not a linear or static series of events. It is dynamic, involving nearly every aspect of the student's life, and is likely to temper all future learning experiences for the dropouts. All learning (past, present and future), occurs within their socio-cultural contexts, including families, communities and schools.

**Peer Group**— Students are often influenced to conform to peer pressure, and they often adopt what has been referred to as a Cool Pose. Cool Pose is defined as a mechanism used by some Black males to cope with the realities of their existence. Its purpose is to enhance social competence, pride, dignity, self-esteem and respect. Historically, Blacks have used metaphorical masks, facades, shields, fronts, and games to ensure their survival by putting on an inscrutable exterior, or a curtain of invisibility that suppresses their feelings of fear, hatred, or confusion in hostile environments (Majors & Billson, 1992; Ferguson, 2001). It has evolved into a strategic style tailored to meet the demands of the moment—whatever they may be (Majors & Billson, 1992). Relative to academic issues, some Black males may act with denial, avoidance and retreat, reinforcing the problem—but preserving their dignity, their cool pose (Fashola, 2005). This cool pose is often misinterpreted by mainstream society as hostility, indifference, reluctance, or a failure to address the students' issues (Fashola, 2005). Majors and Billson (1992) call this coping technique a kind of ritualism. The goal of schooling seems to be unattainable or even irrelevant. As a result, students dis-identify with school goals, seemingly losing sight of who they are academically and where they are going (Fashola, 2005; Conchas & Vigil, 2012).

**Poor Preservice Teacher Preparatory Programs**—Despite technological advancements and information systems, teachers are still, fundamentally important factors in classrooms. Therefore, they should have the pedagogical skills to effectively motivate and to facilitate learning for all students. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many classes. Many teachers have not examined their cultural assumptions about individual differences, and even why and how they chose teaching as a profession. More than 90% of preservice teachers are European Americans and monolingual, from small towns and suburbia, attend college within 100 miles of their homes, and have grown up with little knowledge and substantive contact with others of different racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, or social class backgrounds. Thus, they are in dire need of multicultural exposure (Edwards & Young, 1996). In teacher education programs, prospective teachers are not being trained effectively to work with bi-lingual, urban, and students of color (Sleeter, 2001). In fact, preservice teachers generally prefer placements in field experiences reminiscent of their childhood (Sleeter, 2001). The best candidates often go to schools outside of urban areas where the most effort is needed. These problems with equality, parity, and equity in the distribution of teacher talent are not limited to urban areas alone. They apply to poor rural areas as well. Since 1978, rural poverty has grown at twice the rate of that in urban areas (Zeichner, 1993). High poverty schools tend to have poorly-qualified staff (Orfield, 2005). These are practices that must stop if all children are to be educated effectively. To combat this issue, culturally relevant instruction should be an ongoing aspect of all teachers' pre-service preparation and continuing professional education.

**Cultural Aversion**— In an effort to avoid controversy, some teachers attempt to be culturally neutral. But, race and cultural backgrounds play a significant role in the education of students of color. This attempt to avoid considering race and race-related issues (such as equality, prejudice, discrimination, social justice, and personal experience) in teaching is tantamount to a color-blind response. Yet, race must become a part of teacher education if the issues of student dropouts are to be averted (Fashola, 2005).

**Hidden Curriculum**—According to Ferguson (2001), a hidden curriculum includes teachers' subjective evaluations of students' character and behavior, and encourages preparing all aspects of instruction around these assumptions. Schools tend to reflect and intensify the racial stratification found in society (Orfield, 2005). It is the unintended lessons, values and perspectives that students learn in school. These social messages are often communicated to students while they are learning aspects of the intentional curriculum. Students recognize and absorb these lessons as a valid part of their education. For example, the history of the United States, is most often taught from Eurocentric perspectives, not the lens of Native Americans who may have different perspectives. Not including the Native American perspectives conveys ideological, political, and cultural messages to the Native American in the classroom, about the value of their history in that classroom. Similarly, African American males are perhaps the most highly stigmatized and stereotyped group in the USA (Fashola, 2005). These stereotypes, exist in a milieu of negative socio-political, socio-psychological and socio-economic pre-conditioning. Often the interaction of these forces portends adverse outcomes for Black males by placing their very survival at risk (the deaths of Treyvon

Martin and Michael Brown signal this reality). These pre-conditions do not exist in society at large, only. They are also pervasive throughout schools and classrooms across the USA, where Black students experience the least qualified teachers, the least challenging curricula, and disproportionate assignment to special education programs. The hidden curricula embedded in these events and practices implies that Whites deserve a better education than Blacks (Ferguson, 2001).

**Relationships with Teachers/Cultural Dissonance**— Cultural dissonance is one of the contemporary experiences African American youth encounter as they begin to self-identify. As Orfield (2005) asserts, the Civil Rights movement was not so much about a seat on the bus as it was about equalizing opportunity. Their awareness of European American values and standards of competence, their evolving awareness of racial stereotypes, and their increasing cognizance of and competence in their own cultural group's values and standards, play a critical role in their identity formation. As Gay (2013) argues, in instructing culturally diverse student populations, it is important to include references to their cultures both conceptually and contextually. These African American youth must transition between the diverse social environments they inhabit. If the social and cultural contexts are compatible with those of schools, then the experience is harmonious. If the contexts are dissonant, then African American youth must find ways to negotiate these experiences (Fashola, 2005; Conchas & Vigil, 2012).

**Cultural Factors/Congruence**—There is no stronger relationship related to school success than the teacher-student bond. Who teaches minority students is as critical to their academic success as the subjects taught, and how they are taught (Fashola, 2005; Henrich, Hickman & Mathwig, 2008). Cultural synchronization is the degree to which

factors such as race, ethnicity, gender and social class influence student learning. It is important, for example, for Black male students to work with African American instructors who can relate positively to them (Fashola, 2005)—although most students will relate well to caring and culturally responsive teachers no matter their race or ethnicity. The cultural congruence provides a value-added dimension to the pedagogical process.

**Family/Cultural Capital**—There is a link between certain family characteristics and student academic success. A community where a large number of parents are high school dropouts is most likely to not have stability in its family and social structures (Conchas & Vigil, 2012). Familial contributions and expectations regarding students' educational experiences are associated with what is often called cultural capital (Fashola, 2005). This concept has been used to explain how social inequality is reproduced through institutions—particularly schools. It accounts, in part, for the reason why even when incomes are comparable Blacks and Latino students have lower achievement levels than Whites (Ladson-Billings, 2006). It refers to cultural signals such as attitudes, behaviors, preferences, and credentials commonly used for social and cultural inclusion or exclusion. It comprises those nonmaterial or intangible aspects of the middle-class lifestyle that separate its members from working and lower-class individuals. Cultural capital implies that children of color are victims of pathological lifestyles that do not support their ability to take advantage of schooling (Fashola, 2005; Hirschman & Lee, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Often it is symbolized by practices such as trips to museums and galleries, and taking extracurricular classes in dance, art, and music. Having such cultural experiences prepares students for success in school

because these institutions value and reward such experiences (Fashola, 2005). Because lower and working-class individuals are not able to have these cultural experiences, they are put at a disadvantage in schools grounded in middle-class values. When race is added to this equation, it weighs heavily on students (Fashola, 2005). Bourdieu (1977, 1986) refers to similar resources as social capital or actual and/or virtual tools and experiences individuals and groups possess from being part of a privileged institutional network. Typically, teacher perceptions of academic performance and other expectations are biased in favor of middle class Whites and less supportive of students of color (Fashola, 2005). The advantage-granting status that is derived from one's association within powerful social networks connects to a general quality of life and school achievement.

***Summary:***

In this chapter, the problem of the school dropout crisis in the United States was discussed. The approach that will be pursued in this study is to examine why a small sample of students of color, from their own perspectives and in their own voices, dropped out and what they would have needed in order to stay in school. A conceptual framework for the study was presented and discussed. Also, many possible social contributors to a student's dropping out were considered. As the discussion in this chapter indicated, this is a problem with many explanations and dimensions.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Review of Related Research and Scholarship**

This review of research and scholarship examines factors influencing school dropping out among Native American, Latino American and African American high school males. Questions are raised about whether teachers are adequately equipped with the pedagogical skills needed to teach in ways that may prevent dropouts. Additionally, it highlights several key areas of concern in bridging gaps between students who persist in school and those who do not.

Public conversations about Blacks relative to their separation from mainstream lifestyles and middle class values began with the Coleman Report, published in 1966. The report presented a rather dismal picture of Blacks who were hoping to rise above the racism and classism they were experiencing in their everyday lives. At this time, many Blacks wanted to escape the poverty, but social circumstances denied them this option. Fifty years after the advent of the Civil Rights movement, the offspring of some of those Blacks appear to be opting for the status their parents struggled so hard to escape. They are dropping out of high school at the alarming rate of nearly 50% (Coleman et al., 1966). They may be volunteering to be beneficiaries of a deficit mentality towards them (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

The Coleman Report (1966) was a social science survey endorsed by the Federal Government under the auspices of the Equality of Educational Opportunity Act. In this survey, James Coleman (the chief author of the report) surveyed

approximately 650,000 students in 3,000 high schools across the country. The research, occurred during a rather turbulent time in the US, and addressed the issue of Civil Rights. It shaped policy around school climate and desegregation for years to come (Coleman et al., 1966).

The Coleman Report (1966) addressed student achievement in school—despite students' prior knowledge levels and school-based interventions made to accommodate students at risk. It served as a testament that if students were of a certain socio-economic class, then variations made at the school level did not make a difference. It also advocated the idea that students are products of their environments. Their educational achievement levels are closely associated with where they attended school (Coleman et al., 1966). The findings were daunting, in that they declared that most people remain within their social class (Coleman et al., 1966). Scholars like Ladson-Billings (2006) suggest a deeper, more subtle import to the findings of the Coleman Report. Ladson-Billings suggests: the report supported the placement of students in racially integrated classrooms; argued that more than material resources were necessary to counteract the effects of long-term segregation; indicated how a combination of salient factors were correlated with academic achievement; identified the very composition of a school and the students' locus of control (their sense of the reality of how they controlled their environment and their futures) as important factors; recognized the need for a higher quality of teacher; and asserted that family background mattered. Later, Jencks (1972) argued that social class was the strongest variable in predicting educational outcomes and in sustaining social class.

In response to these analyses, programs for inner city students such as Head Start and Upward Bound, were initiated and supported by various federal programs based on the understanding that a good education could elevate one from one social class and into another. Some of these programs worked, some did not.

One year after the Coleman Report (1966), came the Kerner Commission Report (1967). The 1967 Kerner Commission report indicated that the United States was comprised of two distinct societies: one Black and one White. By using models that based minority student achievement and capacity on White normative values schools perpetuated a deficit-oriented problem (Gilkey, 2008).

### ***Multicultural Education***

Multiculturalism is a process not a product (Gay, 2004). It is a concept that covers a broad spectrum of topics. It is inclusive, as many various groups fall under its umbrella. Banks (2004), in the introduction to the second edition of the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, says that Multicultural Education is an emerging discipline whose purpose is, “to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups” (p xi). Banks adds that one of its major goals is to assist all students in acquiring the composite abilities to function and navigate in a pluralistic, democratic society.

Multicultural Education supported the idea that inequality existed by purporting to create equal educational opportunities for marginalized student populations. Stalwart pioneers in the field, Gay (2004), Banks (2004), Ladson-Billings (2006), and a host of other

multicultural education scholars, discuss the nature of the curriculum, and the structure of the school as contributors and possibly sources of the educational gap. Some scholars (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Zeichner, 2002; Sleeter, 2001) argue that to counteract or to narrow the achievement gap, districts must improve the quality of instruction. Instruction was usually then designed to fill these gaps (Norum, 2000). Scholars in the field of Multicultural Education designed both methods of addressing issues within the educational environment and mediating practices within the classroom.

In one conception of the field, Banks created five dimensions of multicultural education. They are: (1) content integration or the extent to which teachers use examples and information from many cultures to augment major ideas in their instruction; (2) knowledge construction (the extent to which instructors assist students in understanding and analyzing the assumptions, biases, and prejudices influencing the knowledge within a discipline); (3) prejudice reduction that focuses on the nature of students' racial attitudes and how they can be affected by teaching strategies and materials; (4) equity pedagogy, or modifying instruction to facilitate the achievement of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds—sometimes referred to as culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching; and (5) empowering school culture and social structure, by restructuring schools so that they are culturally inclusive from an organizational to a culture/environmental standpoint. These dimensions can facilitate multicultural teaching and learning in environments situated anywhere, from traditional to transformative contexts.

According to a McKinsey report (2005) educational inequity is not located in the US, only. It is one of international proportions. For example, the world's governments spend over two trillion dollars on education and education reform annually. Yet, the

performance of the vast majority of school systems all over the world has not improved in decades (McKinsey, 2005). Between 1980 and 2005, per pupil spending increased by 73% in the United States. The US also reduced the student-teacher ratio by 18%, and by 2005, class sizes were the smallest in history. Still, academic improvement has been marginal, at best (McKinsey, 2005).

In 1994, Ladson-Billings conducted a study that looked at culturally relevant teaching practices through teacher interviews and classroom observations. She examined four classrooms—three of which were using culturally relevant pedagogical practices and one that was not. In the culturally relevant classes, teachers and students were engaged. They used a team or collaborative approach to learning. All students were expected to help each other. Constant praise filled the classroom. In these classes each student was given the opportunity to begin anew. Teachers were invested in the success of their students. They were committed and passionate about their commitment. Students were apprenticed in the learning community of the classroom. They were not taught in an isolated and unrelated way. The lives of the students were reflected in the classroom in a meaningful way and thereby became a part of the actual curriculum. Both literature and oratory were used to facilitate literacy. Multiple teaching strategies were used to ensure that each student was learning. Students soared, academically. These practices were not present in the fourth classroom. The results of that classroom were quite dismal. Students were not learning. They struggled with the teacher and then gave up, themselves (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The literature surrounding the conceptualization of culturally relevant approaches to instruction is grounded in multicultural education and educational inequities. Culturally relevant teaching, although not a new phenomenon in practice, is a relatively new addition to the theoretical landscape. Yet the majority of preservice teaching education does not include culturally relevant pedagogy as consistently and thoroughly as it should (Sleeter, 2001). These programs either do not see its value or are not prepared to teach prospective teachers in a manner that is more fitting to the overall learning styles of diverse students (Sleeter, 2001). Other reasons might be that they are oblivious to the connection and therefore do not address it. Yet, overwhelming evidence from both academic research and scholarship and case law (the 2008 University of Michigan case) shows that the inclusion of cultural diversity in instructional content and methodology improves the education of all students (Sleeter, 2001; Orfield, 2008).

Another promising approach to improving the school performance of racial minority students is funds of knowledge (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004). It is a pedagogical strategy that incorporates the social, emotional, intellectual, and cultural capital of ethnic minority families and communities (as exhibited in household, community, and ideological connections) to augment academic, school-based learning. It includes parents as in-class intellectual resources from the community (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004). This process helps teachers to debunk the myth that students of low SES lack knowledge and experiences that are worthy of use in the instructional process. The implications for student success may be compelling in countering the failure minority students are experiencing currently (Heinrich, Hickman, Bartholomew & Mathwig, 2008). One immediate benefit of using

social and cultural funds of knowledge in classrooms is perceptions of students' households change radically, and the ways students who are taught using this and similar strategies improves. Instruction becomes more inclusive and validating using such a process. This process also enables teachers and students to make learning more relevant (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004). These inclusive strategies may assist in preventing school exclusions or dropouts. This approach is the antithesis to deficit-laden orientations and actions.

Deficit perspectives are used by some researchers to explain performance discrepancy between African American and White students. This viewpoint is problematic because it denies minority youth a culturally specific normative developmental perspective of their own (Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). Instead, it compares their experiences to the normative developmental processes of White students. It does not validate the skill sets minority youth bring to classroom settings. On the contrary, it denies their validity.

Deficit approaches may carry some potentially dangerous implications for minority youth. For example: Black children are 2.88 times more likely than White children to be labeled as having mental retardation, and 1.92 times more likely to be labeled as having an emotional/behavioral disorder. The striking resemblance between SPED classes and prisons may not be a happenstance. Nearly 46% of incarcerated youth with a disability are identified as having emotional/behavioral disorders (Lehr & McComas, 2005).

The general goal of Multicultural Education is to address inequalities, from positions of strength in thought and action about ethnic, racial, and culturally different groups of students. For example, equity pedagogy is a strengths-based approach for teaching minority students and uses their cultures as assets (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004) rather than as deficits. It also strives to nullify “status treatment” (Cohen & Lotan, 2004 pp. 741), by creating equal opportunities throughout classroom interactions.

### ***Youth-Centered, Strengths-Based Teaching and Learning***

According to some researchers such as, VanDenBerg, Osher and Lourie (2006), youth who suffer from a loss of connection to “caring people” (p. 1), experience negative outcomes in their lives. Having no connection to a network of caring relationships runs counter to the gregarious nature of human beings. A youth-centered, strengths-based education counteracts these circumstances. It requires a confluence of multiple systems and institutions to create individualized plans to address the complex issues facing youth and families today (VanDenBerg, Osher, Lourie, 2006). It focuses on the needs of youth within a general population instead of the needs of students within school systems. Much of the work has been done in association with community-based organizations (McLaughlin, 2000; Honig & McDonald, 2005).

Honig and McDonald (2005) point out that learning occurs through interactions and relationships among individuals in different contexts. Youth must be at the center of all learning environments if they are to be successful (McLaughlin, 2000). Learning is situated socially and culturally in that it builds on topics of interest to the youth in

response to their diverse experiences and skills (McLaughlin, 2000), including pop culture, native culture, personal attributes, and hobbies. Furthermore, effective learning requires engaging the entire geographic community/neighborhood; connecting schools and communities in new and different ways; giving students voice; and understanding that learning is a collective effort (McLaughlin, 2000; Honig, Kahne & McLaughlin, 2001). To meet these demands, teachers need to use communities of learning practice in classrooms and involve students in meaningful work, and the decision-making, planning, and implementation processes. (It also necessitates approaching instruction with a sense of humility and an awareness of multiple avenues of access to knowledge and skills and styles of learning (Honig & McDonald, 2005).

According to Jones and Perkins (2005), there is a paucity of analytical research on how society views youth voice and participation in youth programs. Although youth are well-informed about their communities and neighborhoods and can offer valuable perspectives on working with adults as community partners, they routinely do not participate in the management of educational and community-sponsored programs. Why there is such a lack of research dealing with this subject when youth-adult partnering is so fundamental to youth development, is a fundamental issue.

Research and practice indicate that students are more likely to thrive when educators respond to their needs with individualized, needs-driven, child-centered, strengths-based interventions (Fostering Education Program, 2008). Wraparound services that involve multiple agencies working on behalf of youth, with schools as agents in this process, facilitate this development. Schools must change their climates,

build cultures, and develop partnerships with communities for this multiple agency approach to work best (Honig, Kahne, McLaughlin, 2001).

### ***Socio-Cultural Implications of the Problem***

#### ***Latino Americans***

Case studies (Espinoza-Herold, 2003) reveal that Latino students are beset by many influences, some within, but many beyond their control. According to Berliner (2009), these influences include low birth weight; urban pollutants and students' proximity to toxic waste sites; medical care; re-distribution of low-income housing; and poor quality summer programs. Responding to these external factors may be so time-consuming that teachers of these students become ineffective in meeting their primary responsibility of teaching (Knapp, 2001). Unfortunately, many Latino students are also making poor choices by dropping out in record numbers. They are being injured. They are being incarcerated. They are being killed. Too many U.S. schools simply are not effective for many Latino students (Berliner, 2009; Rumberger & Rodriguez, 2002).

Latino Americans who fail to graduate from high school ready to attend a four year college most likely will not gain access to high quality and equitable political, economic and social opportunities. There appears to be a trend, here. Of the 70% of all students who graduate, only 32% are college ready. Only 16% of Latino Americans (and 20% of Blacks) fall into this category. As a result of these low college readiness rates, many Black and Latino students are minimally qualified college applicants, as

well. Only 9% of all college ready applicants are Black and 9% are Latino—14% of 18 year olds are Black and 17% are Latino. (Greene & Forster, 2003; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). There appears to be much work ahead in these communities if headway is to be made in closing the Achievement Gap.

Espinoza-Herold (2003), in a case study of a third generation Mexican-American in his junior year at a high school within a Latino neighborhood in Southern Arizona, reported strong feelings of isolation and disconnection. This student (“Manny”) feels that his coursework is totally irrelevant. The main failing of the school, according to Manny, is the absence of practical knowledge across all curricula. He feels school is a waste of time. Routinely, he passes classes without learning the content. Manny’s experiences are similar to a multitude of ethnically and racially diverse male students.

To better meet the needs of underserved minority students, Fullen (2001) suggests that schools should be re-cultured, rather than merely restructured. Changes prompted by a globalized economy, the new information age, and the era of technology have forced changes in the job market that schools must consider. There is a much greater demand for more sophisticated, literate and highly-skilled workers (Zohar, Degani, Vaaknin, 2000). Yet, in some schools, learning continues to be primarily linear, sequential, and rote. Low-achieving students are likely to experience lower-order instruction due to teachers’ negative perceptions about their abilities (Zohar, Degani & Vaaknin, 2000). Both Bowles and Gintis (1976), and Anyon (1980) wrote that there is a direct correlation between the socioeconomic class of students and the curricula they receive. Working class students are more often given rote assignments in learning than their middle class counterparts, to prepare them for jobs from semi-skilled labor to low-

and mid-level management. More affluent students are provided with more project-based curricula with real world applications, to prepare them to take their place as elite business leaders and owners. To counteract these inequities, researchers and scholars such as Gay (2013) argue that the education of these students must connect their in-school learning to their out-of-school living, and develop their agency, and efficacy if they are to succeed in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century world. These researchers argue for a culturally responsive pedagogy that is both transformative and empowering.

In urban centers, U. S. schools are being re-segregated by an issue that is not receiving the attention it deserves in educational discourse (Orfield, 2003, 2005; Orfield & Lee, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006). According to Orfield (2005), typically, Latino students attend schools where over 60% of the student population is Latino. They are being more isolated (by both ethnicity and poverty) in their schooling than their peers of other ethnicities. Furthermore, Latino and Black students comprise 80% of the student populations of extremely low poverty schools (Orfield, 2005). For this and other reasons, Ladson-Billings (2006) considers Latinos and Blacks as potential beneficiaries of an education debt owed to them by those who disperse schooling resources.

According to Payne (2003), both U. S. schools and businesses operate by middle-class norms and rules—an element of instruction embedded in the hidden curriculum, discussed earlier. Students must be taught these rules in order to open up their avenues of access to success in both school and work (Delpit, 1995). Many of the reasons why students of poverty are in conflict with administrators and teachers on a daily basis are related to their lack of knowledge of these rules. The behaviors they exhibit in school may help them to survive and function outside of school, but are

dysfunctional within school (Payne, 2003; Rumberger & Rodrigues, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

### ***Native Americans***

Educating some Native Americans (particularly reservation residents), occurs in different contexts, but their dropout crisis has persisted throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and and thus far, into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Faircloth & Tippeconic, 2010). There are approximately 644,000 Naïve Americans and Alaska Native students in schools throughout the U. S. Over 90% of Native students attend public schools. Under 10% attend schools that are operated by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and are funded by the federal government (Faircloth & Tippeconic, III, 2010). Some of these schools are operated by tribal nations through contracts and grants from the BIE; however, this population is very spread out. Often, they are excluded from educational data analyses because of their small numbers (considered by some to be the most invisible minority (*Seattle Weekly News*, 2014)), and are therefore placed at a disadvantage based on structural and institutional practices (Faircloth & Tippeconic, III, 2010). Compound these problems with cultural issues Native Americans face in school and reasons why Native American students do not persist to graduation become more complex and graphic. The graduation rates for Native Americans are approximately 50% (Faircloth & Tippeconic, III, 2010). In 2010, the lowest by state graduation rate in the West for Native males was 28.2%, in South Dakota. The highest per state graduation rate was in Oklahoma, where 61% of Native American males graduated. (In Washington State the 2010 Native American male graduation rate was 35.7%.) These

data suggest that throughout the U. S., most Native American males do not appear to be receiving an education that will create for them the potential for economic security and viable, healthy civic lives in the future (Faircloth & Tippeconnic III, 2010).

Native Americans have been largely educated by non-Native Americans throughout U. S. history. Swisher and Tippeconnic, III (1999) suggest that from their internment on Deer Island, MA during King Philip's War of 1675, to their being taken and sent to boarding schools, to the early days of their tribal schools, their education consisted of a re-culturing by secular and religious institutions of the colonizing nation that occupied their land. Christian conversion was considered the only answer. In order to subordinate entire Native communities, they had to be re-settled. Native Americans were perceived to have mental, moral, physical and, cultural deficiencies that required extreme militaristic methods in educating them. These methods amounted to both physical and cultural genocide in the name of civilization. It ignored the diversity of worldviews, cultural traits, and methods of knowing among native groups (Clearinghouse on Native Teaching and Learning, 2008).

From the first encounter until contemporary times, Europeans have opposed indigenous peoples' self-government, self-determination, and self-education. Kill the Indian...to save the man was the order of the day (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Missions, boarding schools, and *encomiendas* (Entire settlements—including both the land and its Indian inhabitants *issued to Spanish colonists or soldiers by the Spanish Crown*), were the primary methods used to prevent Native American children from practicing their own culture and, forcing them to learn the culture of the colonizer (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2006). These methods are considered by some as the mis-

education of Native Americans (Clearinghouse on Native Teaching and Learning, 2008).

Historical legacies of mis-education cause many contemporary Native Americans (particularly males) to not self-identify in schools, and, in part, to suffer the highest dropout rates in the U.S. (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010). Although some positive developments are occurring such as enrollment of over 25,000 students in 31 tribal colleges in the U.S. and Canada; more control of their schooling like the Navajo's Rough Rock Demonstration School; and the 1972 Indian Education Act; much work is still needed to improve the education of Native Americans (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999).

According to Faircloth and Tippeconnic (2010), in 2006, the graduation rate for American Indians and Alaska Natives was 44.1%--meaning over 65% did not graduate. Approximately 32% of all living Native Americans (approximately one-third of the living population of Native Americans) are under the age of 18. These children and youth represent the future of American Indians and Native Alaskans in the U.S. If they are dropping out of school at these high rates, it may put their entire generation at risk in every facet of survival.

Many Native Americans already are at serious risk. For example, in 2000 the median income of Native Americans and Alaska Native men and women combined was well below the national average (\$25,878 vs. \$32,150). Unable to earn competitive wages, Native Americans are twice as likely to live in poverty (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010). If more than 50% of youth from these ethnic groups are not earning high school

diplomas, the economic outlook for their entire generation is dismal. Compounded by trends for dropouts discussed previously (poor health, higher likelihood of family instability, involvement with the criminal justice system, joblessness), these statistics portend a rather bleak future for Native Americans and Alaska Natives (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; Heinrich, Hickman, Bartholomew & Mathwig, 2008). Being part of sovereign nations, with their own treaties with the federal government compounds this crisis with even more complex political, economic and social issues—and hurdles.

### ***African Americans***

An NPR report indicated that, the African American dropout rate is 50% (News & Notes with Ed Gordon, February 20, 2006; Peterson, 2005). When data are disaggregated by race, nearly half of African-American students who begin secondary school do not finish and never receive a diploma (Peterson, 2005). In order to address this dropout crisis, educational establishments must adopt new pedagogies as part of their reform efforts. Twenty years ago, Goodlad (1994) espoused an educational vision much needed today. He proposed that teacher training programs become Centers of Pedagogy in an attempt to improve both teachers' education and the schools they serve. Fullan, (1998) suggested that school leaders face problems for which there are no simple solutions, forcing them to learn new styles of leadership. In Goodlad's Centers, instruction would be researched clinically and continuously so that its structure and content would be always evolving and transformative. This approach would take into account the broad reach of institutions and teachers in the lives of students and

involve them more deeply and non-traditionally in educating youth (Honig, Kahne, McLaughlin, 2001).

Although the reasons for the dropout crisis among African American males are many, a major contributing factor is that schools have not been very student-friendly toward them. McLaughlin (2000) contended that prior to the school-based management initiatives of the 1980s, most schools were top down institutions, in which students' voice did not count, and there were very little actual youth-adult partnerships. An assumption prevailed, one that assumed students could not comprehend the affairs of adults—let alone manage them. Policies of these schools also were often considered to be somewhat inflexible (McLaughlin, 2000; Fine, 1991; Orfield, 2004).

The following six sets of factors have been identified by several scholars as major contributors to African American students' lack of persistence in schools. Each one is summarized briefly.

**Cool Pose**—is defined as a mechanism used by some African American males to cope with the realities of their existence. Its purpose is to enhance social competence, pride, dignity, self-esteem, and respect. Historically, Blacks have used metaphorical masks of roles, facades, shields, fronts, and games to ensure their survival in physically and psycho-emotionally hostile environments. Many create an inscrutable exterior, a curtain of invisibility, to disguise feelings of fear, hate, or confusion. (Majors & Billson, 1992). These mechanisms have evolved into a strategic style, tailored to meet the demands of the

moment. This Cool Pose is often misinterpreted by mainstream educators as hostility and indifference, leading to a cycle of disciplinary recriminations for the students. Teachers need to know how to recognize this facade, understand its purposes, and develop strategies breaking through it.

**Lack of Services for Needy Students**—According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of June 2014, unemployment among female and Black male teenagers was 33.4%. One year earlier, it was 48.6% (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). A study by the Urban League of Chicago released in January, 2014, showed even more disturbing results. Ninety-two percent of Black teens in that city were unemployed, as well as 83% of all Black males ages 16-19 across the U. S. It considers these statistics as indicative of a major crisis (Urban League of Chicago, 2014). Most urban areas also do not provide many recreational, health, and social service for African American adolescents. Living under this overwhelming absence of some basic resources, over time, as a way of coping with stark conditions. This lack of resources is so extensive and pervasive that Orfield (2005) and Majors and Billson (1992) argue, it is virtually impossible to change schools in any significant way without dealing with poverty systemically. Socio-economic limitations create a wasteland of neglect, that schools in their current forms, cannot correct (Majors & Billson, 1992; Berliner, 2009; Orfield, 2004, 2005). Segregation by poverty is a continuing phenomenon that negatively affects many Black

students' changes for high quality and sustainable educational opportunities

**Threat of Gangs**—Gangs are considered to be part of a network of urban terror in the U.S. (Los Angeles Police Department—LAPD, 2014). This lifestyle often leads to death, injury or incarceration. Nonetheless, the gang population has grown tremendously since 1980 (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007).

**Race**—This is one of the most problematic constructs in U. S. history and education within the socio-political spectrum (Gay, 2013). In socio-political terms, race is one of the mechanisms whereby social difference is organized. It is often used as a device for reproducing inequality in U. S. society (Ferguson, 2001; Orfield, 2005). As Ferguson (2001) contends, the underlying assumption around the organization of segregated schools is that White students are entitled to a better education than Black students. Race is both fundamentally and systematically linked to inequality in its many forms (Orfield, 2005). While some White students are becoming doctors, lawyers, engineers, and scientists, many Black students are heading to the streets where they may be destined to become casualties. These inequities are enacted in schools with quasi-incarceration practices such as detention and in-school/out-of-school suspension programs (Ferguson, 2001).

In a 21<sup>st</sup> Century industrialized, democratic society, race should not be a pre-determinant of poverty and exclusion. Yet, families of color are routinely excluded from participating in the decision-making process in schools and the possibility of ensuring that their children receive a quality education (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Spencer, Noll, Stolfus & Harpalani, 2001). It is tragic that in order to appear intelligent, many Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans feel they must act White (Oakes, Wells, Jones & Datnow, 1997). The perception of some communities of color in which school dropouts live appears rooted in a pathology and deficiency which must be re-focused far more positively, or abandoned, if these students are to be successful (Gay, 2013).

**Socio-Economic Status (SES)**—When gang membership and living in the streets are seen as the best existence, one's socio-economic status may be questionable. Street life often trains for criminality not conventionality. For some male youth of color the streets are an easy sell when compared to unstimulating and irrelevant conventional education (Majors & Billson, 1992). According to a number of researchers, SES is a critical factor contributing to the dropout rate (Rumberger, 2004; Ravitch, 2010; Sleeter, 2001). Orfield (2005) reported that schools with 75% or higher, low SES student populations have three times as many uncertified or out-of-area teachers in English and science as middle class schools.

**Structural Obstacles**— Black males are considered by some as an endangered species. Their endangered status is a result of being

systematically conditioned for failures that maintain existing achievement gaps. Majors and Billson (1992) explain that, despite positive role models, the majority of African American males are stereotyped as being: *dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed*. Although these words are seldom written, they are played out in educational policy decisions and school practices. Kunjufu (1985) contends that, through their control of key institutions, dominant cultural groups in U. S. society systematically deny African American males their masculinity, heritage, culture, and rites of passage from childhood to adulthood. Teachers' perceptions of students are grounded in their own conceptions of race, gender, class, and ethnicity. When these perceptions are negative, students are treated prejudicially (Ferguson, 2001; Ravitch, 2010). Ladson-Billings (2006) explains that the historical, sociopolitical, economic, and moral orientations, and associated practices of U. S. society actually create and sustain under-achievement in minority communities.

**Residues of Segregation**—Because of persistent disparities in resources and quality of educational opportunities, many African American male students may be unable to contribute without compensational services (Majors & Billson, 1992; Orfield, 2005). Segregation and poor teacher quality appear to be systematically linked. Obtaining access to teachers with high quality professional preparation usually evades poverty school districts (Knapp, 2001; Orfield, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006). If economic earning power correlates directly with educational attainment levels, then

the education many of these students currently receive destines them to inferior job prospects and continuing poverty.

### ***Problems with Preservice Instruction***

There is a 4-to-1 likelihood that large numbers of preservice teachers will work in urban areas in the foreseeable future. As Sleeter (2001) noted, preservice teachers are not being taught the multicultural pedagogies needed to better teach the diversified students who attend schools in these areas. In years to come, this lack of success could contribute greatly to the dropout crisis in these areas and to the burn-out and high attrition rates of these teachers (Teachers in Space, 2008). Gay (2003) argues that culturally responsive teaching for ethnically diverse students should be a cornerstone of preservice teacher education programs. Such programs should emphasize cultural competence, and student advocacy, excellence and empowerment. Those who teach in racially, ethnically, culturally, and economically diverse communities become more reflective about their personal beliefs, biases, and behaviors, and their related pedagogical practices (Gay 2003). Preservice and in-service teachers must engage in open and explicit conversations about the significance of race in teaching and learning. Furthermore, given the dropout statistics among students of color in urban areas and who their teachers are likely to continue to be in the future , there is a need for curriculum designs and pedagogical skills that resonate with and support them (Paulson, 2006).

If, according to Ladson-Billings (2004), how teachers teach is based on their cultural frames of reference, then if teachers are going to meet the needs of minority student populations they may have to expand their cultural frames of reference. Culturally relevant

instructional methodologies may be in order to retain the interest of many of the at-risk, marginalized ethnic minority and immigrant student populations teachers face. This may apply to all teachers regardless of their own ethnic and racial identities.

Some teacher education programs may be lacking in multicultural intentionality, and therefore may not be able to stem the tide of future student failure if teachers are not being trained to work with urban-centered students. Many of the individuals selected for these professional development programs are White, middle class and female (Knapp, 2001; Edwards & Young, 1996; Sleeter, 2001). Both from mainstream and non-mainstream backgrounds, they are daunted by the challenge of teaching increasingly diverse student populations without the skills necessary to be effective at the task. If they are not being adequately prepared to teach the most marginalized student populations (Sleeter, 2001), then how will this crisis be abated? What mechanisms are in place to avert a catastrophe? If preservice teachers will have grown up with precious little knowledge and practically no contact with others of different racial, religious or social class backgrounds, there may be a need for exposure to people who are different from them (Edwards & Young, 1996).

### ***Factors Causing Dropouts among Students of Color***

Although disparities between the genders have declined, many male and female students drop out of high school because both do not like school; however, the increase in the dropout rate has been concentrated around males while racial gaps have remained relatively unchanged (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Rumberger, 2004). Fine (1991) argues that in the low-income, urban schools that many

minorities attend, institutional policies and practices are often used that enable, legitimate and obfuscate the exodus of students. Students enter, are not served well, and leave. Often their departure is seen as an institutional inevitability (Fine, 1991). In these schools, often student voice is silenced. Students are seldom allowed to critically examine the daily realities of their educational lives. They compete against each other, and sarcasm and humiliation are often used as controlling devices. In essence, these students are psychologically shut out of their high schools, as a result of all that goes on within and beyond the curriculum (Fine, 1991; Orfield, 2005; Ravitch, 2010).

Fine (1991) contends that when students drop out of high school, their exodus must be analyzed and critiqued as a structural issue. Even though in the school she studied where administrators claimed to promote equity, she observed unequal educational outcomes. These observations led her to conclude that a student would not want to experience the realities of a school that preached equal opportunity, but guaranteed unequal outcomes. If a student were working toward the promise of a diploma of utility, he or she would not want to receive a diploma of negligible exchange value. Such a student probably would not want to be in a school that promoted democracy in its public relations, yet silenced it in reality. If one were to live through these contradictions on a daily basis, one might opt to leave (Fine, 1991).

Research and scholarship indicate several common factors that contribute to dropping out of school. These include:

- **In-Grade Retention/Poor Academic Achievement**—Being retained in grade doubles the likelihood of dropping out for both males and

females. Being retained also indicates that the student did not meet the required levels of academic achievement (Rumberger, 2004).

- **Relationships with Educators**—Many students associate their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with school, and their ability to achieve in school, with the quality of their relationships with teachers. Their sense of self, feelings of belonging in the classroom, and interest in the course content are contingent upon a solid relationship with teachers.
- **A Lack of Student Engagement**— A lack of engagement is at the heart of a student's decision not to persist in school (Noguera, 2009). It also predicts dropping out even after controlling for the effects of academic achievement and student background (Rumberger, 2004).
- **Absenteeism**—Absenteeism and disengagement go hand-in-hand. Whether structural (discipline-related) or voluntary, these two factors are highly associated with dropping out (Rumberger, 2004).
- **Student Mobility**—Both residential mobility (changing residencies) and school mobility (changing schools) is a more subtle factor that increases a student's risk of dropping out of high school (Rumberger, 2004).
- **Demographic Variables**— gender, race and ethnicity, immigration status, and non-native English background influence school leaving (Rumberger, 2004).
- **Individual Attributes and Personal Factors**—disabilities and low educational and occupational aspirations; employment; parenthood;

immigration status; English language proficiency, all are individual attributes and personal factors may leading to dropping out.

- **Structural Factors**—racism, sexism, and capitalism in schools and the community at large are contributors to dropping out (Ravitch, 2010).
- **Structural Characteristics**—schools' SES levels and demographic composition involving primarily Latino, African American and Native American students are clear contributors to dropping out.
- **Family Factors**—poverty, composition (single parents, step-parents), social capital, education level, and urban residency contribute to dropping out.

Research and scholarship indicate that dropping out of school among students of color (especially males) is at a crisis level. The crisis is complex in both causes and consequences, and it is affecting large numbers of students. This dropout crisis is affecting a very large number of students. According to Ladson-Billings (2006), it is one of the most pressing educational policy issues that states face, currently. More than 50 percent of African American students, 40 percent of Latino students and 11 percent of its White students attend high schools where graduation is not normative (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). The impact of this crisis is broad in its scope as well (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Entire segments of the youth populations like the males of color in this study may be affected negatively. For example, if approximately one-third of the Native American population is school-age (US Census Bureau, 2012), and over 50% of these students are predicted to drop out of school either at or before they reach 10<sup>th</sup> grade (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999; Sleeter, 2001; Rumberger, 2004; Heinrich, Hickman,

Bartholomew & Mathwig, 2008), then the economic, social and political consequences for Native American communities, are devastating. According to the research and scholarship summarized in this chapter similar predictions and consequences are applicable to Latino and African Americans as well. This study examined these dilemmas from the perspectives of the victimized to determine if they would provide insights and explanations heretofore untapped.

### ***Summary***

This chapter provided the essential findings of relevant research and theory about multicultural education, youth-centered, strengths-based teaching and learning, the socio-cultural implications of the problem relative to Latino Americans, Native Americans and African Americans, problems with preservice instruction and factors causing dropouts among student of color. The major idea was that instruction must consider the factors of ethnicity, culture and other socio-cultural and socio-economic factors because they contribute to dropping out of school. These factors are multiple, complex, interrelated, and interactive.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

This study was intended for male dropouts of color to re-imagine their school experiences and to reflect on what they think could have been done differently to encourage their persistence. Could it be a change of curriculum? Better teacher preparation? Improved student/teacher relationships? The participants were asked to reflect on their school expectations and experiences, and identify reasons for their withdrawal. The specific research questions explored, the study participants, the location of the study, and the data collection and analysis procedures used to answer the research questions are discussed in this chapter.

#### ***Research Questions***

Three key sets of questions were the primary focus in this study. The first dealt with how do African American, Native American and Latino American males who dropped out of high school account for their lack of academic success in the school environment?; and, to what extent and in what ways do they attribute their school failure to their own efforts and actions, or to other forces and conditions, such as the nature of the school, the curriculum, and the instructional process, their socio-economic status and other conditions of their lives? The second set of questions included: What could have changed the participants' academic outcomes in high school? How much of their success would they attribute to teachers and the instruction they received? How much do they attribute to their own initiative? and What do they perceive would have been

effective methods of instruction for them? The third question asked the participants to speculate about what their decisions might be if given a chance to revisit dropping out of school, and to explain why.

### ***Participants***

The study included nine participants from various high schools in the Puget Sound area who have dropped out of school. They were ages 13-29. Latino American, African American and Native American males were interviewed because of their higher and earlier attrition rates (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007; Rumberger, 2004). This study has been approved by the Independent Review Board at the University of Washington. Additionally, permission from both the Gateway to College Program (Blacks and Latinos) and the Federal Way Public Schools' Native American Student Liason was granted. The same protocols to describe the study and their activities were used with all participants.

**Table 1: Demographic Profiles of African American Study Participants**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>ETHNICITY</b>	<b>CURRENT AGE</b>	<b>YEAR DROPPED OUT</b>	<b>GRADE AT TIME OF DROPOUT</b>	<b>COMPELLING REASON FOR DROPPING OUT</b>
<b>AA #1</b>	African American	28	2002	Freshman Year	Anger issues. Did not cope well in school he attended. Works as self-taught auto mechanic. Is disabled.
<b>AA #2</b>	African American	29	2000	Freshman Year	Was expelled for assault, then acquitted. He did not return.
<b>AA #3</b>	African American	29	1999	Sophomore Year	He said he just did not get it. He is on Social Security.

**Table 2: Demographic Profiles of Latino American Study Participants**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>ETHNICITY</b>	<b>CURRENT AGE</b>	<b>YEAR DROPPED OUT</b>	<b>GRADE AT TIME OF DROPOUT</b>	<b>PROFILE SUMMARY</b>
<b>LA #1</b>	Latin American	19	2011	Freshman Year (Should have been in the Class of 2014.)	Caught with drugs and weapons. Went to Alt. School then sought work. Wants to own auto body/mech. shop.
<b>LA #2</b>	Mexican American	*Between 28-33	*Between 1995-2000	7 <sup>th</sup> Grade (Left home at 12 years of age.)	Lack of interest. Caught up in drugs and gangs. Not enough Und./Asst. from teachers. Now works construction.
<b>LA #3</b>	Mexican American	23	2011	Super Senior Year—2-months before graduation	Tired of school. Compelling family financial issues. Works in construction as an interior finish contractor.

\*This participant provided ambiguous and conflicting responses to these items.

**Table 3: Demographic Profiles of Native American Study Participants**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>ETHNICITY</b>	<b>CURRENT AGE</b>	<b>YEAR DROPPED OUT</b>	<b>GRADE AT TIME OF DROPOUT</b>	<b>PROFILE SUMMARY</b>
<b>NA #1</b>	Native American	22	2006	Freshman Year	Did well in 8 <sup>th</sup> grade. But got caught up with drugs and gangs in 9 <sup>th</sup> and lost motivation—had only 2-credits.
<b>NA #2</b>	Native American	**NA	**NA	**NA	Was bullied in school, and had no transportation to school.
<b>NA #3</b>	Native American	**NA	**NA	Junior Year of HS	Caught with drugs. Sent to treatment. Found working more important than school.

\*\*These participants did not provide this information.

The data in the tables above indicate the age range of the participants in this study was 19-33. The dropout range in years was, 1995-2014, spanning the last 19 years. The grade range of the participants was from 7<sup>th</sup> grade to Super Senior year (5<sup>th</sup> year Senior), two months prior to graduation.

## **Research Site**

Interviews were conducted at a High School in Federal Way—pseudonyms were used for all places and people engaged in this study. The school was a comprehensive high school with 1,873-students enrolled. Its demographics were 40% White, 12% African American, 12.9% Asian, 25% Latino, 1% Native American, and 3.3% Pacific Islander (Federal Way Public Schools, 2014). The school was one of eight high schools (of 38-schools total) operated by the Federal Way School District (FWSD), which covers all of the City of Federal Way, portions of Kent, Des Moines, Auburn and Lakeland. The District encompasses 35-square miles within this bedroom community—the Federal Way community was once thought of as a bedroom community for Weyerhaeuser and Boeing executives and their families. There are approximately 23,000 students enrolled in the district which is the 8<sup>th</sup> largest district in Washington State. The District has a total of 2,668 employees, 1,246 are teachers (Federal Way Public Schools, 2014). The governing body is a Board of Directors, which monitors the operations and the progress of the District. Each Board member represents a district in Federal Way. In order to be elected to the Board, each director must be a registered voter in the community. Each member is elected to serve a four-year term (Federal Way Public Schools, 2014).

Between 2002-2004, the Federal Way School District transitioned from junior high schools to middle schools. The district contains two K-8 schools. Because the State of Washington offers inter-district enrollments as choice options, students can attend any school in their own or a neighboring district. Through intra-district choice, students can attend any school in their district. The district has implemented a

standards-based curriculum across all grade levels (Federal Way Public Schools, 2014).

Until recently, the Federal Way School District's scores on state-required standardized tests, were considered among the top ten scoring districts in the State of Washington. In 2013, all four of the FWPS high schools made the State of Washington's Top-20 list. The district encourages all students who pass the (High School Proficiency Examination) HSPE, to take advanced placement classes in the International Baccalaureate, Cambridge or AP curricula (Federal Way Public Schools, 2014). According to the Washington state Office of the Superintendent for Public Education (OSPI, 2013), the Federal Way Public School District's graduation rate was 70.2%, in 2012. In that same year, the research site's graduation rate was 68.8% (OSPI, 2013). Data by ethnicity for the research site were not available.

Although the school was conveniently located, all but one of these former students chose not to come to it. Therefore the actual locations of the data collection were changed to facilitate the comfort levels of the participants in this research project.

### ***Research Design***

This study used culturally relevant and culturally nurturing frameworks that allow the voices and perspectives of members of a marginalized high school-aged youth population to be heard. Their interests and responses were at the center of the inquiry and analysis. The focus was on what has occurred in the lives of the participants that caused them to leave school prior to graduation.

In order to understand the experiences and perspectives of the participants, continuous narrative descriptions were created primarily from interview data collected (Erickson, 1986). Their comments were audio taped to assist in developing thick narrative descriptions about their school experiences and their reasons for dropping out. Due to the relative invisibility of their daily life and the timing of the interviews, extensive field notes also were recorded. These methodological procedures fit within the framework of a case study design (Merriam, 1998).

According to Merriam (1998) case studies are best used for intensive descriptions and analyses of a bounded system. Case studies can be either qualitative or quantitative (Merriam, 1998; Cresswell, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This one is qualitative. Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to a case as a phenomenon that occurs within a confined context. In this regard, a case can be either a classroom, a student, a cadre of professionals, or a system. Cases are selected because they indicate some area of concern, or are interesting and frame a hypothesis or an issue (Merriam, 1998). Typically, in a case study the researcher concentrates on a single entity or phenomenon and uncovers its intrinsic characteristics and their relationship to and interactions with significant factors of the phenomenon. Merriam (1998) suggests that the case study is particularistic, meaning it focuses on a specific phenomenon or issue. It may include many variables that are studied over time. The results are often described in literary or prosaic fashion. A major strength of a case study lies in the questions asked and their relationship to the end product. The results of the case study may reveal processes, programs or events that illuminate an issue or phenomenon in such a way that makes them more recognizable and understandable (Merriam,

1998). Additionally, case studies contribute to understanding the complex varieties of the human experience. To that end, this study was a descriptive case study whose purpose it was to better understand why male students of color drop out before completing high school.

The thick description, and particularistic nature of the data a case study produces enable the discovery of the processes, events, choices, decision-making, meaning-making and circumstances in the participants' lives. The interest is in what shaped their individual, educational, outcomes. Interviews and other data collection methods are used to collect relevant data because through them, the participants can reveal their voices, and validate their comments on their educational experiences (Merriam, 1998).

In 2006, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation commissioned a report by Civic Enterprises in association with the Peter D. Hart Research Associates, to probe what they termed, The Silent Epidemic. These researchers solicited the perspectives of high school dropouts. They attempted to ground the research in the lives and voices of the dropouts themselves. To achieve this aim, they used a series of focus groups. They surveyed 467-student dropouts between the ages of 16-25. Their study was conducted in 25-different locations in the United States. In the study, students reflected on their decision not to persist in school. Interviews were conducted in locations that were suitable to the participants and they took place in a variety of locations including large cities, small cities, and suburbs (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Jr. & Morison, 2006). This study used similar data collection approaches.

There were a few differences between the Gates study and this one. The Silent Epidemic was a broad-based study that included men and women. (In a little more than 25 years the number of women on college campuses eclipsed the number of men (Lewin, 2006). At that time males in high school were scoring higher than females on the SAT, especially in math and science. Also, first generation males from working class families were more likely to attend college than females (Lewin, 2006). At the time of my study, the educational attainment of males was not keeping up with the demands of the economy; and, males were being outpaced by females in nearly every category (Lewin, 2006).) More boys than girls are dropping out of school and at much earlier ages, and, minorities are dropping out at much higher rates than majority students (Lewin, 2006; California Dropout Project, 2008; Heinrich, Hickman Bartholomew & Mathwig, 2008; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010).

### ***Data Collection***

This study focused on a small sample of male high school dropouts from Selected, racial and ethnic groups that have shown the highest likelihood of dropping out of school. The use of academic records was not necessary for this research as it was conceived at the time, and was not used to influence recruitment in any way. Nonetheless, data was collected from participants using semi-structured interviews. This procedure was used once during the data collection process.

The initial meeting with the research participants was meant to collect consent agreements for the screening interview as well as later activities, including the interview itself. As a result of the outcome of this screening, the semi-structured interview took

place in the same session. Given that these are individuals who have not had a particularly good experience with schools or school people, some time was necessary for building rapport, in whatever informal way was called for with each individual. With some participants, I talked about youth and schooling and touched upon their experiences. With others I participated in a Pow Wow. Because all participants were eighteen years of age or older, the signed consent or assent forms and parental permission (for the potential participants who may have been legally underage) was not necessary prior to conducting the screening interview. In order to reduce both burden and risk to potential participants, the screening interview was reduced to a minimum set of questions [Such as: *When did you drop out of school? Why did you drop out of school? This study is going to get you to look deeply into your schooling experience. Are you ready and willing to do that? In what ways have you begun that journey, already?*]. Once a participant was screened into the study, then the semi-structured interview followed.

The semi-structured interviews were 45-minutes to one hour in length. In these interviews, the participants answered 20-25 questions that revolved around the three key sets of questions concerning why they dropped out of school. Embedded in these questions were prompts to get them to share their perceptions of what could have been done differently to have changed their academic outcomes in high school. [*What turns you on about school? What turns you off about school? Are you disinterested in school? How can anyone/anything get you interested in school, again? Is there anything about school you find attractive? Has it ever been easy for you to learn in*

*school? When? Why?]* None of the participants experienced difficulty in completing the semi-structured interview.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis proceeded from the description to the explanation, and from the explanatory to the conceptual and abstract (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It was facilitated by the 12-step process proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). These steps included:

- : • Counting the numbers of times themes or patterns occur in the data
- Noting patterns and themes
- Seeing plausibility which refers to using intuition in determining whether or not there are elements in the data that are reasonable for drawing conclusions
- Clustering, or sorting data into categories or classes
- Creating metaphors that dramatize or propel the research data to another level of meaning beyond literal description
- Splitting variables, or separating them into their parts so they can be better analyzed
- Subsuming particulars into the general categories, so that they can be compared or patterns identified and coded
- Factoring, or representing a large number of measured variables in relation to a smaller number of unobserved hypothetical variables.

- Noting relationships among variables to determine how they influence each other
- Identifying intervening variables
- Building logical chains of evidence, or putting discrete bits of data together systematically
- Deriving conceptually and theoretically coherent conclusions

Repetition that occurred in the data collected was important. It signaled the importance of an item or idea to the participants. Also, as an action, it corroborated the authenticity of the participants' words. The number of times participants referred to specific factors as reasons for their perceived failure at school were recorded. These numbers were used to verify and support assertions made as a result of further analysis of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Analyzing the data required six readings of the transcribed interviews.

Given the use of thick narrative description, the first read was conducted to get a sense of what was being said, to determine what themes or codes I might have been dealing with (Erickson, 1986; Wolcott, 1978, 1988, 1997). This was a multiple case study; I highlighted the transcripts and wrote questions next to comments that did not make sense or seemed to be contradictory (Merriam, 1998). At this point, I listened to the audio taped interviews again, to make sure that the information that was transcribed was consistent with my memory of the sense and content of the interviews. In the second read I looked more closely at the themes that were emerging and tried to think about codes that I would ascribe to each set of comments. With the third read, I began the process of coding, in earnest (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I created a contents

diagram on the front page of each transcript. The content of this diagram indicated on which page I could find responses to each research question. These data clusters signaled a coding theme. During the fourth read, I created a final list of codes/themes, and began to ascribe transcript lines as they applied to each theme. The fifth read revealed that I was duplicating many of the transcript lines (i.e., participants' quotes) to a number of the themes or codes. I realized that I needed codes that would more closely and discretely represent the ideas and explanations of the participants. My concern was that these participants' voices were at the center of inquiry and not at the margins (Tillman, 2006).

During the sixth read, and in consultation with a critical friend, I identified six main areas around which the vast majority of participants' comments revolved. These configurations, comprised with emotional factors, are described as cluster codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). My goal was to be sure the participants' comments were configured in a culturally-sensitive framework (Heath, 1982). The final list of codes or themes extrapolated from these data analyses were: education, peer influence, socio-economic influences, familial influences, intoxicants and socio-emotional influences. Sub-categories related to these code clusters were then developed: class size, curriculum and instructional practice, school structure, school support, dissonance—school and home and temporal were sub-categories of Education. Peer Influence included positive and negative (gangs, lifestyles, bullying experiences). Low SES, Social Capital, Employment/Unemployment and Exigencies/Social Factors/Survival were part of the socio-economic theme. The socio-emotional theme encompassed desire for self-improvement, self-destructive/self-effacing tendencies,

transformational/oppositional defiance, emotional paralysis, uncertainty, unnecessary pressure, Racism/Social Isolation. Functionality and dysfunctionality were part of the familial theme. Intoxicants included the two substances of drugs and alcohol.

### ***Summary***

This chapter explained the research methodology. It was a case study analysis using nine major data sources as participants in this study. These participants underwent a process that utilized semi-structured interviews. The processes and techniques used to both collect and to analyze the data were designed to obtain thick descriptions of the phenomena. This process ensured greater clarity of the evidence gathered in answer to the research questions, in order to achieve the research purpose of this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Findings, Part I

This study, included nine young men from three different ethnic backgrounds— Native American (NA #1, 2, 3), Latin American (LA #1, 2, 3), and African American (AA #1, 2, 3). They answered a series of questions, all of which were designed to get them to discuss their decision to drop out of school, and their related perceptions. These participants were currently in living conditions that have been strongly influenced by this decision. The majority of them are living in a survival mode, while being encumbered with more responsibilities now than when they left school. Most said they decided to participate in this study so that their plight does not befall other teens considering dropping out of school.

These young men spoke from contexts that are real but often invisible. For example, some indicated they had to go through the prison system to realize that a lot of their rights have been forfeited as a result of dropping out of high school. After leaving school, some affiliated with gangs but subsequently dropped out of these relationships. They are now living different, although very challenging lives. They seem to have disappeared from the educational radar. The question is why they are unseen and unheard.

Despite their relative lack of academic expertise, these young men have something to say that is worth being heard by educators. The purpose of this study was to facilitate their stories being told, and hopefully facilitate other educators' access to hearing them. The results of the study further amplified several general trends. They

are presented here in accordance with the seven cluster themes that emerged from the data analyses. The presentation is in descending order of significance, according to the amount of data attached to each theme. These themes are Curriculum and Instructional Practice; School Support/Alternatives; School (Structural); Peer Influence and Intoxicants; Intrinsic Desire for Self-Improvement/Transformation; Family; Self-Destructive/Self-Effacing Tendencies. Findings related to the first three are presented in Chapter IV, and the other four in Chapter V.

***Interest in School—Connected to Curriculum and Instruction:***

Why did these young men decide to drop out of school? Had they ever experienced success in school? If so, why didn't they use some of the success strategies in their more difficult classes that they used in their successful classes, prior to dropping out of high school? One might even assume that students who drop out of school do not have a liking for school. Quite the contrary was true for most of the young men in this study. For example, LA #1, explained, "When I decide to actually stick my mind into [schooling] and actually pay attention to the teachers and actually do the work—turn in everything on time and all that—there is nothing that disinterests me in school. . .I just wanted to be there so that I can graduate and move on to college and move on with my career."

For this student, school was easy—when he focused and concentrated on his work. School was cool! It is a place where he wanted to be in the best of times. AA #2, who took part in using and selling controlled substances, said

Back then. . .math. . .was the only thing that I really liked. But, the older I got, me being out of school and. . .being away and everything, I chose to read—to learn. I was more perceptive about the things that were around me. . .So that’s why I chose to read so that I could find out about something else. . .My math was 11<sup>th</sup> grade and my reading was college level. That was when I was 15. . .Math just came easy to me.

For AA #3, . . .”if it’s the hands-on—that way—I can do it. . .It was easy. In Louisiana, it was easy because. . .the teachers that taught us back home were the same teachers that taught my mother, my auntie and they were Black. So, they knew me. They knew when I was raised—when there was still paddling in school.”

These participants were not afraid of or unable to do schoolwork, and they knew how they best learned. They also knew what they did not appreciate about teachers. LA #2 explained that,

What turned me off about school back then was lack of interest and the lack of the teacher’s knowledge to teach us or me. . .It was hard back then. It was hard for me to enjoy or learn in school because I was not helped—for the lack of the teacher’s interest in people that don’t have the same type of. . .learning ability that other kids have. I felt—many times—I desperately needed help and all I got was whoopings.

Despite his apparent shortcomings relative to his learning and his lack of supportive teachers, LA #2 still recalled having experienced some success in school.

Even though he did not specify who they were, he said that what worked for him was the people [who]

took the time to sit down and say, 'Hey – you gotta do this or you have to know algebra or whatever.' And, it felt like they really cared about me better than myself, not like in a lot of places. . . Once I put my mind into it and I was capable of going to school and talking to people. . . that gave me a little push to keep going.

Other participants also talked about what it took to learn, and what eased the difficulty of learning in a relatively uncomfortable environment. For instance, AA #1 recalled that,

. . . At times, it was hard. But, being around my peers made it a little easier. . . just the interaction. I just enjoyed the interaction. The people in school—the teachers, the counselors, the kids, guests, the nurses. . . I'm just a people-person. As a kid, I was just drawn to people. . . I stay busy with the hands; with the body. I don't like to stay still, so talking and interacting was fun.

Another participant remembered a particular class in which he was having fun engaging in the learning process at first. Then, as an ESL student, he was embarrassed by his limited English language ability. LA #3 said,

At first it was. . . about. . . trying to learn the language and get better at it. I tried to do stuff that my parents couldn't do or have done before, 'cuz both of them didn't really speak English. . . Ms. Velarde's class – in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade I still had her. That was the ESL class – English. There was a whole bunch of different people there

– Russians, Indians. . .Latinos, Hispanic, Mexicans. And, everybody got along. Whenever she'd say, 'Let's open up the books,' everybody would just open up the books and start looking at the books, and when you see that people are listening, you start following along. . .

For LA #3, it appeared that subscribing to and complying with the classroom routines contributed to the effectiveness of the instruction. This also contributed to his perception of the class, in general;

That was always a fun class to go to because it was just a whole bunch of different people that didn't really speak that much English. . .Just like. . .you or every other student that was there. . . By looking at everybody else, it made me want to learn more English and get out of that class faster, because if you knew English, then you stopped going to her classes. . .Plus, it was fun to learn. . .to go to that class.

Despite this failure to remain in schools, the participants in this study had the capacity and most had at least one subject area in which they performed well. For NA #2, it was math. He understood. . ."the concepts" and said he,

Put forth [his] best efforts. The only thing I didn't go all the way through was my geometry. For some reason, the slopes and everything else like that – I used to just get mad about that. But then, you know, Geometry came in with like Trig and stuff like that. When that came in there – it was like Urgghhh!! I couldn't stand it. . .It came with the angles and stuff, but I still did it and I still passed. .

.Maybe because it challenged me and because I saw that when I was by myself, it was just me and math. Something I could conquer.

This student had the ability to deal with the rigors of learning, and he had the tenacity to grapple with some of the more difficult subjects successfully. Yet he did not persist in school.

The participants were cognizant about how they learned, and what was necessary to support their learning. For example, AA #1 explained,

. . .Math [was] easy for me to learn. . .because I'm a numbers person. . . Physical education [was] easy for me to learn because I am an active person. I stay busy. So, being able to run free was what I called my, free time. PE and recess. . .that was my free time – let it out of my system, and then I might have a better chance of staying still for the rest of the day. . .So. . .those have been my easy to learn. . .[subjects].

Even when he was not experiencing success in a particular class, AA #1 could identify his areas of challenge. At the same time, he was experiencing success elsewhere. He recalled that

Reading and writing and trying to express myself on paper [were hard]. I can express myself easy talking and showing you, but as far as writing it down, it's hard. . .[But math] . . . it was just natural. . .It felt like me. Yeah, it felt like I was all ready and here to do that. . .I feel that I am learning everywhere and everyone around me is learning something whether they see it or not. Whether they are learning something from me or I am learning something from them. . . . So, I

don't feel that there is an actual place or a class, because I just feel life is school in itself. . .Some [in life] are learning their own way and some are learning by example. Some are trying to find examples and put it together their own way.

LA #1 was similarly insightful about his learning styles and habits. He noted that, "if I pay attention enough and understand the teachers and the work that we are doing [I succeed]. Not paying attention and being off task makes it hard for me to pass and understand the assignments that needed to be done." For example, in his math class, where the other students were "doing their work and everybody is paying attention and nobody's off task, I am learning because I am getting help from either other people or the teacher and they are showing me how to do the work."

Some of the participants also knew what was available for them to circumvent their learning challenges. A case in point was LA #2. He explained that,

. . .Ever since I was little I think I [had] ADD. . .I was an impatient kid. I was always moving around when I was growing up. I was the one that was always. . .pulling hair, throwing balls of paper and stuff like that. And I think that was one of the problems. . . I know that I am smart – that I can learn things. Like if somebody were to teach me to take a T.V. apart and fix it – I could put it back. . . –because, I have the ability to remember things. But. . .sometimes I can't concentrate on one thing. . .It's hard for me.

He explained further using the following example:

Sometimes I could be framing a wall and I'm thinking about home or thinking about my parents or thinking about – okay, are you going to have

gas for the truck to come in tomorrow. Sometimes, I'll forget and then I'll have to go back to see – like if I'm putting in a hanger or something I have to go back and look at it. But it's just my lack of concentration. I have always had trouble concentrating on things. . .And it was always the same thing. . . 'Oh, yeah – he needs medication so he can calm down.' Even till now. . . Sometimes I joke around like, 'You know what – I think I have ADD. I think I need medication.' . . .and she [his mother] is like, 'No you don't!'

The informal curriculum and school/classroom climate played an important role in these young men's engagement (or lack of engagement) with school, along with the formal subject matter taught. AA #3 attributed his early interest in schooling to the daily rituals and routines his teachers practiced. Even though his Louisiana school used corporal punishment, he felt, "It kept us in check." Other rituals he valued included saying prayers every morning and the pledge of allegiance prior to beginning school work. AA #3 said he, "Loved it. . .when it was more family orientated. . .Up here you have like 3 schools within a 3 block radius of each other and then all of the elementary schools. It's like everything is separated." He placed a high value on interactions with teachers, while noting that, some teachers were there to [just] burn the time away on the clock. . .They did not know how to engage you." AA #3 was particularly complimentary of his Louisiana State History class in which his teachers used a school without walls approach that made the content contemporary and relevant in real time. He explained that,

We had the history right there. . .the place right where it was happening in my city – the battle of Mansfield. [Teachers] would talk about everything that happened right down the street. . . We had family members that were in the war. My uncle QT was in that war. And, when he died, the government [gave him a] 21 gun salute. Yeah, I was engaged down there. You know – agriculture – everything. . .it was really interactive ‘cuz we would be doing it right. And it was family – everybody lived right next to each other. So, we were all teaching each other. Everybody said we were our greatest teachers. . .we were already doing it. . . We didn’t need to go to school, really.

When he relocated to the Pacific Northwest, this feeling of learning in a community of living history and kinship was lost. The effects were detrimental on AA #3’s school persistence. He noted, “. . .That’s why when I got in high school I came up here. Somebody older already told me – it’s a waste of time. This is wasting my time. That’s what it felt like.”

NA #3 expressed some of the same sentiment about feeling out of place in school, and not finding classes interesting or stimulating. He said,

I felt like I didn’t belong in them. I felt like I wasn’t in them. And, I felt like I wasn’t learning anything because the teachers weren’t really helping me. . .Not because of a lot of distractions. . .the teachers weren’t giving me the right answers or weren’t helping me out with the problems I’ve had with the work they gave me.”

In addition to knowing the kind of instructional support he needed to improve his

learning, this participant also described the physical space and problem-solving strategies that would produce the best success for him. He thought a good place for learning,

Would be. . .a library or. . .a study hall or. . .after class. It's not like the whole class where everybody is doing their work. And everybody is just there trying to do their own thing. . .you know. . .focused. . .It wasn't easy at first, but, my teacher always told me to take it slow, read it slow. If you don't get it, read it again. That way you can memorize it.

While the physical location for learning that NA #3 described implied the need for order, structure, guidance and collaboration, AA #1 was more explicit in his description of environmental obstacles to learning. He said, “. . .A place of confusion. I believe that is where. . .people are not learning. I believe I am not learning when I am confused and I don't understand something, and people around me don't have the answers to give or to show. So, there's nothing to learn in that instance.”

### ***The Opposite of Me***

Although disengaged from school, NA #1 knew what was required for him to learn, and he recognized a teacher who had the fundamental instructional and relationship skills he needed. His perceptions about his skills were revealing. He knew that he was not motivated. He was uncooperative. He had anti-social tendencies. He had attendance problems. As a result, he had no academic credits. NA #1, recognized

that, as a student, he was atypical. During a moment of insightful self-analysis, he explained that,

It takes a lot to get me to learn. First you have to get me motivated. And, the hardest part is making me do it. I'm not much of a cooperative person. . .[I don't like]. . .people telling [me] what to do. Some people you don't like at school. . .I had a lot of those. . .I never even really went to school. Even when I went to school, I went like. . .two days a week. I tried at the time; but, it just never worked out for me. . . .It'd be nice. . . to go back to school. . .and get all those credits back; but, I don't see that happening in less than four years. . .

The condition essential for him to learn that was similar NA #3 was the teacher. According to NA #1, "Ms. Sanchez. . .[was]. . .the best teacher I know. She helped me all the time. I studied all the time. The class [was] algebra. I got pretty good at it." But, the negative pulls and tugs in his life apparently overcame him. He declared, "I tried but then once I started smoking again, it just disappeared. And everyone else are still in school. They are doing good. I can pretty much say they are the opposite of me."—NA #1 perceived the other students' efforts to achieve school success and their resultant achievement in school as the opposite of his efforts while he was in school.

### ***A lot of "Too Little!"***

The participants were asked if their schools provided them with alternative avenues for achieving academic success and staying in school. NA #1 could not recall

any. Instead, he said, “There’s a lot of too little!” The support and assistance that schools failed to provide, he found on the street. He explained that,

I [was in a] run away home for a while. I even was homeless for a bit too. I was staying at the ESP house. That’s how I got rushed-in. They are not like peers. They are not like everyone else down here. They are like brothers to me. They are there for me—especially the one that invited me in the house.

Although LA #1 did not find school satisfying and gratifying, he felt he had no other alternative but to attend when he did. He went to school under duress. He offered the following explanation for why he felt this way:

Like I said – I just don’t like school, but, I have no other choice. if I want a good career and a good education I have to go to school. And there were no other alternatives available to me at the time. . . I think that it was just too little. . .My family always pushed me. . .Like a hard-headed kid. . .I. . .always [told them and myself], ‘I’ll take care of it.’ But. . .I didn’t want to do anything at that time because I was going through so many family issues and stress. I just couldn’t deal with it. I couldn’t make a decision about what I wanted to do in life, even though I had my goals set.

This young man had goals for a better life established already. He was on a constructive course, only to turn in the wrong direction. Why the shift? Did his “hard-headedness” and a lack of follow-through due to his family concerns, factor into his lack of persistence in high school?

NA #1 was even “Cool with some of the teachers,” because they helped him out a lot. Still, he did not graduate. He attributed this failure, not to a lack of effort or interest, but to not being, “very good in school. Even if I tried, it was a failing grade... I just popped—I guess.”

Lack of support was not always the problem that prevented school completion. For example, AA #1 had support at the school level, including financial. He explained that, “money wasn’t a factor ‘cuz I was actually on a football scholarship at Kennedy High School. So. . .it wasn’t the fact of the money being the issue of not finishing school. My parents did not support my decision [about] quitting school. They wanted me to stay in school.” However, he lacked other kinds of crucial support. AA #1 noted that his parents did not teach him how to survive on his own. Their attitude was, “If you want to quit school and be a man, you get out there and you act like one.” They also put him out of the house, “for eight months.” No one else offered any feasible alternatives for AA #1. He said,

I had my football coaches and everything. They were trying to counsel me. . . [about] my decision- making. . . .It was family and friends. . . that also didn’t support the situation and were trying to counsel me into staying in school. So, I can’t say that I didn’t have a support group. I was just rebellious.

Although unexpected and unreasonable, some alternatives were suggested to AA #2. Shifting his enrollment from one high school to another prior to dropping out was initiated by being put out of his family’s house. He recalled,

My dad kicked me out first, then. . .my older sister and my brother. So, all three of us were homeless. . .together. . .I was going to go to Marshall [high school] with my sister. I have to protect my sister. So, anyway, I go over there to Marshall – I watched a security guard beat up a student. The student was smaller than me. . .I reacted. I didn't like that. I don't like bullies. . .[or anything] else like that. So, I intervened – caused all kinds of chaos. The police came and got me.

Unfortunately, AA #2's options were limited. He could not go home. He was not a Child Protective Services (CPS) case. No one alerted CPS to his situation, so he could not be placed anywhere. AA #2 explained,

They didn't release me to my home. . .they didn't release me to my parents. [They] released me to my case worker. So. . . the next thing I know, I [ended] up with a court case. I got criminal charges. I cannot remember what type of charges they were. . .I went down to Juvenile [Hall]. . .I couldn't go to school, because I was expelled out of the school district. I wasn't allowed to go to school because of those criminal charges. And all I did was just stop [the security guard] from beating up that little kid. I was cleared on the charge.

AA #2 was not told he could not return to school. In fact, according to him, the Judge said he could return to a district school any time he chose. The judge, advised him not to "go back to the school." The judge also told me, "I'm sorry this had to happen to you. Hopefully you will go ahead and move forward with your life and just use this as a stepping stone." AA #2 remembered him being the first juvenile judge he really

believed in because this was “the first time that somebody really took interest in me. . .It was something else.”

Apparently, AA #2 was aware of the resources a school could provide, but he did not know why his school did not offer them to him. By his own admission, though, he was not as familiar with the application processes as he should have been. When asked what the school could have done differently that would have indicated support for him, AA #2 responded,

They knew about the issues. They knew about the problems and did not intervene. They should have found a place for me to stay. They should have at least reported me to DYS, CPS or something; knowing I was homeless this whole time. I didn't live with my parents. They knew this. . .They knew everything.

At first, AA #2 was much less definitive and forthright in declaring what he could have done to prolong his staying in school. Initially, he said, “Nothing,” but then added,

Let me rephrase that. I should have [gone] to DSHS and told them I'm filing for support right then and there. If I would have followed it through, I would have been a ward of the state, automatically. That's what I should have [done]. I didn't know anything about the law. Nobody was there to help me come to those [conclusions]. . .I should have read. . .some books about the law. I wasn't thinking like that because I was a child. I was a

minor and I didn't understand. . .They understood but. . .they didn't help me for shit!. . .What was done was way too little.

The judge essentially dropped all charges against him. Nonetheless, when the judge informed AA#2 that he was free to go home, he told the Judge, "I'd rather sit in jail. At least I know I [have] a bed to sleep on. . . .So the Judge maxed out my time. . .I got out of jail. I [was] 16."

AA #2, had not been accustomed to this level of generosity, compassion, and caring. The novelty of this kind of investment in him came through in comments like, "[The judge} said, 'Good luck. Hope you have a better life.' . . .I said, for real? How can that judge care, man?. . .The best thing I ever had, man. The judge cared about me enough to put me inside the system."

Ultimately, AA #2 was schooled by the justice system. He was assigned to a transitional program with the stipulation that he drop a dependency case against his father filed by his case worker. In return, his father gave consent for him to participate in the transitional program. He was dismissed from the transitional program for a lack of compliance. At the time, he was enrolled in a college outreach program that he had to quit. AA #2 was trying to do the right thing until he found out that his efforts were not in agreement with the rules of the transition house. In reflecting on these experiences AA #2 said,

I made a deal with the fucking devil. . .He [the transition house manager] told me that I wasn't allowed to be there no more at the house. So I was thrown back into the streets, again. . .That's when everything went all the way around. .

.There wasn't anyone there to help me. They didn't understand. I'm going to school – I'm at school. I'm not doing nothing wrong. I don't care about missing a meeting or not, it doesn't matter. So I don't come to the house meeting. I'm at school. . .And you want me to come back for funky ass meetings, and if I don't come back then I don't have a place to stay? [What do] you want [more] for me: a place to stay or a career for a lifetime? [I] can actually make it out the system!

While AA #2 experienced a lack of support from educators, family members, and inappropriate social services LA #2 and LA #3 suffered from lack of support related to language and feelings of isolation. LA #2 told a similar, though somewhat less graphic story as AA #2 spoke about not receiving support, assistance, and guidance with challenges he encountered in school. He recalled,

After I dropped out, I went to the courts because you know how you can be in a foster home. None of the schools—in the whole [city] District. . .[helped. I dropped out from South. . .They sent me to \_\_\_\_\_ for one day. . .and. . .I didn't like it and I didn't go back. . .It was too many white people there.”

This participant also did not see any representations of his culture or ethnicity anywhere in the schools he attended. This absence was an important contributor to him leaving school before graduation.

Unfortunately, LA#2's family was not in a position to offer any constructive intervention or prevention. As he explained, “I think my family did everything that they could. I mean, they can only do so much. . .My mom used to go to school with me because I

didn't go to school. . .One time, she [sat]. . .behind me. To me,. . . it was. . .an embarrassment.”

Even this did not stop his disconnection from school and learning. Later LA #2 was diagnosed with a language problem that should have qualified him for ESL services, but that never happened. He remembered the experience as:

It was like, ‘Really? You are going to put me on blast with my mom here? I know I’m dumb but damn. . .’ And then [my mother would] get mad and she [would] be like, ‘You know how to do this – you’re not stupid – you’re not dumb.’ I know. And that’s the same things that I tell my son. Because. . .the way that the school system is, I think that that is the reason why my son is like that! My son sometimes. . .he’s negative, he doesn’t have no confidence. . .And I always tell him, ‘Dude, you have to have confidence.’

LA #2 empathized with others who were in similar situations (or had the likelihood of being so). He even tried to offer the kind of aid and assistance he did not receive. This was evident in the following situation.

I went to the IF project about a month ago. . .The lady that runs the workshops, she’s a prosecutor for the State. So she works with the Juvenile Detention. . .But the school system, they refer kids that are skipping school or doing bad. So then she’ll take them to court and the judge will be like, ‘You have to go to those workshops.’ I met this Chinese kid. He’s from China, 16 years old. And I was like, ‘Damn, he’s already living the lifestyle. . .he didn’t want to talk to nobody. . . .So, I come up to him and I think he had a watch like mine [laughter]. My watch

still got my DLC number on the back from prison, you know because they engrave them. And I was like, 'Hey, Dude, look, I got a watch like yours.' He couldn't really speak English, you know what I mean? But I didn't know. I thought he did because he was like, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.' Until we went through an exercise—you know the exercise tells you why you are having this behavior in school. Or, why are you having these problems in school. Or, what can you do differently, you know. . . .He was like staring at the paper. . . .I thought, 'Something's going on here.' And I was telling him, 'Why did you skip school, Dude?' He's like, 'Because my dad takes me to work at night. He tells me that it's better for me to work at night and not go to school. And. . .then in the morning he wakes me up to go to school and I'm tired. I might be sleeping at school and the teachers get mad.' But then when I tell him, 'Put it down right there.' What can you say differently? The judge will send you back here to this type of workshop. And then he grabbed the pen and he couldn't even write, you know what I'm saying?

According to LA #2, this Chinese youth had repeated the same grade possibly three times. He suggested to him, "It is because of your language barrier," and offered the following advice:

'In school—have they talked to you? Have they helped you out?' And, he was like, 'No!. . .School is no good for me' And I was like, 'No, man. School is good if you put your mind into it. . .You in a gang?' And, he was like, 'Yeah.' And I said, 'Man, that's no good.' So then I told him my story and he was listening. . .I showed him my tattoos. . .my prison I.D. and everything. And I [said], 'Look man,

that's not the way. . .stay in school. . . .So, at the end when everybody left, the prosecutor, she talks to us one-by-one and she was like, 'What do you think? What's the problem with this kid? He wants to talk to you.' And I said, 'I think it's a language barrier.' He said that they don't help him with his homework, 'They don't really care and they never called his parents.'

But, LA #2 assessed the problem as being more complicated than merely calling home to gain parental support. Instead, he attributed it to deeper and more complex cultural incompatibilities. As LA #2 explained,

I mean, if you don't speak. . .or write [English] what the hell are you doing in the regular school?. . .Don't they have a school for kids that don't know how to read or write English? Or, have somebody like a translator or something there, I mean, you can't expect a kid that has a language barrier to keep up with. . .the regular students. . . .He's not going to be able to do it because he doesn't understand. . .If he says he works at night so maybe that's a problem, too. He works at night and he's gotta go to school the next day. Well, what do you think is gonna happen? He's gonna be falling asleep.

Questions posed by LA #2 about school interventions (or the absence of them) for students like the ones he described, have implications for possible ESL class placements, and multicultural education. On this point, comments made by LA #3 were similar to, yet different from the other participants. For example, he felt schools conferring with parents was a useful strategy. He thought if parents really care "they'll do something." He then used his own personal experiences to elaborate on this idea:

That worked for me once. I wasn't turning in homework for. . .one semester and the teacher called my parents and my parents [said], 'Why aren't you turning in your work?' I [said], 'well, it's been like this and that.' [My father said], 'Well you need to turn it in by the end of this semester,' and I did. Now, like I said, If your parents care, they will make you turn [your work] in. So that works.

These techniques occurred for LA #3 in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. When he got to high school, he noticed a radical change in his parents' attitudes toward his schoolwork. He noticed also a social disdain among school personnel for the Mexican Spanish that was his native language. He perceived that it was not valued. LA #3 recalled:

At the time I was doing good. . . I had a C-average and I guess my parents just stopped caring because they had two jobs. . . five kids. They really couldn't speak good English. They really didn't care whether that teacher called them or not because now that I was in high school, there was no. . .Spanish speaking like the Spanish that we speak at [home]. . . .That's the thing about that school. . . .They have Spanish teachers but they're not Spanish. There's an American teacher that's speaking Spanish, or you have a Hawaiian teacher speaking Spanish, or you have a Panamanian teacher that's speaking Spanish, or, you have a Puerto Rican teacher. . . .When you have people that are straight up from Mexico, that Spanish doesn't work, you know.

LA #3 did not call his experiences racism, as did LA #2. He saw them more as a socially- structured circumstance, and cultural and linguistic stratification. They were

akin to caste-based phenomena, with Mexican Spanish at the bottom of the social hierarchy. LA #3 explained,

Let's say you have a class of 15-students. . .and the teacher is South American and then you have a Mexican student in there. The Spanish that he speaks is not correct because the teacher said so. So, how does that work?. . .Now the student is going against three languages that he has to understand – the South American's Spanish, the Spanish at his house, and the English he has to work with. . .I have two kids in school and they are in dual language school. . . .Some teachers are from Mexico. . .I help my kids with their homework, and I speak Spanish, read Spanish and write Spanish. . .I don't do that accent stuff that you guys put on the letters or anything like that, but don't go telling my kid that's wrong because then he'll just go back to me and it's like, 'Okay, Dad. Why did you tell me that's right if it's wrong? The teacher said so.' . . .I check my kids and tell the teachers if anything like that happens just give me a call and we can just sort it out. . . That Spanish teacher at the school is not saying that it's the one you speak at the house or write at your house or your parents talk at your house. . . .I was told once was that my Spanish was slang Spanish. . .But I was like look, I translated it perfectly. . .I write it and I speak it and I read it and it all sounds the same.

Although he was told his language was slang, LA #3, insisted that instructors must work with their students. Teachers should make their instruction culturally responsive to the learning styles and background experiences of their Mexican students. LA #3 argued further that,

If you are from South America, of course, [Spanish is] going to be. . .different because there's just no comparison with that. . .I mean, if you really want to teach Spanish, you should teach it like the Mexican one. Don't teach it like the South American or the Spain one. . .It's just not the correct one. . .Let's say you learn Spanish as the Spain, Spanish, . . .[don't] go to Mexico trying to speak that.

The out-of-school challenges LA #3 faced were even greater than those he encountered in school. When confronted by these challenges, unfortunately, LA #3 thought he had no resources or alternative to dropping out of school because

After seeing what had happened. . .to my family and the stuff we were going through, it was just nothing that I could have done or anybody could have done—unless that accident never would have happened. . .But there was just so much that everybody could do, [and] it wasn't enough for me to stay in school. . .Not unless they could give me some money for my house note—which was \$1,500. . .There was nothing that could have been done. There's no, 'could haves.' There were no solutions for my dropout situation.

Similar lack of resources contributed to NA #2 leaving school prior to graduation. He had a transportation problem that could have been corrected and perhaps prevented him from dropping out of school. Potential options were assignment to another school, reduced cost or funded bus passes, or enrollment in a state-approved, online high school program. But, none of these happened. He recalled,

It was kind of hard to get. . .transportation. . .either finding bus fare or gas money to get a ride, or even finding a ride in general. . .They [his family] didn't support

me. . .Well, at first they were. . .trying their hardest to get me to school and then. . .just financially, it was getting tougher and tougher. . .My family is really big on education but it just didn't work out for me. . .It was just mainly the transportation and the money situation. . .I didn't really have any other alternatives. 'Cuz when I went to school, I was in Everett; but, I would have to go to Marysville and that's like a 30-minute drive, maybe, and the school district wouldn't give me a bus [pass]. . .It was pretty difficult to make it to school.

AA #3 acknowledged that both his peers and the school contributed to his decision to drop out. He said,

They could have asked me, 'What do you want to do?' not just, 'What do you like? What are your interests?' Instead of doing that, they could have taken my interests and incorporated [them into]. . .the curriculum. . .and I would get all of it at the same time. . .Well, why didn't they do that back then? I'm self-taught, pretty much. I do it to myself all the time. . .and I've been doing it for years. My daughters feel the same way—it's like well school—they will be like, 'Daddy, come and let me read you a book.' She's been doing this since she was five or six. She's eight about to be nine. I also have a 13-year old about to be 14.

Likewise, NA #3 mentioned several sources of support that could have helped him stay in school. They are similar to what some of the other participants noted. The resources included encouraging friends; teachers he could relate to; caring counselors; and more interesting and relevant courses. Yet, he contradicted himself as he declared that his friends

did all they could. . .they were with me the whole way. Even though there were some ups and downs, they were like, 'That's how life is!' . . .now they are giving me moral support. . .but, back then, they weren't like, 'You should stay in school or stay in class . . .we'll do all that after school.'

NA #3 felt his peers could have been even more encouraging. But he did not absolve himself of responsibility for his own behavior. For example, he said, "I felt like I should have just said, 'hard things are going to come. Not everything is easy.' Or better yet. . .I should have [talked] to a counselor so that I [could] sort it out." This was yet another example of a lot of "too little."

### ***Structural Elements of Schooling***

The policies and procedures of schools can be prohibitive for potential dropouts. They often reflect structures of society at large, and have profound effects on the type of education provided to different students, and on the process of delivery. In this regard, school structures often resemble legal structures outside of school. These structures and processes had negative consequences for the participants in this study. For NA #2 sometimes the pace of schooling was too fast, and, "Working in big groups didn't really work. . .too well" for him.

AA #1 had issues with the organizational and procedural protocols used most often in school. He attributed these difficulties to being, ". . .a hands-on person, so. . .I can't sit still too much. . .I have to be in. . .something that keeps me active. It's not the school work, it's the work of trying to focus and stay still through. . .the slow process of

it.” AA #3, was challenged by the school time schedule. He found it difficult to adjust to the early hours in the morning. He remembered, “fighting it’ and, “moping” getting up for school.

Students need a specified number of credits to graduate. These vary somewhat by states. Unfortunately, some students can be in high school four or more years and still not meet this graduation credit requirement. When some students realize they do not have enough credits to earn a diploma, they drop out. This was the case with NA #3. As an eleventh grader he realized that he did not even have 10-credits, which led him to conclude that his future was not, “. . .going to be all that.” He claimed that now he does not dwell on past, missed opportunities because he has “bigger stuff to think about.” LA #1 was a little more philosophical in declaring, “I guess I’m just like any other teenager. I just don’t like school. I just don’t like being there.”

AA #2, was not very fond of typical school structures and protocols either. Being, “in one place,” and “having to be with everybody” was problematic for him. His disaffiliation from school was further influenced by the fact that,

When I was growing up, I was teased and picked on. . .because I was smarter than the rest of [the students]. I used to do their homework. . .I turned out to be one of the most ruthless gangsters out here. That’s why I am still living. . .They [were] in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade and I’m a 9<sup>th</sup> grader and I’m doing the same work they’re doing. It’s a trip. And then they are looking at me—because I got [placed] into the class. . .So. . .you’ve got to sit [there] – and everybody was looking at me like – this young-assed dude. . .They knew my brother – my brother was a Senior. .

.So, they were looking at me like, 'What's his baby brother doing here?' Besides. . .these are all Seniors and they are all looking at me. . .And I'm like, 'Hell no!. . .I can't be here. It's a bad image. . .'

LA #3 had an experience that was in between those of AA #1 and NA #2. He now works construction on his own terms. He manages a crew. He does not bring work home. High quality job performance has created both a reputation and a demand for his services. His approach is enabling him to complete a number of jobs quickly. He saw no connection between schooling and his work styles in his success. LA #3 reasoned,

What's the point of coming to school if you are going to have work at home from school?. . .You know how sometimes you gotta write this long, really long paper. I guess they are necessary, but not really, because. . .the work I'm doing, I don't do that kind of stuff. And I thought I would use it, but now that I'm into the real world and have a family, I don't really do that. And I ask myself what was the point of me writing those long essays and trying to get. . .good grades?. . .With what I'm doing, they don't look at the grades. They just see that you can do a good job and get it done in the time that they [give] you. . .

LA #2 was the harshest of all the participants. He recommended a whole-scale makeover for schools because he blamed them for students' dropping out. He suggested,

change the whole school system. . .And [don't] put so much pressure on the students. . .A little bit more time – like one-on-ones with the students. . .Like,

'Hey, what's going on? Are you lost or something? What's up?' But, I never see that. . .The system has always been like they always have the ghetto books with missing pages and stuff [for us]. Then we'd have to [share] books to do an exercise or something. And I'd always end up with the book that had the pages [missing]. . .So, it would be like, "Well, that's the last book so you gotta share it with somebody else." It's just stuff like that [a]. . .lack of interest from the school system towards the students. . .I think that [it would be different] if they would be willing to hear the students. . .

LA #2 also pointed out that students come to school with a lot of emotional baggage; some witness domestic violence; others suffer from the threat of corporal punishment. He believed schools and districts contribute to these problems as well. In explaining these claims he made general statements followed by specific conversation starters to reinforce his point. In the following comments, he included some questions schools should ask themselves in developing their understanding of students:

. . .They don't understand how much pressure they put on their [students]. .  
.[Schools and districts] should be more understanding. 'Hey, what's going on with him? Why is he going through all this? . .Why – are you having problems [at] home? What's going on?' They [don't] understand. . .and, that has a lot to do with [it]. . .[For example, a boy] not being with a male figure in his life, somebody. . .that could teach him. . .

In another instance, LA #2 told a story about his son attending two schools with two different climates, one warm and the other cold. He spoke about the lack of support

in one school and the presence of support in the other. The loving and caring school climate is transformative, and makes a significant personal difference for students. In LA #2 son's school,

Basically, they work with you. [In] his classroom they have couches and it's more inviting. . . It's like the teachers are. . . more nice. . . 'Man, I am so proud of [his son]. He is such a good kid. He participates in school. He's always up for whatever.' . . . The coaches are always telling me, 'Man, you've got the best kid. . . He's hands-on; he's smart; he's always willing to learn; to listen. . .' Those [other] school districts . . . they should fire whoever is on the top and start all over again, you know what I'm saying. . . When he was at the other school – or at the regular school – it was like, 'Oh yeah, your kid. . . he don't concentrate. What's going on? He needs medication.' . . . Not one time [had] they said [anything positive] over there at the other school.

Despite being critical of schools in general, LA #2, praised the use of innovative curricular efforts that his son's school used to meet the students where they are.

Another example he described was,

. . . a skateboard class that he's interested in. . . They will work with you, because they know that a lot of kids have problems and struggle with their regular school because not every kid is the same. A lot of them – they're not dumb – just need a little bit more help. . . I'm hard with [my children] because I want them to do good. I don't want them to go through the same things I've gone through.

LA #2 also expressed concern about the cumulative effect of subjecting students to negative school climates and experiences. He sometimes notices the effects on his son's behaviors and opinions about himself:

Sometimes he'll be like, . . . 'Oh yeah, see because I'm dumb.' And I know that he got that from the public schools. . . from that system. They might not tell you straight up that you're dumb but. . . And I know that's why he's like that. And I tell him, 'Dude, you're not dumb – you just act like you're dumb -- but you're not dumb.'

The son dropped out of school because he received too little support. At the time of this study he was in a more nurturing school environment. LA #2 continued to juxtapose his son's and his own experiences in examining dropping out. He said,

. . . [He] got kicked out of school like I got kicked out. . . . And it was like they killed my vibe. . . . And now, thinking about it – how it felt. That's messed up, man. . . . To me, it was like. . . I was numbed by the drugs. . . now that I think about it and. . . every day that I'm with him. . . since I got out. . . me being involved. . . and being around. . . He's not used to me being here. . . A lot of changes. . . This is my kid, man. He's good now. He's happy. . . He's. . . always excited to go to school in the morning. . . I remember I was never excited to go to school. I was always late. . . Your past is what makes you the man you are today. . . I regret the bad things that I did, you know. But [they] also made me [the] person that I am today.

## **Summary**

The reasons youth drop out of school are many and varied. It is not always, or only, about gangs, guns, and drugs. The participants in this study spoke from contexts that were real and complex, but often invisible. They had dropped off the education radar, unseen and unheard. They were insightful about their education, their study habits and their needs. They knew they needed more specific and personal support. They found many of their classes uninteresting or not stimulating enough to command their interest and attention, and many of their teachers were not helpful either. Schools failed to provide support and alternative pathways for learning even though these youth were identified as at-risk for dropping out before it actually happened.

The structure of school did not support these students, as well. For example, when they were students, if they were too far behind in credits, they lost hope and dropped out. One of the participants called for a full-scale educational overhaul.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Findings, Part II

The data collected in this study revealed that there were several other factors contributing to the participants' failure to persist in school in addition to those presented in Chapter IV (i.e irrelevant curriculum and instruction, school structural features, and in- and out- of-school support). Dropping out of school also was affected by peer associations and use of intoxicants; desire for self-improvement beyond the boundaries of formal education; family dynamics; and self-destruction and/or efficacy tendencies. Data related to these influences are presented in this chapter.

#### ***Peer Influences and Substance Abuse***

The issue of peers, according to the perspective of these dropouts, was critical. NA #2 recalled being bullied when he was a younger student which caused him to develop negative attitudes toward school. He went from being turned off by school, to heroin addiction. According to these dropouts, peer influence played a more critical role than their socio economic status (SES), and it was not necessarily negative. Although making poor choices occurred often in their friendship networks, their peers did not cause the participants to make the choices they made. It was more choice by association, or some variant thereof.

One of the more interesting perceptions came from Participant AA #2, a leader among his peers who eventually became a gang leader and considered himself as

“ruthless.” He said, “I didn’t use any drugs at all. I didn’t even smoke weed then. . . .I didn’t like it. I still don’t smoke weed. I didn’t drink. I didn’t do nothing.”

His friend, AA #1, was not so circumspect. His dropping out of school was influenced by peers, but not exclusively. Another contributing factor was losing motivation and interest in schooling. As he explained,

A lot of factors [contributed to] me quitting school [including] a lot of peer pressure. Also, the group I was hanging around. . .that was another thing that played a role in me quitting school. I was a popular, fun guy. . .so, we were the school-ditchers and would go to each other’s houses while the parents were at work and [we would] play video games and try to make it back to 6<sup>th</sup> period so we could get on the bus. So it would look like we were in school all day. . . At the time. . .I wasn’t a casual drug [user]. . .I was around it all my life. That’s probably one of the reasons why I didn’t use drugs at that time. I’ve tried marijuana. That was the only thing at that time in school that I ever tried, and it was not a factor in my decision-making at all, ‘cuz I wasn’t using it. I just tried it at a party with a friend -- where most teenagers start. . . The main factor in my decision to quit [was] that I just. . .didn’t have the drive for school.

LA #1 also had major peer problems. He assessed them and came to a harsh realization on his own. In his reflections he stated:

What could have kept me in school was, stop hanging out with the friends I was hanging around and doing the stuff I [was doing]. What the school could have done? There’s nothing really the school could have done. It’s just that I didn’t

like school, and my family just could have, , given me more of a push to stay in school. If my friends were my real friends, they would be able to push me to stay in school. . .I help out my friends – they should always help me out and motivate me to do stuff. And what I could have done was just tell myself to stay in school and that sooner or later it will be over with, and I won't have to deal with it no more.

He regretted that these current thoughts, ideas and words of wisdom were not available to him at the time he decided to stop going to school.

Poor choice of peers did lead to drug use and eventually to non-persistence in school for NA #3. He attributed dropping out to,

A lot of the friends I've had [created] distractions – said, 'Hey, let's cut class! Let's go do what we are not supposed to be doing instead of being in school'. . .Well, a lot of times we would just skip school because we'd go out and party or whatever. . .Sometimes it would be like a test or quiz. Sometimes I would have. . .a bad day and be like, 'Alright, I don't want to be in this class.' I'd just go. . .

Although NA #3, was only a casual drug user when he dropped out of school, he felt this played a significant role in his decision to quit school. He felt, "like nobody could tell me. . .what to do or. . .what not to do or when. . ." The drugs made him feel almost invincible, and he saw no alternatives for himself. As he explained,

The first time I got caught with drugs. . .I started getting frustrated and [I was in and out of] jails. And then, finally, the Judge just said, 'I'm going to send you to treatment.' . . .I liked it 'cuz I was around. . .Native youth. I was around other

guys with the same problems and. . .it was court ordered. I only did treatment for. . .10 months and I stayed because it was. . .a three month program. I stayed. . .actually a month. And then, I saw that I didn't have that drinking and smoking problem. But then I went back again willingly without the court telling me to.

For NA #1, peers and drugs were the determining factors in him dropping out of school. He now thought his friends were the

wrong group of people. . .I wasn't with people I should have been with. . .I got into gangs. I joined ESP. . .East Side Piru. . .It's a global gang. . .I stayed at the house all the time. . .Once I got into gangs, I started doing other drugs. I even went to treatment for the drugs; but, it didn't work. But right now—I'm proud to say I'm sober. . .I've been sober a month now. . .Every day counts. . .as long as you try. . .

These peers were influential but NA #1 placed more emphasis on drugs as a determining factor for his leaving school. He said,

my school [became]. . .the gang house. I was there most of the time. . .All we ever did is smoke and drink. . .We were together. . .We hustled together. . .We did what we had to do. We shared what we needed to, including food. For a while, I was living off my friends. . .Half a burrito they got from the store. Even if I got money, it'd be gone in less than a day or two. Like, everything I get that's good—goes away really quick—really fast.

Despite this rather dismal scenario, NA #1 included a ray of hopeful and optimistic advice for himself and other dropouts. He cautioned, “Don’t try to rush something that’s supposed to last forever. You’ll end up with nothing. That’s exactly where I’m at. But, I’m working my hardest to get back up there. I’m fine, right now. . .I’m with my grandma. We’re happy. I keep a smile on my face no matter what.”

NA #1 had experienced some education success prior to high school. Becoming involved in drugs reversed these directions for him. He explained when and why that happened in the following comments:

My best educational experience would be 8<sup>th</sup> Grade. . .I had good grades. I cooperated in school. I did my work. But everything all ended in the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade at the same time. . .I got into drugs. I got addicted. . .As soon as I hit 9<sup>th</sup> Grade, I had no motivation. I couldn’t focus on school work ‘cuz. . .I was smoking weed—you know how that is. . .I couldn’t think straight. I couldn’t think about school. I wasn’t thinking about my future. . .I wouldn’t call it casual. I’d call it. . .crazy. . .because every day I’d. . .hustle. . .I got into stealing—that was a bad habit. . .I had to do what I needed to do to get what I wanted. . .methamphetamines and marijuana. . .I did what I had to do in the beginning. . .It was about October—I was 13, barely getting in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade. After school, I went to. . .Valerie’s house. I didn’t know her. I ended up. . .smoking. She handed me the pipe; but, I thought in my head, I was gonna pass it. But, I hit it. That’s what [dragged] me down. . .The drugs made me quit school. . .The drugs basically dragged me out of school and told me, ‘Stay here!’ . . .Yeah. . .I’m healthy now. I can say that. . .

The story LA #2 shared about how he avoided becoming involved with drugs, and how he deals with peers, revealed a kind of personal strength. His strategy involved recognizing, understanding, and staying away from troublemakers, skills he developed while in prison. He said, in prison “you don’t have nothing to do but to think. You study people. . .I like to have eye contact with people because when you have eye contact with people you learn a lot about them.” He also identified some of the issues he had with attending school, how they intersected with his gang affiliation, and contributed to his disconnection from schooling:

I used to live in South Central, and Crenshaw {high school] is. . .a little far and. . .you’re a gang member and you can’t walk. . .so I used the bus and even when I was sitting on the bus I would have to. . .watch out and make sure nobody [saw] me because. . .I miss the bus and I’d be like, ‘Ah, man, fuck school,’. . .Or, I didn’t have the money to take the bus or I didn’t have the nice shoes to go to school. My shoes were ripped up and I was all embarrassed because I didn’t want to go nowhere. Because they asked me for a \$75 book and my mom doesn’t have money. . .Or, if you don’t have it, then. . .you need to have it or you’re not passing this class. . .They don’t understand. . .’We’re broke!’

LA#2 was not encouraged to attend school when he was an active gang member. Instead, the reverse was more desirable. He remembered that,

If I didn’t go to school, they were happy. If I went to school they would be like, ‘Why did LA #2 go to school? School is for suckers, man!’ And you’re in there. . .younger. . .14. . .smoking cigarettes, and with girls. . .And. . .[the] gangsters,

they were like, 'Skip school, Dude – let's go kick it,' . . . I think that was a big negative thing for me to not go to school. . . A lot of them were like, 'Dude, why'd you go to school? You keep repeating the same year!' . . . So you start thinking, 'Man, that's true! . . . School's not for me!' . . . I don't have not one friend, not one homeboy from back in the day that would say, 'Stay in school, Dawg. School is good for you. You're gonna learn.' . . . It's like they'd rather see you at the corner park slinging dope for the neighborhood. . . I remember one of my homeboys was like, 'Oh, you want to go to school? You want to learn math? Come over here and help me weigh this. Here. . . how much is that? It's 3.2 grams,' of whatever. . . And I would be like, 'What?' And they would be like, 'Well, you want to go to school don't you?'

These recollections indicate that LA #2's peers had strong and negative influences on his school persistence. Gangs and drugs caused him to make life-altering decisions regarding his education too soon. And, he was not able to prevail under the pressures imposed by schools. These dilemmas are evident in the following comments.

Drugs have always played a big role in my life—especially going through school. . . I left home when I was. . . 12. . . And [I'd] go from couch to couch. . . [with]. . . homeboys out in California. . . I was travelling at 13 and 14 on the Greyhound. . . Back then schools put so much pressure on us that I don't even know how to deal with the pressure. . . And. . . then I would get home or whatever and didn't have no help and. . . it's like, 'Man, forget this!' . . . at times I even went to school drunk. . . And I would just sit there. . . I'm high, you know. I started doing methamphetamines when I was 14. . . Hard drugs like cocaine and heroin [were]

always. . .a part of my life. . .I tried every drug that you can think of. . .Growing up I even knew how to sniff glue and stuff. . .when we didn't have weed. .  
.Sometimes I think. . .that's why I was probably so dumb in school or something.  
Did it like kill my brain cells or something?

### ***Impact of Family***

In much of educational scholarship, family plays a key role in students' persistence and performance in school. Often where parents are involved in school their children are successful, and where they are not outcomes are uncertain or unsuccessful. Overall, the participants in this study said that their parents did all they could do but it frequently was not enough. They also acknowledged their own responsibilities and the poor choices they made. Although LA #3 was a strong advocate of family support, that offered by his own parents declined upon his entry into high school, and evaporated entirely in the midst of a family tragedy. For NA #2, "They've done pretty much everything they could have."

Other participants thought similarly. For example, LA #2 had strong support from his mother even though he experienced some hard times while incarcerated. She advocated for her son; declared his intelligence; was his protector; and was an unequivocal supporter. Nonetheless, he did not persist in school. NA #3 said his family did not support him in his decision to quit school. Instead, they told him to "do what you want; it's your life. . .You control what you do." However, they did advise him to, "put the pipe down, put down the joints, and throw all of that stuff away." According to NA #1,

his family gave him good suggestions even though he did not follow them. However, because he did not follow their advice, his actions compromised that support. On dropping out of school he recalled,

. . .They were mad. Once I started getting in trouble. . .The cops know my name. I ended up running away. I was caught-up for stealing. There are a lot of things I [had] done in the past that were wrong. I even stole from my own family to get what I wanted.

AA #1, thought his family imposed unnecessary pressure on him. As he explained:

I think that if I hadn't . . .had so much pressure on me, I probably would have been more relaxed. . . [My parents]. . .pressured. . .everybody. . .You have to do this; you have to do that;. . .don't do that. . .Don't do that. . .School, school, school, school, school, school, school. That's all you are hearing, and after a while you get tired of it. It's like with anybody hearing anything over and over again. It's like. . .just get away from me. Get out my face. I hear it. You told me already. I got you. Leave it alone.

Since then AA #1 has learned some hard life lessons from his experience with dropping out of school. He was still not unequivocally in favor of going to school in general, but did recognize the value of skill-based training in specialized or vocational schools. He thought people:

[waste] a lot of time and money going through school and still can't get a job because it's not out there. . .And if it is out there it's rare. Nobody cares about it.

So the . . .[payoff] is not as great as you thought it was going to be. And you find yourself going to school again for something else. . . .So I'm not going to waste my money for college on something that you are not going to excel in, and I tell my nieces that all the time, too. . . .If you are going to go to school, go to school for something that's going to pay you for life; that's going to be worth it; – something that's never going to go out of business; something that the economy is always going to need. Go to school for something like that and then afterwards if you want to do something exotic – whatever.

A few years earlier, when he was considering dropping out of school, AA #1 did not listen to the advice of others that he later endorsed himself. In his own assessment he felt he did not have to listen to anyone else; that he could make his own decisions.

He recalled:

I was just rebellious. . . .They [supporters] put a big effort into keeping me in school. My parents and friends [were telling me to] stay in school and everything. [They] wanted to see me do good. . . .They thought I could have made it to the pros in football if I would have just stayed in school. They were like, 'Man, you're. . .such an athlete. Why don't you just stay in school, tough it out? Who cares what the coaches are saying. Who cares what these people are saying?'. . . .I just didn't listen.

For the other participants, interactions with their families were not always positive or functional. For instance, AA #3 thought his family had unreasonable expectations of him. His inability to meet them led to frustration, and the realization that “just because

someone has high expectations for me [is meaningless]. [I] have to have high expectations for [myself]." These were some of the reasons why his parents eventually insisted that he leave the family residence. In hindsight, AA #3 claimed his family "did all they were capable of doing." Now when he visits his parents, "they beg me to stay." But, "[I'll say], 'I be busy, Momma. I have to do this, do that.'"

AA #2 implied that there was something about his home environment that interfered with him concentrating on schoolwork. But he did not specify what this was. He simply said,

Going home did not work for me. I couldn't do none of my homework. That. . . [was] the dilemma. . . When. . . my teacher [asked], 'Why don't you ever turn in your homework?'. . . I didn't tell him why. I just said, 'I don't do homework.' He was saying he could give it to me and I could do it at school. . . It was just a different environment – different everything. . . I would try to finish my homework in class before I'd go home, because when I go home, it was different.

AA #2's family also did not encourage him to engage in other activities in which he was competent. The effects were demoralizing and devastating. He remembered being "really into basketball, [and coaches] used to recruit me like no other. [But] I couldn't play basketball because my parents told me I'm too competitive. That was a blow. That was one of the biggest blows. They told me I couldn't do something because I was too good at it!" A series of other non-school-related events culminated in AA #2 being told he could no longer live with his family. This event occurred at the same time he was completing a scholarship program, working at a law firm, painting houses, and digging

ditches. In the midst of these busy, industrious times, he was made homeless by his parents. After telling him he could no longer live at home, they responded to his question of “Where was I supposed to go?” with, “Go and sleep underneath a bridge or at a bus shelter!” No one else offered him shelter. Even when AA #2, tried to respond to a younger brother’s request to work along with him, his father disapproved and prevented it from happening. His father considered AA #2 “a bad association.” But AA #2 contended that he was merely trying to teach his little brother that “if you work for something, you get paid.”

This lack of family support was even more apparent as AA #2 elaborated further on the contentious relationship that existed between him and his father. In one instance he explained that,

I used to work 16 to 20 hour days with [my dad] working in construction. I built the Indian Center, right here. . .There are so many houses. . .South and Beacon. I built three in the South and four on Beacon Hill. . .He was a general contractor. He had his own construction business. . .He built these big-assed houses. Everything. . .sold for a lot of money. Now he’s one of the lead building inspectors in Seattle, Washington—the first

Black building inspector in Seattle, Washington. So, you know, he’s a millionaire now – off of my back though. . .and I never got nothing.

He concluded his description of this contentious relationship with the statement that, “My family should not have kicked me out of the house.” AA #2 credited his peers for

supporting him “all the way through,” even to letting him live with them temporarily. Then it was, “Time to get up and roam the streets at night.”

### ***Self-Destructive/Self-Effacing Behaviors and the Desire to Learn***

Some of these young men lived lives that vacillated between self-destruction and self-efficacy. Yet, all possessed an intrinsic desire to learn, but did not necessarily enjoy or value schools. Not liking school is not analogous to not wanting to learn. For example, NA #2 characterized the life he lived after dropping out of school as unexpected, given all of its negative consequences. He has come to realize that dropping out, “wasn’t really a good decision at all.” AA #2 loves to learn, but he has more pressing issues that are currently preventing him from engaging in learning. In explaining this dilemma he declared:

I love school. But the only problem is now I have anxiety issues and I don’t like being around a lot of people. I would love to learn. Give me books—I can read. The problem is. . .I have children now. I have God-children. I have nieces and nephews that rely upon me. . . .I wish I can go to school. I can’t. Then, there are the money issues. There are [also] issues about who is going to take care of my kids.

AA #3 was ambivalent and somewhat contradictory in reflecting on the merits of dropping out of school. He considered it was a good one for him, but because he disappointed others it was a bad decision overall. He explained further that

I made my mom sad – so [dropping out] was bad. I feel like I let people down, but I didn't though. I felt like I did but now I didn't. You never can let nobody down. If you don't let yourself down – it's all about yourself. If you feel like you're going to let everybody down -- let them feel that way – you can't change [their] feelings.

Nonetheless, AA #3 had not lost his love for learning. He explained that,

You're never too old to learn something new. . .and you're learning something that you want to learn. If it's something that's forced on you. . .then I say, 'I don't like it. I don't want to be forced to do something.' You [may be] about to teach me the wrong thing. . .I have to investigate this for myself.

NA #1 was on the opposite end of the spectrum. He associated only negative things with school. Among these were using his girlfriend, having no friends, smoking marijuana, and self-indulgence. He concluded that by ninth grade, “[Smoking] was the only thing I could think about to cheer me up. There were no friends. . .And, after that, it was pretty much about me. I [could] care less. . .the goodness popped. The badness. . .I was pretty much unstoppable. I decided to quit school.”

For a while NA #3 loved being in school. He enjoyed “just being in the classroom, doing the work and knowing that I am getting ahead. I'm getting the smarts that most people don't have. . .Just showing that I can easily get myself where I want to be.” Unfortunately, this initial interest did not prevail, and he left school permanently. Now he is rethinking that decision, saying to himself, “You don't want to be on the

streets for the rest of your life. You want something better for yourself. If [I]. . .end up having a family. I want to protect ... [them] and show them that I can.”

AA #1 had pragmatic reasons for why he saw some value in schooling and justification for his efforts to gain re-entry. These explanations included the following:

What turns me on is knowledge. . .That’s something that won’t be taken from me. . . knowledge. . .I’m not disinterested in school. I’m trying to actually get back into school. I need. . .[an] online course to complete my GED because I want to get certified for my mechanics. . .But, most [technical] schools don’t take you until you at least complete your GED. . .The only thing attracting me is knowledge to continue life and be able to teach my son how to feed himself. . .So, I have to learn how to do it to teach him how to do it. . .Now that I am getting older. . .I need to step up and take responsibility and finish my education. Get my high school diploma. Get a job and then. . .work on my career. . .I want to finish school -- graduate -- and I want to run a business in auto body mechanics. The only way I know I will do it is if I finish school and learn. . .how to do the [work] first. . .I just like learning new things—meeting new people.

Of all the participants, LA #3 was the most at-ease with schooling. He had the highest GPA [above 3.0]. He was doing well in school, and he was not involved with drugs. His problem was a financial one that prevented him from completing high school. At the time of this study, he was focused on providing for a family. Yet, he liked school and had a strong desire to learn, as is evident in the following comments:

At first, it was. . .about learning – and trying to learn the language and get better at it. I tried to do stuff that my parents couldn't do or have done before, 'cuz both of them didn't really speak English. . .I really liked art classes, science classes, biology classes, physical education (PE). I didn't like language arts. I didn't like math. . .But other than those kinds of classes, I liked every other one. . .Well, now after living what I've lived, I'd really like to go back to school and get my. . .GED or my diploma. . .Just so that I can tell my kids that I didn't graduate, but I still tried and I made it.

LA #2 was the most outspoken of the participants about his lifestyles and casual drug use. He also was the only one who admitted to using the most dangerous drugs. He explained that, “. . .There are people that still have lives without going to school. . .They are smart people with businesses and stuff like that. . .” The poor treatment LA #2 received in school caused him to doubt his intellectual abilities. He attributed some of these doubts to teachers in both Mexico and the U.S. who do not really help students in their quests to learn. Instead, they, along with the schools at large, are driven by racism that has major negative consequences for students' learning and persistence in schools. LA#2 elaborated:

. . .The reason why I lost interest [in school], was because I always felt left out [of the schooling process]. . .Some of the teachers were racist to us. . .Even the kids, too. I remember. . .when nobody would talk to [me] and stuff. . .I was a loner, but once I was in the gang, everybody knew me. . .I think what could have kept me in school was. . .maybe if I would have not grown up in the place that I grew up. And maybe if there were better teachers. . .Somebody [like] the old-

school teachers from back in the day. They. . .dedicated themselves. . . .Like in Mexico you know – they have so many good teachers. Now they are substituting those older teachers for younger students. . . .My mom was telling me that all the teachers in the whole Mexico – the whole country got tested. She said like 70 or 85 percent of the people that take those tests fail. So what are they teaching the kids down there?

Despite all of these negative experiences, LA #2 still wanted to complete his schooling. But, like AA #2, he feared that given his experiences in the classroom, it would be too difficult. As he explained:

working all day and then going to school at night or anything, it would be way too hard. . . .I've always tried to better myself. . . .for me and most importantly, my family. I wish I could have a job. . . .at an office or something. . . .For the short period of time that I have been out here, I have gone through a lot of things, but it's cool. I should have some college credits for a couple classes that I took when I was in [jail]. Knowing that I have those, it's like, 'Man, why don't you try to use that?' But at the same time. . . .what happens if I have to go to school during the day?. . . .I can't, because I gotta eat. . . .It's either go to school or not eat.

Even though most of these participants had a desire to learn, they did not see the value of remaining in school. Additionally, many of their teachers were not able to make the teaching-learning processes relevant and engaging for them. Life experiences have taught these young men some hard lessons that they have learned very well. Whether they will really return to schooling to complete their formal education

is unknown. Some alternatives to conventional structures may increase the likelihood of this happening. As adults, these young men would not fit into traditional high school arrangements just as they did not as youth.

### ***Transformational Experiences vs. Oppositional Defiance***

For some of the participants dropping out of school inspired transformational experiences while it evoked defiance in others. In some the subsequent events have led to thoughtful reflections, regrets, and reconsiderations; for others, attitudes of victimization persist. For example, NA #2 now understands some of the negative consequences of not completing high school. Even though he was too young to control his family's inability to secure transportation for him to get to school he continues to reflect on its consequences. Having a family now of his own and being a professional drummer consume all of his time. At this point in his life getting a GED is a realistic goal. He recognizes one of the negative consequences of dropping out is limited job opportunities. He noted that, "Right now it's really hard for me to find a job and I don't have a GED, either. . .so. . .it's just really hard. I think that's my only regret of dropping out."

Having a family has shown AA #1 the importance of having a job that provides long-term security, and a living wage. He also is making an attempt to pursue a GED. Concerning dropping out of school and its effects on his future plans, he declared,

It was a bad decision because life is just so much harder with the direction I am trying to go in right now without it. I feel that at the time it was a good decision

because it gave me the time to really look at myself and see what direction I wanted to go. I just didn't know that without school, the direction I wanted to go was going to be so hard. I figured I was invincible and I could make anything possible.

A part of what makes youth consider themselves invincible is their capacity to endure change, and to transform propelled by it. They are changing all the time, growing (infancy to adulthood); maturing (innocence to experience, ignorance to understanding); learning (both in and out of school); moving from dependency to independence; and embracing newness of life amplified in their nascent eyes and minds. LA #1, had experienced these transitions, but did not yet fully understand their meanings and effects. This limitation was apparent in him considering dropping out of school as being both a positive and negative decision:

It was a bad decision because if I would have stuck with school and paid attention – kept myself in school – I would have graduated already [with] the class of 2014, and I wouldn't have to be going to school like I am now. I would have been finished, and moving on with college. [It was] a good decision to get out of school [because] it made me learn that dropping out of school wasn't good. It made me learn my lesson that. . .I'm not too sure.

Although he was not certain what life lessons were entailed LA #1 was sure that he needed to continue schooling. The interview process may have prompted him to think deeper about his life lessons.

In reflecting on dropping out, NA #3 revealed a powerful insight. He found it difficult to learn while in school, but now finds learning easy, and realized that his thinking about leaving school was naïve. He recalled, “I wasn’t doing that much in school and I thought. . . ‘You know what? I’m just going to go out in the work world.’ And I thought I was just going to go get this and that, but things don’t really come like that, you know.”

NA #1 had a similar awakening about the negative consequences of dropping out of school. In explaining why it had both some positive effects while being an overall poor decision he said:

I’m trying my hardest to get back in school. I’m not allowed to go on school campus, but I could try. It’s [the decision to drop out]. . .just not right. [It] made me mentally stronger, physically stronger too, basically. I learned to not care about things that drag me down. . .I could have stayed in school. I could have been a better person. I’d be up there instead of being down here. Right now, I’m pretty much stuck. I have no choice but to get my GED.

LA #2, the most vocal and radical of the participants, had learned some of the most valuable life-long lessons from his experiences as a dropout. He explained some of them thusly:

When I got my GED. . .it was a big accomplishment for me. . .It might just be a GED. . .but it was hard. You have to put work and dedication [into it]. And I learned through all of that, through all my years of being alive, that if you work hard. . .you are going to get where you want to strive to. . .I concentrate more. .

.on what I do. . .At the end of the day. . .the one that I've hurt is myself. .  
.because now I know that knowledge is everything. . .I believe that if we have the  
ability to. . .listen and think. . . that's all we need. . .Once you lose that, I think  
that you might as well be dead. . .[It] wasn't a good decision for me to quit. . .I  
always keep that old saying that my grandpa used to tell me that, 'The older you  
get, the wiser you get.' . .I didn't know what he meant by that when I was  
growing up. . .but now I know.

The decision to leave school for LA #3 was prompted more by circumstances  
beyond his personal control (such as his family's financial crises) than his own  
initiative. Yet, in hindsight, he considered it a poor decision because,

After all the years I went to school and ended up not graduating. . .It doesn't  
really change anything whether I know English or not. It doesn't really matter  
how much English I know right now. It's stopping me from getting other. . .jobs. .  
.just in case I want to leave this job because now everywhere, they ask you for a  
diploma or a GED. It was good for me because I got to know. . .the value of  
money. And it's not like when you are at school and you don't have nothing to  
worry about because your parents have it. . .It's a whole different thing. You get  
tired after work. You wake up. You do the same thing all over again. And if you  
don't like your job you're gonna just be miserable all the time. . . If you like  
making money, you will like doing your work because the better work you do, the  
more you can charge on it.

LA #3 had learned the value of money, and the importance of being a skilled craftsman. He also has the passion, motivation, and acuity to make the processes happen. During his interview he made the following appeal to educators and parents to develop a better understanding of why students drop out of school:

I just hope that it's helpful for you guys to understand what people actually go through and are going through when they are dropping out. It's not always about drugs or – stuff like that. Everybody's got a different story, but I'm hoping that my kids are not that 32% or whatever percentage it is that they actually finish school. And I will do my best to keep them in school, and that's why it is a good experience. Now I can tell my kids, 'this is what happened. It will not happen to you guys. . .I'm making sure of it – that way you guys have no excuses for not finishing school.' . . .Whatever little time I can spend with them, whether it's outside or inside the house, they will always know that I will always do my best and everything or anything to give them what they need. My parents had 2 jobs. They weren't really with us at the house most of the time, and that's another experience I take from living back in my childhood. . .always having more time for the family [than] for work. . . .Get home, turn the phone off. . .Talk to the kids about how their day is going and what they are doing in school. Talking to the teachers – calling the teachers. Actually, the teachers from the elementary school are doing a really good thing. They are calling parents. . .once a month; telling them how their kids are doing and what they need to work on. So. . .if the parents care about the kids. . .at school and education, they will get on them and tell them you need to get it straight.

## **Summary**

The participants in this study did indicate, as reported in previous research and scholarship that peers and associated influences contributed to them dropping out of school. But these were not the only factors. For some it was as the result of their own volition. For others families were as detrimental—if not worse—than peers, although, most families were supportive of their sons staying in school. Some of these factors were beyond family control, such as economic hardships.

These young men wanted to be successful in learning, even though most did not think favorably of schools at the time, and they had career aspirations. They knew what they wanted to do after high school and sometimes instead of it. Most of the participants had experienced some success in school, and those times were remembered fondly. Yet, their overall schooling experiences were book-ended by failure as students and subsequently beyond upon dropping out.

Rather than any one set of factors leading to dropping out of schools the young men in this study revealed that they were caught up in a complex web of interrelated variables that spiraled out of control over time, to the point that they felt they had no viable alternatives other than to leave school—a place of alienation, isolation, and disaffiliation—and to seek refuge “in the street.” “The street” was symbolized in multiple ways, including substance abuse, unconstructive peer relationships; homelessness, estrangement from families; impulsive and/or poor decisions; and resistance to normative expectations on the part of the individuals. While recognizing the negative aftereffects of dropping out of school most of the nine young men were not totally

convinced that they could have done anything else, or that if they were in similar situations currently they wouldn't make similar choices. Given the apparent contradiction of valuing and recognizing the importance of education, yet not unequivocally rejecting dropping out of school, some influences other than personal choice may be the greater determinants of why so many African, Latino, and Native American males are dropping out of high school. These results and speculations suggest the need to take deeper and more critical looks at other contributing factors, some of which were presented in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations

In this chapter, a brief summary of the study is presented, along with a discussion of the findings, limitations, and recommendations for future research and practice. Several insights derived from the findings that illuminate points for further consideration also are discussed.

#### ***Summary***

This study focused on students who propel the dropout crisis. The intent was to illuminate their issues with non-persistence in schools by using their voices. Related issues were how can educators make teaching and learning exciting and stimulating for potential dropouts? Paraphrased, how can educators make teaching and learning relevant to the lives of racially diverse male students? The main purpose of this study was to investigate causes of dropping out, and to consider viable alternatives for educating Latino American, Native American and African American male dropouts. To achieve these goals, nine participants from these ethnic backgrounds were selected to participate in the study. These young men expressed a need for different approaches from the traditional educational practices of most schools. Their views provided some direction for addressing the problem.

Three sets of questions were explored. The first set included, how do African American, Native American and Latino American males who dropped out of high school,

account for their lack of academic success in the school environment? To what extent and in what ways do they locate their school failure in their own efforts and actions, or in other forces and conditions, such as the nature of the school, the curriculum, and the instructional process, their socio-economic status and other life conditions? The second set of questions included what the participants thought could have changed their academic outcomes in high school, what could have been effective methods of instruction for them? The third set of questions included, if given the chance, would the dropouts make the same decisions?

Data were collected from participants in semi-structured interviews. The types of data analyses were descriptive, explanatory, and conceptual. Relationships among issues of interest were noted, how they influenced outcomes was observed, and conceptually and theoretically coherent conclusions were drawn.

The data revealed much inter-relatedness among the issues examined. The participants stressed the need for instruction that was differentiated. All wanted more one-on-one instruction with the classroom teacher. They also indicated that classes were, uninteresting and not stimulating or relevant enough to capture their attention. Both the educational processes and products made available to these participants were inadequate.

The participants in this study felt that schools did not provide the supports or alternatives they needed, or they were not enough. In their words, there was a lot of, “too little” that was done. In one instance, a participant did not have transportation to school. His district did not provide transportation and he was forced to drop out. Other participants suffered from family issues that precluded their ability to persist at school.

For instance, after being put out of his home at the age of 12, one of the participants joined a gang. Another participant, wandered the streets at night for a while until he too joined a gang. It appeared that the solidarity and brotherhood feeling of the gang served their needs at the time.

The structure of school was simply overwhelming for these young men. It forced one participant to lose hope. Another participant who was inappropriately assigned to a class as a result of layers of bureaucracy did not feel empowered enough to get his schedule changed to the classes he needed. One of the more vocal of the nine participants, declared schools need a total, structural overhaul. He indicated that a lack of interest towards students, an unwillingness to listen to, and failure to meet their needs caused him to drop out of school. A generation later, the participant's son suffered a schooling experience similar to his dad's. The cycle was not broken.

Contrary to what some previous research findings have revealed, peer pressure was less of a problem for these participants than casual use of drugs. They said they made their own decisions about leaving school. But, using drugs hastened their departure from school.

Family was another area of concern. Although lack of family support was expected, this premise was only partially confirmed by the findings. Most participants indicated that even though their families were not in support of their dropping out, they supported them in their lives before, during and after the fact. After a point, families had lost the capacity to influence their offspring once they reached a certain age and made the decision that they were leaving school. Most of the participants admitted to their own willfulness and stubbornness about dropping out.

Another finding contrary to expectations, was a desire to learn. Lack of a desire to learn was not a primary factor in their leaving school. These young men wanted to learn even as they were not persisting with school—and they still do want to learn. They are now motivated to work for a better life for themselves. They are inspired by knowledge. Unfortunately, they felt left out and pushed out of the schooling process.

### ***Discussion***

In many urban centers across the U. S., many students of color come to school from a host of environments that in so many ways reflect and re-image the status quo. Often, teachers believe they face insurmountable obstacles when attempting to educate these students. Yet, moving these students beyond those of sustained academic failure may not require gargantuan efforts. Small shifts may lead to big gains. If teachers position themselves as gateways rather than gatekeepers they may find that the greatest barrier to learning and school persistence is not what students can learn but what the teacher believes about students' motivations and capabilities. A classroom is not a factory where input regulates output in a linear fashion. On the contrary, it is a dynamic, living and breathing laboratory, where each child's capacity is laid bare like a Petri dish full of possibilities.

A key question that needs to be considered is how educators change the conditions of schooling that are disenchanting for male students of color, to ones that are more personally supporting and intellectually stimulating. The answers may lie in:

- Making teaching more culturally and instructionally responsive
- Blending working and schooling

- Bringing the communities of the students into the school

Dropping out of school is a structurally-generated phenomenon, grounded in the economic, political and cultural inequities that are endemic to U. S. society. For many educators and policy-makers, achievement gaps are often considered analogous to differences in test scores of students from different ethnic, racial, socio-economic and gender groups. Yet, these gaps are often temporal. Many girls in high school do not perform well in math and science. Most boys do not perform as well as girls in their early years. Also, these gaps are often the by-product of socially-constructed phenomena and they are perpetuated by structural norms of schooling. These test score gaps, compounded by a lack of social and cultural capital in culturally-charged environments like schools, perpetuate academic disparities among students. Many working class students (both ethnic minorities and Whites) lack the linguistic cultural capital that enables them to actualize their educational capital. Upper class cultural capital is valorized while lower class cultural capital is essentially dismissed (Banks, 2014). The implications of these differentiated resources for dropouts are far more damaging than simply being considered uneducated.

Research such as that conducted by Balfanz & Legters (2004), Berliner (2009), Fine (1991), Gay (2013), Ravitch (2013), indicates that some students attend schools where they are receiving a sub-standard education, testing is being used as the ultimate measure of a good education, and teachers are being held accountable for the education of students with poor skill sets with whom they have had no prior relationship. In order to solve the problems it is imperative to first understand them. Part of that understanding involves compiling a comprehensive data set and analyzing the problems

from multiple perspectives or viewpoints. Much of the sense-making efforts around male dropouts of color has ignored the perspectives of the dropouts themselves. This study refocuses the discourse by centering the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and reflections of dropouts as told by themselves.

In addition to recognizing dropping out as a structurally generated phenomenon, this study revealed that it is socially-mediated as well. As such, it results from a number of socially-grounded factors impinging upon students, such as SES, peer influence, family, and school climate factors. The study looked at what was happening in school as well as out of school that contributes to dropping out.

While the out-of-school factors may be beyond the control of school personnel, the in-school ones certainly are not. The findings of this study suggest that many of these fall within the arenas of caring for students, creating more supportive learning environments, and using instructional materials and techniques that are more relevant to ethnically, racially and culturally diverse students. These implications are within the purview of culturally responsive teaching as characterized by scholars such as Ladson-Billings (2007), Villegas and Lucas (2002), and Gay (2010).

The findings of this study also are consistent with claims made by Fashola (2005) and Noguera (2009) about how connected students are to their families, peer groups, communities, and school settings, and how these connections influence the need for alternative contexts in which to learn. Sometimes that influence is direct and explicit; other times it is indirect and implicit, even opaque.

While most of the participants in this study said their peers were not instrumental in their dropping out of school explicitly, some simultaneously, indicated that their move

in that direction hastened once they began to engage in substance abuse *with friends*. Thus, drug use and the corollary of gang membership that often went along with it, can be considered forms of peer pressure that negatively affected school attendance. Most participants did not explicitly discuss SES and race as determining factors in dropping out of school. Yet their presence was consistently implied or embedded in other statements. For example, being taught Spanish by a teacher of non-Latino ancestry, not having money to buy bus passes to get to school, being homeless, experiencing micro-aggression in school and classrooms.

It was necessary to discover the struggles of each of the three ethnic groups (African American, Latino and Native Americans) included in this study to better understand their social histories which may have influenced their schooling experiences. The following is a summary of the findings by ethnic group:

### ***Latino Americans***

- These three participants were beset by many influences beyond their control, although some were within their control. By and large, schools were not effective for them.
- The idea suggested by scholars such as Berliner (2009), Bridgeland, DiLulio, and Morrison (2006), Brown and Rodriguez (2009), Conchas and Vigil (2012), Gay (2013), and Noguera (2009), that schools undergo a re-culturing rather than a re-structuring could help Latino males succeed in school. The idea is to provide culture-specific instruction in culturally meaningful ways to increase motivation for and persistence in learning.

- For these Latino dropouts, their in-school learning was disconnected from their out-of-school living. It was often linear, sequential, rote, and segregated.

### ***Native Americans***

- They are known as an invisible minority, and they do not self-identify in large numbers. Their educational needs were often unattended.
- Too often they were not educated by Native Americans, and their education was, in effect, a form of cultural subtraction for purposes of assimilating into mainstream societal cultural norms.
- Historical legacies of colossal mis-education were the reason why they often did not strongly self-identify as Native American.
- They were members of the ethnic group that has the highest dropout rates.

### ***African Americans***

- School was not student-friendly for these African American males.
- They found the structure of school was alienating.
- Their student voices are virtually silenced.
- Factors such as attitudes of cool pose, a lack of alternatives, structural issues, gang membership, and concerns about segregation, race and SES were contributors to dropping out of school.

Several other pertinent factors contributing to dropping out across the three

different ethnic groups were revealed by the data. These included:

- The existence of structural issues that reinforced students' not being served well and leaving schools.
- Students are shut out of their high schools as a result of what transpires through both the overt and the hidden curriculum.
- Poor academic performance or failure in subjects increases the likelihood of dropping out of school.
- A lack of in-school relationships and student engagement increases the likelihood of students' dropping out.
- Absenteeism and student mobility are factors.
- SES, family, and other demographic variables in combination with individual attributes and personal factors also contribute.

Contrary to what one might assume, most of these young men were not disinterested in schooling, even though it was often difficult and alienating. Sometimes, prior to dropping out, some of them had experienced success in some aspects of schooling. Many of them also received encouragement from their families to continue their pursuit of an education, but their families often were not in a position to enforce this desire for their sons.

Most of the participants placed responsibility for dropping out of school on themselves rather than blaming their social conditions or teachers and schools. However, they did have issues with teachers and schools not supporting them better, particularly in the areas of culturally relevant instruction and socio-emotional

understanding. They noted that they learned better in classrooms where there was either teacher or peer support, and where students engaged in cooperative learning activities, and where there was some one-on-one instruction. They were adamant that a caring, supportive environment is essential to good learning. These findings suggest that, for these young males of color, it is imperative for teachers to differentiate their instructional techniques, and to consider students as partners in classroom teaching and learning.

Given the estimates of how many students are dropping out annually (1.2 million), this decision might be thought as being made by students in a cavalier manner. The data from this study indicate that although dropping out of school was not something that the participants took lightly. In fact, they appeared not to want to do it, but their lives outside of school and their levels of failure inside of school were so compelling that they felt there was no other choice. Classrooms can be emotionally, socio-politically and culturally challenging and sometimes hostile places with webs of disenfranchisement for certain students such as the ethnic minority males who participated in this study. The roadblocks that the hidden curriculum (as embodied in the overall climate of the classroom) especially, poses to students of color may be paralyzing. Delpit (1988) wrote about the silenced dialogue of marginalized populations. She indicated there are five complex themes that frame a culture of power that is replicated in classrooms across the U. S. These are structural power over students; the power of determining the view of the world presented in the textbook which publishers and curriculum developers exercise; the power of the state to enforce compulsory schooling; the power of individuals and groups to determine the intelligence

of others, such as what happens when an ELL, or SPED teacher responds to a referral; and the power of schooling itself to prepare (or not) students for a specific level of employment, and that level of employment determines their economic status. The participants in this study were caught in these webs of power, and feeling unable to function effectively in them, they opted out of the schooling process.

### ***Schooling Experiences of the Latino Participants as they Relate to Prior Scholarship***

Educational scholarship indicates that Latino students are beset by many influences—some emanating from within and many beyond their control (Espinoza-Herold, 2003), and schools are often unsupportive or ineffective places for many Latino students (Berliner, 2009; Rumberger & Rodriguez, 2002). The participants in this study were influenced by many factors beyond their control—a dad who suffered an accident; a pull toward gangs upon getting kicked out of the house at age 12; the appeal of employment. None of the Latino participants had role models in their lives who had completed high school—let alone college—and who could provide guidance through the educational pipeline for them. They experienced some level of discomfort and disconnection in school. A Mexican participant was told, in a Spanish class, that his language was, “slang.” Another Latino participant considered what he was learning in the classroom and the instruction he was receiving as an inferior, sub-standard education. The third Latino was so disconnected from school that employment was more favorable than continuing his schooling.

Scholarship also indicates that learning for Latinos is sometimes linear, sequential and rote. Students, disconnected from the instruction, do poorly. Teachers' negative perceptions about their abilities lead to lower-ordered instruction for them (Zohar, Degani & Vaaknin, 2000). All Latino participants experienced a level of schooling that in some way did not value them, their language or their innate ability to learn. Gay (2013) argues that schooling for these students must develop their agency and efficacy if they are to succeed in a global marketplace. These Latino males indicated that their schooling was not culturally responsive or transformative.

A part of the problem for Latinos is that many of the schools they attend are being re-segregated. They are attending schools that are over 60% Latino (Orfield, 2005). Too often ethnicity and poverty are forcing their schooling to be isolated in ways that their peers of other ethnicities do not encounter. One Latino participant commented on attending a school that was predominantly Latino, and that was poorly-resourced. Another was simply disconnected from school. The third Latino participant experienced all of the above. Although he was the most academically accomplished of all the participants, still, the pull of his out-of-school life and family needs, quickly overpowered his perception of the need for schooling.

Payne (2003) proposed that the middle class values of businesses and schools are a part of the hidden curriculum of schools. This classism, in part, is responsible for some of the conflicts low SES students encounter with administrators and teachers. The behaviors that support them out of school, do not support them in school (Payne, 2003; Rumberger & Rodrigues, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2006). These arguments,

although valid, were not discussed explicitly by the Latino males in this study, but they were strongly implied.

### ***Perspectives on the Schooling Experiences of Native Americans in Prior Scholarship***

According to the research, Native Americans have suffered a persistent legacy of dashed hopes and dreams of academic success due to structural and institutional practices (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, III, 2010), such as the boarding school crisis, broken promises, and slaughter at the hands of the colonizing nation. These historical experiences may have some residual effects on their current high dropout rates. The education they are receiving is inadequate and seems incapable of creating for them the potential for academic success, economic security, and viable, healthy, civic lives in the future (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, III, 2010). The participants in this study were caught up in this cycle of failure. They did not receive relevant instruction and other kinds of support to entice them to remain in school. Instead, schools for them were places of isolation, hostility, and alienation. Although the hostility was more psychological and subtle than physical and overt, it was nonetheless powerful, and reminiscent of the historical legacies of treatment Native Americans have been subjected to as reported by scholars such as Faircloth and Tippeconnic, III (2010).

Further, the research indicates that Native Americans have been largely educated by non-Native Americans. The aim of that education has always been to re-culture or to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream society (Swisher &

Tippeconnic, III 1999). These educative approaches have ignored their worldviews, cultural traits, and ways of knowing practiced among and within their home cultures (Clearinghouse on Native Teaching and Learning, 2008). These historical legacies of mis-education are continuing to cause many contemporary Native Americans like the ones in this study to disaffiliate from school programs and practices (Swisher & Tippeconnic, III 1999; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, III 2000).

### ***Schooling Experiences of African Americans as they Relate to Previous Scholarship***

Traditionally in school settings, there have been too few youth-adult partnerships in educating African Americans, and the policies of these schools often have been inflexible (McLaughlin, 2000; Fine, 1991; Orfield, 2004). Even in situations where it is obvious that students are having troubles outside of school (as was the case with one participant) personnel within schools seem incapable or unwilling to provide any constructive interventions. None of the three African American participants spoke favorably about school experiences that were supportive enough to prevent them from leaving school. This lack of support was personal, social, cultural, and emotional as well as academic. Similar findings have been reported in previous research and scholarship by McLaughlin (2000) and Orfield (2004).

Previous scholarship has identified several specific conditions or factors contributing to dropping out that were evident among the African American young men who participated in this study. Among these were: the Cool Pose, or adopting an anti-

intellectual persona; that is, being smart or academically proficient is not cool. Another factor was a lack of services for students in need academically and otherwise.

Research indicates that success in school involves more than academic factors, many of which are located in students' social, physical, and emotional environments outside of school (Gay, 2010).

The appeal of gangs was also a factor. The gang crisis has worsened. Its appeal grows in times of economic crisis (Conchas and Vigil, 2012). All three African American participants were involved in gangs at some point. Gang membership had its negatives but, for a while, it was positive for these participants. It provided a sense of significance and belonging that was missing from their homes and schools. Conchas and Vigil (2012) argue that at-risk youth need role models, positive after school activities, and other outlets in order to combat the appeal of gangs.

None of the participants indicated that they and their families were included in the decision-making processes relative to their schooling concerns and in the enforcement of them receiving a quality education. Noguera (2008) claims that many assumptions made about Black males often preclude their voices and their family's voice when decisions are being made about their schooling. Furthermore, schools are places where patterns of privilege and inequality are maintained and reproduced regularly.

### ***Dropouts or Push-Outs***

In low-income, urban schools, institutional policies and practices are often used that enable, legitimate and obfuscate the exodus of students. In these schools, many

students of color are not served well, and high rates of departure prior to completion is viewed as an inevitable eventuality (Fine, 1991; Orfield, 2005; Ravitch, 2010). These were certainly the perceptions of the participants in this study. The causes of these young men leaving school prior to graduation were more structural than individual. Their academics were an issue; attendance was an issue; discipline was an issue; irrelevant curriculum was an issue; and the relative lack of one-on-one attention was an issue. They were allowed (and in some cases invited) to leave school without fanfare. While in school, all of the participants wanted more from their teachers; they felt underserved by them.

Relationships with educators was a contributing factor for most of them. All had at least one teacher at some point in time with whom they had a good relationship. But these relationships were not consistent throughout their schooling and broad-based, which contributed to them not persisting in school. Absenteeism from home and school was a factor for several of the participants. They were too busy trying to survive to attend school conscientiously. Whether imposed (structural) or by choice (voluntary), absenteeism, increased the likelihood of these participants' dropping out of school. Student mobility, a factor often associated with lack of persistence with schooling, did not factor into the lives of these participants until they were forced to leave their homes. For those who remained at home, there were no real mobility issues.

Demographic variables, individual attributes, and personal factors are interactive possibilities for dropouts. Some of these participants may not have been in the predicaments they were in if they had lived in a different area, went to a different school, and were of a different ethnicity and linguistic heritage (Rumberger, 2004). All

participants were in one of these categories and suffered for it to some extent. Further, many of these young men did not have employment aspirations while in high school. Some were immigrants and a couple did not have English language proficiency. Racism was an issue for some, and others were troubled by a lack of money to buy things like books and to pay school fees. These factors had negative effects on their school persistence.

### ***Significance and Implications for Future Research***

This study follows the precedents of Ginsburg (2015) in that it enables the voices of the participants to rise above the clamoring of statistical information and puts human faces and names on the data. By allowing the participants to speak themselves, it adds perspectives to the discourse about dropouts that have rarely been present in the past. Consequently, this study may offer some insider insights on males of color dropping out of schools that can be valuable to educators in their efforts to correct this problem.

The study is somewhat unique because it included participants from three different ethnic groups: African Americans, Latino Americans, and Native Americans. Most other case study research examines school dropouts by separate ethnic groups. As a result, it may be a foundation for future researchers to build from and a teaching tool for school practitioners for designing multiethnic intervention strategies.

The findings provide both some answers (albeit tentative ones) and some lingering questions. Some of these that could be pursued further are:

- If these students were capable of learning, then why do they not connect to schooling? And how can “schooling” better connect to them?
- How can school officials reach potential dropouts before school leaving becomes a reality?
- Why are interest in, excitement about, and potential for learning of some males of color being systematically extinguished? The research here should focus on a careful and thorough analyses of the processes of instruction and specific components of curriculum (rather than whole unit studies) and students’ critiques of these processes before they drop out.
- How can educators identify when relatively good students are being turned away from school? How can these diagnoses be best addressed in practice?
- Why don’t educators use certain students’ particular areas of interest and social capital as transferable skills to encourage and support them through academic aspects of schooling? How can these special interests and skills be better identified and characterized, and their transfer possibilities actualized?
- Is schooling such a complex process that its intricacies are imperceptible by some students? If so, what are these features and what makes them unrecognizable and non-negotiable, and according to whom?
- If dropouts are aware of what it takes to succeed in school, and the obstacles to that success, then why do they not marshal resourcefulness to overcome the obstacles?
- How do focus, motivation, desire and interest in school, and dropping out of school interact with factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, immigration status,

class, language background, and with specific subsets within these large cluster identity categories?

- Why don't students apply what they learn elsewhere about learning, to courses where they are not led by good instructors?
- Why don't schools and teachers work more closely with families of their more at-risk student populations?
- How do the perceptions and experiences of the participants in this study regarding their families and educators compare with others within and beyond their ethnic, racial, gender and age groups?
- What do school officials think about the techniques, resources, and supports used to help potential dropouts persist in school? How were these efforts perceived, by whom?
- How do the pursuits of GEDs compare within and among different identity groups; and, what about this educational alternative for regular school attendance is more viable for some students and why?
- How can schools use peer pressure as leverage to offset possibilities of dropping out of school?
- Why can't families prevent their children from dropping out of school?

### ***Limitations of the Study***

This study was limited in its scope. It included only nine male participants. The female viewpoint was not included. Their individual reasons for dropping out of school comprised the data, limiting its ability to be generalized. More specifically related limitations included the following:

- Given the scope of the problem (approximately 1.2 million students drop out each year), interviewing only nine participants (three Native American, three Latino American and three African American males) does not constitute a comprehensive study, or one where conclusions could be drawn that apply to entire segments of a particular school's dropout population.
- Although the results of this study are not generalizable, the information obtained may be indicative of other males of color. Nor are the results intended to be prescriptive, but they may be helpful in providing perspective on male dropouts of color that have not been considered in previous research.
- Because other populations were not included (no Whites or Asians), some potentially important information for developing a more nuanced understanding of the high school dropout crisis among males in the U. S. is overlooked.
- The study participants may not have remembered all of the details of their high school experiences. Or, they may have blocked out the most

negative details, and may even have fabricated some aspects of their experiences.

- The data collected were only as good as the veracity and forthrightness of the participants. Triangulation controlled somewhat for these possibilities (Cresswell, 2009); Thurmond, 2001; Olsen, 2004) but could not eliminate them entirely. The participants' stories were self-reported. They may not have captured the accuracy of real events when they occurred. The good feelings can increase over time at the expense of the real anguish. There may be some distortion in their reflective memories.
- My ability to establish productive and trusting relationships with these participants may have been less than ideal, and they may have been reluctant to be as forthcoming with their perceptions and explanations as desired (Chaudhry, 1997; Smith, 1999; Asher, 2001; Groves, 2003).
- Knowing my role as an Assistant Principal may have skewed the perspectives of those participants who suffered from discipline issues. They may have perceived me as one of the people who put them out of school. Also, my position may have impacted my ability to establish productive and trusting relationships with the participants. Conversations may have been constrained and data collection limited.
- Also, the duration of the study may have impacted the results obtained. If it had lasted longer and occurred in several places, different data probably would have been obtained, and may have improved the overall quality of the study.

- Some females of color also are dropping out of school disproportionately. Their stories need to be researched, as well as those of other ethnic minorities (both males and females).
- Undoubtedly, significant others in the lives of these dropouts (such as girlfriends, parents and other relatives) affected the participants' decision-making process. But, their perspective and influences were not examined.

### ***Recommendations***

The data generated by this study support the need for more culturally responsive instructional practices in the classrooms of underrepresented student populations. Graffiti-scribed buildings and other artifacts in urban centers of the U. S. may be symbols that speak of the desire of some in those communities to be seen and appreciated. Nearly all humans possess this desire. Unfortunately, some students feel like they have no hope. Because too little was done to prevent them from dropping out, several participants in this study had a sense of apathy which they were not able to articulate at the time. A response to this silent cry may be what lies at the heart of Ladson-Billings' (2006) claim that an education debt is owed to underserved minority students. One of these dropouts in this study said that he would rather learn online than face the humiliation of the classroom. Others said that although they did experience success with specific teachers, still teachers failed them before they failed themselves. If academic achievement is what they want, then the likelihood of dropping out may be minimized through improving both the quality and the delivery of instruction. This

possibility has implications for multiple levels of the educational process, including classrooms, schools, and districts, as well as policies, programs, and practices.

It is important to gather more insider perspectives from African American, Native American and Latino American real and potential male dropouts to reverse the process, assuming educators will value what they hear and act responsively on the knowledge gained. The identities of youth like the ones in this study are grounded in very different socio culturally-situated communities, including school, home, and much in between. What occurs in one may be countered in another, and functioning in these different systems or sites of being are in constant flux. Yet, these young men are developing ways to negotiate their multiple identities. If understood and honored by educators, this complexity could produce some insightful possibilities for pedagogical intervention. But it is imperative for educators to know, listen to, and value their students, share experiences about constructing (without imposing their construction on students), listen carefully and thoroughly, and then act differently in their instructional relationships and use of instructional strategies. Therefore, schools and teachers will have to be much more receptive to diverse cultural and experiential backgrounds to better meet the instructional needs of students who are candidates for and/or who are actually dropping out, rather than continuing to place the primary burden of accommodation on students. Several recommendations for consideration in making these adaptations are suggested here.

**Building Responsibility**—Educators speak often about how all children can learn, and how “all” means all. In working with the more at-risk student populations of color, schools must develop the skill of taking full responsibility for all students and work to

augment their learning experiences by all means necessary. At times, interventions should support existing educational measures. At other times, they may have to supplant measures that maintain the status quo. These approaches need to be school-wide initiatives, and impact the ways schools function. For example, these competencies may involve high school teachers collaborating with elementary reading teachers in planning and implementing reading remediation for potential high school male dropouts. Other guidance for preventing dropping out may be derived from the AVID program that is demonstrating that when teachers create support systems based on students' self-determined, academic and social needs within schools, possibilities for success are numerous.

**Rethink the Metaphors**—Often, teachers work in isolated conditions, and are racially, culturally, and ethnically unlike their students those who work in urban areas teach. The confluence of these realities, in effect, perpetuate the metaphor of the Little Red School House, and all of its implications of an isolated, rural, Eurocentric educational model. This symbolism needs to be updated to reflect a more multicultural, Web-based, technology-driven information-centered, living and learning environment. It could be replaced with an image of **Schools Without Walls**, with schools and communities blending seamlessly, with one reaching into and out from the other. Yet another image that conveys a similar message is schools as **Open Door Teaching and Learning Centers**. In such a conception, students of diverse abilities and backgrounds co-mingle. They work in cooperative learning communities on a regular basis. They are engaged in project-based, technology-rich learning, and they examine reality-based issues, experiences, and opportunities.

**Create Alternative Learning Environments—**Non-traditional educational strategies must be used with potential dropouts. If some youth are not going to schools, then schools must go to them. But the school that comes to these at-risk youth cannot be or cannot resemble the same school that pushed them out. It must be culturally and experientially responsive in what it does, and how it looks, sounds, and feels. It must reflect them. It must be full of their own heroes and sheroes giving them encouraging pep-talks and providing relevant knowledge, values, and skills. Some of this student-centered schooling also can be accomplished through individualized, technological and distance learning, accessible 24/7 and with teaching aides available for online consultation and assistance (Clark & Mayer, 2003). The idea here is that students will learn with computers not from computers, and might follow some of the conventions currently being used by Khan Academy, Engage New York, Achieve 3000. Learning takes place outside of the typical place-bound classroom where problems and needs of youth in real-world domains will be the targets of study; collaboration will occur through problem-solving; and applied knowledge and skills will be emphasized. For face-to-face interactions with teachers, drop-in centers (somewhat like computer assistance sites) could be established where students could receive instruction in problems that are not easily resolved online. If these individuals are working, they will be able to continue to learn and earn a high school diploma, while they are meeting life necessities.

**Building Instructional Capacity through Cultural Knowledge and Application—**

School curricula should reflect the cultures of the enrolled students, and instruction should be responsive to their learning styles. They should also cultivate a classroom climate of caring, culturally responsiveness, advocacy and resourcefulness for ethnically

and racially diverse students. There is a pivotal and dynamic relationship among learning, language, and culture. As explained by scholars such as Spindler & Spindler (2000), Erickson (2010) and Adler, Poi, and Shadiow (2005). It then stands to reason that learning, if it is to be effective with students of varying cultures, then schools must make it a priority to somehow embrace the language, the culture and their learning styles, and use them as tools for improved academic performance, including school persistence. These achievements should include the intellectual, social, personal, cultural, and civic endeavors of these youth. Educators must go beyond simply being aware of demographic data. They must access cultural data, and examine it thoroughly to understand how learning within each culture represented in the school is nuanced, facilitated, and demonstrated.

**LESLEY (Love Every Student as you Love Yourself)**—Do unto others as you would do to yourself is a variation of the Golden Rule that should be the moral barometer for educators working with students of color who have encountered too much failure at nearly every turn of their educational experiences, such as was the case with the participants in this study. Dealing with them may require more of a personal investment from their teachers. Instead of asking what would someone else (or some other entity) do, teachers need to assume responsibility for taking transformative actions, personalize their responses, and then reflect on the quality and effectiveness of their efforts. All of these actions need to be grounded in deep content knowledge and exemplify the mandates of culturally responsive teaching, educational equity, and social justice. It is also imperative for teachers and other school personnel to sustain hope

and faith in their students' potential resilience, no matter how far along they are down the path to dropping out.

Finally, several suggestions for future research emerged from this study. They included:

- Extend the parameters of the study to more participants, and choose ones closer to the event of dropping out. For example, increasing the sample size; including Asian, along with African, Latino and Native American males; and, studying female dropouts from these ethnic groups as well, all within two years after leaving school.
- Examining intra-ethnic group variations of causes and effects of dropping out of school. For example, differences may exist among various Latino groups, such as Puerto Rican, Columbian and Mexican ancestry, and immigrant versus second and subsequent generation individuals.
- Studying dropouts in different school districts, schools within districts and public and private schools for similarities and differences.
- Dropouts' trends in different city sizes, demographic distributions, and geographic locations may produce valuable information.
- More thorough and group-specific studies of pre—or potential dropouts and the effects of different preventative strategies, such as culturally responsive teaching, and Web-based teaching and learning.

## ***Conclusion***

The dominant discourse in most U. S. schools continues to be primarily Eurocentric and male-centric. It does not include enough of the authentic voices, experiences, and histories of disenfranchised groups. Undoubtedly, it is a contributing factor to dropping out of school for the males of color in this study and otherwise. It reinforces a false sense of security in the dominant culture's superiority, desensitizing its members to the needs of others. Many minority students like the participants in this study, suffer a double jeopardy; they are not validated, and they fail to survive in a hostile school culture—that is very unlike their home cultures. Making learning easier for this student population is going to require a remaking. But, rethinking the instructional process for these students is a complex and uncertain enterprise, due to fluctuations and lack of structure in their lives, their unreliability, their challenges and their inner courage.

Fortunately, a number of multicultural educators and other researchers have been pondering this issue for some time now, and both direction and encouragement can be gleaned from their efforts. If educators are to do what they have not been able to accomplish up to now, then they are going to have to modify their practice. They will have to add to the sum total of their efforts, much more culturally responsive processes.

There are distinct challenges involved in these processes. Among them are the dislocation and initial uncertainty that comes with resisting the status quo. Educators must be unequivocal about the work that has to be done, and they must have the will to do so, especially when it challenges their normative processes. This approach to

change cannot be dictated as a top-down, one-size-fits-all mandate. Instead, it has to be an organic one, growing out of the needs of students. This is not about social debates to stir the public imagination. The dropout crisis is about students' lives, futures, and destinies. This research provides a glimpse into the perspectives of victimized students, conveyed by themselves in their own voices. Hopefully, it reminds educators how important it is to listen to their students speaking in multiple ways.

There are some other valuable take-aways from this research. Students need to learn coping skills that do not victimize themselves. There were indicators that these participants were opinionated, strong-willed individuals who were both leaders and followers. When they received no love, respect, and support in school, they responded by silencing their own voices at school, knowing that to speak their minds in a White, middle class-dominated environment could lead to disaster, or they withdrew entirely. This is a complex problem whose solution is not simplistic. Many of these participants gravitated to alternative lifestyles by their choices and have been or are now being pulled and torn between living the "street" life and returning to school. In addition to implications for educators, there may be some messages for other professionals such as criminal justice, transportation, housing, and psychology. Learning how to think, how to learn, and how to make reasoned decisions are of utmost importance to at-risk youth, like the ones in this study. But they need personal support, advocacy, and mentoring too, and on much more than academic, in-school competencies.

Dropping out of school might not be merely about pedagogical poverty for racially diverse students, ethnic distancing or even socio-political incongruence or dissonance. It may be that the entire system of schooling is unintentionally, but very effectively

ensuring that certain students do not persist in school. Hence, it may be more accurate to call these youth “pushouts” rather than “dropouts.” Yet, these students must learn the ins and outs of intention and re-invention within the context of their lives. They need to be counseled by individuals with whom they relate; who can stand before them as examples of people who have walked similar paths and have overcome, successfully. Can teachers make the kind of changes needed to deliver these kind of services? This may not be a choice but a necessity—particularly since such small pedagogical shifts may lead to big gains.

To do what needs to be done, to turn the tide on the dropout crisis, educators need to understand that a school is not a factory where input regulates output in a linear fashion; the many customs and traditions of the past are now obsolete; that both teaching students love for learning, and learning with love for self and others, practicing all of these skills is the beginning of the wisdom needed to instruct culturally diverse, at-risk youth who are seeking and finding no hope in their schooling. In a nutshell, the purpose of education (beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic) is to get students to think for themselves. It is time to close the opportunity gap and to support at-risk males of color, who are uncertain about how to succeed in school, by providing them with the guidance, knowledge, wisdom, and love they will need to succeed.

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## APPENDIX A

### PRE-QUALIFICATION RECRUITMENT PRESENTATION

Hello, my name is Paul D. Nichols. I am a graduate student at the University of Washington, and I am also an employee in the Federal Way School District. I am conducting a research study on why so many Native American, African American and Latino American males are dropping out of high school. In order to do that, I am trying to find out why several individual students have dropped out of the Schools in which they were enrolled. I will then pool their general information with the information from several other students to determine if there is a trend. I really need your help in order to complete this study. I think your perceptions about your decision to drop out of school will make this study very meaningful to those who will read it. And, only you can provide that perspective.

If you choose to be in this pilot study, you would be involved with the following activities: interviews, role-plays/simulations; you will also engage in journaling. Although there is no immediate benefit of this project to you, over the long term, your interactions with me may open you up to think about your decision to drop out of school, in ways you perhaps have never before thought about it.

Being part of this kind of pilot study is completely voluntary. Everything I learn about you and your schooling experiences will be kept confidential—that is, I will never use your name or other identifying information in anything I report from my study. And I will keep the information in a secure location away from the school for five years—until

6/30/2019, then, it will be destroyed; only I will have access to the information. I will also share this information with the research team with whom I am working, only.

Can we proceed with this initial screening process?"

1. What ethnicity are you? (African American, Native American, Latino)
2. When did you drop out of school? Why did you drop out of school?
3. What are you doing now?
4. This study is going to get you to look deeply into your schooling experience. Are you ready and willing to do that? In what ways have you begun that journey, already?
5. This study is going to take a few months to complete. Are you committed to sticking it out through to the end of the study? What makes you want to be part of the study?
6. In this study, I am going to use an audio tape recorder to collect your responses to questions. Is that alright with you?
7. In this study, I might use several different types of methods to interview you: direct questions, make-believe scenarios or role-plays drawing and journaling? Are you comfortable with these?
8. Is there anything else you would like to know about me or the study? Is there anything else you would like from me?

## APPENDIX B

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

In the initial interview, I will ask the following kinds of questions:

1. What turns you on about school? What 'turns you off' about school?
2. Has it been hard for you to learn in school? What have been your educational experiences that you have enjoyed?
3. Are you disinterested in school? How can anyone/anything get you interested in school, again? Is there anything about school you find attractive?
4. Has it ever been easy for you to learn in school? When? Why?
5. In that successful situation, what worked for you? What did not work for you?
6. What does it take to make you learn? Did that ever occur during your entire school experience? When? Why do you think it did not occur during your entire school experience?
7. Describe to me a class/place where you are learning. How is everyone there learning? How are you learning? What are you learning?
8. Describe to me a class/place where you are not learning. Why are you not learning? Why do you think others are not learning?
9. Were you a casual drug user when you made your decision to quit school? What drugs did you use? Did drugs play a role in your decision to quit school? How?

10. Did a lack of money or other resources play a role in your decision to quit school? What were these factors? Did your family support/not support you in this decision? How did your family support/not support you in this decision?
11. What other factors forced you to make the decision to quit school? What other alternatives were available to you?
12. Why did you not choose any of these/the available alternatives?
13. In what ways was dropping out of school a bad decision? In what ways was it a good decision?
14. When you were in school and making the decision to leave school, what could have kept you in school? What could the school have done? What could your family have done? What could your peers have done? What could you have done? What else could have been done to help you stay in school?
15. Do you think nothing/too little was done? Why?

## CURRICULUM VITAE

PAUL D. NICHOLS

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827-32<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Seattle, WA 98122

206-554-1586/206-328-6620

### **EDUCATION**

#### **Ph.D. in Education (Curriculum & Instruction)**

University of Washington

December, 2015

#### **Master's Degree in Communications**

Stanford University

August 1980

#### **Master's Degree in Educational Administration**

Boston State Teacher's College

June 1979

(University of Massachusetts)

#### **Bachelor of Arts, English & American Literature**

June 1974

Harvard College

### **PUBLICATION**

2001      Shorty the Other Malcolm, McFarland and Company

### **PROFESSIONAL SKILL SUMMARY**

#### **Instruction and Curriculum Development**

- Taught (English, Life Skills, Social Studies, Business and Science) in Boston Public Schools on both middle and high school levels for a total of 22-years
- Taught English, World History, Social Studies and Physical Science in the Providence Public Schools, RI

- Taught Reading in the Ravenswood School District, CA
- Designed interventions and taught classes to improve student performance on the MCAS and acquired funding for, and implemented a student preparatory program for the HSPE Exam; analyzed test data and compiled reports on student outcomes
- Taught Test Prep at Academic Tutoring and Test Prep in Bellevue, WA
- Served on Massachusetts school accreditation boards, conducted accreditation visits in several districts and investigated district-level strategies, approaches and practices, observed these programs in action and made recommendations for improvement
- Served on the Development Board of the Gateway to College Program at Highline Community College, a high school program for at-risk students based at Highline Community College

## **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

### **Assistant Principal**

Federal Way Public Schools

July 2008-Present

- Planned, organized, directed, supported and strengthened programs in the senior high school.
- Implemented practices that supported academic rigor, relevance and relations within the school and throughout the campus.
- Established and led a learning agenda for the school as an instructional leader. Lead and continuously improved instructional practices.
- Developed a professional learning community culture and modeled leadership.
- Analyzed summative school performance reports; monitored and held the school accountable for their performance.
- Created and inspired a culture of student achievement and preparation for college, careers and citizenship.
- Designed Administrative Teas where Administrators interacted socially with community representatives of student population segments that demonstrated consistent failure on Standardized Tests.

### **Educational Programs Manager**

January 2006 – June 2008

Gear Up Project, University of Washington

- Planned, implemented and evaluated program services and activities for high school students to improve their academic success and college readiness
- Hired, trained and supervised staff and summer programs instructors; developed course schedules for both the Honors Academy and several Summer Institutes
- Compiled data about services provided to students, parents and teachers for reports

## **Director**

Providence School District (Leadership SLC)

July 2002 to June 2005

- Responsible for 37-teachers and 443-students; managed the budget; developed the master schedule for the Leadership Academy's students and faculty; monitored enrollment, maintained high daily attendance rates
- Developed community outreach programs in partnership with community agencies and business leaders; successfully acquired grants; conducted community, and parent engagement activities
- Maintained records and responded to federal, state and district mandates; recruited, hired, trained and supervised staff and summer institute instructors; supervised all school athletics
- Coordinated daily schedules, resolved discipline issues, conducted team meetings, expanded relationships with area businesses, local colleges and other community agencies

## **Assistant Headmaster**

English and Writing teacher

Sept. 1995 to June 2002

Boston Public Schools (Hyde Park High School)

- Created a community service-based discipline intervention program
- Coordinated all after school activities including all sports programs and all on-site, after school SAT, and MCAS tutorial programs, provided oversight for student security

## **English and Life Skills Instructor/Cluster Coordinator**

Boston Public Schools

Sept. 1992 to June 1995

- Acquired the following mini-grants: Co-wrote grant for \$1,000 for Dearborn Middle School Symphonic Band; \$3,000 for "Professional Writers in the Classroom" program; \$1,500 for the "Young Businessmen's Club" for Learning Disabled students; \$3,000 Middle MaSt grant to create a living science laboratory at the Dearborn Middle School; received \$1,500 for computer literacy courses designed for parents of the students at the Dearborn Middle School
- Created a Computer Physics Club utilizing a \$12,000 grant from NUCRCM
- Developed a \$16,000 grant program with the Massachusetts Council and Recycle Center to use recyclables across the curriculum at the Dearborn Middle School

**English, World History, Social Studies, Physical Science Teacher**

Providence Public Schools Sept. 1990 to June 1992

**Cluster Coordinator/ Guidance Counselor/Teacher**

Boston Public Schools Sept. 1983 to June 1988

Reading Specialist

Ravenswood School District Sept. 1979 to June 1980

History, Geography and English Teacher

Boston Public Schools Sept. 1974 to June 1979

**NEASC ACCREDITATION SITE VISITS**

Arlington High School 1998

Swampscott High School, 2001

Woonsocket High School, 2004

Thomas Jefferson High School (Site Manager), 2014