AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF


Abstract approved: __________

Warren N. Suzuki

Five student-researchers and the author engaged in a continually-evolving, student-driven qualitative research study. Despite significant disadvantages, including navigating a foreign culture without speaking the language, these invulnerable learners succeeded. Ultimately of greatest interest to the six were an analysis of their collective knowledge and experiences, and their individual transformation over the course of the study.

The findings are organized around emergent themes and their evidence. Themes participants identified include resilience, the Mexican family, teachers and education, Mexican pride, and misconceptions about Mexicans.
**Resilience:** A combination of personal resources (e.g., resilience) and environmental resources helped student participants to feel cared about, supported, and significant in school. Schools, as external mediators, were critical environmental resources in alleviating negative effects of student participants’ stress.

**Family:** Families, especially participants’ parents, were their greatest source of motivation, inspiration, and support. The five student participants’ concluded that the best means of promoting the ability to avoid problems is to instill in children early on a strong, non-negotiable value system.

**Teachers and Education:** Participants and their families viewed education, and related necessary sacrifices, as key to success in this country. Academic frustrations included often-unchallenging curricula, isolation in the English as a Second Language program, and being treated as “less than” by teachers and peers.

**Pride in Being Mexican:** The five expressed strong pride in being Mexican, and chose to demonstrate this through showing the dominant culture that Mexicans are capable, intelligent, hard-working people. Participants were also committed to serving as role models and counselors to those struggling as they had.
Misconceptions about Mexicans: Interdependence, generosity, altruism, and camaraderie are attributes highly valued among most Mexican individuals. Misconceptions about Mexicans abound and are exacerbated by the American media.

by

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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Carla A. Temes, Author
I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Warren Suzuki, a great teacher and person, for his support, help, and patience. This study reflects his honest commitment to his students, to equity, and to true education, among the reasons that I hold him in such high regard. Warren’s “walking his talk” has earned him the respect of his students and colleagues alike.

Thanks also to the members of my doctoral committee, Dr. David Beranek, Dr. Karen Higgins, Dr. Sunil Khanna, and Dr. Eileen Waldschmidt, for their guidance and encouragement on my behalf.

Without the tremendous commitment and patience of the Resilient Five, this project could never have taken flight. What started off as a “Hey, wouldn’t this be a neat idea?” matured into an extraordinary experience that changed my worldview. The bond and affection the six of us formed are profound.

Two of the best people I know, my parents, encouraged me to pursue my studies with their love, support, and high expectations. I hope to pass on those things to my students, and to my own child one day. Finally, I thank my wonderful fiancé Jeff for encouraging me to laugh and enjoy the sunshine between my wrestling bouts with Microsoft Word©.
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From Risk to Resiliency: 

"Men can move mountains with words." -Winston Churchill

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 A Dominant-Culture Perspective

"At my school I see racism and discrimination against ESL [English as a Second Language] students because they don’t all speak English, or they are from Mexico, and that automatically makes other students think that they’re at a lower level than they are and deserve no respect.

I have heard students say, ‘Why don’t you speak English? You’re in America, not Mexico.’ Also students will say that ESL students should go back to their own country if they don’t want to speak English, and live as ‘Americans.”

This year at school I’ve taken an ESL Aide class and have had the opportunity to be around Mexican-American, Russian, Cambodian, and Marshallese students. I used to think that ESL students were not as smart as American students but I have found that to be false.

I’ve had the chance to work with these students, and to see how hard they work and how smart they really are. I have a new respect for all ESL students, and if other kids would take the time to get to know them, they’d see that they are not any different than American students, and they work just as hard as anyone else in the school.

At a pep assembly my junior year, where we usually chant our class ("Juniors! Juniors!") some kids in my class decided to chant “U.S.A.!”
U.S.A. instead. This was an attempt to try to get the ESL kids, mainly the Mexicans-Americans, to get the hint that they were in the U.S. now, and needed to act like it.

In the time that I've been able to work with the ESL students, we've become friends. Before I thought of them as minorities, and not capable of participating in the things I was able to because they couldn't speak English and communicate. After taking this class, I've seen that they are more than capable of participating and doing just as good a job, if not better, than any American. All they need is a chance, but people won't give it to them. I've grown to love and respect these students. They are hard-working, respectful, and smart kids that deserve a chance.

-Dominant culture student who was my teacher's assistant in ESL I this year

1.2 The Focus and Significance of This Study

I have taught, and come to love, Mexican-American students for many years. As a teacher's assistant while in high school and college and having been a teacher of English as a Second Language students for twelve years now, I have become enamored of and touched by the generosity, kindness, and zest which characterizes the Mexican culture as I have experienced it. My Mexican-American students have (mostly) been enthusiastic.

1 I will use, throughout this paper, Valdés' (1996) terminology as follows: the term Hispanic, a cover term, includes persons of Mexican ancestry. Chicanos are those Mexican-Americans who have been in this country for one or more generations, and Mexicans are Mexican nationals who are recent immigrants (p. 209).
learners, loving and appreciative participants in
difficult and foreign surroundings they often had not
chosen for themselves. Their parents and guardians have
shown me such warm gratitude, dignity, and generosity
of spirit that, not Mexican myself (although English is
my second language²), I have often longed to be a part
of that culture (if, that is, I were living in Mexico.
I likely would not want to be Mexican in the United
States because of discriminatory attitudes toward
minorities in general). As I look around the house at
drawings and other hand-made gifts given me over the
years and answer their letters, I am grateful for the
serendipity that got me involved with teaching such
wonderful people.

Although I aspired to be as objective as possible³
in the course of my exploration, I could not have been
less biased or more hopeful for my students as I began
my research journey. In this sense I am Guba and
Lincoln’s (1994) model constructivist, whose voice, as
inquirer, is “...that of the passionate participant
actively engaged in facilitating the multivoice

² Spanish is my third language of fluency. I mention this, as well as my being certified Bilingual by
both the states of Oregon and California, because much of the data in this study involved
participants’ “code-switching,” or making use of whichever language fit the specific contextual vane
of the conversation. Nonetheless, it was reassuring to know that participants were my ultimate
editors of accuracy of content, intent, and essence.

³ As will later be discussed, it is impossible to be “objective;” I nonetheless tried my best.
reconstruction of his or her own construction as well as those of all other participants. Change is facilitated as reconstructions are formed and individuals are stimulated to act on them” (p. 115).

Researchers have traditionally devoted less energy to examining the factors that might contribute to resilience in Mexican-American (as well as other societally-marginalized) learners than we have to the causes of their being at-risk. The potential for social transformation is, to me, a crucial part of true research. Granted, from a positivist standpoint, the resulting construct runs the danger of “rampant subjectivity,” but it also allows “for other ways of knowing which do justice to the complexity, tenuity, and indeterminacy of most human experience” (Mishler, 1979).

At the outset of this study I intended, as most research and practice have, to focus my investigation on students’ deficits. Reading about resilience, however, I began to think about how this field might inform me about better educational practice. Uncannily, around this time, I was leafing through an educational journal that I randomly removed from a library shelf while waiting for a copy machine repair person to come

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4 I will randomly alternate genders throughout this paper to avoid using the syntactically-awkward “he/she” and “his/her”. Each pronoun is intended to refer to individuals of both genders.
save me. What I happily discovered was the Pizarro (1998) article referred to throughout this study, research that was a primary influence in its collaborative design. From that point on, the study assumed a life of its own, with our direction decided by group members' suggestion of investigative topics, pacing, and direction.

This study is based upon my belief that both students' personal knowledge and their learning environment are key to their educational success. Neglecting or minimizing the importance of either will prevent learners from flourishing. Viewed even from a purely pragmatic educational point of view, students' perceptions and perspectives are crucial, since "[a]ll knowledge reflects the values and interests of its creators" (Banks, 1994, p.4). Learning, put simply, must be made relevant to students in order for them to succeed.

If this is true, and if "students are not called upon to know, but to memorize the contents narrated by the teacher" (Freire, 1970, p. 68), then our educational system might be missing the emancipatory mark. Despite well-intended momentary spurts of "valuing diversity" (serving tacos in the school

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5 This was a new experience for me. Although I always had a “back-up” list of suggestions just in case, I tried my best throughout the study to allow students to pilot this investigation.
cafeteria on Cinco de Mayo, or playing a video of
King’s "I Have a Dream" speech out of context on Martin
Luther King Day), Freire (1970) extends the challenge
that "in the name of preservation of ‘culture and
knowledge’ we [currently] have a system which achieves
neither true knowledge nor true culture" (p. 68).

A 14-year-old girl with short black
curly hair says this: ‘Every year
in February we are told to read the
same old speech of Martin Luther
King. We read it every year. ‘I
have a dream...’ It does begin to
seem–what is the word?’ She
hesitates and then she finds the
word: “perfunctory...it’s like a
terrible joke on history’. (Kozol,
1991, p. 34)

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 The Design of the Study

Central to the design of our study was Freire’s
(1970) notion of meaningful education, in which
students are investigators, and teachers are supporters
in their shared quest for knowledge. Although written
in the context of day-to-day classroom activity,
Freire’s prescription struck me as tailor-made to the
type of study I envisioned participating in:
Once the investigators have determined the area in which they will work and have acquired a preliminary acquaintance with the area through secondary sources, they initiate the first stage of the investigation. The investigators need to agree to an informal meeting during which they can talk about the objectives of their presence in the area. If the participants agree both to the investigation and to the subsequent process, the investigators will gather necessary data about the life of the area. Of greater importance, however, is the active presence of these volunteers in the investigation. (pp. 101-102)

This research project was, therefore, a collaborative effort among four of my former English as a Second Language (ESL) students, one newly-acquainted student invited to join the group by a student participant, and myself. I envisioned our collaboration as one in which

The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (Freire, 1970, p. 67)
Garmezy (1981, 1983), an eminent resiliency specialist, describes “invulnerable” individuals as those who, despite significant disadvantages, succeed under even the most unfavorable conditions. The student participants in this study were selected based upon their having demonstrated characteristics common to resiliency and academic success, rarely losing sight of the ultimate meaning in their lives; they viewed education as an intrinsically motivating, life-long process. Their perception of such meaning was a highly impelling tool that encouraged perseverance, even in the face of obstacles that might have discouraged less determined individuals. It was also germane to this study.

Having interacted previously with five of the six students in the classroom and in collaborating with them for the present study, I benefited from prolonged and in-depth previous engagement with participants. The academic challenges and related perceptions this study’s marginalized group of students articulated were remarkably alike, as were their responses to those challenges. Such commonality of worlds and racial consciousness illustrates this study’s contention that this awareness does not preclude a belief in the
possibility for social change\textsuperscript{6}. In their varied socio-economic backgrounds, the Resilient Five\textsuperscript{7} reflect my Mexican-American high school English as a Second Language students' diverse home environments. Sharing, however, a similarly high level of achievement and an optimistic outlook on their life opportunities, all resilient participants in this investigation additionally expressed a keen awareness of how race and class operate to threaten the potential realization of opportunities for people in their situations.

Additionally, unlike a majority of their Mexican-American high school English as a Second Language student peers, all resilient participants revealed a familiarity with the notion of struggle and the possibility of resulting favorable change. Significant also is the fact that each student-participant would be the first family member to graduate from high school. Notably, such "trail-blazing" was viewed as a meaningful challenge rather than a discouraging deterrent by the five, who viewed a diploma as a valuable tool to bettering their and their families' situations. As their observations will illustrate, this

\textsuperscript{6} See O'Connor (1997).

\textsuperscript{7} I am borrowing and adapting O'Connor's (1997) nickname for her study's participants, the "Resilient Six."
optimism and driving attitude was characteristic of all participants.

1.3.2 The Step-by-Step Evolution of This Study

Concurrently with the doctoral coursework I was completing, I researched the subjects of Mexican-American academic achievement, failure, and rate of drop-out, as well as English as a Second Language theory and methodology. Synthesizing and analyzing a wide body of literature on these subjects, I composed a library research paper that I presented to a group of my professors and peers. Subsequent to the presentation, I assembled a lengthy portfolio that merged the research and theory I had encountered with my ten years of teaching experience.

Using this research and experiential information as a framework and guided by my doctoral coursework, I "brainstormed" some general topics I thought we six might consider for exploration. These were, however, preliminary notions that were not collaboratively decided upon by the group. As I read and became increasingly transformed by the work of Freire (1970) and Pizarro (1998), however, I discarded these plans.
The study, when it began, therefore evolved daily with each discussion, assuming a student-centered, collaborative format guided by the works of Freire (1970), Pizarro (1998), O’Connor (1997), and Valdés (1996 and 1998).

Participants and I individually brainstormed and then discussed potential problem statements, methods of data collection, questions to ask interviewees, and individuals to interview. Then, based on our collective knowledge and experiences, we realized that we were experts enough. Initially we journaled on some days, conversing on the others. We found, however, that lengthy periods of time spent engaged solely in either were exhausting, so we decided to alternate, dividing each 55-minute meeting between writing and conversation. I transcribed audio data using the laptop computer with which I kept a journaled record of our daily discussions, and, towards the end of the study, I combed through the written and transcribed audio data, drawing from it a list of major themes that appeared recurrently therein.

I typed up a list of these themes, and distributed them to student-participants, who individually edited their copies. I revised this theme list based on the Resilient Five’s suggestions, and we agreed upon a
finalized version that I printed up and redistributed for final participant consensus.

I translated all Spanish-language data into English, verifying the accuracy of my translations with participants, and categorized "chunks" of data according to the major themes we had identified as I judged most appropriate. Throughout the duration of the study, on an on-going basis, I continued to read and re-read data.

I additionally re-formatted my own journaled observations into acceptable text (non short-hand) format, and condensed themes, eliminating ones that, by virtue of their having inadequate amounts of data, were deemed "under-represented." I re-read and re-shuffled data under more appropriate themes on several occasions, reading textbooks about qualitative data analysis to help us to make sense of our data. On-going member checks for data accuracy were additionally conducted throughout the course of the study.

Re-ordering our themes for readability, flow and chronological coherence, I then inserting various quotes from Kozol (1991), Freire (1970), and resilience research where they appeared most textually appropriate. These were, however, relocated in the subsequent numerous revisions of this document.
I divided the dissertation, after numerous rounds of revision, into chapters and sub-chapters according to the agreed-upon themes and their data content, and later inserted my own transitional observations between the sections in order to clarify their context and sequence fluidity. After writing this methodological description, I formulated the sections containing concluding thoughts, analysis of participants' transformation, and suggestions for further research.

1.3.3 The Setting of Our Study

The Oregon suburb in which our study occurred is a lively and energetic community which, like all geographical locations in this study, will be referred to by a fictitious name. The high school which students attended at the time of the investigation is located along a busy main street lined with restaurants, shops, and small businesses whose livelihoods are sustained primarily through the patronage of local residents. This school serves most of the high school-aged students of the area, and has one of the largest and comparatively diverse student bodies in the district.

Beginning in the early 1990s, the suburb and its neighboring communities began to experience a
relatively rapid increase in its population of Mexican immigrants. Many of the newcomers traveled as migrant workers through California and up through Oregon, following seasonal agricultural cycles. Not necessarily driven by a preference for agricultural work, immigrants often find this form of labor one of few avenues open in a search to escape limited economic conditions in México, and to find a better life for their families. Shifts in school and neighboring communities’ demographics were accompanied by corresponding changes in student body compositions, and like many schools in similar situations, this one was forced to make adaptations. These included the hiring of an English as a Second Language teacher, and, as language-minority students’ numbers rapidly increased over time, additional teachers were hired as well.

That this study took place in the state of Oregon is significant due to its being a state in which, although “...racial and ethnic minorities have made impressive gains, [Hispanics] still lag behind the state average” (Molander, 1998). The report notes, in fact, that “...the state’s high school drop out rate increased between the 1991-1992 and 1995-1996 school years and that Hispanic students were the most likely to leave school” (Molander, 1998). Furthermore, in
Oregon, as compared with the over seven percent of Oregon high school students who left school prior to graduating, "the highest drop out rate is found among Hispanics who drop out at more than twice the state average" (Oregon Department of Education, as cited in Oregon Progress Board Press Release, 1998).

1.3.4 Process and Data

Working collaboratively, student-researchers and I formulated, discussed, and agreed upon the initial direction our joint exploration would take. These questions mutated and evolved as the qualitative research investigation progressed. Additionally, investigators kept journals and notes subsequent to, and based upon, discussions and activities in which they chronicled their life experiences, impressions, and emerging ideas for group exploration.

Our initial research question was: "How do the meanings resulting from Mexican-American ESL high school students' academic experiences influence their motivation and academic success?" As the study progressed, however, it became apparent that "with regard to the 'product' of the research, we [as study
participants and their audience recognized] that it may not actually be writing at all." It turned out that participants and I, as Pizarro (1998) predicted, were ultimately "...less interested in the documentation [and the written end-product] of [our] experiences than in [our] transformation" (p.70).

I kept audio-taped recordings and participant journals for purposes of data verification and accuracy, and a self-chosen, fictitious name was used to identify information that each student provided. Three of the student-investigators received academic credit for their participation in this project, while two chose to waive this option. In order to prevent any possible question of coercion, all grades issued were on a "pass/no pass" basis. All grading criteria were clearly explained in the "Independent Study" form that was approved by graded student participants, their legal guardians8, and school administrators.

Granting of academic credit was made available based upon my desire to give participants credit they earned for their reading, writing, and speaking commensurate with that which they would have received in a language arts class of comparable second-language

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8 All explanations and permission forms to be signed by parents and legal guardians were written in both Spanish and English, translated by me, and double-checked by participants for accuracy in order to ensure their and their parents' full comprehension of the documents and the study itself.
difficulty. Additionally, since all participants’ contributions to the project were comparable in terms of value, and in light of my having received doctoral credit for my own participation, I believe such credit to have been theoretically and professionally appropriate. Student participants receiving academic credit in this study were required to attend daily meetings, and students volunteering their participation in this study were expected to attend a minimum of three meetings per week (usually Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Ultimately, however, we met every day, with a few exceptions).

Initially we planned that on Tuesdays and Thursdays, data collected would be written and not audio-taped, since all participants were not originally asked to be present on those days. Within the first week, however, participants decided that we would engage in both daily group discussions and writing assignments based upon shared readings of literature, rather than alternating days as was initially planned. Theoretical and practically-based readings related to Mexican-Americans’ culture and educational experiences were (in addition to the data, students’ own experiences and insights) provided, and these served as bases for the collaboratively-derived, ever-evolving
investigative questions which we explored throughout the duration of the project.

Significantly contributing to the formulation of the initial research question, discussions had been ongoing among most participants over the course of previous semesters. These conversations were based upon students' perceptions of the themes and ideas we, as a group, went on to identify in this paper. Project activities formally began during February of 1999 and continued through the end of June. Some researchers additionally met sporadically throughout the summer with me for purposes of data verification.

Since participants were potentially subject to both outright and subtle oppression if what they wrote or said was inadvertently exposed to other teachers, all students were identified by pseudonyms, and will be identified as such throughout this dissertation. Students were also encouraged to use pseudonyms in their logs. Students were reminded monthly about the potential risks involved with their journals, and with exposing what has been discussed among them outside of the study group. I corrected grammatical and syntactical errors in participant data, and the accuracy of my editing was approved by participating students to determine intended meaning and context. An
important part of the study's overall methodology, in fact, was on-going participant concurrence with all written data prior to its publication.

1.3.4.1 Data Collection

Data collected in this study included researcher-participant journals, goal statements, and writings on themes that emerged over the course of the study through group discourse, shared readings, and responses to researcher-generated shared writings. Additional data included audio tapes of some group discussions and interviews of individuals considered key by researchers; participants' written autobiographical statements were also collected. Student-researchers' articulation of our project's initial problem statement, as well as reflections emerging from group discourse, provided valuable documentation of our research journey and participants' individual metamorphoses. Reflection on researchers' personal transformation throughout the course of the study was, itself, a valuable informational source.

As discussed earlier, the work of Pizarro (1998) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) served as guiding
principles throughout this study. True to Lather's (1986) characterization of effective research methods as "interactive, contextualized, and humanly compelling because they invite joint participation in the exploration of research issues" (p. 259), almost all aspects of this project were highly collaborative and student-driven. "Furthermore, [because] CRT suggests the significance of research that emphasizes social justice not simply as a goal, but as a process" (Pizarro, 1998, p. 63), this project strived to be less "research on empowerment [than] research as empowerment" (Pizarro, 1998, p. 61). To meet this additional objective, participant feedback on accurate transcribing of data was solicited on an on-going basis throughout the duration of the study.

1.3.4.2 Data Interpretation

In assessing data resulting from this study, researchers analyzed patterns and areas of commonality of experience, perspective, and interpretation. Written data, including written journals and transcripts of some tape-recorded sessions and interviews, were analyzed and re-read by me on multiple occasions.
Affording participants the opportunity to re-live specific episodes, revisiting of data not only assisted in the tracking of the project's evolution, but also allowed for recognition of embedded information and patterns which may not have initially been obvious or seemingly significant. In "discussing, challenging, and/or reconstructing...through the lens of their individual experiences" (Pizarro, 1998, p. 69), participants additionally gained a deeper insight into their own life experiences.

As the study progressed, "researcher and the participants [began] to conduct a meta-analysis of the area of investigation by re-evaluating the entire research process" (Pizarro, 1998, p. 69). Re-analysis of data additionally afforded researchers the valuable opportunity to consider how their personal theoretical frameworks, constructs, and philosophies transformed over the course of the study.

1.3.5 Participants' Gender

When I began my doctoral studies, I prefaced a statement in one of my courses with the disclaimer, "I'm not a feminist, but...". Some months later in a different class, a self-identified feminist in my
cohort leaned towards me, after I had expressed an opinion, and whispered confidentially, "You are a feminist. You just don't think you're a feminist." The statement caused me to smile at the time, and later to ponder what a feminist is.

Labeling individuals according to their affiliations is sometimes a process used to quantify and delimit people who are in some way threatening to the labeler. At other times, however, associations can reveal a perspective enabling us to re-examine what we hold as "the truth." Because my personal perspective will thus be consequential to our study's findings, I will express my belief that women are equal in worth, capability, and potential to males. I am fortunate and proud to be an American; there are numerous cultures that do not afford women the same position in society that mine permits me.

It has been my experience that in the classroom, perhaps a societal microcosm, when a female student and a male student both volunteer a response at the same time, frequently the female will defer to male. This classroom dynamic is not unique to the Mexican culture; studies exist whose conclusions and findings reveal

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9 If this makes me a feminist...I am a feminist!

10 See Losey (1997) for a thorough discussion of this topic.
that teachers direct more praise, questions, and overall attention to males in their classrooms. Like Moraga (1994), however, I contend that being a female ‘...in an anglo [sic] context is [far easier] than in a Chicano one. That is not to say that anglo [sic] culture does not stigmatize its women for ‘gender-transgressions’—only that its stigmatizing [does] not hold the personal power...which Chicano culture [does]’” (p. 35).

Moraga, proud of her Mexican heritage, describes how

[a]s a Chicana and a feminist...I did not move away from other Chicanos because I did not love my people. I gradually became anglocized [sic] because I thought it was the only option available to me toward gaining my autonomy as a person without being sexually stigmatized...at each juncture of my development, I instinctively made choices which I thought would allow me greater freedom of movement in the future. This primarily meant resisting sex roles as much as I could safely manage and this was far easier in an anglo [sic] context than a Chicano one. (1994, p. 35)

The researcher additionally notes,

I have never met any kind of Latino who, although he may have claimed his family was very woman-dominated
("mi mamá made all the real decisions"), did not subscribe to the basic belief that men are better. It is so ordinary a statement as to sound simplistic and I am nearly embarrassed to write it, but that’s the truth in its kernel... Ask, for example, any Chicana mother about her children, and she is quick to tell you she loves them all the same, but she doesn’t. *The boys are different.* (Moraga, 1994, p. 36)

Reflecting over her sadness at her brother’s born place of priority in her mother’s heart, Moraga further ponders,

What I wanted from my mother was impossible. It would have meant her going against Mexican/Chicano tradition in a very fundamental way. You are a traitor to your race if you do not put the man first (1994, p. 37).

Being a language-minority Mexican female can create its own unique classroom challenges as well. For example, Losey (1997) found that Spanish-dominant elementary school students, despite making a greater effort than English-dominant Mexican-Americans or Anglo children to get their teachers’ attention, were more likely to meet with less approval than their peers, as well as to be provided with less information. Buriel
(1983) additionally found that teachers are less likely to hold high expectations of language-minority children, and less likely to direct praise at them. Losey (1997) furthers that especially with regard to Mexican-American learners, "the importance of gender as a sociolinguistic variable cannot be underestimated" (p. 20). "Few studies", she maintains, "have looked at the interactional influence of both ethnicity and gender as cultural factors in a single study. As two of the cultural groups in which individuals operate, however, it is necessary to consider the possibility -- nay, the probability -- of both influencing interaction in the classroom" (P. 21). Further, Losey (1997) maintains,

[w]hen examining classroom interaction for gender difference, silence again becomes a prevalent finding. Studies suggest that women tend to be silent for reasons not unlike those found in the research on Mexican Americans--because of their socialization, a lack of teacher attention, and to some extent, an unwillingness to initiate. (p. 24)

The criterion of participants in our study's being Mexican-American is intended to amplify the silenced and valuable perspectives of an oppressed group. The predominance of female participants in this study,
however, is designed to give voice to a particularly voiceless student subgroup: Mexican-American language-minority females.

1.4 Researcher Disclosure

A Gary Larson cartoon, *The Far Side*, depicts panicked droves of humans, jammed in the streets. The Earth, torched by Martians, is going up in flames. Amidst this chaos, two oblivious dogs, one in a fleeing car and the other on the curb, lock eyes intently and drool with joy at their meeting. Perspective and worldview are the unavoidable result of the perceiver’s experiences and background; they determine whether the dog, the burning earth, or the sun on the horizon will be center-frame. My own viewpoint undoubtedly biased my research, as well as my examination of others’. Further, it was my interpretation of the perspectives of students from an extraordinary culture which I hoped to capture in my research. Perspective means, and influences, a lot.

I am not convinced that my bias was an altogether bad thing, for it is my viewpoint and beliefs that have been the motivating forces for my research. They have
also inspired my general respect and desire for knowledge, a perspective-dependent construct in and of itself. Paritally because of my love for the Mexican culture, and partially the result of my having been born to hard-working immigrant parents whose struggles and persistence paved my way, I am fascinated with resiliency, education, and privilege. Like my Hungarian parents, the Mexican immigrants to the U.S., brave enough to take action in order to improve the lives of their children, embody great strength and motivation. Such qualities would logically foreshadow future similar academic resilience, drive, and success in the children for whose education they have typically sacrificed so much in coming here. How, then, do we explain the tremendously high school dropout rate among Mexican-American youth (Molander, 1998)? I contend that the causes generally do not lie within our students, but within the institutions that are educating them.

1.4.1 A Theoretical Understanding of the Data

[M]en’s activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And, as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it. Men’s activity is theory and practice; it is
reflection and action. It cannot...be reduced to either verbalism or activism. (Freire, 1970, p. 119)

Working together as a group, students and I explored the ways in which meanings resulting from their academic experiences affect their motivation and academic success. One of the primary goals of this study was to incorporate the voices of a traditionally-silenced group of students in an account of what they have experienced in the course of their schooling in the United States; as such, their voices are placed center-stage in this dissertation. Study participants constructed and subsequently built upon their own research questions. This afforded the study a qualitatively sound foundation, and provided student participants a greater awareness of their own agency and ability to counteract negative environmental factors.

The study’s methodology "...invite[d] joint participation [of the participants of the study] in the exploration of the research issues" (Lather, 1986, p. 259). Pizarro (1998) provides rationale for a methodology incorporating the voices of the students

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11 Participants’ words are so eloquent, in fact, that it difficult for me to want to include my own transitional observations in this dissertation. For anyone acquainted with me, my being rendered speechless would be both significant and surprising.
whom this study seeks to help, suggesting that "...our disinterest and inability to see the world of school through the eyes of Chicana/o students might be related to their continual failure" (p. 59). Pizarro (1998), a Chicano himself, professes to have been aware for some time that "those in 'power'... are...not fully invested in seeing the complexities of [marginalization] because it demands questioning their own power and authority...at an interpersonal level and the way in which it allows for the maintenance of inequalities" (p.66). Kozol (1991) suggests how such a power differential can be observed in the dominant-group classroom:

'It seemed rather odd,' says David, 'that we were sitting in an AP class discussing whether poor kids in the Bronx deserve to get an AP class. We are in a powerful position.' (p. 130)

As a researcher, Pizarro came to realize "...that not only do we need research on empowerment...but research as empowerment. What we [have] not done...[is] to allow the participants themselves to analyze and explain their world as part of their empowerment... These institutions communicated to them that, as Chicana/o students, they were no authorities" (p. 61).
Pizarro (1998) additionally suggests "the necessity for social justice to become the measure by which we evaluate the strength of research" (p. 57), calling attention to the long-overlooked absence of the voices of the very people whom we claim to want to "empower." As Lory, one study participant, illustrated:

English as a Second Language children have problems because as newcomers they can't communicate with peers or their teachers. This is so hard, because they are not able to ask for simple things like a pencil or paper, or even to ask permission to use the restroom. It's like being mute. I think that everyone can understand how hard that would be, to be unable to communicate with other people.

This is the situation with the new children who arrive from a new country. They have so many difficulties: asking for the things they need, difficulties writing, reading, and speaking. I know how it feels, because I went through the same suffering and struggling. But the hardest thing is not being able to express yourself, how you feel, or to voice the things that you are thinking about.

Further illustration of the importance of researcher-researched collaboration is provided by Lather (1986), who notes that

"persons, as autonomous beings, have a moral right to participate in decisions that claim to generate knowledge about them. Such a right [protects them] from

12 "Empowerment" is a currently popular term implying a debility in marginalized peoples which I contend does not exist. The power is already there; it is the voice that is lacking.
being managed and manipulated...the moral principle of respect for persons is most fully honored when power is shared...not only in the application...but also in the generation of knowledge...". (p. 262)

Gutierrez (1973) further observes that traditionally disenfranchised groups possess a non-mainstream knowledge, and have the right to determine how they want their knowledge used. Freire (1970) echoes this notion, concluding that “[m]any political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their action) the men-in-a-situation to whom their program was ostensibly directed” (p. 83). Stated another way, “[a]uthentic education is not carried on by ‘A’ for ‘B’ or by ‘A’ about ‘B’, but rather by ‘A’ with ‘B’” (Freire, 1970, p. 82). Inspired by this notion, this research study’s findings, and my representation of others’ knowledge, emerged over time through collaborative discourse and sharing of interpretations and experiences. By involving in our research those whom we hope will benefit from it, we “walk the talk” that “at the heart of [research] is an interest in other individuals’ stories because they are
of worth" (Seidman, 1991, p. 3). Ultimately, participation and collaboration are essential, since:

\[
\text{attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building. (Freire, 1970, p. 52)}
\]

Pizarro (1998) furthers that an essential step in the empowering investigative process is "...for the participants to define themselves as authorities. They must know that we are turning to them for guidance" (p. 67). This notion of the research participant as expert, rather than "subject" to be studied, has recently become more widely accepted as a legitimate characteristic of qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Nonetheless, a majority of "[e]ducational research is still a process that for the most part silences those studied, ignores their personal knowledge, and strengthens the assumption that researchers are the producers of knowledge" (Gitlin, 1990, p. 444). This study affirms potentially valuable data collected in such a manner, since
[s]tudents, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge...Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings; and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed. (Freire, 1970, pp. 68-69)

Study participants and I arrived at the conclusion that it would be important for us to study ourselves as experts, and analyze our own experiences, rather than turning to outside sources (other students and teachers\textsuperscript{13}) as "expert" sources of data. Students agreed that we constituted authority enough, especially in light of the fact that resilient and successful Mexican-American individuals\textsuperscript{14} are sadly under-represented (the lack of which provided the driving force behind our investigation) in educational research.

In the spirit of bias disclosure, I point out my educational basic belief, or paradigm, as most closely aligned with constructivism, critical theory, and post-modernism. Whether this epistemology has influenced my

\textsuperscript{13} This went contrary to what we had initially decided to do in the planning phases of this study.

\textsuperscript{14} Study participants are examples of such individuals.
teaching, or whether my classroom experiences have led me to this way of thinking is not clear to me; I view the one as being the fluid and natural extension of the other. From my side of the theoretical stadium, then, I see importance in trying to "do justice to the individual point of view" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) by trying as hard as possible to understand the learner’s perspective. An important task, then, in my own research was to surrender the positivist notion of my being able to represent fairly, objectively, and accurately the experiences and worlds of marginalized groups such as people of color.

Scheurich and Young (1997) posit that "much of the social science knowledge referable to Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans ignores or demeans [members of these races and]... often presents distorted interpretations of minority conditions and potentials" (p.6). The white race is a privileged subset of the population (Stanfield, 1994), and, as the dominant group, is likely to define "the world," or what is "real," according to its own image and way of thinking (Scheurich and Young, p. 7). While my study, then, may serve to present a white perspective of a non-dominant group’s experience, it cannot be said to represent
the dominated group's perspective. Positivist research studies, when viewed from this paradigm, lack sufficient integrity; the world views and perspectives of non-majority groups are considered apparent subjective threats to validity, rather than the important data they represent to qualitative research.

I am aware, from my theoretical framework, of the limitations being placed upon my understanding of the Latino world by my being una gabacha (a white girl). I agree with Seidman (1991, p. 3) that "it is never possible to understand another perfectly, because to do so would mean that we had entered into another's stream of consciousness and experienced what he or she had. If we could do that, we would be another person" (p. 3). I hope that my willingness and effort to remain open to new perspectives, however, made my (white) interpretation of the Mexican-American's experience one that is both responsible and possible\textsuperscript{15}. I also greatly enjoyed participating in the sort of research in which "both the researcher and the researched become, in the words of feminist singer-poet Chris Williamson, 'the changer and the changed'" (Lather, p. 263). To facilitate this transformation and to give my students

\textsuperscript{15} Participants, subsequent to numerous member-checks for accuracy, agreed that it was both.
their voices, my own study was interpretive. The more audible participants' voices and the more hushed the researcher's, the more legitimate I believe this study to be representative, and thus, transferable to the experiences of the class of people considered.

1.4.2 Qualitative Research

As Ralph Ellison observes in *Shadow and Act* (1964), the experiences of people of color "cannot be reduced to statistical tables". They are, he explains, "[t]he experiential places in which the realities of the intellectual enterprise are created and given legitimate expression" (p. 182), existing hidden from the dominant culture as "subjugated knowledge" (Hurtado, 1996, p. 385). The intent of many drop-out related, statistics-based research studies is not, however, to fulfill the three postpositivist inquiry criteria (Lather, 1992), *Understand, Emancipate, and Deconstruct*, by means of such portrait-painting. Quantitative studies fulfill the positivist criterion, *Predict* (Lather, 1992), and this "approach to generating and legitimizing knowledge" (p. 7) appears more concerned with efficiently identifying the
existence of phenomena, rather than exploring their relational elements.

Eisner (1997) appears to prefer qualitative research methodology to quantitative, proposing that if a deeper understanding of a social problem is the intent, then qualitative, descriptive, "story-telling" research might be the better choice: "If we reflect on the culture at large and ask how we convey what we know...we tell stories... Stories instruct, they reveal, they inform in special ways. We also use pictures. They show us what things, places, and people look like" (p. 5). The researcher (1988) further suggests that "...efficiency is mainly a virtue for that we do not like to do" (Eisner, 1988, p. 17). This may be why quantitative research is, for many (white) researchers, the methodology of choice when analyzing minority-related issues. Numbers represent, to positivists, "proof," or "hard data" that marginalized groups are failing. Quantitative measures of statistical rigor cleanly "ensure" that the numbers don't lie; the dominant ideology may be duly saddened, and absolved of responsibility. There is no shortage of quantitative research indicating a severe rate of educational failure by minorities; there remains,
however, a marked absence of those studied voices’ insights into what is causing them to fail.

An important opportunity to listen to those expert perspectives, then, might be afforded by qualitative research, since “[n]ot everything will take the stamp of a numerical system,” (Eisner, 1988). “People begin to judge [quality] on the basis of certain kinds of indices, but those indices do not tell the whole story” (p.5). Eisner (1997) furthers that people, as verificationists (many of whom are positivists), feel a need to “...[concretize] our view of what it means to know. We prefer our knowledge solid and like our data hard. It makes for a firm foundation, a secure place on which to stand. Knowledge as process, a temporary state, is scary to many” (p. 7). Thus as educational policy makers and practitioners, Eisner contends that perhaps,“[w]e should be concerned about not simply school performance,” the focus of much educational reform, but more importantly “the relationship between school and the lives that our youngsters lead. The real dependent variables in education are located outside, not inside, the school. But the independent variables we examine are the treatments we employ; the dependent variables are the test scores” (p. 6).
Bruner (1990) proposes that as educators, then,

We shall be able to interpret meanings and meaning-making in a principled manner only in the degree to which we are able to specify the structure and coherence of the larger contexts in which specific meanings are created and transmitted. (pp. 64-65)

Influenced by these researchers' perspectives, I therefore prefer thick, detailed qualitative relational explorations such as those conducted by O'Connor (1997), Valdés (1996), and Pizarro (1998). Such research gives voice to the victims of the exhaustively-documented rate of minority academic failure, providing a richer portrait and a deeper understanding than its quantitative counterpart; "[i]t is about the ways in which the transformation of experience from the personal to the public can occur" (Eisner, 1997, p. 7).

My theoretical framework is, additionally, to a great degree built upon Freire's (1970) notion that "reflection - true reflection - leads to action" (p. 52), and Patricia Maguire's (1987) refining and parsing such research into three parts: investigation, education, and action. The dominant class may have much
to lose in admitting race, class, and gender inequity; in order to withstand a likely barrage of defensive criticism, research related to these three areas may have to be especially strong. A study lacking in any one of these areas will be weakened, and will not be an agent of change for the group whose situation it is meant to improve. The degree to which research studies meet these criteria, as well as how the data are used to benefit the studied group(s), may therefore be of great importance.

My recognition of my being a member of the dominant group, thus seemingly lacking right-of-entry to certain kinds of information, was thus of importance to my own research. Hurtado (1996) confirms that "the differences in value attached to significant group memberships to a large extent determines what access individuals have to knowledge, what is considered knowledge, and ultimately how it is that one comes to perceive oneself as knowledgeable in spite of one's group memberships" (p. 372). I believe that a researcher’s debriefing with study participants, then, is of great importance to a study’s credibility within this theoretical framework. The degree to which researchers’ exploration designs are “interactive, contextualized, and humanly compelling because they invite joint participation in
the exploration of the research issues" (Lather, 1986, p. 259), is additionally, I believe, critical to emancipatory research such as this study strives to be. These notions shall serve as guiding principles of this project, such that participants' feelings of agency led them

...to see that their writings, which represented their worlds, their thoughts, and their feelings, had the power to evoke response. from a reader (Livdahl, 1991, p. 70)

Further, as Freire (1970) maintains,

[o]nly dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education. (p. 81)

This notion was clearly borne out in the insightful observations of this project's participants found throughout this dissertation.

Valdés (1998) precisely expresses my own feelings subsequent to my participants' and my joint exploration:
During the period that I have been attempting to write this book, the struggle has involved finding a voice with which to write con respeto y cariño (respectfully and in friendship\textsuperscript{16}). The families and the children that I studied are, to me, not just examples of Mexican immigrants, but people whom I came to know and care for. I started out seeing them and relating to them as people who were part of my study, and somewhere along the three-year period of frequent contact, I stepped over the line, and they became part of an extended network of special friends. (p. 13)

Further illustrating the closeness that evolved over the months that students and I collaborated, Valdés (1998), herself observes that her participants, "...had become like a part of my own extended family... I had been allowed to enter their worlds, and ...several women and I became good friends" (p. 13).

1.4.3 Participants' Autobiographical Statements

**Martha:** Martha is an eighteen-year-old high school senior who has been residing in the United States for three and a half years. Living in México while her

\textsuperscript{16} I might translate this a bit differently: "with respect and affectionate concern"
husband was in the United States earning money to send home to support her, Martha’s mother became pregnant with her, and decided to join her husband in Longview. Nearly seven months pregnant with Martha, she obtained a passport and papers through her brother, a lawyer, and traveled to this country as if she were her brother’s secretary.

Martha and her parents lived in the U.S. for around two years after her birth; however, they decided to return to México. The family wanted to stay together, and because there were very few Mexicans living in Longview in the early 1980s, Martha’s mother wanted to return to México. Born in this country, Martha and her younger sister are the only two U.S. citizens in the family. Taken back to México when she was two years old, and like numerous Mexican nationals (although she is a U.S. citizen), Martha was raised in a rancho (a small, close-knit community with around five to twenty homes), by her parents, until the age of fifteen, when she and her family relocated to Oregon.

My name is Martha and I’m eighteen years old. I was born in the United States, but my family moved back to México when I was two. When I was fifteen years old, I came to the United States with all my family, and now have lived in this country for three and half years. In my family I am the oldest, and I have three sisters and two brothers. Both of my parents work, and I have the
responsibility of staying home and taking care of my siblings. My parents are very nice with them and with me, and always worry about us. They are very understanding with me.

Imagine living in a small town where there is no electricity or running water. The houses are made out of mud, there aren’t concrete streets, toilets or any emergency medical resources. Well, this is not fictional; it is my real life story. Although I was born in a country with all the commodities, at the age of two my parents decided to move back to México. Even though at that time I didn’t understand exactly what was going on, I often thought about how my life would differ if I would have been raised in this country. I am now at an age where I can analyze these situations. I thank them for having me experience this kind of life. Being raised in an environment like I mentioned gave me pride. It makes me value things more to the degree of realizing simple things that even can make a difference in other peoples’ lives. It allowed me to have a greater connection with the history of my people.

My life as a child was simple, yet complicated. I come from an honest, humble family of seven. I realize that being the oldest puts a lot of responsibility in one’s life. In my experiences I probably had a diverse childhood, while other children who were my age played and had a complete father figure. I didn’t, because my father was always working to better our family. As early as five years old I had the responsibility of maintaining many of the household chores. At this age I was already washing clothes in the “lavadero” (a hard surface made out of cement or it could simply be a rock). I was taking the responsibilities of an adult.

As I was growing older in México, education was not important to me. In fact, I didn’t even understand the purpose of education. Later, I realized its importance, and now I can tell you that education is one of the most important values that one can hope for. My mentality is now completely turned around. I realize that once you learn something, no one can take that away from
you. It is only through education that one can attain the necessary knowledge to succeed in life.

Well, in my personality I am a quiet person. I don’t like to talk in front of people because my face gets so red, but most of the time I don’t talk too much, just when it is necessary. I like to be quiet because I like to think, and to watch what other people are doing.

During summers I work, just for that short time. When I was in México, I never thought to come to the United States even though I was born here. I had every possibility to come here easily, but in México I was happy. I had everything I wanted, and a big home with four bedrooms and a big yard to play in. In México I didn’t suffer because my dad was always working, but I just saw him for a short time during vacations because he had to come here and work for us. When my dad was here in the U.S. and we were in México, he wrote letters and sent money to us, and we used to talk with him on the phone each weekend.

Some students that were with me in ESL I, now they don’t go to school because they started to have friends that aren’t good. They start to change, but I think that when we want to study and to be something we can do it. But we have to work hard.

Ana Like Martha, Ana is a quiet young woman whose silence is no indication of a lack of perceptiveness or expressiveness. I will not try to hide my strong admiration for Ana and her accomplishments under inconceivable circumstances that would most likely have incapacitated anyone without exceptional strength. I have a similarly profound respect for Junior and Lory17.

17 Because I had not met Mayra, a study participant, prior to this study, and because she was not present for many meetings, I am not very well-acquainted with her.
All researchers in this project participated at some risk to themselves. The possibility of a pseudonym’s being disclosed and a student’s being recognized, was an omni-present threat under which students collaborated, and of which they were frequently reminded. Ana’s, however, represents more than a nebulous possibility of hardship; hers was a level of acute discomfort, bordering on pain, at having painful memories brought up and explored. Her commitment to the goals of the project, however, was so strong that she was never absent from any of the numerous daily group meetings.

I was born in México, and remained there throughout my infancy. The only place I moved from there is here. I have been in the United States for four years, and I like it. I didn’t have many friends because since I was around eight I had been helping my grandparents, and I didn’t have the opportunity to play with children my age.

My family are very honest people and we like to show, not to talk, because we think that words are just words. That the air takes them away, and that’s why sometimes we can’t take them back after we have said them. That’s something very important that I always keep in my mind.

Well. One day when I first came to the United States, I was in the store with my aunt. She didn’t speak English, and I didn’t, either. So it was the first time I tried to speak English, and I was afraid and shy that nobody was going to understand what I was trying to say. My aunt and I went to ask for a kind of shampoo. When I asked them for it they showed us the brand, and I couldn’t believe they had understood me. That day
was the most exciting because I knew that I was learning and could speak with different people.

But I told this to my uncle, and he told me that not all Americans like Mexican people. He told me to be careful. That day I learned the difference between us, but later I met a girl named Michelle. She was American, and we talked about México and the United States. She told me that she would like to go to México, so I explained to her what it was like to live there. All we talked about that day was our two countries.

Anstrom (1997) calls attention to the ways in which such interaction between members of heterogeneous groups can, as Ana perceived, be a positive experience:

Students collaborate and thus learn from students of differing backgrounds and beliefs. Learners greatly benefit from the resulting variety of experiences, belief systems, and vantage points. Similarly...students may feel kinship with others similar to themselves, or develop a valuable respect for different perspectives and ways of being. (Anstrom, 1997)

Ana further reflects,

That's why I think there are good and bad people. I had never spoken English before that girl, because I was shy to make mistakes. My sisters and I talk about it now and we think some Americans are confused about us, but others know why we came here and left México.

When I tried to go to work and I didn't speak English, I learned how hard it was to work without
English. Some people think that it’s not important to speak as long as they’re working since at least they are working, but they don’t see that they are stuck in a poor job. I’m not trying to say that if I’m going to work I want to become rich, because we work to eat and to have the things we need to survive.

That’s why I’m always thinking about my education. Sometimes teenage girls get pregnant, and that changes their whole future. Maybe getting married doesn’t make them change if they don’t have children, but if they aren’t married and do have children, they would be in a way with no exit.

I think that every parent has to be in communication with his or her whole family, especially with teenagers. Because sometimes they feel that that no-one loves them, and there’s where they are in danger. I think the reason most Mexicans drop out of school is that when they start having problems, their parents don’t speak enough English to get them help, or they are too busy working to help their families survive.

Mayra told us about her experiences and it was interesting, but that made me remember some bad things about my life. So when the group asked me about mine I told them, but my life is very sad and I cried because I talked about my experiences with my family. So I would like to continue, because maybe that could help me, to get some peace, because I never talk about these things with anybody else...I never tell my goals to anyone, because I like to make them up first. Then I show them all I can do.18

Now I’m still doing my best, and I will do that for the rest my life. I have many people around me that I love and who I know love me, too. Those people always believe in my power of learning, and they always tell me to be strong and

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18 Ana has not described her commitment to helping her peers through her participation in this project. She has, however, contemplated and then gone against the advice of the people she respects most, demonstrating her commitment to it. Ana has spent countless hours writing in her journal, and, like her peers, has discussed extremely private experiences, feelings and goals with the added discomfort of a tape-recorder placed almost directly in front of her (not only as a tacit reminder to participants of their being recorded, but also because Ana is so soft-spoken).
face everything, especially the things that could hurt me. They also tell me not to stop my eagerness to do my work and accomplish all my goals."

**Lory:** Benard (1996) defines resilience as "our inborn capacity for self-righting" and for transformation and change. Lory is a perfect illustration of self-righting resilience despite extremely difficult circumstances.

"My Respect for This Person"

The person that I admire and respect is a smart girl; she is smart because she studies and tries to do her work perfectly. And she is nice, too, nice in the way she is with people and teachers. She knows how to communicate with everybody.

Another thing about her is that she has a sweet personality. If people treat her nicely, she does the same thing with them. But if they mess with her, they will be regretting having done that. That is the way she is.

Helping others is a part of what [Lory] likes to do; she is a helpful person. She never stops doing her work—once she starts, she never quits. She is like this because she has been through a lot of stuff in her life.

[Lory] used to be a troublemaker, someone that didn’t care about herself or her life. She was stuck in a hole and going nowhere, starting in middle school,
and through her sophomore year of high school. She has had many experiences in her lifetime.

Something I should mention is that she has made important differences in my life too, because I was in the same hole she was in. That is why I thank her for all she has done for me. I really do not know what I would do without her.

- Lory’s younger brother

Lory states,

What has been very important for me in my life, and is still important, has been helping my friends get out of the hole that some are in. Doing this has also taught me a lot about life, and made me realize things. What has helped me a lot to get through school is the tutoring that I have received there, and a very special teacher that I appreciate and miss a lot. She was like a mother to me and my brother. She was a very big support, both in my family and in our community.

Well my personal experiences have been very different than Martha’s, Ana’s, and Junior’s, but there’s been a lot in common. When I was only ten years old I started skipping school, talking back to my parents. Not caring about anybody or anything, and being a rebellious and stupid child. I thought I was able to do whatever I pleased, but by doing stupid things I was hurting my parents and especially my little brother, whom I thought I would never hurt, by doing those things. Later on it got to the point that I was

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19 Lory’s younger brother, a former high school student of mine, was asked in another class to write a composition describing someone whom he admires. He showed the paper to me, and, upon my asking, granted me permission to reproduce it in this dissertation. It has, like all participants’ writings, been edited for grammar.
selling drugs, was already in a gang, stealing, fighting, doing drug runs, doing drive-bys; all types of criminal things. But the worst thing of all was that I was doing drugs that ruined my life, and those of the ones who love me. I was falling in a black hole, and I was pulling them in with me, even though they didn’t deserve it.

I’d stay away from home if my parents were asking a lot of questions or doing things that bothered me, taking off and doing whatever I wanted with my life. When I was not living at home I was doing a lot of drugs, and sometimes I wouldn’t eat for two or three days or sleep for a week. All I would do is get more into it. Thank God that I never passed out or died or something.

I remember starting to slow down when I saw my best friend overdose. They took her to the hospital, and she started rehab. That made me realize so many things, like that my family loves me so much, no matter what.

I was especially worried about my mom, that she would get sick because of me. I started thinking about my future; what I wanted to be, and what I wanted to have. If it was worth it to drop out of school, and leave all of those years of study behind.

When I got more into drugs I was thinking that there was no point for me to be in this world, that I was nobody important, and that my parents wouldn’t want me because of the bad things that I was doing. That I was going to bring problems to them. All kinds of crazy things passed through my mind.

Still, throughout all of this I stayed in school. My mom and a teacher, who I love so much, were very close to each other. I say “love” because she was able to understand everything like a mom. Even though she wasn’t fortunate enough to have her own kids, she considered her students her own children. When I was in the eighth grade, my mom and that teacher got together and talked, so she knew what was going on.

But I was trying my hardest to keep going with school, to get my grades up, to show my family that I could do it. That I was not going to
fall into that black hole again, that I was going to start going the right way in my life. But I was still dealing drugs. That was a matter of money, because that money was mine. I was able to do what I pleased, to buy whatever I wanted to.

The biggest disgrace was that my parents no longer had confidence in me, which really depressed me a lot. That was what I deserved, for not taking into account all that I had caused them to suffer, for all of the bad situations that they had to bear because of me.

But I was determined to make them see that I could move ahead with my life, and regain their faith. Still today I’m continuing to work at it, showing them that I’ve earned their trust back. I’ve shown them by getting good grades, attending school every day, and being involved in extra-curricular activities. I’ve done sports, participated in clubs, am helping other people, like the ones who want to drop out, or who are doing bad things. I was doing things like that at a time when I myself was still having some problems of my own.

**Junior:** Junior is exceptional because he has been exposed to several of the risk factors traditionally associated with drop-outs, yet he clearly demonstrates all of the internal protective factors of resilience. Junior always walks right along its edge, but manages to stay on the “right side” of the risk line.
My friends and I used to live in a 'hood [neighborhood] near to each other, and we used to hang out together. We always used to go to a place where there’s a bunch of trees. We called that place "El Pino" [The Pine]. We used to say that we owned the biggest tree, and that it was our territory. But I left to come down to the United States two years ago, and I really miss my family and friends.

Eighteen years ago when my mom was fifteen, she married my dad, and they both came to the United States. When my mom turned sixteen I was born, but a year later we had to move to México, because we had a lot of economic problems. When I arrived in México, I was one year old. From then until I turned three I was constantly sick, but when I turned three my body got adapted to that climate.

I started to go to school when I was five, and I remember that I was terrified about the idea. I got used to it, but as soon as I started to go to elementary school I became terrified all over again. But again I also got used to it, and everything became normal for me, and I had friends who I used to play with.

At age eleven I was in the sixth grade, and everything was real bad for me at school, because people started to make fun of me and to insult me in my own face. Those were just words, and they didn’t hurt me, but I was feeling a lot more loneliness inside me. Our situation, at that time, became really bad because my mother didn’t have money to buy us as much food as before, and she and my grandmother had a lot of debts with people who had let them borrow money. It was really frustrating to me because before I had always had everything I wanted, and now I could barely have what I needed.

When I turned thirteen, everything was good at home. I got used to not spending money although I had the desire to do it, and my uncle was sending us money for our needs. I decided to put myself on a diet, so I lost a lot of weight and had a skinny body. It took me only a month to do this, but right after that I got sick, had a
fever, and felt weak. I was like this for over a month, but after that I recuperated and was healthy again, but with a better body.

Everything became harder for me because I couldn’t finish middle school (la secundaria), and I had to say ‘bye to my mom, my sisters, and my grandparents. I wasn’t going to see my friends for a while, but my aunt and my uncle decided to come with us to the United States. I had a lot more trouble crossing the border than they did because the people from immigration didn’t want to believe that I had been born in this country, while someone else helped my uncle and aunt to cross.

Once we were in Ciudad Juarez, a guy who is a friend of the family took us to a place that was near the border between Oregon and Cali. But he couldn’t get further because his truck broke down, and my other uncle had to pick us up and take us to Oregon, to my uncle’s house.

Everything changed for me when we got here. I came on the last day of March, and it was all incredible to me. The houses were pretty different than the ones in México, and the parks were cool, and I could get lost in the stores. But I didn’t want to go out of the house because I was afraid of everything. I started to attend school around the middle of April, and I was scared and didn’t know where to go. But I met a lot of friends, and they helped me whenever they could.

Time passed, and the day my birthday arrived, everything got worse. I turned seventeen, and no one in this country cared about it, only my family and friends who were in México. They sent me letters asking me why I didn’t come back, and in the meantime my family here continued to ignore me. In general, it’s been the case that if they talk to me, it’s only to start nagging me. As a result, anytime I have a problem I try to solve it for myself, no matter how big or complicated it is. The worst thing is that I don’t have anyone I can trust, or anywhere I can get advice. The only thing I can do is to escape from my daily home routine by being on the streets.

When I was working at the cannery, I worked and studied for a whole month, and it was like
hell for me because I was always tired, and wasn’t sleeping much. At school I had some boring classes. Around the middle of February one of my best friends moved back to México, and I felt sad because we had always gone cruising with our other friend every weekend, and now things weren’t going to be the same. I became a lonely person at home, even though I hung out with some friends that I met here at school. Then a few weeks later I found out that my best friend (R.I.P.) had passed away, and another one of my friends (whom I didn’t hang around with too often) had also died.

I remained the only one left after another of my friends who had come to the United States died a few months later, and then a classmate and friend of mine was killed just last year. Now I feel misunderstood by my family, my uncle doesn’t like me, and always calls me “Gangster ****”[sic].

Junior’s family experience has been different from other study participants’ as well:

But now I’m more interested in studying than ever. When I first came, I didn’t care much about school and I always wanted to stay away from home and clique with my homies. But since December of last year I decided that I would have a better life if I study and graduate. The reason I hadn’t been interested in school earlier was that I hadn’t known how the school’s credit system works, and now I’m so interested in graduating that I even decided not to go to México last year.

Individuals with worldviews shaped by different familial backgrounds and life experiences, all study participants were, by the most prominents experts in that field’s\textsuperscript{20} definition, resilient individuals. As

their words will illustrate, their academic experiences in the American school system, however, were remarkably, and disturbingly, similar.

**Mayra:** Mayra was the only study participant with whom I had not been acquainted prior to this study. A vivacious, outgoing young lady, Mayra never appeared hesitant to express her viewpoints, and her participation in the study lent the study a perspective both interesting and informative.

Hello! My name is Mayra, and I’m going to talk a little bit about myself. I was born in Michoacán, México, in a little city called Zacapu. I was very happy growing up there with my family, until, at the age of twelve years old, I moved to the United States.

We are eight in my family and I am the oldest child. Every year we organize big celebrations with our family and friends to celebrate holidays. A very friendly person, I love to dance, and have fun with my friends.

I’m always happy, even if I have sufferings, because I know that if I laugh, it’s going to be better both for me and for everyone around me. In conclusion, I might summarize myself as a dreamer, a playful girl, and one who is determined to move ahead in this life. I hope that everyone who reads this will understand that sometimes the situations make you do things that you really don’t want to, and that is why Mexican people often decide to emigrate here; it’s not just because we want to; it’s because we need to.

I have many dreams, and try to look my best at all times. My favorite things to do in my free time are to dance, to play soccer, to draw, and to talk on the phone with my friends, but I also
to help people when they need me. One of my dreams is to be very famous.

My dad was working in Oregon while we were living in México, but he had to come back because of an emergency. My sister died, and after her death, my parents decided to move the family to the United States. I was in agreement with them, because my sister's dream had been to come to this country. She had believed that if she were over here, her illness would be cured.

Now I'm here helping my parents to support our family, because I'm the oldest child. From the beginning this has been hard, since I did not speak any English. When we'd been living in México my parents had hired an English teacher for me, but I didn't have that much time to learn it well. Then, when I arrived to this country, I was confronted by many problems beyond just the new language, including drugs and gangs.

I attended elementary school, middle school, and high school in this country, but my real problems began in high school. I made many friends, but most of them were into gangs and also drugs. Why? I believe simply because we were, at that age, old enough to think for ourselves.

I began to change my personality as well as my style of dress, and these changes caused me to have problems at home with my parents. My attitude became very bad, and my grades at school began to drop. I got through this difficult time, and I learned from the experience.

One thing that helped me was that, ever since I was born, I have loved music; in fact, I'm sure that music is going to be my favorite hobby forever. I remember that every time that I'd have an argument with my family, I'd stay in my room listening to my music. I'm thankful to God, because it was through listening to music that I began to dream. It was then that I began to become very sure that if I wanted to be something in this world, I could do it.

I trust myself to do anything that I want to do, and I have shared my dreams with my family. I have been surprised to find that they will
support me in anything that I choose to do, and I now realize that they will always be there for me in any way when I need support.

In high school I began to work at a wonderful radio station as a volunteer. I gained experience by doing so; I also had a chance to learn about the profession and to see if it was something I was able to do, or interested in pursuing. Working there was the best decision I made in my whole life. Later on, I began work at another radio station answering telephones, until one day they asked me if I wanted to become a disc jockey.

Although I knew how d.j.s did their job, I had never imagined myself sitting there speaking into a microphone to I don’t know how many people. But, again, I had to trust in myself, so I decided to try it. I was successful there, so the station decided to give me time on the air to do my own show.

I worked at that station for about two years, and although I am no longer employed there, I already have other open doors waiting for me. I’ve done so many other things as well, including a television show (although it was only a local one), but the important thing is that I have done them.

Now, since I have experience, people know that I can do many things. They don’t stop to think that I’m the same person who they thought one day might become involved with gangs and drugs. I have never taken any drugs. I have never been in a gang, either, but my friends were.

I still have dreams; I know that they will come true because I trust in myself, and know that I have to gain others’support and respect. Why? Because nothing in this world is free. Work hard, have dreams, trust yourself, and the most important part of this game is to make the best choices for yourself. Not for your family, not for your friends, but for you.
1.5 The Presentation of Our Findings

This dissertation is organized into chapters, each of which represents a theme which participants and I deemed significant. This judgement was based upon the number of participant observations that we agreed could most accurately be categorized under each concept. Subheadings denote tendrils of these major themes, which, although significant, did not contain enough data to stand alone as chapters, nor could they be dismissed as uninformative.

Themes throughout are organized in what we judged to be a logically-connected sequence, and interspersed among student-participants' observations are research excerpts that might present the reader with a greater understanding of what they describe. Such excerpts are set off in "block format," noticeably offset from the left and right margins, and single-spaced. Student-participants' observations are also single-spaced; however, each is preceded by the speaker's pseudonym, and formatted using standard margins. My own observations are easily distinguishable by virtue of their being double-spaced, and considerably more long-winded.
2. RESILIENCE

That students' success or failure in the societal and the academic arenas interact and are positively related seems clear to me. Which success foretells the other, however, is a chicken-or-egg debate that, while interesting, yields no conclusively-generalizable answer. My professional observation has been that some students, functioning well within their community, transfer their social skills into the academic setting. Others demonstrating school-related competence often carry the resulting strong self-concept into other areas of their lives, leading them to enjoy additional success. Given this apparent relationship, I suggest our tremendous ability as educators to maximize the chances of Hispanic ESL students' educational and societal success through our individual and institutional practices. I believe that the most successful approach to such a proactive intervention might occur on two fronts; the first would involve educating the school faculties and staffs who are, for the most part, inadvertently harming ESL and other non-majority students.
In a study of how ethnicity, ethnic identity, minority status, and perception of opportunities affect school performance, Matute-Bianchi (1986) found that "...different students utilize strategies to cope with the demands of schooling and that these strategies are both participatory and reactive" (p. 254). The second form of support to be implemented at all scholastic levels, then, would involve better equipping the at-risk learners themselves with the internal protective factors to themselves effectively navigate an educational environment in which they have not traditionally experienced a high degree of success.

2.1 Resiliency and Environmental Protective Factors

Personal resources, promoters of resiliency, describe the internal attitudes and personality traits that people possess which can mitigate the negative effects of a potentially damaging environment (Garmezy, 1981, 1983). Environmental resources, on the other hand, are those external sources of information, advice, and affective support that help individuals to advance in adverse environments (Garmezy, 1981, 1983), and which may often cause individuals to feel cared
about, supported, and esteemed by members of their social network (Barrera, 1986). Among potential external mediators are people playing important roles in a child's life (e.g., parents, relatives, friends and teachers). As will be illustrated in detail, schools can additionally serve as critical environmental resources with the power to alleviate the negative effects of stress on scholastic accomplishment.

A considerable number of studies indicate that individuals' social problem-solving skills, differing perception of locus of control, and sense of agency may be significant factors in predicting the academic success among marginalized students. Gándara (1995), for example, interviewed 45 highly-educated and successful\textsuperscript{21} Mexican-American professionals who, despite having grown up in relatively poor and uneducated families, had earned graduate academic and professional degrees (PhD, M.D., and J.D.). She found that 51 percent of respondents credited persistence, an individually elective personal resource, as the single factor responsible for their high level of achievement; hard work and ability, associated with internal protective factors, were identified as the two next

\begin{footnote}{21} Judged by American cultural standards, which are not necessarily those defining success in the Mexican culture.\end{footnote}
most significant factors responsible for their impressive academic accomplishments\textsuperscript{22}.

O'Connor's (1997) Resilient Six's varied social backgrounds were, like participants' in this study, representative of a larger study's diverse home environments. Sharing, however, a similarly high level of achievement and an optimistic outlook on their life opportunities akin again to students' in this study, all resilient participators in O'Connor's (1997) investigation were also keenly aware of how race and class operated to threaten the life chances of people in their situations.

Additionally, an analysis "by which and [of] the extent to which struggle figured prominently in their imaginations" (p. 597) revealed that, unlike their peers from the larger project, all resilient respondents, similar to those in this study, were familiar with the notion of struggle and the possibility of resulting favorable change\textsuperscript{11}.

O'Connor (1997), Gándara (1995), and Valdés's (1996, 1998) findings are consistent with those of numerous other researchers studying the relationship between children's perceived locus of control and their academic achievement. Learners with a strong sense of

\textsuperscript{22} Differences in gender were also identified, substantiating the noted, and under-researched (e.g., Losey, 1997), interaction between the Mexican culture and issues of gender achievement.
academic direction, it seems, repeatedly credit their success to stable internal protective factors, and will tend to ascribe negative outcomes to inconstant elements such as lack of effort. It also appears that individuals who feel powerless, however, will tend to attribute their failure to a lack of personal ability.\textsuperscript{23} Marginalized people who have failed academically may also be more likely, retrospectively, to attribute their failure to a lack of effort rather than to institutional barriers which may have impeded their success. Similarly of potential importance to Mexican-American students is research relating the impact of stressful life occurrences with the development of feelings of self-efficacy. Alva (1991) concludes that marginalized learners who repeatedly endure stressful events beyond their control\textsuperscript{24} may develop feelings of helplessness that interfere with their academic motivation and performance. Over time, these students may become at high risk of believing that they cannot overcome failure.

\textsuperscript{23} Gender differences in assignment of causes of success were also noted, with females more inclined to exemplify those of academically powerless individuals.

\textsuperscript{24} Such events may include discrimination or poverty.
2.2 The Difference between The Resilient Five and Others

Peer pressure can represent a significant influence upon high school students, especially to those whose needs are not being met by the other significant individuals in their lives. Often those whom teenagers call their "friends" do not behave in ways encouraging them to make the best possible decisions, so the ability to withstand negative persuasion is especially important. English as a Second Language students, far from their friends, family, and home, may be especially at risk of feeling desolate and in need of new connections. The ability, then, to form attachments with friends who encourage their strength rather than their weakness is crucial.

Study participants described having been exposed to friends who encouraged them to skip school or engage in negative behaviors ultimately detrimental to themselves; each participant also described having had minimal difficulty in choosing to resist these influences.

Junior related how although students often taunt their peers into doing bad things (e.g., committing acts of vandalism and taking drugs), he himself will not cave to this kind of pressure, nor has he ever been one to do so. On separate occasions all other
participants agreed that they simply walk away from such pressure, and, upon recognizing the overall negative influence of such potentially harmful companions, no longer associated with these individuals.

Ana, for example, told our group about her long, in-depth talks with a fourteen-year-old cousin who was associating with cholito, or gangster-type, friends. This young man, not wanting to fall victim to his friends' encouraging him to engage in self-destructive, "deviant" behaviors, expressed his finding it increasingly difficult not to succumb to the peer pressure, and turned to Ana for help. As Ana further described the situation, Junior and other participants nodded in recognition of what they said is a standard taunt directed at one hesitating to join the group: "Esta 'bajo de las faldas de su mamá" (he's under his mother's skirts)²⁵. Recounting how her cousin asked her, "What do I do?", Ana described how, to her, the solution was obvious (other participants nodded in agreement as she spoke, possible additional evidence of their resilience): "Piensa por ti mismo (Think for yourself)."

²⁵ Junior added that another gibe he has frequently heard is "Just let him go...his husband is going to hit him if he gets home late."
None of the participants, further, appeared to easily relate to this young man's difficulty in "just saying no." Junior, for example, asserted his belief that no-one can force another to do something that (s)he doesn't wish to; people, he posited, do not typically put a gun to another person's head to influence that person's decisions. When faced with friends trying to shame him into doing something against his will, he recalled his sarcastically asking them, "Would you repeat that?" They typically, Junior furthered, would never ask him again. All other student-participants demonstrated a similar immunity to negative peer pressure, a noteworthy way in which they differ from many of their peers:

**Lory:** I think that persistence and strength are responsible for the change in me. I'm successful because I never do what people tell me to do when they try to push me around, and I try to get along with other people. I also don't give up easily, and don't let people get me down.

I'm able to do things correctly all by myself; someone only has to tell me how to do something once, and I'll get it right away without their having to repeat it. I will ask for help, but only when I'm not very sure of something, like whether my math problems are correct, or if I'm having difficulty with my homework. If I'm not sure of what to do in my personal life, I'll ask for a few opinions of people I trust.

I'm pretty sure that I could be accurately described as self-motivated. If I have a goal, I'll reach it no matter what. My attitude and my
character have been important to turning myself around. So has the way I care about others and try to help them first before myself.

**Ana:** The difference between me and other people is that others often use bad language, and I don’t ever say bad words, or offend anyone. Other kids get into fights, but I don’t like to do that, either. They many times don’t like to study, do their homework, or pay attention to the teacher. I always try to do my best by doing all of those things.

Many kids behave disrespectfully towards others out in public; I respect others by not doing what I call “putting on a show” for others. I always tell the truth to my family, the ones who I know love me. Many teenagers always try to do things on their own, without thinking of the impact of what they do on the people whom they love. I always check with my family first before doing something that could affect them in a bad way.

**Martha:** What are the differences between us and the other ESL students? Well, I think that it is that the other students don’t talk to their parents, or their parents don’t care about their kids. Some kids don’t come to school, and others who do don’t know why they are doing it. I think that these kids need someone to talk to because much of the time they have problems, and that’s why they do the bad things that they do.

I think that the reason that people do well in life is because of what is inside of them. Like the desire to continue to fight and to move ahead, no matter what. But really the most important thing to my own academic success has been my parents. They always talk to me, give me good advice, and work to keep good communication with their children.

When I was in México, I just saw my dad for around three months, because he had to come back to the U.S. to work. I never thought about why my dad wasn’t all the time with us; I didn’t even know what kind of work
he did when he came here. Also, when I was in México, I just would just go to school. I was happy there, but I never thought about what I wanted to do in my future.

So when I got here and I saw my dad working hard, I started to like school and to get excited about learning a second language. I started to dream about being something in life, and to think differently than before. Now I am in ESL V, and speak almost always in English. I understand everything. It is hard, but it is something that I did. Now I just have one class in ESL, and the rest are regular classes. I have always gotten good grades to get to this point.

I think that the personal characteristics that have helped me to be successful are my respect for others, and the way that I am with them. I owe this to the way that my parents brought me up, because I am very respectful, and I think that being this way is very important. This makes me different, because there are many who don’t know how to respect others.

Mayra: The difference between me and the other students in ESL is that I am a very decisive person, and a fighter. I don’t like to conform with anything, or have less than the best. The difference between me and the other students is that I would like to control things, and not have things control me.

Each of the differences identified by the Resilent Five are "internal factors" directly controllable by the individual. The presence of such internal locus of control, perhaps especially important to ESL students' success in a difficult and foreign external environment, is also central to the concept of logotherapy.
2.3 Frankl and Logotherapy

2.3.1 Logotherapy and Motivation

Viktor Frankl’s (1963) notion of logotherapy provided me with a deeper understanding of what student participants shared in this study. Logotherapy (also referred to as “The Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy”) focuses on “the meaning of human existence as well as man’s [sic] search for such a meaning (Frankl, 1963, pp. 153-154).” As such, logotherapy may be an appropriate lens through which to study the resiliency of ESL students\(^{26}\) in facing the many obstacles that impede their academic success.

Logotherapy describes

...the striving to find a meaning in one’s life is the primary motivational force in man [sic]\(^{27}\)...Man’s search for meaning... is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance that will satisfy his own will to meaning” (Frankl, p. 154).

\(^{26}\) This includes both study participants as well as their ESL peers.

\(^{27}\) all male references are directly quoted from Frankl’s writings, but should be understood to apply to females, as well
Such an internal locus of control is a trait commonly attributed to resilient individuals, children and adults alike (e.g. Benard, 1993, 1995, 1996; Frankl, 1963; Henderson, 1996).

Alfie Kohn (1993), for example, presents research evidence that "reduced intrinsic motivation produces achievement deficits" (Boggiano et al., 1989, P. 24) similar to those observed in Mexican-American high school students. Therefore "[e]ven if what matters to us is how well children learn, we still have to focus on intrinsic motivation" (Kohn, 1993, p. 147). In his discussion of the importance of internal motivation and locus of control, Kohn (1993) cites Ames and Dweck, "two of our most penetrating thinkers on the subject of academic motivation" (p. 148). He recounts their having "...independently pointed out that we cannot explain children’s lack of interest in learning simply by citing low ability, poor performance, or low self-esteem, although these factors may play some role...The decisive issue, it turns out, concerns students’ goals with respect to learning" (Kohn, 1993, p.148).

Struggle is the key to combating ennui, according to Frankl (1963); he contends that "what man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggling for some goal worthy of him...a
polar field of tension where one pole is represented by a meaning to be fulfilled and the other by the man [sic] who must fulfill it" (p. 166). A healthy individual, therefore, will not grow and develop unless engaged in life-long pursuit of knowledge and a constant striving for self-betterment. Thus "it can be seen that mental health is based on a certain degree of tension, the tension between what one has already achieved, and what one still ought to accomplish, or the gap between what one is and what one should become” (p. 166).

Tremendous potential power therefore lies within the individual, as has been witnessed even in conditions as extreme and terrible as concentration camp survival:

[T]here were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom; which determined whether you would or would not become the plaything of circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity to become molded in the form of the typical inmate. (Frankl, 1963, p. 104-105)
2.3.2 Logotherapy and The Power Within

Resilience research suggests that the logotherapeutic drive to move ahead and focus on a perceived greater meaning might be promoted on both the internal and external fronts. Practitioners and researchers further, corroborating Frankl (1963), have demonstrated that not all adolescents who endure disadvantaged environments will develop psychological problems or experience academic difficulties. Further exploration into the source of such resiliency in the face of obstacles, such as that demonstrated by this study's participants, might prove momentous in the promotion of resiliency among students at risk of academic failure. It is in light of Frankl's (1963) powerful notion, that the individual may develop the ability to determine her individual reaction to a set of circumstances beyond one's own control, that I engaged in my own exploration.

Within the same dysfunctional family, for example, one individual may lead the rest of his life from a focal point of a terrible childhood trauma. His sibling, however, may vow to seize upon the second chance at a healthy future family dynamic by making an on-going and conscious effort to create it with his own

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spouse and children. Within the same classroom walls, similarly, when presented with the same academic environmental advantages or constraints, certain learners will rise to the occasion, while others will abdicate the responsibility of doing so. As Frankl (1963) challenges, "[w]hich choice will be made an actuality once and forever, an immortal 'footprint in the sands of time'? At any moment, man [sic] must decide, for better or for worse, what will be the monument of his existence (p. 191)."

Controlling personality factors inherent to the learner is beyond our control as educators. That the Resilient Five in this study were successful in their academic endeavors does not indicate that our schools are providing ESL students with the equitable education to which they are entitled. What it does suggest is that, in light of our current system, we can do our best to maximize resiliency-promoting factors within the academic setting, and seek to replicate them throughout our educational institutions.

Garmezy (1981, 1983), an eminent resiliency specialist, describes "invulnerable" individuals as those who, despite significant disadvantages, succeed under even the most unfavorable conditions. From my perspective, based greatly upon professional
experience, the concept of invulnerability seems appropriate to discussions of resilience and subsequent societal and academic success of this study's five Mexican-American participants. In their daily taking on the numerous challenges they are likely to encounter in our culture, in fact, numerous Mexican-American students can be described as academically invulnerable, achieving high grades and overcoming potential impediments to their academic success despite conditions and events that place them at risk for academic failure.

In understanding and then taking into account the five study participants' perceptions and experiences towards educational reform, we have a valuable opportunity to further strengthen and promote the invulnerability of the group of individuals whom our current educational system has rendered most vulnerable to dropout.

High-achieving and resilient students, as opposed to their less successful counterparts, tend to have an internal locus of control and high sense of efficacy, (e.g. Benard, 1993, 1995, 1996; Frankl, 1963; Henderson, 1996), whereas their white, lower-achieving counterparts may tend to assign blame to loci outside of themselves. Low-achieving students, at higher risk
of dropping out, are more likely to assign the blame for their failure to teachers and peers than to their own lack of effort or ability. Similar to high-achieving students, however (and clearly, as their scholastic status indicates, at a lower risk of dropping out), each of the Resilient Five expressed a strong belief in his or her own ability to succeed despite a recognition (which was not immediately clear to every participant, as our initial conversations reveal) of the scholastic and societal obstacles which they daily encountered:

**Mayra:** It's how you are inside that counts, not your environment. I am a happy girl, I talk with everyone, and I'm open to everything. I work hard, because I know that that's the only way to get the things I dream about and desire. You could be successful even if you were from Jupiter.

**Ana:** I think that for me, my environment has been very important, because it's been the backdrop for the many experiences, not always pleasant, that have taught me so much. Especially my sisters' experiences, from which I've learned quite a bit.

**Lory:** The environment that we have around us doesn't make people change. That is, when you want to get involved with something, you get involved because you are making a choice to go the right way or the wrong way. It's the same with the attitudes you choose. What happens to you in your life is your decision, because in everyday life we make decisions, and sometimes we ask ourselves "Why did I choose this path instead of the other one?" So right there, you are thinking that if you
had chosen the other one, things would have turned out better. Your own decisions are what count.

I do think that people can succeed even when their environment makes it very difficult for them if they keep their sights on what they really want to do, and set their goals. I mean, if you really want something, you will do anything to get it. Fight for it, because you know that you deserve to have it for doing your best. But there’s no excuse for not succeeding in life. The ones who don’t succeed in life are the ones with low self-esteem, or who prefer to have a low income and work for others like a slave.

**Martha:** I have always believed that people are responsible for everything they do, and I know that I can control myself in any situation.

**Junior:** I can control my own problems most of the time, but if a situation’s out of my hands, I have to ask for help. If the situation’s really bad, I’ll get upset, but most of the time I probably won’t even really notice a problem. Whenever I feel well and I can concentrate, I know that I’ll do a good job at anything. When I’m sick, or I know that something’s out of my control, I can’t do much. Other than that, though, I almost always take on decisions by myself, and I very rarely get help from anyone. I am happy to give advice to my friends when they need it, but ultimately I trust myself and believe I can make it.

So I think that we can succeed even in difficult situations if we give our best try, no matter how hard the situation is. We are still going to succeed, but sometimes the situation can be so hard and frustrating that people feel that they shouldn’t support it any more. So they give up.

I think that our attitudes and decisions are more important than our situation, because even though the environment plays an important role, we can still decide to avoid doing things which we shouldn’t do. And we can have a good attitude of always thinking that there will be a better future.
2.4 Resiliency and Internal Protective Factors

Piaget (1966), a cognitive psychologist, combined the tenets of behaviorism with the Gestalt school of thought, proposing that learning is a result of "the organism’s interacting with the environment and being exposed to an increasing number of experiences" (Knox, p. 129). Piaget’s (1966) theory seems appropriate to my belief that a student’s academic success or failure is the result of the individual interplay between environment and those internal qualities (such as resiliency) which, combined, comprise the individual’s personality. Without exception, participants in this study demonstrated all of the invulnerability traits described by resiliency experts.

Acting as a buffer between individuals facing challenging circumstances, "protective factors" are those characteristics of "...environments, situations, and events that appear to temper predictions of psychopathology based upon an individual's at-risk status (Garmezy, 1983, p. 73)." Two basic classifications of protective factors have been identified by researchers as common to resilient children: personal and environmental (Compas, 1987; Garmezy, 1981, 1983; Garmezy and Rutter, 1983; Rutter,
1979, 1987; Werner and Smith, 1982). A closer look first at the internal, and later the environmental factors, that characterize resiliency might best precede discussion of ways in which to promote it. Henderson (1996) adapts the findings of Benard (1991), Werner and Smith (1992), and Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller (1992), identifying the following characteristics as:

- Gives of self in service to others and/or a good cause;
- Uses life skills, including good decision making, assertiveness, impulse control, and problem solving;
- Sociability; ability to be a friend; ability to form positive relationships;
- Sense of humor;
- Internal locus of control;
- Autonomy, independence;
- Positive view of personal future;
- Flexibility;
- Capacity for and connection to learning;
- Self-motivation;
- Is "good at something"; personal competence;
- Feelings of self-worth and self-confidence (p.9).
2.5 Optimism, and a Self-Confident Outlook on Life

All five academically and socially successful student participants in this project repeatedly demonstrated each of the above internal factors that resiliency experts characterize as common to successful individuals. I observed these characteristics, shared by all five, on numerous occasions; with the exception of Mayra, all participants were my students for at least two semesters. Throughout our lengthy engagement in this study, as well, I had the opportunity to observe what our discussions and their academic transcripts attest to their demonstrated resiliency, motivation, and a dedication to education as a key to a promising future:

Martha: I am an optimist, because I always love to think about what I can do and to dream about what I’ll one day achieve. I believe in myself.

A teacher of less optimistic students, however, sadly describes:

'I have four girls right now in my senior home room who are pregnant or have just had babies.' When I ask them why this happens, I am told, 'Well, there is no reason not to have a baby. There's not much
for me in public school.’ The truth is, that’s a pretty honest answer...most of these pregnant girls are not the ones with self-esteem.’ (Kozol, 1991, p. 29)

While this may be true for many young girls today, in Lory, who was pregnant throughout this study, we clearly see that not all incompatible data should be disregarded as uninformative;

[w]e do, in fact, utilize not only convergent finding but also inconsistent and contradictory findings in our efforts to understand the social phenomena that we study. (Mathison, 1988, p. 15)

Lory: I’m optimistic also, because when something bad happens to me, I look at it in a different way, try to find a way out, and believe that it’s going to get better soon. Bad things actually teach me things about life because they show me how to do things better, and this feeling helps me to pick up my spirits and to move on.

Many [dominant-group] Americans think that all Mexicans are gangsters and drug users, all the bad things, but that just gives us a stronger reason to show them that we are not all the same, and that we can be successful if they give us the chance to do it. Right now, for example, I think that I’m showing a lot of people that even if they are pregnant, they need to keep on going, and not letting anything get in their path. If they knew all of the crap [sic] that I have been through, they would realize so many things about life.

I believe that I can accomplish almost anything that I set as a personal goal. I’ve
challenged myself to be someone in life, to show that although I have had many problems, that’s not going to stop me or prevent me from getting ahead. On the contrary, I want other people to see me as a role model, and for my family to be proud of me.

If someone told me that I can’t do something, I’d think that person wasn’t really talking seriously, because if they really thought that about me I’d show them how capable I am. I don’t let other people get me down—just the opposite. Their doubt makes me stronger in my life, and it teaches me; if I feel good about myself, I don’t let anyone get me down. People who try to do so just end up making me try even harder. They motivate me to show them that although there have been big obstacles in my way, I can still have confidence in myself and in what I can do. And I want others to be able to have that, too: to see that even if they’re not doing that well, they can still get better, no matter what.

**Mayra:** I have always said that our power is the best key to a good future. If you believe in yourself, you can do whatever you want. You have to be very optimistic if you want to achieve many things in life, including success. When people tell me that they don’t think that I can do something, that helps me to work harder at my goal to show them that I can do it.

**Junior:** I have always done well in school. I guess that’s because I always work hard, and I always have a strong belief in my ability to succeed. I have plans to graduate while most of my friends have either dropped out of school, or are not sure if they want to graduate. I think that the power to succeed is inside of us, because the choices we make are up to us.

Before December of last year, I didn’t really care about graduating. But then I started thinking about what might happen to me in the future, and that got me to motivate myself to graduate. I was planning to graduate earlier by attending summer school, but it isn’t going to work like I’d hoped it would because there’s some classes that I can
only take during my senior year. But I’m still going to graduate next year. So this vacation I’m planning to work real hard so I’ll be able to buy a car, learn how to drive, and have a lot of fun. But even if I get a car I won’t skip school.

I’m planning to keep going like this until the end of the semester when I’ll only need 5 more credits. During vacation I’m planning to find a job and also work at the cannery, which means I’m going to work two jobs. But I don’t really know if I can make it, because although I’m willing to sacrifice myself by supporting both jobs and my aunt will prepare lunch for me, the ride [to work and to friends’ homes] is what I’m considering as a major problem, because I don’t get much hope from my family. I really feel more upset because there have been three times that my family has denied me a ride, so I had to walk more than a mile and a half to my friend’s house, and I have to spend my time alone in the garage doing my homework because we can’t get along with each other.

Martha: I know that I have a lot of confidence in myself, and I think that’s because my parents have always urged me to move ahead, and to trust in myself and my ability to do whatever I set my mind to.

Mayra: Sometimes when you are confused, you can’t think right, and you lose out on an opportunity. That’s why when they offer you a job or another opportunity, you have to think carefully, and figure out what your future will look like if you take that opportunity, and what it will look like if you don’t.

Ana: We have to realize that we’re in this world to do great things, and to forget the negative thoughts. And if we help each other to do the same thing, we’ll get even better results. Doing these things, we’ll also be examples for others who don’t know what to do to get ahead; we can help them to get out of the holes that they are in, maybe hurting themselves or other people. That’s
why I think it's so important for me to be expressing my thoughts and experiences to all of those teenagers in a forum like this.

I know that we can turn ourselves around, and that it's never too late to start doing what we should do. But I also think that the sooner we can start along the right path, the less time we will waste. We know that every person has the right to do whatever he or she wants; that's something that we all share in common. But we also have to know how, when, and where to do it. We also have to know that there are people who love us, and that we have to think about them, too, in whatever we decide to do.

**Lory:** Some of us are strong, or try to be, but some give up easily and don't want to show everybody that they can do it. We could all have the same power only if we agree on it together, and think the same way. Sometimes we get together and fight for the same cause, and we have equal power that way. It depends, though, on the individuals, and the way that they think.

In my experience, if you want something really bad, you need to fight for it. To try to reach that goal no matter what is actually up to the individual, and doesn't have to do with their physical appearance.

Like many other Mexican-American ESL high school students, I had to decide between going to school and helping my family financially, because I saw how stressed-out they were, and how hard it was for them to get by on the little earnings they were getting. I didn't want to see my parents suffer or argue about stupid things only because of money.

Other times I wanted something, but I wasn't able to get it because my parents didn't have enough money, or because they needed it for something else. I wanted to get my own things and help them out with some money or give things to my little brother. I wanted him to have all he wanted, but it was impossible with the little earnings I was getting.
The low educational level of Hispanics might be tied to their relatively low economic status in the American economy; nearly 40 percent of Hispanic children live in poverty (Chapa, 1991). This is a problem not only morally, but pragmatically as well, "[g]iven that 10 percent of the nation's labor force will be Hispanic by the year 2000, their undereducation portends potentially grave consequences for the economy and social structure of the United States..." (Gándara, 1995, p.2).

Lory: It has crossed my mind what it would be like to not be a Mexican-American in the United States, because that way I would have many open doors for my future, and not have to struggle as hard; I don't like to see my family struggling. I mean, if we were white, they would have the advantages of speaking English, getting well-paid, and having better educational skills.

None of my family has graduated²⁹, and I want to show others that anybody can do it. All they need is the will to come to school. Also, it has been all of the bad experiences I have gone through, and the fact that I did not want those things for my life in the future; I wanted something better. To demonstrate that I am capable of anything. I do actually ask myself why my life has been like it has, why I have had so many problems. Sometimes I'll let go of it for a while, but the question does come to my mind again.

²⁹ It is noteworthy again to note that each participant in this project will be the first in the family to graduate from high school.
Lory's question is a source of frustration not unique to her. Being a part of my students' lives, a privilege that has brought me great joy over the years, has enabled me to witness with great frustration the unnecessary failures and discouragements they and their families routinely experience. Kozol (1991) shares the similar feelings of defeat of a school teacher whom he interviewed:

'I had a little girl stop in to see me yesterday. A little ninth grade girl. 'It's my lunch hour. I wanted to visit you.' She said. There is so much tenderness and shyness in some children. I told her I was glad she came to visit and I asked her to sit down. She looked at my desk. 'I'd like to have an office like this some day.' I said to her 'You can! But I was looking at this little girl and thinking to myself, 'What are the odds?' (Kozol, 1991, p. 142)

Lory: We don't really have very good chances like [dominant-group] Americans to have all the doors open; for example, some Hispanics don't have that chance because they are illegal, don't have enough money, or because they need to help their families support the young ones. Those are some of the obstacles that we have in life, but we have to fight to achieve our goals in life, and to do our best to fulfill them. I can't really say that we have good chances at being successful, but I can't really say that we are destined to fail. I can say that I don't give up easily, and if I personally have a goal I will reach it no matter what.
**Junior:** I always work hard, and strongly believe that I can succeed. I know that after I graduate, I’ll be making my own decisions and I’ll have more freedom. If I didn’t graduate, I know that I’d probably be working real hard like most of the people I know, and losing out on a good chance to study. What I’ve been challenging myself to do is to get prepared for the future, and to get a good job.

It is important to note that freedom, to study participants, means something different than it does to many of their teenaged peers. Where the latter often confuses freedom with license to act irresponsibly and without thought of their actions’ consequences to others, The Resilient Five expressed a consistent weighing of their behaviors’ results. In this country Ana, for example, says that she is free; she does whatever she wants, she described, but always tells her family what she is doing, as well as with whom and where she is going. Ana never, she emphasized, does anything that they do not know about, strongly believing, as she has previously said and written, that communication is important for everyone, regardless of where they may live.

Like each participant’s, Junior’s life has been full of challenges. Rather than discouraging the five and diminishing their drive to achieve their goals,
however, externally-imposed obstacles only appear to have honed their determination that much more:

**Junior:** I have lived through many experiences, and that’s why I can understand why people commit some mistakes. Unfortunately, it’s true that the strong can be on top of the weak. I’ve learned to prove to people that I am as strong as they are or stronger, and I don’t punk out [back down from a challenge] too easy.

### 2.6 The Ability to Think for Oneself

Viktor Frankl (1963), a highly practical and reality-grounded concentration camp survivor, is certainly familiar with the difficulty and struggle inherent in the attempt to rise above adversity. To a differing degree, I contend that all Mexican-American students face adversity in the United States as well. He also acknowledges that one’s will to meaning can be frustrated, in which case logotherapy speaks of “existential frustration.”

Having goals is important for a number of reasons. Without recognizing the meaning to their lives, individuals often become bored, frustrated, and apathetic. More likely to thrust the locus of their lives’ control to a place outside of

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30 The term “existential,” as used by Frankl (1963), refers to (1) *existence* itself, i.e., the specifically human mode of behaving; (2) the *meaning* of existence; (3) the striving to find a concrete meaning in personal existence, that is to say, the *will to meaning* (p. 159).
themselves, they may likely fall victim to "...that feeling of which so many [people] complain today, namely, the feeling of the total and ultimate meaninglessness of their lives. They lack the awareness of a meaning worth living for...they are caught in that situation which I have called the 'existential vacuum'" (Frankl, 1963, p. 167).

Adolescents today often complain of being bored, of not having enough momentous things to do or to which to aspire. Frankl (1963) might attribute this to the fact that

[m]an has suffered another loss in [modern times]: the traditions that had buttressed his behavior are now diminishing. No instinct tells him what he has to do, and no tradition tells him what he ought to do; sometimes he does not even know what he wishes to do. Instead, he either wishes to do what other people do (conformism), or what other people wish him to do (totalitarianism). (p. 168)

All resilient participants in this study, raised in tradition- and culture-rich Mexican homes, described having no difficulty in detaching themselves from detrimental people and situations. They are clearly not the directionless and frustrated youth described above,
although they face daily oppression that might predispose others in their situation to be so.

As mentioned previously, students will tend to group themselves, if left to their own devices, with those to whom they feel the most kinship. Matute-Bianchi (1986) describes, for example, Chuy, a Mexican-American, who "would never consider eating lunch or hanging out in the "quaddie" area of school [since] 'that's where all the "soches" [wealthier dominant-group individuals] hang out. You don't want to be there. They're all a bunch of rich honkies' [white people]": (p. 252). Teacher-arranged groups represent an effective means of breaking through such social barriers and promoting diversified student interactions.

Fathman, et al. (1992) similarly praise heterogeneous grouping of students as an excellent way to provide opportunity for and encourage interaction between second language learners and native speakers. Sasser (1992) additionally corroborates that such interaction affords "...students from the majority culture the opportunity to learn from perspectives that may differ from their own."

As a teacher, I also have found such heterogeneous grouping arrangements to be of great benefit to students across all cultural, socio-economic, and

The Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance tells the press that it is "only fair" to let the kids from [the predominantly minority area school] share in the resources that the middle-class kids enjoy. The panel also notes that the poorer children do not tend to bring the top kids down. "It is more likely that the high-achieving kids will bring the others up." But the truth is that few middle-class parents in Chicago, or in any other city, honestly believe this. They see poor children as a tide of mediocrity that threatens to engulf them. (Kozol, 1991, p. 61)

In teaching ESL concurrently with either English or Spanish, I have the marvelous opportunity to work with students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. This enables me to facilitate activities bringing all of my students together, both in formal (panel discussions) and informal (inter-cultural interviews and conversation) interactions. "By interacting with native speakers in academic contexts," August and Pease-Alvarez (1996) summarize, "second language learners have access to language unavailable in traditional teacher-directed settings."
Results of my experience with these cross-cultural events are uniformly positive, with numerous students joyfully pointing out that they now regularly greet and talk to peers with whom they previously would not have felt comfortable doing so. Overcoming initial fears, intimidation, and previously-held prejudices, these individuals improve their second-language skills (both Spanish and English). They also demonstrate what is by any yardstick a resplendent and edifying success: the ability to look beyond ever-present social barriers and what they believe they already know, in order to build meaningful connections and new understandings.

Many of the children voice a curiously resilient faith in racial integration.

‘If the government would put a huge amount of money into East St. Louis, so that this could be a modern, well-equipped and top-rate school,’ I ask, ‘with everything that you could ever want for an education, would you say that racial segregation was no longer of importance?’

Without exception, the children answer, ‘No.’ ‘Going to a school with all the races,’ Luther says, “is more important than a modern school.” (Kozol, 1991, p. 31)
It is fortunate, for the benefit of all students, that

'studies of resilience suggest that nature has provided powerful protective mechanisms for human development' (Maston, 1994) that 'appear to transcend ethnic, social class, geographical, and historical boundaries.' (Werner and Smith, 1992)

It is my opinion and professional experience that stereotypes and most racism are rooted in unfamiliarity and fear. Ultimately, thus, it may be only through opportunities to dialogue and becoming familiar with one another that racially-based mistrust and fear can, one interaction at a time, be eliminated.

Perhaps significantly, each of the Resilient Five not only felt comfortable interacting with people of other races, but also sought out racially diverse individuals as friends with whom to exchange ideas:

**Mayra:** I like to be around people who are similar to or different from me. I’m not afraid of little differences.

**Junior:** My parents say that it’s OK to have a friendship or to get married with a person of another race if you really get along with the person.
**Lory:** My dad is OK with white people, since the experiences he's had with them have mostly been the same as with other people. He is realizing that there are good and bad people in every race, but he does believe that white people will always want to see Hispanic people beneath them, working in the worst jobs.

He doesn't really like them because in most of his experiences with them, he's been treated poorly. For my mom, though, interactions with white people haven't been nearly as bad, because all of the people around her tend to show her how much they appreciate her. As a result, very few of my dad's friends are white, but since my mom is the only Hispanic worker at her job, she is always around white people whom she likes.

**Martha:** My parents have no bad feelings toward white people. They see them the same as other people, but they never regard them as better. They feel equal to them, and they like them.

My parents have always, always told me what they think about my friends and the other people I know. They tell me not to marry young, that my first priority is my studies. They also tell me to talk with everyone in the whole world, regardless of their race, or color of skin.

Sometimes I do prefer to be with Mexicans, but not all the time. I like to have friends from everywhere, and I think that if I were only to want to be friends with Mexicans, I'd be discriminating against everyone else. Everyone deserves to have my friendship, not only Mexicans.

**Lory:** I get along well with almost everyone. I was raised with kids from other cultures and we were good friends, so that helped me to be comfortable around most all people and their beliefs, and to help them to get more familiar with my culture, too.
I do, though, think that in some ways I’ve had to adapt to the American culture in order to be successful here. Examples of this would be modifying my style of dress, working on my English, learning the history of the United States, and learning how to express myself patiently and clearly.

**Junior:** I don’t feel that I have had to adopt Anglo values in order to do well in school; I can act like a Mexican, and still succeed. I have always been proud to be Mexican. I prefer to be with both Mexican and American people, but I do feel like I can be better understood when I’m with Mexican people.

**Lory:** Even though they may act unpleasant and show me that they don’t care, I like to get nearer to others to show them that they can have a good friend in me, and that I can help them with whatever they need. I’m quiet most of the time, but I like people who make me laugh, and I’ll do the same for others when it’ll help someone who’s sad feel better.

Well, I think I have the right to choose to share my culture with others, and to let them know what is going on with us. Also to have the chance to learn new things from other cultures.

**Martha:** After I came to this country, I cut my hair short because I used to have my hair so long, like Mexican girls when they first get here\(^{31}\). I started to use make up, and to be a completely different person. I made a lot of friends, some good and some not, because some of them started to

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\(^{31}\)Participants explained that the dress of new arrivals is easily-recognizable — they wear no make-up, and are not particular about what brand of clothing they wear. Participants said that students, after being here a while, begin to undergo changes because they don’t feel the same as/equal to their American peers. The Resilient Five, with the exception of Junior, described their feeling a need to “fit in,” therefore to learn English faster and to feel more accepted.

This difference may be attributable to gender; however, Junior has the additional distinction of being without the local support of family. He describes his having to be, as a result, more independent and self-reliant.
dress like gang members and they didn’t come to school every day.

I saw that they started to change in everything, like they didn’t come to school and when they came, they skipped almost all of their classes. They started to be different, and I didn’t want to be like them. So, I went with other friends that were like me, good students. Some of them have already graduated, and they are in college.

My other friends, when I see them, I just say, "hi," because most of them don’t go to school anymore. When I started to see all these things I changed my way of thinking. When I had been in México, education wasn’t important to me. I just thought about getting married, or having a lot of boyfriends and being happy. Well, I was so innocent when I was in México. Now I know that at that time I didn’t know anything; I was just fifteen years old.

Some ESL kids don’t care much about school, asking, "Why should I get good grades if my parents don’t even know how to read?" And many times kids don’t feel like anyone understands them, and so they have no desire to strive to move ahead. They might join gangs, skip classes, or start making other bad decisions.

But I think that it’s possible to have friends who do bad things, or dress like gangsters. But that’s not to say that I think that I should behave like them. And many times the kids you see dressed like gang members go to their classes every day and are good students.

Some people think that we should not talk to or be friends with anyone who dresses like a gang member or with kids that skip school because we will become like them. But that’s not true, because no-one can force you to do anything that you don’t want to do.

I have no problem hanging around with friends who dress or act differently than I do. Although these people are not those I choose to be my closest friends, I can be with them without problem. That’s because if I am with my friends and they want me to do something I don’t want to
do, I just don’t do it. Regardless of what they say, think, or do to try to convince me, I won’t change my mind. I know myself, and I’m never going to do something that I don’t think is right. But I think that we should be friends with these people, and help them to go in the right direction.

**Lory**: I’m very friendly, get along with others, and like to be sociable. I’m the type of person who likes to meet other people, but I also tend to be very independent. That way I can learn more about life, and also get a good sense of what it’s like out in the real world.

I won’t go along with what my friends want to do if I think it’s wrong. I know what my parents and other adults have taught me, that I should not follow in the footsteps of people who I know will only hurt me. They’ve taught me only to follow the footsteps of the people who become successful in life. But I do have friends who don’t make good decisions, and I try to help them, and then let them go their own way while I find mine.

**Junior**: I’m not that way. For me, it depends on whether I think it’s something we must do. Even if it were wrong, I might do it, but fortunately it’s never come down to that yet. But generally whenever I’m calm, which is most of the time, I think several times before acting. I solve my own problems most of the time. I always think that there’s a reason for everything, even if it’s not obvious at first to me, and I try to think about things from different perspectives.

I have had many friends since I was in my second year of middle school, and even now, and I also have a lot more of them on the streets than here. So I’m very sociable, but independent at the same time. I can get along well with almost anybody. I prefer to work in groups in class, but if the situation requires me to work alone, I can handle it.
Junior affirms O’Connor’s (1997) positivist notion that “[s]tructure indubitably affects the attitudes and actions of marginal\textsuperscript{33} people, but it does not preclude their ability to think and act in ways that are not wholly determined by their place in society” (p. 624). This assertion is a powerful one, worthy of discussion as it relates to current educational practices. Such findings invite further research on African-Americans and other people of color, as well; O’Connor’s (1997) conclusions were, additionally, illustrated by the participants in this study. The Resilient Five, moreover, demonstrated a growing desire, over the course of the study, to intervene on behalf of their peers. As their awareness of Mexican dropout statistics and associated risk factors increased, participants actively sought to support their struggling peers through counseling, and by their own example.

2.7 The Desire to Help Others Succeed

It is essential for the oppressed to realize that when they accept the struggle for humanization they also accept, from that moment,

\textsuperscript{33} I disapprove of O’Connor’s having chosen the word “marginal” rather than “marginalized”, the former connoting an inherent trait, the latter implying an externally-imposed condition.
Ana: The best way to be a good friend to our friends who are using drugs, or who are gang members is not to turn our backs on them, and not just to talk, but to act. Actions leave results, but words don’t. So sometimes we don’t know exactly how to help them, but if we try to do it, we can make a big difference. If we don’t even try we might be sorry, because it might be too late.

Sometimes we get too shocked to do anything when we have the opportunity, but helping others will help us, too. I have always thought that the best way to learn is to pay attention to, and to pool together, all of our experiences in order to learn from them. This attitude has always helped me a lot not to be helpless. It has, also, made me believe that the world is in the hands of all teenagers who are prepared to get ahead, and to do good things for the whole community.

As I said before, we need to organize ourselves into groups to plan on how to best help our community. That will also set a good example for all kids, because I think that there are more kids who want to drop out than who want to help their neighborhoods.

Ana’s suggestion, invoking the problem of dropout among Mexican-American students, re-emphasizes what the participants unanimously recognized: their potential, even as individuals, to make a powerful difference for members in that community. This theme, recurrent in our discussions, illustrates each of the Resilient Five’s familiarity with the notion of struggle, and the possibility of resulting favorable change.
Mayra, in a group discussion, described an attempt by one of the larger of the local gangs to recruit her as a member when she had first moved here; she would have been their only female member. Rather than joining their ranks, which she recognized would be detrimental to her future, Mayra attempted instead to help those who sought to recruit her. Upon my asking her what had prevented her from joining despite the fact that many of her peers had, Mayra recounted:

My first days in Oregon, I only had a few friends. My parents talked to me about gangs, and I started thinking about what would happen to me if I joined one. So I decided that I would be friends with those kids, but I would try to help them, too. I told them that I was not going to change my personality--I came here for a better life, and that was what I was going to work for.

But I told them that I would still hang out with them, as long as they were trying and were doing their work. I'd do whatever I could to help them in their classes, and I'd work with them and do everything but do the assignments for them. And when we'd do school work, that's all we'd talk about, not gang stuff or anything else. Then they started getting better grades. They're my friends, and I love them, so if I'm as good a friend as they think I am, I've got to show it.

Women are the ones who usually cause fights, so I'd try to talk to the girls about not fighting. People are violent because they haven't learned respect for other people. So when they tell me, 'Tira Raza' [throw Mexican-pride signs], I tell them, 'Ok, you teach me that, and I'll teach you math.' And if they'd get no referrals in class, and really showed me that they were serious
for a whole month, I'd even end up doing their homework for them as a reward.

At a dance one night I saw a friend of mine who was expelled from school, and started dressing and acting like a gang member. I asked him right off why he'd changed his dress, his walk, and why he had gotten all of those tattoos. I said, 'You're not my friend, the one I knew a long time ago. You're not the one I knew in the past.' I was worried because if he went out on the streets at night that way, he could get into trouble. He told me that all he does is dress that way, but he really hadn't changed.

I made him cry, because I said, 'If you're not that way, look me in the eyes and tell me that.' He didn't look at me, because he knows that he can't throw me any lies. He started crying. I'm of very strong character, and people can't lie to me.'

With great delight I have witnessed study participants "walk their talk," putting their feelings of "control" to use by helping their ESL peers and one another. Junior, for example, came to speak with one of my ESL I students who was seriously contemplating leaving school to work. The young man intended to drop out in order to help his brother (also a drop-out for the same reason), who was working full time, with paying the bills. After my finding some gang-related graffiti on his desk in my classroom and asking him about it, he admitted that he was thinking about becoming a gang member. Lory, a teacher's assistant in that class, counseled this very bright and very
frustrated young man about gang issues and probably made a significant impact on his decision not to join.

Additionally, when Ana was seriously thinking about quitting school in order to go back to help her grandparents in México, participants joined forces to show her how, educated, she would be a better source of assistance to both them and herself in the long run. We all discussed how we admired her gratitude and willingness to potentially sacrifice her own well-being on her grandparents' behalf, but maintained that she might likely find herself in the same situation as her sisters: without a diploma and married.

Through discussing the situation with the other participants, Ana came to see that the diploma could help her to better not only her own future, but the future of her children. The group suggested also that Ana could, with a better job, send more money back to her grandparents to better help them financially. Her other sisters, she said, agreed with our contention that she would be unlikely to come back to this country if she were to go back to México. Mayra additionally pointed out that as oldest of the unmarried sisters, Ana is a role model for her younger siblings. It was, thus, her responsibility to be employed in a dignified job to demonstrate for her younger siblings their
ability to do the same, and to provide them with the tools to be successful in the future when her other relatives have passed away.

Lory, very pregnant and uncomfortable\(^{34}\) towards the end of the study, nonetheless maintained her on-going efforts to be a counsel and role model for her struggling younger brother, as well. When, for example, he was repeatedly disregarding curfew and talking back to his parents, Lory intervened and succeeded in changing his attitude and behavior. Similarly, when her brother became involved with gangs and other risky behaviors, Lory put a great deal of effort into helping him “get back on track” to the extent she was able\(^{35}\).

English as a Second Language students themselves, as participants have modeled, are perhaps those most well-received and qualified to counsel their peers. To be most helpful, additional support services such as peer counseling and mentoring might be offered in students’ primary language to prevent linguistic and cultural barriers from interfering with the services’ effectiveness. Anstrom (1997), Buriel (1983), Laosa (1982) suggest that native-language peer counseling and

\(^{34}\) She was, however, continuing to come to school daily until she was explicitly told to stop by her doctor, mother, school counselor, and me.

\(^{35}\) When she thought that additional, scholastic, adult intervention (in the form of sustained nagging) was called for, Lory would escort him to my classroom.
mentoring have proven themselves very effective in lowering the high freshman drop-out rate among the many students who have utilized them.

Because the drop-out rate for Hispanic students is considerably higher than that of any other ethnicity, it is clear that the problem of their needs' not being met must be addressed in an aggressive, proactive, and multi-level concerted effort (Kerka, 1988). Henderson (1996) illustrates how peer counselors benefit from their efforts as well, presented with the opportunity to strengthen their own protective factors through the meaningful interactions in which they make their contributions:

"Protective factors," the term referring to the characteristics of environments that appear to alter—or even reverse—potentially negative outcomes and enable individuals to transform adversity and develop resilience despite risk, comprise three broad categories. [These include] 
[care]ing relationships: (compassion, understanding, respect, interest, grounded in listening, establish basic trust), 
[h]igh expectations: (firm guidance, structure, challenge, a conveyed belief in child's innate resilience, strengths and assets emphasized over problems and deficits), and [opportunity for meaningful participation and
contribution: (valued responsibilities, making decisions, for giving voice, for being heard, and for contributing one's talent to the community. (pp. 11-14)

Junior: I like being helped, but I also like to help other people, and to be united with them in order to have more power. I can communicate and get along with almost anyone of all colors of skin, languages, nationalities, or beliefs.

Lory: When I was in middle school, some of my friends were involved in drugs, and I really tried to help them to quit using them. I pushed them to stay in school, and tried to make them see reality by getting into programs so that school wouldn't be that hard, and they wouldn't want to drop out.

In high school, others were trying to help me to get out of drugs, but they didn't help. I think that the only thing that actually helped me to keep up and to stay in school was that I still liked to help others. My ESL teachers and coach also helped me, and so did being active in school clubs and activities. I know that changing the direction of your life is possible with hard work, and the opportunity to do it.

At school I was respected because my teachers saw how hard it was for me to get out of drugs. They and my very close friends saw how hard I was working at rehabilitating, and how hard I worked to stay in school and do my work. People also helped me to get involved in good things like extra-curricular activities. I realized then the big mistake I had made with my life, but that time has passed, and now I help others, so that they can realize all the stupid things they are doing. I try to help them in the same way that other people helped me.

I like to help others because many things have happened during my life, and I've had a hard time because I didn't know the way. So if I have the power to help someone else, I'll do it with pleasure.
Because I like helping others, and, specifically, my people. I don’t want to see them down, I want to see them in a higher place so that people won’t consider Hispanics stepping stones because they are trapped in low-paying jobs. It gives me a lot of pleasure to help other people, and if I can help them, I’ll do whatever I can to do it.

I like to find ways out of my problems, or if something bad happens to me, I’ll look at it from another way, almost as if it were a puzzle. I’ll try to do things in a different way, to find the easiest or shortest way to fix the problem. But at the same time, I’ll try to have fun while solving it.

Ana: One person who helped me a lot to face my bad problems was a classmate who died. He always asked me why I was so quiet, but I never told even him what was on my mind. He told me that life was boring without problems, that life’s dilemmas add spice and mystery about what will happen in the future. I will always remember him and his honesty. Another month has passed since his death. He helped me with my problems when I was in a way with no exit.

I would like to help my Mexican brothers give each other a hand; to support and help each other to get what we need, and to thus have peace in the community. It’s better to work for the group than for yourself, because that way we can find a solution to all of the problems that I think everyone would like to solve. The problem is difficult, because so many people are involved in it, so we have to plan carefully to get out of this hole. I am mostly referring to the teenagers who use drugs and quit their education without even thinking about the consequences.

Martha: Whenever they need me, I always like to help others by doing public service and other things when I have the time, and when there’s a good cause. I like to hang around people from different countries, and it makes me really sad when I see someone suffer. I really want to help
them with all of their problems, but one can't always do that.

Right now I am applying for scholarships to help me in many ways. Educationally, they will provide me with the knowledge that I would not otherwise be able to attain, if at least I didn't try. It will also highlight the importance of education within my surroundings. As a female of color, college will give me the opportunity to obtain a professional career, in which I can help the community. I would like to obtain a degree in social work, especially working with the Latino community, because we are in desperate need of Latinos with degrees that can represent us. In order to seek higher education, I believe the only resource that someone can't provide you with is to have "ganas" (the desire) to succeed and continue.

Ana: Our experiences have so much power, and we can do things more easily when we have had many of them. The first time I came here I knew how bad it was not to know how to read or write or talk using English. It was like being mute. I know some people now who don't know how to read, write or count. That makes me think about how hard it must be to be that way, because these things are so important to everyday life. I would love to change people's lives a little bit by helping them, by teaching them how to do all of those things.

In my opinion Mexican immigrants have to help each other, because almost everyone comes to the United States for the same reasons. The situation when I first came used to make me feel lower than others. I was always asking my uncle and aunt why they chose to bring me here when I had no friends and spoke no English. But now I have some good friends, I can speak a little English, and the most important thing is that I'm near my sisters. I think they are the most beautiful thing that I have in this world.
Through their commitment to helping their Mexican-American peers, the Resilient Five demonstrated their own resilience; they also revealed their optimistic estimation of the change that hard work and perseverance could effect, even in the face of institutionally- and societally-imposed obstacles. Participants unanimously predicted a successful future as the probable result of maintaining such a consistent effort.

2.8 A Consistent Eye on the Future

At times it may be motivationally challenging for a student to attend school when his peers are not, and there may sometimes be a covert pressure for him to quit, too. This has been most noticeable to me when students who have dropped out come to visit my class wearing new clothing, perhaps driving a car. The momentary flicker of doubt in my students' eyes provides timely impetus for discussions of the reality of their challenges, and the reasons that they will be likely better off for having mastered them. Drop-outs who have gone to work full-time are clearly in a better position to acquire more things than their peers who
are sacrificing the immediate for the future gratification of a diploma, and subsequent higher earnings (Houle, 1980).

Students' setting and focusing on their goals, then, within Frankl's (1963) logotherapeutic model, are of primary importance; hence "[they are] confronted with and reoriented toward the meaning of [their existences]" (p. 153). Resilient students, similarly, rarely lose sight of the ultimate meaning in their lives; they see education as an intrinsically motivating, life-long process. This perceived meaning is a highly impelling tool that encourages "stick-to-itiveness," even in the face of obstacles that might discourage less determined individuals. A number of researchers, including Gándara (1995) and Valdés (1996, 1998), have recognized such an internally-generated drive to succeed in Mexican-Americans.

It is not uncommon to hear teachers express feelings of frustration over the lack of motivation and interest becoming more prevalent among their students. It is with very rare exception36, however, that one will hear that concern expressed by a teacher of newly-arrived ESL students. What is common among these learners is a

36 In over a decade of working with these learners, I have never once heard a teacher complain of apathy among them.
joyful enthusiasm and zest for school, new experiences, and their new environment.

‘If one stands here... in this room and does not know of these things, the moment seems almost auspicious. But if one knows the future that awaits them, it is terrible to see their eyes look up at you with friendliness and trust--to see this and know what is in store for them.’ (Kozol, 1991, p. 45)

When my dominant-group students play vocabulary games in my English or Spanish classes, they play with the somewhat reserved enthusiasm of high school students not wanting to look too “geeky” in front of potential dates. When I engage my ESL students in similar vocabulary games, however, I find myself morphing from motivational cheerleader to wet blanket. In a constant state of fear of annoying our neighboring classes, I forever urge leaping, overjoyed competitors to tone down the zealous shouts of encouragement they direct at their teammates and opponents alike.

Although I have a great fondness for almost all students, there is simply not a sweeter or more highly-motivated group of learners than ESL students. In the beginning they come to school every day, in sickness and in health, and will very rarely miss a day unless
to babysit or serve as interpreter for a family member. Over time, though, it is almost predictable how their spirit, motivation, and attendance will plummet. The statistics appear too glaring to blame the catastrophe of Mexican-American ESL high school students' dropout on the victims themselves.

**Junior:** I started to work in the strawberry fields around my classes at school, picking. I earned some money, but I sent most of it back to my mom in México. After working in the field, I started working at the cannery, and was earning good amounts of money. I sent most of that money back to my mom also, and bought some clothes and other cool stuff I wanted.

I even bought a plane ticket to return to México for three months. It cost me $500, and I sent $350 for my mom to keep for me so that when I arrived, I'd have it there to spend. But everything got ruined when I found out that I was going to lose all of my credits from the first semester and half of the second if I went.

So I decided not to go. I felt bad because I had told all of my homeboys [close friends] and my family that I was coming, and in addition to all of this what more affected me was that I worked very hard to earn that money. I had been filled with dreams of going to México, and it was made worse by the situation in school. School was pretty frustrating because I had no friends, and was always alone. I had started school with so many friends, but they were all gone by that time. I had never predicted that I would be in this situation. But I knew I was making a difficult sacrifice in the present for a better future.
Other study participants expressed a similar view of education as a means of access to future success well worth making a sacrifice for in the present:

**Mayra:** My parents have always made sacrifices for me. They have always given me everything, and have not cared what it has cost. In México, people don’t value education as much as they do in this country, and it’s not uncommon to quit school in order to go to work there. But here in this country, it’s more important to study in order to survive, and to earn more money.

I think that only those students who have a good idea of what they want to do in this life fight to get ahead, and I’ve noticed that many people don’t understand this concept. Everything in life is all the same to them, and they don’t do anything to get ahead.

I think that speaking to them helps them to understand that in this country it’s possible to find good work easily, but only with an education. And that an education can sometimes be the only way to move ahead. This life has many opportunities, and you can find them very easily if you do two things: (1) study and be responsible, and (2) believe in yourself, and dream about your future. I always do these things, and that’s opened many doors for me. Some were closed, but I knew that later on they would open. I like to be independent from the world, because that helps me to understand more about life. And I plan to be a special person in the future, because I love to dream about the future.

**Martha:** I always think about and plan what I’m going to do in the future before I do it because I’m a really organized person. When I want to do something, I always think about what the consequences of that action might be. When I’m not sure, I talk to my parents, and they advise me.
Ana: We have to know that there will always be two ways to go: a good way, and a wrong way. We have to decide between the two every day of our lives, and that's why it's really important to be clear on the difference between them. When my family used to tell me this, I was confused about what they were talking about, but now I understand what they were saying, and I thank them for it.

The right way to go is the way that will help us toward a good future. To have a good future is to do well economically, to have friends, peace, and, as a result, to be proud of our power and intelligence. The wrong way to go with our lives will bring us the troubles and tragedies that will prevent us from doing the best for ourselves.

Ana and Martha describe how their families' encouragement was a primary motivating force in their academic achievement. Junior recalls that his focus on the importance of earning a diploma was intensified, on the other hand, by witnessing the results of his less successful peers' decision first to skip class, and then to quit school altogether. Kozol (1991) postulates the same linkage in his observation that "[t]he route from truancy to full-fledged dropout status is direct and swift" (p. 57):

Junior: I think that the difference between me and the students who skip, don't pay attention in their classes, or drop out is clear. The guys who skip too much don't have any interest in school because they really don't know how it's going to affect their future. Those who tune out what the teacher is saying are the ones who probably don't have information about how what they learn in class relates to real life.
These people usually haven’t stopped to think about what they’ll be doing in three or four years as a result of the effort they’re putting in now. They are focused more on the present and on having fun, but they don’t know what the future is going to bring them. The people who drop out, though, often have just given up on their opportunities for a better future after becoming discouraged with school.

This happens because they have given up the dreams they had when they had just arrived from México,

'Over there, where I was from, America is very famous. People think of it like heaven. Like, go to America—you go to heaven. Because life there is hell. Then you get here and, you know, it’s not like that at all.' (Kozol, 1991, p. 156)

and they abandon their dreams by looking back or staying in the same place instead of looking ahead. To look back is to go back to México or to move to another state to work, forgetting about school. To stay put is to find a job, leaving school, and planning to work for low-wages without moving in an economical improvement-focused way. To look ahead is very important, because it means always having an eye looking toward the future, and to be constantly moving to better positions and better jobs. It means always trying to be better, doing your best, and fighting for your rights.

**Lory:** I have a good feeling about my future. I know that it’ll be hard, but I think that it will be no problem if I keep my eyes on my goal. If that goal is for me to be successful, I’ll do whatever it takes to achieve it, especially now that I’m expecting my baby girl. I’m going to do as much as I can to open the doors between me and
success so that my baby will have everything she needs.

**Ana:** We have to think ahead, about how to start a new beginning in order to get good results for our future, especially if we have made mistakes in our past. Because when we want to change by starting a new life, that means that we expect a better outcome to come from the change. I think that the best thing that we can do is to be careful in everything that we do. It’s never too late to change if we want to; I think that it’s never too late to start our lives again. But we don’t have to waste time just because we don’t know the difference between the right and wrong way to go in our lives, and we don’t take advantage of the opportunities which we have been given.

During our numerous conversations it became apparent that student participants’ sights were clearly fixed on the linkage between their academic success and the future success they anticipated would result from it. All participants discussed being acquainted with numerous individuals who had either been denied, or had themselves rejected, the opportunity to attend school and achieve a diploma. The Resilient Five, by contrast, referred many times to the opportunity for a better life their living in the U.S. afforded, and the importance of their taking advantage of the education that they would get if they applied themselves to their studies.
2.9 The Importance of Not Wasting An Opportunity

While grateful for the comparatively better circumstances they said resulted from their families' moving from Mexico to the United States, participants also expressed an acute awareness of the boundaries their limited family income placed upon their present opportunity. Kozol (1991) cites one youngster's similar observation:

'This is my life. It isn't all I dreamed of and I tell myself sometimes that I might have accomplished more. But growing up in poverty rules out some avenues. You do the best you can.' (p. 26)

Each of the Resilient Five, expressing a similar recognition of his/her current situation, nonetheless viewed education as the key to escaping that underprivileged condition:

Martha: My father decided to bring us to the U.S., and when I started to go to school I was sad because I remembered my friends in México. With the passing of the time I start to adapt to this country, but also I started to think differently. Well, I was another person. Because now that I think about how I was when I first came here, I see that I was a very different person who didn't
want to go to school and didn’t have any goals and
dreams in her life.

When I came here I started to see new
things, and one of them was seeing how my dad
worked in a very hard job every day. So my
mentality was completely turned around, because
now I want to go to college, and be something in
life. When I was in México I never thought about
going to college, I just thought about getting
married someday. But now I see how my life would
be if we were living in México without an
education. My parents have always wanted us to go
to school, but when I was in México, I didn’t want
to go. I cried every day and asked my mom if I
could please stay home with her, because school
wasn’t important to me.

My dad is always seeking ways of making my
family’s life better, even if it means his having
to be away from home. For many years before we
moved here, my dad came to the United States on a
seasonal basis. He came and worked for about eight
months to provide the necessities for our family.
He would then go back to México for approximately
four months to spend time with us. This was a very
hard situation because not only did my mom suffer,
but all of us did, too. I often think that quality
is more important than quantity, but in this case
I would have done the impossible to have more
childhood memories of my dad, my immediate family,
and me together.

My parents have made sacrifices for my
education. When I was in México, in the eighth
grade, I had to go to another town because in the
town where I lived, there wasn’t a school. My
parents had to send me to the other town by bus,
and gave me money to ride every day. But sometimes
they didn’t have money to give me, and I saw that
they worked really hard so that I could go to
school. Sometimes we had less food, or they would
just give me money for the bus but not for lunch,
because we didn’t have enough for both.

My parents always think of the family, and
about what is in our best interest. Their children
always come before anything having to do with
themselves. We always come first.
Martha described her family's past sacrifice for her educational opportunity; Lory's situation also required sacrifice, but of a different kind. Where years before she had seriously considered quitting school, Lory, now pregnant and faced with greater, more numerous obstacles, described her single-minded focus on her educational opportunities:

**Lory:** Sometimes I make decisions that I later regret, but I don't usually make the same mistake more than once. That's what life is about: learning from your mistakes, and those of others around you. Nobody is perfect in this world, but we do have the power and the responsibility to try our best.

Right now I'm pregnant, and I don't feel that this is a problem for my peers or schooling, except that I need to be careful that nothing bad happens to me. It's a big responsibility, but I think I'm being a role model for other girls and for my friends. I'm showing them that no matter what, I am going to receive my education, to finish school, and not give up. Or let other people get me down.

I mean, it's hard to be in school right now because I get tired very quickly, and am not able to walk very quickly like other students. Or sometimes I feel strange, well, different from others because of the way they look at me. Sometimes they ask me if I'm pregnant, why I am still coming to school, but like I say, I'm working for something I want. I want to reach my goal, no matter what. I won't waste that opportunity.

**Ana:** I know how very important education is from my own experiences, and from the experiences of other people. I know many people who never had the
opportunity to get an education, and that makes me wonder how, if I have this opportunity, I could waste it.

I know people who aren’t educated because they had to go to work, and this reminds me of my grandfather. Many people I knew had told me that they thought that an education wasn’t important, since they thought they’d never leave their village. They believed that they just needed to know how to grow crops, especially corn, which is the most important crop for everyone.

But we all have to learn from the experiences that other people have had, and to compare what we are doing to what they have done. That way we can imagine ourselves in the same situations, and can think before we make a mistake, instead of feeling sorry afterwards. I always try to do my best to learn more, because I know that I’ll have more opportunities if I do that.

Many Mexican people have not had the opportunity to go to school, and to learn everything they need. They have many times been living in a village where there were poor opportunities to study, because sometimes there was not a teacher to teach them. Sometimes these people had to go to a nearby city to attend school\(^37\), but because of economic problems, they couldn’t. Now as adults they often think it’s too late, but it’s never too late.

Some people ask me how I can be so strong. It’s simple: we have to ask ourselves, “If we don’t love ourselves, who is going to?” We have to do it before anyone else can. But the second thing that we have to remember is our family. When we think that they don’t love us, we are offending them, because they usually love us as much as we love them.

I think that almost everyone wants to show or to do something good for their families, and to make them feel proud. But sometimes we don’t have the opportunity to do that, and this is when we need to have an especially strong desire to continue moving forward. Sometimes people who have

\(^{37}\) This is the situation that Martha described having experienced in México.
chances to get better things don’t do anything with their opportunities. Not all people are like that; some will do their best when they are given a chance. Others will waste their opportunities.

Over the course of the study, participants’ comments revealed their increasing recognition of the greater number of difficulties that Mexican-American ESL students, as compared to their dominant-group peers, circumnavigate in their effort to graduate. All five continually maintained, however, that for them individual effort had been powerful enough to counteract the scholastic obstacles they had encountered. Participants cited such effort, in conjunction with the strong familial support all of them enjoyed, as the factors most influential to their outstanding academic achievement. The Resilient Five’s educational endeavors were supported both emotionally as well as monetarily by hard-working families who viewed the sacrifice of their childrens’ potential added income as worth the long-term benefits participants would enjoy with a high school education. The strong conflict that may arise between family loyalty and the investment of an education is exemplified in Ana’s dilemma in having to choose whether to quit school prematurely in order to care for her grandparents in México. Her love and gratitude for

38 Junior’s mother, he said, was for him a source of long-distance support, comfort, and motivation.
the couple whom she considered (and consistently referred to as) her parents were brought into conflict with her unswerving devotion to her studies, emphasizing the powerful influence of each in her life.
3. FAMILY

3.1 The Mexican Family

As mentioned at the outset of this paper, I have, over the many years that I have taught Mexican-American students, become enchanted with and touched by the generosity, kindness, and zest that I have repeatedly experienced as characteristic of the Mexican culture. My Mexican-American students have been enthusiastic learners, loving and appreciative participants in difficult and foreign surroundings they often had not chosen for themselves. Their parents and guardians have typically treated me minimally as an honored authority, and at cherished times, as a family member. Their warm gratitude, dignity, and generosity of spirit continue to move me and give me optimism in trying to better their children's scholastic situation.

That the Mexican culture is so often and so greatly misunderstood is a source of pain for me, and it was with genuine joy that I read, by the serendipitous suggestion of a stranger, Valdés' (1996) compelling book, "Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools." Illustrating
her ability to use one of her cultures to mediate and focus the lens of the other, Valdés (1996) recounts a discussion, in which she proudly outlines her son's life in graduate school with Rosario, a Mexican mother and study participant:

Rosario: Say, Lupe, and how old is your son?
Valdés: He's 24.
Rosario: And he doesn't work?
Valdés: Well, no, that is, yes. Well, the thing is he's studying and his job is to study. When he finishes he's going to get a very good job and what he's got to do now is to dedicate himself to his studies.
Rosario: And he doesn't send you money?
Valdés: No, but I don't send him money either because he has a very good scholarship and they pay for everything.
Rosario: Oh, I see. (p. 185)

Valdés (1996) reflects upon the collision of the two friends' very different cultures, revealing an understanding of both, and an ability to reconcile them:

She said nothing more, and neither did I. However, from both Rosario's tone and her expression I knew that she felt a little sorry for me. Not only was my son far away- when he did not really have to be- but he
had also not taken responsibility for me and for his sister. For Rosario, success as a mother involved teaching a young male how to be responsible. She could not conceive of the fact that a 24-year-old man was still in school and not working. In her book, I was either not a great success or I had been unlucky in having a son who only cared about himself. (p. 185)

Hispanic parents are typically extremely involved with their children, instilling in them from a very early age a profound respect for adults, religion, and education. It is frequently Hispanic parents' own deep respect for educators and school administrators that prevents them from questioning or challenging the decisions and actions of education professionals. Mexican families diligently do their part to educate their children in areas of morality, ethics, and civics; they confidently trust that teachers are doing an equally outstanding job in the classroom. They present their children with the loving and attentive context to which Benard (1993, 1995, 1996) might expressly be referring when she relates that:

The voices who have overcome adversity...tell us loud [sic] and clear [sic] that ultimately resilience is a process of connectedness, of linking to
people, to interests, and ultimately to life itself. (p. 4)

Pines (1998) furthers that development is a combination of their personal experiences and the environment in which they live. Our hope, he indicates, lies in taking steps to alter these linkages, so that children who find themselves in a bad environment do not continue having bad environments and develop a sense of impotency. This, provides hope that although often we can not control the numerous influences operating within the lives of our students, we can "arm" them with the tools to take on the challenges\(^{39}\) that life brings. Benard (1996) illustrates the numerous opportunities adults have to effect such support:

The fostering of resilience operates at a deep structural, systemic, human level: at the level of relationships, beliefs, and opportunities for participation and power that are a part of every interaction, every intervention no matter what the focus. (p. 3)

Resilience-promoting teachers and parents, recognizing this, provide frequent and meaningful opportunities to take part in such inclusive

\(^{39}\) I contend that these challenges are more numerous for students of color than their white peers.
activities, all within the context of consistently firm, caring high expectations that prepare children for "the real world." Kozol (1991) gives voice to one teacher's illustrative philosophy:

'This is the point of it,' she says. 'I'm teaching them three things. Number one: self-motivation. Number two: self-esteem. Number three: you help your sister and your brother. I tell them they're responsible for one another.' (P. 48)

Participants' descriptions of Mexican families' similar beliefs brings these words to life:

Martha: My parents like to be with their children, to go out together with us, and to talk together as a family. They also used to read to us when we were little, and now read with my younger sisters...I know that I always have the support of my parents. They have taught me to continue moving ahead, to help and respect them, and to set a good example for my little brother and sisters.

My family is typical of Mexican families in how they worry about us a lot, and pay us a lot of attention. But I also believe that we are a little bit different from other Mexican families because we don't have many parties, or attend them, as others do. We also don't like to drink wine in our home.

My family and I go to church each week and on weekends. I remember that we always went to church when I was growing up, and now here we go twice a week. For us religion is important, and we believe strongly in it. I think that it has helped me to think more about what I do and how important it is
to help others, because often what I do and what I think, I think and do for God...I believe in God 100% because I've always gone to church. I enjoy doing it, and I take pleasure in my life because I believe in Him.

Spiritual beliefs appear to strengthen participants’ affirmation of self-worth, compelling individuals to achieve and help others in constructive ways:

**Mayra:** My family's typical because my father is very strict...Religion is important for me and my family, because God is the greatest thing in the world. I have always said that if I help God, He is going to help me more.

**Lory:** I think that what is common to most Mexican families are strong morals and honesty...I also believe in God; that's what my culture is about. It gives us the strength to keep going along the right path. We think about how God sacrificed His own son so that we could go on living, and have one more chance to change things.

But I realize that different people have different beliefs. It's kind of hard to explain, but for us religion makes us think remember and think about our ancestor's sufferings, and how we don't want the past repeated. That keeps us moving ahead from generation to generation.

Lory's unmarried pregnancy directly contradicts the Catholic tenets strictly followed by most Mexican families; she nonetheless espouses and exemplifies the strict but loving atmosphere in which this family-
centered culture, in my experience, typically raises their children:

**Lory:** Especially typical of Mexican families is a strong respect for the importance of family, and a strict up-bringing of children to teach them how to be strong people of character. Now that I am starting my own family, for example, I always think before I make important decisions in my life. But when I used to hang out with friends, I didn’t used to ever think about the problems I could have had, or the consequences until they were actually happening.

But now that I’m with my boyfriend and having a baby, it’s different, because I do have to think very carefully about what I’m going to do, and what I shouldn’t do. All of the stupid things that I did when I was around 13 have changed. I don’t think I’ll ever do stupid things like that again, because I love my baby very much, and also my boyfriend. My original family was the reason I turned my life around, and my new family is the reason that I’m going to continue moving ahead in the future.

It appears that the combination of Lory’s family, school staff, and her own effort was responsible for her escaping the “hole” from which she emerged. Ana similarly illustrates how on-going familial and scholastic support were responsible for, in her case, her avoiding the pitfalls of drugs and gang membership, temptations made all the more enticing by the stresses of being a Mexican-American high school ESL student. It appears that empathy leads to both understanding and acceptance, two important facets that may empower
people to risk the rejection of others when refusing to accept their offers to engage in destructive behavior.

**Ana:** I would like everyone to know how we feel when they discriminate against us. But sadder still is that we sometimes feel that we have to lie and say that we are happy when we are not. That’s exactly what happened to me; I always tried to be happy, laughing, and telling everyone to tell other people how happy I was. I did this because I was afraid that nobody would love me otherwise. One day I tried to forget all of my problems, and I called a guy who went to school with me. He had offered me something to forget all of that, and told me that it would be fun. So that day I called him, and he came to my home.

Then he showed me some white powder, and I asked him what it was. He told me to taste it, and after that day I never tasted it again. He also gave me a cigarette to teach me how to smoke. I learned how to smoke, but then I remembered my grandparents, how they had taught me to live my life.

So I decided to break off my relationship with this kind of friend but before I did that, I told him to get out of that situation himself. He ignored me, and told me that I was a little baby. Then I ignored him, because I knew that I had been wrong by doing that kind of thing.

At first I didn’t tell anybody, because I thought that nobody cared about me, but later I talked with my sisters. They told me about their sadnesses, and I told them about mine. That made me feel a great amount of love for them. It’s very important to feel loved by those near us, that gives us the desire to do things. Being brought up by strict and loving grandparents, and having the support of my sisters have made a big difference in my life.

I also think that when someone doesn’t want to be in a gang, he doesn’t have to be. When we’re smart and strong, we can keep far away from gangs
and drugs. But the most important thing is how our parents have brought us up since we were little children. If they gave us love, and made us feel sure of our power of learning, we are going to be able to say no to everything bad, and focus on our goals, dreams, and our future.

Having arrived in the United States, Mexicans’ world changes, but not always for the better. Where, for example, drug use in schools is practically unknown in Mexico, drugs are both available and fairly common to school-aged children in this country. Ana shared with the group, for example, that her aunt had not even known what drugs were when her family had discussed this problem days before. Mexican immigrant parents, often working all day and unable to speak English, become desperate for help once their children become exposed and addicted to drugs. For parents unaware of the resources available to help them recover their children, and fearful of disciplining them as they had in México\textsuperscript{40} (where they had been well-behaved, respectful, and completely under parents’ control), what had been an emigration intended to better the family’s life turns into a nightmarish existence.

\textsuperscript{40} Because child abuse laws in this country prohibit the striking of a child, many Mexican parents describe being fearful of physically disciplining their children as they had in México. Although the strongest punishment Mexican parents typically mete out on their misbehaving offspring is a swat on the behind, numerous Mexican-American students have corroborated that one of the first things they were told by friends and relatives as new arrivals to the U.S. was that they could call the police on their parents if they received a smack. A high number of students threaten their parents with such a phone call, and it is thus that some Mexican parents find themselves incapacitated as authority figures in their own homes, and begin to lose control of their own children.
Participants agreed that limiting children's exposure to drugs is beyond the control of parents. The best means of promoting their avoiding drugs, then, might be to instill in them at an early age a value system that clearly stigmatizes risky behaviors such as those to which they may be exposed at school. It is this value system to which participants attributed their ability to avoid temptations, despite their also sometimes feeling lonely and dispirited, that had adversely affected the lives of their peers.

Ana continued:

My sisters are the people I always talk with about my feelings, and about everything I am doing or would like to do. They really believe that I can be and do whatever I want. And that’s the most important thing, that someone loves us, and gives us motivation to do our things. When I told my sisters about what we are doing in this project, they told me how much they admire my strength, because none of them can discuss our problems and personal experiences like that. I think that sometimes we really don’t know how important our families are.

In my opinion, Mexican parents must have close communication with their children. Especially when it comes to school they have to see how their children feel, how they are doing, and what kinds of friendships they have. These kinds of things are important for everyone to do, but especially for parents.

Sometimes our confusion about problems causes us to do things that we usually wouldn’t want to, but we do everything that we can to help us to forget our troubles. But I think that if someone
were to try to help us, we could get up and start again, and learn that way to think before we act. I always try to talk to someone when I have problems, and I think that helps me a lot. It also keeps me focused on studying, which is good because I love to do the best I can with everything that I do.

Junior's family experience, as mentioned earlier, was different from the other resilient four's. Abandoned by his father and unwelcome among his peers, Junior more than once described his motivation to graduate as being in large part due to his watching his mother struggle to make ends meet. Ostensibly Junior would appear to be the perfect candidate to be a dropout; he contends daily⁴¹ with the challenges described above. Additionally, since most of his friends have dropped out or died and his family is in México, Junior's "support network" is notably absent. For him, then, the internal protective factors that typically work in conjunction with supportive environmental protective factors (absent from his life) continue to propel him forward.

Although he says that he plans to remain in the U.S. indefinitely, Junior attributes much of his scholastic focus to the greater amount of money he predicts that he will be able to send back to his family in México after receiving his diploma. For

⁴¹ Junior was in his junior year of high school at the time of this study.
Junior failure does not appear an option; as he once told me, "I'm not that easy:"

**Junior:** Unfortunately, when I was in third grade and eight years old my father left me, and I never heard anything about him for a long time. He went to the United States for the second time when I was two years old, but kept on coming every year in December to spend his vacation with us.

When I was eight years old my father asked me to accompany him to the United States, but I turned him down. When I was nine I passed to fourth grade, and I used to hang around with these guys who humiliated people who were weaker than they. They never did well in school, but even while I was hanging around with them I was studying hard and getting good grades in class.

That year my father said that he would come in December, but he didn't. His brother did, though, and he told us that my father said that he'd come in January instead. But again he didn't, although he continued to send letters and money to us.

In the fifth grade, none of my friends passed; they all stayed in fourth, so I was a very lonely person. I didn't used to talk much, and I changed a lot. I had been really fat since I was eight, and in the fifth grade people used to make fun of me, but they never told me anything to my face. That year my dad stopped sending us letters and money, and we didn't know about him for a long time.

My mother's encouragement and support of my educational goals, and my uncle's telling me to take advantage of my opportunity to go to school to avoid working in the fields are typical of Mexican families. Like most Mexican families, I absolutely believe in God, and in the saints, also. Most of the Mexican families also give good advice to their children, wanting them to keep going and not to give up.
Ana suggested, in a journal, ways in which parents might alleviate some of their children’s difficulties in their new surroundings:

- Explain major life’s changes to children, what the changes mean, and how to deal with them;
- Help the children with their homework;
- Listen to their children’s problems and ideas.

Lory: For me the biggest influence in my desire to do well academically was my grandfather, because he’d always ask my brother and me whether we wanted to be slaves, instead of important people. He gave us advice that has turned out to be true, good advice.

He wanted us to be successful, to escape the holes that so many of the people who we saw on the streets had fallen into, and to be a source of pride to the whole family. To be people for our little cousins to look up to, and to keep them from going down the wrong road. In our family, the important thing is for us to help out each other, to be united. I think it would be hard not to help my family, and to only be independent and self-focused.

In México City, things are very different from the United States. Because of the Mexican economy, people work on the streets doing anything, as long as they are making a few cents. The educational system is very poor, and people don’t have many opportunities to get ahead; there are also a lot of people down there, and it’s very crowded. It’s not like the United States, because in México people walk for miles and miles to get places, and there are not the same commodities that there are here. The education is different; living is different; the jobs are different; and the laws are different.

My grandfather was very important to me because he knew a lot about life. Since he was old, he had gone through a lot and knew more about
life than we did, and he knew how hard it was to struggle for things. He didn’t want us to have to go through the same things he had been through.

Junior: My uncle told me that he was going to support me so I could go to school, and that it was up to me whether I wanted to get a good job in the future, or whether I wanted to work in the field harder and for less money. I’m different from the other participants in this project because I rely on myself and my own judgement to get through problems and difficult times. I don’t have family with whom I’m close in this country. Whenever I feel active, I can really do cool things really fast, but when I’m unable to concentrate, I don’t get any farther. So if I’m not motivating myself, nobody is going to do it for me.

The numbers cited in reference to Mexican dropout are too high to continue to ignore, even without a familiarity with Mexican people, their work ethic, and their devotion to working hard to achieve a better life:

Academia cannot ignore the striking discrepancy between Hispanic versus white students in the degree to which concerns inherent in students’ home lives interfere with their schooling (Houle, 1980). For example, “[o]ne third of Hispanic seniors at a level at least 10 percent higher than non-Hispanic whites, worry about money problems, family obligations, [and] a lack of a good place to study at home....” (Duran, 1983)42

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42 These very real deterrents are well-illustrated in the movie, “Stand and Deliver,” by several Mexican-American students, most notably Lupe, whose household responsibilities include the
**Junior:** My biggest influence to achieve has been my mother, because I know that everything she does is for my own good. My father used to get really mad when I said bad words, but he used to let me go wherever I wanted, and to do whatever I wanted on the streets. I don't think he cared very much. My mother thinks that we should look upon others' experiences and situations, or look back upon our own and learn from them. She has always proven that she cares about us.

Independence is very important in my family, because they always say that people have to be independent to be able to survive. My family encourages me to keep moving ahead by telling me to get ready for the future, or I'm going to end up working in the fields.

**Ana:** I remember that when I was a little girl I started to understand life. I was around eight years old when I found out about my mother's death; I had thought up until then that my grandparents had been my biological parents. When I asked them about this, they told me that I wouldn't understand, but later they finally told me the truth. I found out that my dad had abandoned us and had married another woman, and that my mom had had a very difficult life. That made me hate all men, but I realized that there were also good men, because my grandfather was never abusive to anyone. Although he's very demanding, he never hurt me. I have learned through all that has happened to me that not everyone is good, but that we can try to teach them to try to be their best.

I think that we have to make our parents understand the way life for us here is, but never to make them feel bad, or less than ourselves because they are less educated. Most of our parents want us to study and to have a good

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raising of her younger siblings, house-keeping duties, and meal preparation for the family in order to help ease the burden on her hard-working mother. Despite her innate motivation and willingness to work hard academically while continuing to fulfill her household obligations, Lupe eventually "cracks" when she can't even do her studying at night because the light disturbs her mother who is trying to rest after a hard day's work.
future, so we have to think first before we decide what to do in every situation.

We know that every parent loves us, no matter how they act, and we have to know that all they do is because they want the best for us. Some parents may have had bad experiences, and want their children to avoid having to go through the same things. Because thanks to them we are in this world, and we have to demonstrate our gratitude to them by doing our best.

Participants unanimously and emphatically expressed an appreciation for their families, and their heart for demonstrating this gratitude. The Resilient Five described how they express their thanks through their remaining studious, responsible, and helpful children; they additionally described striving to serve as a strong role model that their younger siblings might emulate:

**Showing Our Parents Our Gratitude**

Me: This is the bad part of equal power, because I'm not gonna go, "OK, here's what you should talk about!" (More laughter)...so you guys come up with the theme.
(Silence.)
Junior: (Joking) Can we take our time?
Ana: Let's talk about how to help our parents...
Martha: How to learn English.
Ana: To give them our thanks for all they've done for us...
Junior: That's a good question.
Me: So, in what form would you give them thanks?
Martha: For all that they have given me.
Ana: For giving us life...
**Martha:** Uh huh...for having caused us to be the way we are.

**Me:** So (checking), what they've done for you ("uh huh") and how they are with you ("uh huh")? OK...OK, go for it! That’s a good question! How do you show your appreciation?

**Martha:** By...how do I say it...not defrauding them. They hope for and expect the best for me, that I’m going to graduate, that I’m going to go to college, that I’ll have a good career. That I’m going to help my little brothers and sisters, doing that which they would like to see me do. That I’m going to set a good example for my siblings. Umm...

**Ana:** (Says something barely discernable)

**Me:** You guys, loud! (Laughter)

**Martha:** That they feel proud of me, that...

**Ana:** That they not feel that all of their efforts...

**Martha:** ...That they had been in vain. Because they are working so hard all of the time.

**Ana:** And many parents say that if the parents don’t obtain an education, their children won’t, either. But in a way they are all teaching us how to value life, and how to fight to work. Because they don’t want us to have to do jobs as hard as the ones that they have to do...and to study.

**Martha:** And to have the best.

**Ana:** The best...and more than they have themselves.

**Junior:** (has been trying to speak) ...alone here by myself (referring to “solo male participant” status. His feigned sadness makes us all laugh, and we high-five each other).

**Me:** (laughing): Poor guy, go ahead!

**Ana:** I talk with my younger sister, and tell her that we should continue to take our example from our older sister. And she says ‘Yeah, but look! She didn’t study!’ And I say, ‘Yes, she had to work, and look at how hard she works. And our education will get us further.’
And I say this, and then I say, 'Look, she never went around looking like a chola [gangster-type], or dressing like that. Always working, and...' I would watch her like this, and there I had her for an example, and...

Me: (I member-check what I’ve written.)

Ana: Yes, and to help her like my older sister helped me. The way I study, my little sister has to study the same way.

Martha: Because she saw her older sister doing it.

Ana: Like my younger sister has to watch me. And I watched my older sister. And we had this discussion because she had skipped a class. And I asked her, “Let’s see, when did I ever skip a class?” Because I’ve never skipped even one.

And...

Me: (I member-check what I’ve written.) And did she listen to you?

Ana: No, because she has many friends, and her friends skip. And, well, she had never done that before.

Me: (I clarify; in transcribing this conversation, I realize how patient participants have been with me!)

Ana: I don’t know what’s going on with her, because before, yeah, she had always listened to me. But now...before, if she was going to do something, she talked with me first, and then asked my opinion about it. But right now it’s different, and she’s listening more to her friends. And I think that now when she needs me for advice, I’m not there, because on the weekends I’m with my other sisters who live in another town. The other ones. So she’s with my aunt and uncle, and we don’t speak much anymore. Well, even here in school, either. And I’ve always said that la comunicación es muuuuy importante, porque...[communication is very important because...] 

Me: (I feed back what I’ve typed in my notes to clarify, and you can hear me catch up typing in the silence. To Martha:) Who does your...you have brothers and a sister, right? Who do they listen to more, you or their friends?
Martha: I think that they obey me most...no; I know that they obey me most. (Laughter.)
Me: You go, Girl, Woo!
Martha: Sí, they obey me well.
Me (to Ana): You know, I’m again going to put this tape recorder right in front of you, because I always hear the keyboard louder than your voices (participants laugh).
Ana: (Makes face and passes tape recorder to another student).
Me: Hey, you’re the one I can’t hear; you keep it. OK, so “Listens more to Martha than to her friends.” As I type. OK, and why do you say this? In what ways do you see it? Or what do you think about that? Why do they listen to you more?
Martha: Because I’m their oldest sister! (Laughs.)
Me: OK, what does that mean to them?
Martha: Ayyyyy, Miss Temes!
Me: ‘Cause I know I don’t listen to my brother (All laugh).
Martha: Well, we always listen to what our parents tell us, and are obedient to them. I have always done what they have wanted, whatever they say, and have never disobeyed them in anything. And I, as the oldest that I am, have to teach my brothers and sister, to show them the good paths. If I dress like a gang-banger [gang member], then that’s how they’re going to dress. And if I do wrong things, they’re going to see this and say, “Well, if my older sister is doing this, why not me, too?”
Me: (I read back to member-check)
Martha: If I don’t demonstrate for them the right example...who will show it to them? As the older sibling that I am? It’s my responsibility.
Me: (Typing furiously) Ugh, speak slowly, Hombre! (Laughter.)
Me: (I member-check what I’ve written)
Martha: I feel responsible as the oldest that they continue moving in the right direction. They look to me like...I don’t know how to say this...I think that they look at me to see what they should do. I’m their oldest sister. Like, I’m about to graduate, and I say “I’m going to college”, so that they are motivated to continue
coming to school. For them to aspire to a four-year university. Because I want them to have all that I have, and for them to be more educated than I. They say "Oh, you're going to a 2-year college. I'm also going to go there." But I say, "No!" I don't want to see any of my brothers or sisters at a 2-year school; I want to be the only one. I say "You're going to a four-year university. I can't go to a four-year, but you guys will be able to." I think that yeah, it's very true that children always look to their older sibling, at what he is. If I see you there, I'm going to send you back (all laugh, Junior says, "Yes").

Ana: MmmHmmm (she nods her agreement).
Me: (I clarify what I think I've understood so far, and then joke:) Who says that? And how old is she? 17? Yeah, I think I know her [she was also my student the year before] (we laugh). Do you all agree with that? Is that what you all want for your younger brothers and sisters (all say yes). Is that how your parents feel about you? That they want you guys to pass them?
Martha: That's why my parents want me to get the very best, because they have always wanted the best for their children, and I want even better things for my brothers and sisters than I have had.
Me: (I member-check my notes for accuracy)
Ana: They need the opportunity for that, to have someone to provide them with that chance.
Me: So you're saying if they can go ahead, that's what you want. And so, your parents wanted the same thing for you, right? So in a way, your parents were modeling for you hard work, and now you're modeling hard work for your brothers and sisters.
Ana: And in other ways the older influence the younger. For example, when my older sister got married, she said to us, "I married happily and to a good man. And if I did it, why not you?" Not that she is encouraging us to marry young or right now, but she is intent upon our marrying a good man like she did.
Martha: Yes; sí.
Ana: Because my older sister is always thinking about showing the right road to us, and about helping us. Because she’s always saying that she can show us what to do, but that we will always have the last word in our decision-making.

Junior: Mmm-hmmm (he indicates his agreement).

Ana: That she can show us what to do, but that we will always have to decide our own way for ourselves.

Martha: Not that they marry, but that they marry well.

Ana: Yeah, “Don’t get married! But when you do, do it in this way.”

Me: Yeah, see, and I have so much trouble with that as a teacher, because you can tell a kid what to do, but ultimately? It’s their own decision.

Ana: They need to also understand that we love them, and they us. They listen to us, and tell us the best thing to do, whereas others, like our friends, may tell us to do the opposite. They tell us, tell us, tell us to do things, things that are not necessarily in our best interest.

Me: Do you think that this is typical of the Mexican culture, wanting your brothers and sisters to go further than you? And for the Mexican families in general to want more for their children? Is it typical for the kids to want their sibs to go further? And you? In your experience, too (students all nod in agreement)? You guys, don’t just nod! This is being taped!

3.2 Parents as Teachers of Respect and Morals

Investigated by Valdés (1996), an exhaustive ethnographic depiction, aptly titled “Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools,” examines the influences of family environment on children’s success both within
the families as well as in the communities in which the children lived. A comprehensive, three-year-long exploration of the Mexican culture recounted in a richly-painted portrait of ten recently-immigrated Mexican families, the study's intent was "to [bring] to life the everyday worlds of ten newly arrived Mexican families" (Valdés, 1996, p. 5). It is a book about "...values and beliefs, dreams and struggles, newly discovered expectations and serious misunderstandings. It is also a book about unfair perceptions and well-intentioned efforts to reform families so that their children can succeed in school" (p. 5).

Valdés' description of female participants' unquestioning faith in and support of educators is reminiscent of Freire's (1970) description of the oppressed's (disenfranchised) internalization of the oppressor (mainstream society's) opinions of them. Freire describes how "they call themselves ignorant and say the 'professor' is the one who has knowledge and to whom they should listen" (p. 49). Valdés recounts how the mothers of Mexican-origin children in her study shared this similar sentiment: "Las maestras están ay pa [sic] enseñarles, y ustedes están ay pa [sic] aprender ('The teachers are there to teach you, and you are there to learn')" (p. 153). Some mothers like
Rosario, Valdés observed, were "more than willing to do battle with teachers, to talk with high school counselors..." (p. 153), but she found, without exception, a profound trust and respect for education belied by commonly-believed stereotypes of minority parents' indifference to education.

The fit between Valdés' findings and those resulting from my own years of teaching and familiarity with the Mexican culture is virtually "exact." This additional source of research credibility meets Cusick's (1973) major test of validity criterion of one engaged in a similar setting's saying "that is the way it is" (p. 233). Valdés paints a comprehensive and solid portrait of the very different context in which each participant (educator, child, parent) is involved, and she is equitably critical of all. Mexican immigrants are portrayed as hard-working, struggling individuals, part of a larger cultural context with which the reader becomes familiar through thick, vivid description. Educational professionals are portrayed as well-meaning but uninformed.

In México, educational attainment is not perceived as a predictor of socioeconomic success; for example,
according to Texto Integro del Programa para la Modernización Educativa 1989-1994\(^{43}\):

- Approximately 20.2 million adults had not completed primaria (elementary school);
- 700,000 students between the ages of 10 and 14 are not enrolled in school;
- Only 54% of 14.6 million students enrolled in primary school complete this level of study in the normal 6 years;
- More than 15,000 primary schools (20% of total schools) do not offer the full six years of primary schooling;
- The average level of schooling among the Mexican population is 6 years;
- In 1983, there were only 331 public libraries in the entire country.

Many studies of Mexican-American children\(^{44}\) cite low parental levels of formal education; they note, also, an almost uniform parental commitment to their children's educational success as a means of economic mobility. Gándara's (1995) study, for example,

\(^{43}\) See Valdés (1996).

describes her Mexican-American participants as being "people who chose education as a vehicle for social and economic mobility or personal fulfillment" (p. 11) with a strong, internally-generated drive to succeed academically. Valdés' (1996) study of 10 newly-arrived Mexican immigrant families, additionally, found that "...most of the adults in the study had not focused on education as a key solution upon which they could depend in order to open up doors for themselves in México. None of these adults were [sic] acquainted with people who had 'made it' by going to school" (p. 177):

**Ana:** Young kids learn most of their character and values when they are young children. So if parents teach them at an early age to respect everything, and to do the right thing, that's what they're going to do. Parents must teach their children the difference between good and bad, the consequences for choosing each, and what to do if they want to avoid the negative ones. Most of all, they need to teach children how to be responsible for their choices.

**Martha:** I agree with Ana. It's parents and not teachers who have to teach their children how to respect. It's the parents' job to teach their children the difference between good and the alternative. Parents have to discipline, and to teach kids how to behave well. Everything I learned about those things I learned from my mother and father. My teachers did not teach me those things.
Mayra: Yeah, usually in México, it’s our parents who teach us good manners. We have to show respect for our parents, for older people, and any adults. No matter what... Sometimes teenagers make it difficult for us to understand the cultures and traditions of our new home. I think the changes affect young people pretty deeply. Because here the parents expect that the teachers will teach students to respect them and to learn the difference between what’s right and wrong.

My dad is strict, too. He wants everything almost perfect, and everything to be right. My mom’s very strict also, the same way as my dad. She wants me to get the best education I can to go far and to help my future. She wants me to have as much as I can now, as well as in the future, and to help others, too. My dad does, also.

My parents always let me participate in school activities, and support and help me with what I do. They think that the most important thing for my brothers and sisters is an education. I think that my parents have been my biggest influence to do well in school. They’re the ones who love me and care for me the most in the world.

Martha: My parents were my biggest influence to do well in school, and to do my best to reach my goals. I always respect what they say because they are my parents, and they have taught me to respect them and others. They also explain things in a special way so that I understand what they have said. I know that they love me, and that they want the best for me.

Junior: I’m different in that way. I solve problems by myself most of the time, because if I look for help from my family members in this country, they might get mad at me. So I’m very independent, and rely mostly on myself and my ability to solve my own problems.

Lory: On a strictness scale of one through five, my dad’s a five, because he has this belief that education is everything, and he is right. If I’m not at school, I have to be at home, and not
hanging out with guys or gangsters. My mom would be like a three. She’ll protect us from our father, and cover for us. She’s not that strict; mothers are more sweet, and the fathers have the firmer hand. But she will get mad if we cross the line too many times.

**Martha:** My father is strict, but only when it’s necessary. He’ll tell us what he doesn’t like, and things like that. My mom is also strict, but just about things like getting home on time. She loves the way that I am, and how I think about other people, because I’m a good example for my sisters. She wants me to keep studying to get a career that I’ll enjoy, to get the highest education that I can, and to be proud of what I do. She also encourages me to work hard to get what I want, and to be helpful to others. My parents always help me and give me advice, but at the same time, they want me to do things for myself, to fight and to work to be better.

I think that some parents don’t know how to educate their kids because they were not educated, and when they see that their kids are headed in a bad direction, they start to try to correct them. But their kids ask themselves, "Why are they telling me this now, when they’ve never said anything before?"

So I think that it’s very important for parents to teach their children consistently how to behave beginning when they are very young. When they reach a certain age they are going to make their own decisions, and by then it will be too late for parents to begin trying to teach their kids how to be educated and respectful with others.

Reflecting on the Mexican family and the extended family represented by the rancheros (community members) living nearby, participants agreed that, in their experience, the Mexican and American cultures are quite
different. In this country, they noted, most people, including women and mothers, typically work. In Mexico, however, only fathers work; almost all mothers stay at home, helping their children with homework, attending school meetings, and developing the youths' character and morals. The Mexican mother is a guide for her children, and they are the center of her world.

Participants described that despite Mexican parents' typically being more strict, ironically, there is more freedom in Mexico as compared to America. Young people in México, unlike here, feel free to stroll around whenever they please, and to attend dances and social events without concern for their safety. In December, for example, there are numerous all-day dances, and large numbers of youths attend them without incident. In this country, however, participants say that Mexican children are often expected to be home immediately after school. They are not permitted to go out alone since their parents are unsure of what might happen to them in this unknown and relatively unsafe environment. On the Mexican ranchos, by contrast, everyone is acquainted with one other; the community is a tightly-knit one in which everyone knows and looks out for their neighbors.

I verified these statements with numerous other Mexican-Americans, all of whom enthusiastically corroborated what participants described.
Participants additionally discussed the very different implications of being a pregnant teenager in this country versus in Mexico. In México the simple act of a boy and a girl holding hands in public, for example, quickly ignites the rumor fires, since neighbors tend to discuss everything amongst themselves. If a teenaged girl gets pregnant in Mexico, participants described, she is ostracized. In the United States, however, we have numerous programs to support our pregnant children, and a pregnant student is no longer an uncommon sight. When Mexicans move here, said the group, the Mexican culture and accompanying societal conventions are typically upheld by parents; girls must, as mandated by their parents, be accompanied on dates.

In Mexico a male suitor is expected to come to a girl’s house, where her father and uncles will proceed to interrogate him; however, young girls are permitted to go out without a brother or sister acting as a chaperone after dating a young man for six months or so. A strict curfew is enforced once the couple is permitted to date (after four to six months). Public displays of affection are “death,” joked participants, for couples committing them, and hand-holding or hugging spotted by a fellow ranchero is big trouble.
Should word get back to their parents, laughed student-researchers, the offending couple had better get married.

The Resilient Five pointed out the remarkable differences between themselves, raised in Mexico, and their relatives, usually cousins, raised here. Ana described how, for example, her cousins will ask permission to do something, and when it is denied by her aunt, will proceed to do what had just been expressly forbidden, disobeying their parents "to their faces." Each participant, however, raised in Mexico, corroborated understanding and respecting the meaning of "no" the first time that it is said, without question. Where her cousins are often resistant to familial authority, Martha illustrated, her brother obeys her like a parent. Martha further described how her aunt ominously warned her mother that after a year, Martha and her siblings would begin to behave like their cousins (i.e., disobediently). Martha firmly maintained, however, that the respectful and obedient behavior of her and her siblings, in no way resembling her cousins', have remained unchanged. Noting this, Martha's aunt repeatedly cautions Martha's mother, "Oh, it'll happen. Give them another month."
Ideally, all of us agreed, it may be through a collaboration between parents, teachers, and students that the latter's educational needs are best met. Family, as described earlier, was cited by participants as a source of motivation, as well as emotional and financial aid. Additional assistance, in this triumvirate, is provided through the efforts of supportive educational professionals. Our discussions illustrated my earlier-expressed contention that resilience is a combination of both internal and external factors. Students' internal drive to succeed can work in conjunction with, and be strengthened by, sources of external support such as the family and the school. Through its teaching practices, the availability of support personnel, and their on-going efforts to equitably serve all of their students, schools have a valuable opportunity to increase the likelihood of all students' achieving academic success.
4. TEACHERS AND EDUCATION

An education is no guarantee of future economic success; the likelihood of getting a high-paying job, however, tends to increase in relation to the degree of education attained. This correlation, the importance of college, and of an education in general needs to be cogently presented to potential "consumers," for as Matute-Bianchi (1986), among others, observes, "...more successful Mexican-descent students are achievement oriented and goal oriented, even if they lack a specific career goal. They see a definite connection between their experiences in high school and their success as adults. Virtually all of these students express an interest in going on to college" (p. 242).

As previously discussed, initially many language-minority students may be unlikely to seriously consider higher education a realistic part of their future. Educators need, in my opinion, to proactively encourage such a goal at a point early enough for the idea to take firm root, and to steadily grow over time. The year that this study was completed, for example, my ESL level I and II classes themselves requested, and successfully completed, college and job applications
subsequent to a field trip to a local community college. On this trip they toured the campus, visiting classrooms, language labs, and other facilities. At the end of the day we were treated to a brief account of her own academic experiences, in Spanish, by a Mexican-American scholarship-receiving student there, a recent high school graduate herself.

Several students told me that the trip, which had cost them nothing, awakened in them a realization that a college education is a potential reality for them. The subsequent discussions, practice in filling out the necessary paperwork, and individual connections that the students made with native language peers attending the college extended the benefits of the activity well into the future (an earned diploma will make the effects life-long)\textsuperscript{46}. This experience suggested that the benefits of higher education might optimally be presented to ESL students in elementary, or, at the latest, middle school, and reinforced throughout their academic careers.

Because cost of tuition is often a major concern, students should also be encouraged early-on to earn

\textsuperscript{46}It bears repeating that first-year ESL learners participated in, and benefited from, the activities described above. Students of all levels, given adequate time and assistance, can successfully participate in numerous high-level learning projects. When, however, teachers mistake students' low-level linguistic skills for low-level cognitive ability, students are deprived not only of meaningful learning activities such as this one, but also of life-impacting exposure to academic opportunities such as the possibility of attending college.
high grades to qualify them for the academic scholarships that can help defray the cost of a college education. Matute-Bianchi (1986) found, by way of illustration, that the difference between successful Japanese-American students and their successful Mexican-American peers was that "[a]s a group [the Japanese-descent students] had more detailed and intimate knowledge of adult occupations and opportunities, as well as more detailed knowledge of the high school curriculum and its link to successful post-secondary experiences.

Unlike their successful Mexican-descent peers, the Japanese-American students expressed the importance of taking particular types of...classes...and [were], for the most part, aware of the hierarchy in the...system of higher education (p. 246)." Again it appears, then, that it is a lack of exposure to resources, rather than a lack of motivation, that limits Mexican-American students' academic success. Matute-Bianchi's (1985) findings illustrate that calling attention to the various benefits of community college as a transitional stepping-stone to a four-year institution is another means by which educators can encourage Mexican-American students' pursuit of higher education as a goal. These institutions' lower cost and somewhat less-demanding
classes can make other obstacles seem more surmountable, and can help to ease the transition from high school by providing an intermediary step.

4.1 One Teacher's Impact

Few lessons will ever come off as flawlessly in motion as in the planning stages. Troubleshooting potential potholes, then, is key to successful implementation of any lesson plan, regardless of how creative or experienced the teacher. Also crucial, in my opinion, is the teacher's having the sense of humor not to be procedure-driven to such an extent that he fails to enjoy and encourage students' enthusiasm and vitality during the learning process. On-the-spot flexibility to extend or curtail individual learning activities according to their success or failure is also critical to effective teaching.

Students appreciate a teacher who transports them to worlds they had never imagined, but ultimately they will forget (too) much of the information that they learn. What they tend never to forget, however, is the teacher's approach: what they perceive as her degree of concern, respect, and warmth for her students. Ultimately, too, these will dictate the lengths to
which learners will “go for” that teacher\textsuperscript{47} (really, for themselves), in order to earn his approval and praise. In other words, at least one Mrs. Hawkins in every child’s life is, in my opinion, vital:

\begin{quote}
[\textit{W}]hat is unique in Mrs. Hawkins’s classroom is not what she does but who she is. Warmth and humor and contagious energy cannot be replicated and cannot be written into any standardized curriculum. (Kozol, 1991, p. 51)
\end{quote}

We often focus, as educators and educational researchers, on factors over which, sadly, we often have little control; there, however, appears to be hope:

\begin{quote}
[\textit{P}]edagogic problems in our city are not chiefly matters of injustice, inequality, or segregation, but of insufficient information about teaching strategies: If we could simply learn “what works” in Corla Hawkins’s room, we’d then be in a better position to repeat this all over Chicago and in every other system. (Kozol, 1991, p. 51)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{47} One of my favorite teachers remains the lady whom I had for first grade; she simply would not tolerate lack of effort, laziness, or corner-cutting of any kind. She was calm, kind, and consistent in her guidance, and I came to see that, because there was no getting around it, I always had to do my best for her. As a high school student, I returned to her classroom as a volunteer, watching her no-nonsense but loving approach to shaping corner-cutting children into individuals who could be proud of the final product of their efforts.
The loving heart from which the Ms. Hawkinses of the world expand their pupils' horizons are especially powerful medicine for the marginalized students whom the system gradually wears down. Benard (1996) reinforces Kozol's notion of the teacher’s and the entire educational system’s great potential for positive intervention on behalf of such students:

Ultimately, resiliency research provides a mandate for social change--it is a clarion call for creating these relationships and opportunities in all human systems....Changing the status quo means changing the paradigm, both personally and professionally, from risk to resilience, from control to participation...from Eurocentrism to multi-culturalism, from seeing youth as problems to seeing them as resources... (Benard, 1996, p. 5)

**Martha:** The teachers I had in ESL are different from the others because they don’t care that we are Mexicans. They treat us like everybody else, and they don’t see differences between us and the [dominant-group] Americans. I have never been discriminated against in my ESL classes. But when I started to have more mainstream classes I felt different, because some teachers seemed to treat me differently because I am Mexican.

I had one mainstream teacher whom I really appreciate because when I was the only Mexican girl in his economics class, he treated me like the rest of the students. He saw me not as a
Mexican, but as a girl who did not understand what he said. This teacher tried to help me in many ways, because sometimes I didn't know some words in English, and he tried to help me. He never made me feel different from the others.

I have also had teachers who were not very nice. I don't know why, because I have always had the same attitude and behavior in all of my classes. I am a person who is usually quiet and hard-working. These teachers don't talk to the Mexicans like they do to the American people. They don't give a smile to you or anything, or sometimes they will actually ignore you even if you are standing directly in front of them.

In another class I was the only Mexican, and no one talked to me, not even the teacher. In this class we had to do presentations every Friday. I never gave even one, and the teacher never asked me why, or told me that it was going to affect my grade. She never encouraged me to try, or anything like that. She gave me a zero, but never tried to find out why I wasn't doing the homework or the presentations.

In fact, the whole semester that I was in this class, the teacher never spoke to me once. That's why sometimes I didn't do anything in her class. I know that she was a teacher, and she should have talked to me and asked me why I wasn't doing anything, but she never did. She never once even said hello to me, although I saw her every day at school.

If this teacher would have had a better attitude towards me, I am sure that I would have been successful in her class, but it was impossible without her helping me in any way. She knew that I was in ESL classes, and that my English was not perfect, but even so she chose not to help me.
Freire (1970) would question the humanity of such a teacher, based upon his assertion that

No-one can be authentically human while he [sic] prevents others from being so. (p. 73)

Martha continued,

You see this is what makes my other teachers special, because they have always helped me. Knowing that I didn’t speak English, they talked to me and said, “Hey [Martha], why don’t you try? You can do it!” They considered me like all of the other students, and didn’t treat me differently from them⁴⁸.

Mayra: There are some classes that help us quite a bit, and the students in them attain a lot. Without exception I have to try to understand everything, and to do my very best so that I can get good grades in my classes.

Teachers have to show students that they can be intelligent, and that they’re able to do many things. I don’t agree with some other ESL students’ opinion that some teachers don’t treat their students well. I think that a good way to eliminate some of the students’ problems would be for teachers to learn a little Spanish, and for teachers and students to put themselves into situations in which they don’t traditionally find themselves.

I’m referring to students’ having to respect their teachers, but when the teachers offend a

⁴⁸Dweck, et al. (1980) report that teachers’ conveying differing degrees of belief in students’ efficacy along gender lines can directly impact the academic performance of girls and boys. Differing amounts of teacher praise and criticism, it is also posited, influence the degree to which students feel in control of their scholastic experiences. A disturbing number of studies (e.g., Anstrom, 1997 and Buriel, 1983) call attention to the differential treatment Mexican-American and language-minority students receive from their teachers, strengthening the case for these students’ need of having direct access to a number of external, environmental protective factors.
student, that student has the right to go and talk with the principal. But if the student does the same to the teacher, the teacher has the right to react in the same way. One must take into account, though, that not every teacher and not every student tells the truth.

ESL students sometimes are difficult to understand, not only because of language deficiency, but also because we're very playful. We love to joke with everyone around us, and we're always happy and making noise. We love to dance, and we don't worry about things.

Ana, journaling, brainstormed a list of those traits she believed characterize a "good" teacher. Her list is included below because it summarized all Resilient Five's opinions on the subject (characteristics which were cited by various individuals in different discussions, and agreed upon by all participants):

**Ana: A Good Teacher:**

- Is nice.
- Is understanding.
- Explains clearly.
- Has good communication with students.
- Makes learning fun.
- Helps us with understanding homework.
- Needs to be patient.
- Expects and enforces students' being polite.
- Is able to understand cultures, and the problems that they face in the U.S.
- Keeps encouraging her students to succeed.
• Makes students feel comfortable in class, and feels comfortable doing so.
• Is able to be a good teacher, and at the same time, a good friend.

Ana: In my opinion, there are some good teachers who try to help us, but others who don’t. I don’t want to say that they are bad, because I understand how hard it is for them to understand Spanish...like English is harder for us to speak. But I would like to have their help when I need it, although we have to think about how they feel about it, too.

In school what is frustrating to me are teachers who have Hispanics or ESL students in their classes, and don’t pay any attention to them. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that these teachers are wondering why they should spend their time on these students. I believe this to be true from the way that they act. For example, they will give the problem or the lecture, and if someone doesn’t understand they will explain it, but get angry at the student, or at having to re-explain.

A good teacher helps us to understand, and a bad teacher doesn’t care whether we understand or not. So that’s why some students aren’t learning that much, although that’s why they are coming to school. At our school, there are both good and bad teachers.

When I was in one particular ESL class, the teacher tended to discriminate, and would always yell when a Mexican student wasn’t doing what she wanted. I felt that in those situations she should have first told us clearly what she expected us to do, rather than just yelling at us. In another bad class the teacher never asked students if they needed help; she just told us what to do, but never told us how to do it. Every day was just like this, and sometimes she wasn’t even there for us to ask her. In this class I got my only “F” for this reason. I think that teachers need to think about their students who might need help, because
that's a big reason why students lose interest in going to their classes.

I went through all of these things before I became fluent in English, so now when I need or want a teacher’s help, I know how to ask for it. And I haven't had negative experiences since then, either, because I have had good teachers who have helped me a lot.

Ana reminds us of the meaningful way in which a “Mrs. Hawkins” can impact the motivation and achievement of her students. That Ana (one of the most academically-motivated students I have had in my ten years of teaching) had received a failing grade and was experiencing such profound frustration was amazing and maddening news. If a student so profoundly dedicated to succeeding was failing, this failure could not, it was clear to me, be attributed to lack of student effort. Further illustrating what I believe to be the true source of blame for her academic failure, when Ana left this particular class and again came under the instruction of caring and supportive teachers, she resumed earning straight “A”s.

**Ana:** I can tell when a teacher is good or bad because I can tell the difference between them. The good ones always care about our work and will make sure that we understand it. Sometimes when I think about it, I wonder how they are able to be so good when some of them don’t speak any Spanish; I guess it's because they try to understand us, and to talk with us, too, and I admire them a lot for that.
I would love to know just good people like that, and to feel that peace everywhere. But I know that’s impossible, because there are people coming from different places, religions, and beliefs. For this reason, it’s impossible for everyone to be like we would like them to be.

I had a teacher whom I admired in middle school because she was a very good person. She always helped me when I first arrived and I was worried about how I would do at school. When I first came, she talked to me in Spanish. She didn’t know a lot of Spanish but she tried, and I think that helped me a lot because it made me think that there were other people like her, too.

She always told me to speak in Spanish to her, but then she answered me in English and had me repeat her English. That helped me to learn even more English than I did in the class. I always told her my thoughts, or when I was confused, or having trouble in class, and she always helped me. Because I wanted to learn to write, read, and speak English quickly, I always asked her to pronounce the words, and then she dictated to me and had me repeat the words back to her.

I always tried to stay after school to read with her because I liked how she explained things to me. I think that I learned a lot from her, especially how always to try to do better than I am doing. I know how important and fun it is to learn with people who really know how to, and really want to, help others who need their help.

I’ve always liked and respected people like that, because if they help me I know that they want me to get something better. I think also that people listen to and learn better from people they respect and love, which is why teachers need to know their students as individuals. But I always respect all people, especially adults, because I know that they know more than I do. I know that if I listen to them and watch their actions, I will learn from them.
Lory: During the time when I was doing drugs, a teacher helped me. She came up, talked to me, and made me realize that my little brother was going to follow in my footsteps if I kept going down the wrong path. And she told how much my mom needed me and loved me, and that all of the people that care for me wanted to see me succeed in life...that my family wanted me to be someone important. I didn’t have any answers to those things. I had never even thought about them.

That teacher helped me out a lot in my life. If it weren’t for her, I think that I would not be here. Probably in jail, or dead; who knows. But it’s not that easy, to quit habits like that. The other problem was my friends who I used to kick it [hang around] with most of the time that I was doing them. It’s hard to stay away from friends, although they may be bad company for you to keep.

A teacher I had a problem with recently, though, is a different kind of teacher. He only gives lectures and doesn’t do anything else, although he expects the class to do assignments right. He doesn’t let us talk at all, even if we are asking a question to the person next to us. He will say “Callate!” ["Shut up!"] really loud, and say, “I explained it once, and I can’t explain it again.” That to me is not right, because that’s why one becomes a teacher. Teachers who are not prepared to deal with students need to learn to be patient with them and to get closer to the kids so that they can feel more comfortable.

Sometimes, to make a class better, teachers should try new techniques, not to just go by the book all the time, which makes it boring. The classes should have no more than 20-25 students, also, because if there are more students than that they won’t be able to learn. If there are fewer students, then the teacher will be able to pay better attention to the students who need it.

To me being in a good class means that the teacher is happy, of character, is encouraging, has a lot of communication with students, and is able to understand them. By this the teacher builds the confidence of the students, and if they
have a problem, they will go up to the teacher and be able to trust her with the problem or secret that they have.

An example I would give is another teacher I had. She is a wonderful teacher. Her technique of teaching is wonderful because she tries to make it fun to learn, and not boring like other teachers. She will give you help when you need it, not like she is too busy. No matter what, she will be there to listen and give you some advice so you could do things better, or make them better.

The way she is is like a mother who wants the best for her children, and it hurts her if something happens to one of her students. The great care she has for all of her students is something. Some other teachers are like that too, but not as much as her. I appreciate and respect all of my teachers, but for her I have special care, appreciation, and a lot of respect.

**Martha:** When my brother was in school, a teacher was different with him, and never paid him any attention. I think that she was discriminating against him. The teacher had a different attitude with him than with other students, and I remember when he came home crying, and asking my mom why the teacher acted like that with him. My brother used to do the homework every day, but she never even wanted to check his homework to see how he was doing in the class.

My brother really tried to put his effort into showing the teacher how much he liked to study, but she was always different with him. Then my parents talked to a different teacher about this, and everything changed. She still wasn’t very good, but she didn’t do anything bad to him anymore.

In the participants’ words we can see the potential a single teacher can positively or negatively impact the lives of his students. The corresponding motivation
or frustration his students will experience appear to be factors within our immediate control as educators; this is promising news to teachers who might feel doubt about their individual ability to successfully intervene in the high dropout rate of Mexican-Americans.

4.2 Participant Reactions to Valdés (1998)

In "The World Outside and Inside Schools: Language and Immigrant Children" (1998) Guadalupe Valdés describes how

[I]n coming to this country and adjusting to American schools, immigrant students and their families travel very long distances. These distances are physical, emotional, and psychological....what has become increasingly clear is in recent years, however, is that newly-arrived immigrants from non-English-speaking countries encounter serious problems within our educational system. (p. 4)

Writing with the same compassionate depth and incisiveness as she did in "Con Respeto" (1996), Valdés (1998) seeks to bring the reader "...a notion of what
some of the distances between homes and schools, countries and cultures involve but what it means for youngsters to arrive at school without knowing English" (p. 4). The article concludes with a discussion of "both the policy and the instructional dilemmas that now surround the education of immigrant children in this country" (p. 4). As I had been upon concluding "Con Respeto" (1996), I reacted with an overjoyed, "Yes! That's exactly right!" that resulted from her true, responsible portrayal of these students' academic and social struggles.

I then introduced the theme of Valdés' (1998) journal article to participants, all of whom expressed an interest in its contents. The five translated into Spanish words with which they were not familiar, and were given a brief explanation by me of some theoretical concepts referred to in the article's text. After having taken several days to read and think, students began to discuss their impressions and understanding of the study, and to discourse about how accurate they perceived it to be:

**Lory:** In the article that Guadalupe Valdés [1998] wrote, what really got me into what I was reading was that I was able to feel when the kids arrived to the USA. Students feel lonely, different from the others, and I was able to imagine how hard it is for them to leave their hometown, school, their
friends, and especially their grandparents, since many times they are the ones who raise the children while their parents are working. Leaving their families behind is often the most painful thing for Mexicans coming here.

Valdés [1998] says that it’s very difficult for newcomers from México or Latin America when they enter school in the United States, because everything looks and feels different, and they are afraid to try to speak to others. They feel shy and sad, and because of this they’re often quiet. They begin to think about all that they’ve left behind in México. But the maybe the hardest part is that the people here don’t understand them.

What Guadalupe Valdés [1998] writes about the two participants in her study’s attending an ESL program that’s like a “school within a school” is very accurate, and is like the program at our school. ESL classes don’t usually encourage students to go around the school finding out new things, or making new friends. It’s almost as though the students were in prison, because they are denied these opportunities to be involved with the school [at large], but it’s also hard for the teachers to teach to so many students who are from such different cultures.

‘Is it ‘separate but equal’, then?’ I ask. ‘Have we gone back a hundred years?’

‘It is separate. That’s for sure,’ the teacher says. She is a short and stocky middle-aged black woman. ‘Would you want to tell the children that it’s equal?’ (Kozol, 1991, P. 36)
Lory: These things are frustrating to both the teachers and the students. Here at our school for example, ESL students often have four classes with the same teacher. Again they are isolated from the other students, with whom they never have any classes until they are in the regular classes [after ESL V]. When they get into the regular classes, it's like starting school all over again for them. They get so scared that they sometimes even try to get back into the ESL program to take the easier classes.

Ability grouping in English as a Second Language classes in inevitable, and to mainstream students who have minimal language skills would almost certainly be disastrous. What might help to diffuse ESL students' separation from their mainstream peers, however, are regular activities encouraging students school-wide to interact, regardless of language spoken or speaking ability. While this notion may seem initially unworkable, such activities are both an enjoyable and,

49 Anstrom (1997) challenges, “In order for reform to occur, teachers need to accept that traditional text-book based instruction is no longer acceptable (p. 21).” McLaughlin and McLeod (1996) further add that students will develop academic abilities to a greater degree when solving real-life problems. These findings are especially meaningful to ESL teachers who, by virtue of a lack of educational materials (such as, for example, full classroom sets of textbooks), are often creatively challenged to develop and implement their own lesson plans and teaching materials. This freedom can be both a blessing (no “pre-packaged,” inflexible curriculum) and an inconvenience (it is sometimes difficult to whip up exciting materials for four or five different courses, each with multiple-level linguistic ability students).

50 Foreign language requirements for high school graduation potentially make such interaction of benefit to every student.

51 These might include ESL classes’ and Spanish classes’ tutoring one another, one of numerous possible activities in which students from different cultures interact, learn about each other, and are given the opportunity to become friends.
as bountiful research illustrates\textsuperscript{52}, an educationally-
sound means of language and cultural instruction for
all parties involved.

As Lory points out, it is ultimately critical that
ESL and mainstream students be provided with ample
opportunities to befriend and respect one another; also
vital is their being provided with as close to grade-
appropriate instruction as possible (given linguistic
constraints) so that ESL students are not forced to
fall behind their dominant-group classmates. Initially
perhaps a sensible curriculum design, the rapidly
growing ESL program, over time, has become a detached
"school within a school." Meeting students' needs and
spurring their sense of belonging might be best
encouraged if they were given more numerous
opportunities to be meaningfully and actively involved
in their school community as a whole.

"A caste society" wrote U.S.
Commissioner of Education Francis
Keppel 25 years ago, "violates the
style of American democracy....The
nation in effect does not have a
truly public school system in a
large part of its communities; it
has permitted what is in effect a
private school system to develop
under public auspices.... Equality
of educational opportunities

\textsuperscript{52} E.g., Arias (1986); Losey (1997); Padilla (1988).
throughout the nation continues today for many to be more of a myth than a reality." This statement is as true today as it was at the time when it was written. For all the rhetoric of school reform that we have heard in recent years, there are no indications that this is about to change. (Kozol, 1991, p. 80)

Lory: Overall, I think that language is only a problem until one learns to speak and understand, but it actually mostly depends on the student, how much desire to learn English one has. If this person continues with the same enthusiasm that he or she had at the beginning, he will learn quickly. But if a person loses that desire to learn, it will become a battle to learn the language, and much more difficult. In my case, I have a great appreciation to my parents for encouraging me to keep striving.

As described earlier, marginalized students often attribute their lack of academic success to internal, rather than environmental factors. This "victim as villain" perspective can lead students of color themselves to cite a lack of effort or motivation as the primary cause of their failure to achieve. Additionally, their frustration with their experiences in the educational system can lead students to begin "acting out" in unacceptable ways; this deflects blame for the problem away from the system, and onto the victims themselves. As Kozol (1991) observes,
Children hear and understand this theme—they are poor investments—and behave accordingly (p. 99).

Ana confirms this notion with her own experience:

Mexican people are so strong to support themselves and their families, and to work in an environment that is completely foreign to them. There are many American students who don’t like Mexican people, so they go out of their way to make them sad, and, to make them feel bad. Mexican kids sometimes don’t understand what’s going on and begin to fight, and there’s where the problem becomes much bigger.

Like Houle (1980), rarely have I found lack of motivation to be a problem common among my Mexican-American students unless the result of one or more of the other deterrents discussed previously. As a rule, ESL students are an enthusiastic, optimistic, highly-motivated group whose families have made tremendous sacrifices for them to attend school. In a study examining minority school experiences in comparative and cross-cultural perspectives, Matute-Bianchi (1986) accordingly noted that “[c]omparing the junior class of 1983 to the subsequent graduation list for the class in 1985 indicates that 51 percent of the Spanish-surname students did not graduate with their class."
However, of the 127 Spanish-surname students in the class identified as limited English proficient (LEP), 65 percent went on to graduate (p. 235).53”

**Junior:** I think that the Valdés [1998] article is totally right, because the ESL classrooms and the ESL teachers are almost exactly as they are described within it. The article is also very accurate in its description of the Mexican newcomers to the United States, how they feel about their education, and the ideas that they have about learning English.

Ms. Valdés also discusses how they see education as a way of becoming prepared for the future, and how they struggle during the first few months learning English. The article describes the way that students get discouraged from learning the new language, and how it affects them in a good way to sit with other people who speak the same language as they do.

But sometimes sitting with other Spanish-speaking kids is not the best thing for them, because they sit together and don’t have to speak English. This makes them much less interested in learning English, so they don’t feel like doing their work. They also develop different attitudes, and feel like they can behave badly by disobeying their teachers, refusing to do their assignments, and just playing around with their friends.

Sometimes these kids join gangs or other Latino groups that make them think that they don’t need to speak English to be better, and they feel secure because they are with their people. All of the situations that I listed above distract students and get their focus off of learning English. They have the further negative effect of making kids feel that learning English is not necessary and, in the end, a waste of time.

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53 This “change”, however, may have been due to other factors as well, including migrant-worker status, students’ transferring to a different school, going to work prior to finishing school, or perhaps returning to México.
Houle (1980) corroborates that from learners’ perspectives, as has also been expressed to me by students over the years, there may not be a high perceived correlation between the subject matter taught in classes, and the community and culture to which students return after school. Such disconnectedness is a well-documented deterrent to academic persistence. Over time this incongruity, along with the previously-discussed other discouraging ingredients, may begin to decay the eager enthusiasm with which students originally entered ESL I. Kozol (1991) describes that the change over time is starkly vivid when one compares how marginalized, in this case language-minority, students enter our schools, full of eagerness to learn.

‘Our students are innocent of the treachery of the world,’ [a teacher] says. ‘They do not yet understand what is in store for them.’ (p. 145)

Martha, too, expressed her agreement with Valdés’ (1998) similar observation:

**Martha:** I read the Valdés article, and it interested me a lot, because the things she says are true; when people arrive from México, they come with great enthusiasm about finding a better
life. But when they come to school without knowing how to speak English, they feel bad because when the others speak with them, they can't understand what is being said.

I think that when people come to the United States speaking no English, it motivates them to learn it, and to continue moving forward as time passes. So that for example they can defend themselves. But as time passes, school becomes less interesting than it was at first for immigrant students.

What the article says is true, because when people come here they miss their friends who are in México a lot. Also, some parents have to work at night to be able to pay the bills and the rent, and they have to leave their children in the house. This is hard because sometimes their young children really need them, and they can't be there for them.

Many Mexican students don't finish high school, also, because they have to work to help their parents financially, have personal problems, and often have responsibilities such as taking care of siblings and interpreting for their families.

Houle (1980) maintains that a lack of time available for educational pursuits\(^{54}\) is also frequently a problem among Mexican-American ESL students, who work while attending school in order to financially assist their families. My repeated observation over the years has been that students juggling academic and job responsibilities, unconvinced of the practical applicability of what they are studying in school, may exit school prematurely in order to work full time in what are often low-paying jobs. Without a diploma or

\(^{54}\) This is cited as more commonly a deterrent to adult learners.
the advanced English language skills conferred by a high school education, these students are often locked into a future of such employment.

Martha: The children have to suffer, and so do their parents. Everyone who comes here from México has to go through a lot. I also agree with the article when it says that some students learn faster and are more educated than others. I have friends who are still in ESL III, and have been here a long time. On the other hand, though, there are those who have been here a short time, and quickly pass on to the higher levels of ESL and into the regular mainstream classes.

That a large number of students are hindered from advancing to higher levels of ESL appears problematic to me. In other subjects, for example, students may, despite failing a class, be promoted to a higher-level course, later able to make up for the missing academic credits by taking an additional class in that discipline. Mainstreamed students\textsuperscript{55} can thus avoid the frustration of having to repeat the same curriculum, likely taught by the same teacher with whom they experienced failure the first time. English as a Second Language students, often due to schools' very limited teaching staff (and therefore limited numbers of offered sections for a specific class), do not typically have that opportunity.

\textsuperscript{55} These are former ESL students who are now taking "regular" classes with the rest of the student body.
Furthermore, students unable to pass the placement test and thus qualify for advancement to the next level may need to repeat the coursework they failed the first time. One of my former students, for example, was required to repeat his second-year ESL reading and writing courses since his skills were so low. Intelligent and highly motivated, this young man, a gifted athlete, ultimately quit school out of frustration; he returned only because in order to participate in his sport’s highly-advanced level at his age, he needed to be a full-time student. Again it seems clear that when our most motivated, hard-working learners begin to abandon their aspirations of receiving a diploma, serious analysis of our practices as educators is imperative.

4.3 The High School English as a Second Language Program

4.3.1. Inequities

The educational experience of an ESL student is not commensurate with that of her dominant-group peer. In my own school district, insufficient district
funding means that students receive limited access to textbooks, less individualized attention due to large class size, and a lack of exposure to important support personnel. The absence of such resources places English as a Second Language learners at a distinct disadvantage in their pursuit of a high school and college diploma. At the beginning levels of ESL, for example, a geographically-diverse array of non English-speaking students come together to learn a challenging language from a teacher who, likely, does not speak their language at all.

Individualized attention, afforded by limited class sizes, is especially critical at this level where students’ language proficiency is minimal, and their needs are tremendous. Such much-needed attention, however, is often not something these students will experience in their over-crowded classrooms. At one point in a recent semester, my ESL I class had over 40 students enrolled; I actually hoped for student absences and borrowed a neighboring teacher’s (deskless) chairs when all students were present so

56 As previously discussed, ESL students’ awareness of college as an achievable option is atypical.

57 Not all ESL students are Spanish speakers, and ESL teachers are typically not required to be bilingual in any language.

58 These, as mentioned earlier, are uncommon among ESL students for whom attending school is a priority.
that they would, at least, have a place to sit.

Another commonly-cited problem is schools’ seeming inability to involve Hispanic parents in the school community. This lack of scholastic participation, often mistaken for parental disinterest in their children’s education, is frequently attributable to many factors. Causal influences may include Hispanic (in particular) parents’ unfamiliarity with the American school system, their own lack of educational experience, their gratitude and respect for educational professionals’ judgement and ability, and our schools’ culturally-ineffective means (by mass-mailed letter, rather than by a phone call or visit) of inviting parental participation. Lack of parental-scholastic partnership is often simply due to a lack of information, a problem easily remedied by supportive school teachers and counselors.

Anstrom (1997) distinguishes ESL students’ particular need for special forms of assistance, maintaining that, among other hardships, "[t]hese students may have difficulty with texts that are culturally unfamiliar to them, contain difficult vocabulary and complex themes, and academic or archaic

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59 It is interesting to note that complaints involving Mexican-American ESL students’ scholastic issues are commonly leveled by the schools at the students. As previously discussed, the students’ parents are typically trusting and respectful of our doing our best to meet their children’s needs.
syntax" (p. 28). More important to students' long-term academic success, I believe, is teachers' actively teaching students practical strategies to enable them to unlock meaning in works of literature, especially since mainstream works of literature are likely to be less familiar and comprehensible to them. Failing to provide these forms of support, teachers may start even the most highly-motivated ESL learner off at a distinct disadvantage in future academic competition with non-ESL peers.

Houle (1980) further points out that many mainstream (non ESL) teachers have not had any formal training in meeting the needs of ESL learners, and that their class sizes are often larger than they should be. Some teachers, therefore, simply ignore the failure of mainstreamed ESL students, blaming what they perceive to be cultural and linguistic deficiencies (e.g., Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Gándara, 1995; Losey, 1997; O’Connor, 1997; Valdés, 1996, among numerous others). Those students, often diligent and motivated learners, become frustrated by their inability to keep up with native English-speaking peers. Frequently, over time, they finally give up, either accepting failing grades, or quitting school altogether. This unnecessary experience may be easily prevented by training all
school personnel to be a helpful resource rather than an additional barrier contributing to students' decision to drop out.

The more, finally, that schools are willing to draw upon their cultures and experiences and correlate their learning with their "real world" lives, the more we will bring to students' education. Learners, in turn, will thus be more likely to recognize the utility, importance, and meaning education holds for their future quality of life. One way to alleviate this problem might be to invite guest speakers of English as their non-primary language to discuss the experiences, both positive and not, that have impacted their lives. These potential visitors, manifest throughout the community, can frequently be provided (since they often moonlight as parents, friends, or relatives) by students themselves. Invitations to speak honor both students and speakers, and are of great benefit to the class as a whole.

In summary, due to ever-changing classroom cultural demographics, all teachers must be methodologically proficient in the most effective strategies of meeting the unique needs of language-minority learners. Anstrom (1997) succinctly summarizes the concepts previously
discussed as those most needing to be addressed by mainstream teacher education programs (p. 37):

- Adapting mainstream lessons and learning materials to meet the needs of language minority students;
- Making oral presentations more comprehensible;
- Identifying suitable learning materials and matching them to the instructional needs of the students;
- Promoting the interaction of language minority and native English speaking students through cooperative learning activities;
- Promoting comprehension of academic English by teaching specific learning strategies;
- Incorporating ESL methods into the mainstream classroom;
- Managing multi-language level classrooms;
- Assessing and grading language minority students;
- Distinguishing between language difficulties and learning problems; and
- Working with teaching assistants.
It is my belief that in not doing our best to fulfill these goals, educators will promote student frustration, apathy, and subsequent failure to achieve:

‘My mother believed I was a ‘gifted’ child, but the system did not challenge me and I was bored at school. Fortunately one of my mother’s neighbors was a teacher and she used to talk to me and help me after school. If it were not for her I doubt I’d have thought that I could go to college. I promised myself I’d return that favor.’
(Kozol, 1991, p. 50)

Crawford (1997) further illustrates such students’ educational dilemma:

Low self-esteem is a social phenomenon, affecting a sizable percentage of minority children, not just a handful of laggards. It is a syndrome of disempowerment and alienation, exacerbated -- if not entirely created -- by school experiences such as insensitivity toward minority cultures, low expectations by teachers, and deficit models of education; in short, by institutional racism. On the other hand, schools can help to counteract low self-esteem -- for example, by incorporating minority languages into the curriculum,
encouraging parent and community participation, promoting student-directed learning, and offering assessments that consider cultural factors, such as students' "disabling" interactions with the school.

**Ana:** Yesterday when we talked about our experiences, it caused me to feel, and to be able to better imagine, what discrimination is. Because very few times had I experienced this personally. I had seen it, but only happening with other people.

For example, sometimes students like me don't speak sufficient English, and feel less worthy than others. I have always been very serious, but not just because I didn't speak English. Because I don't speak with Mexicans, either. I have had the good fortune to always have understanding teachers. When I arrived here from México, I understood English, but I couldn't speak. That for me was very difficult, but I always knew how to continue moving forward in my classes. I believe this is the same that all of us should do to demonstrate our power to study.

Sometimes other people try to make us feel bad, which is something we have to put up with. But at the same time, we have to think about how to prevent this disapproval that causes us to feel bad day after day. We are all aware that it's very difficult, but we also know that we are capable of putting an end to all of this.

**Lory:** I think that Mexican-American ESL students face a high degree of racism in school because of the low level of school work that they are doing in their classes. Because of this other people think that they are stupid, and they think this also because ESL kids usually have accents, or can't speak English well.

The specific difficulties that children encounter include being pushed around, being made fun of, and being told to repeat things that they
don't understand, often bad words. Other students also sometimes criticize how they dress, only because the style doesn't fit in with their way of dressing. But their biggest problem is in not being able to communicate in English.

Brainstorming one day in her journal, Ana summarized how ESL students often feel in their unfamiliar new educational context. Her perceptions were echoed by each participant at various times through the study:

ESL Often Students Feel:

1. Shy
2. Confused
3. Afraid
4. Uncomfortable
5. Ignored
6. Skeptical
7. Unable to do their homework
8. Unable to understand English
9. No longer excited
10. Nervous

Discussion of the difficulties encountered by ESL students encompassed a variety of specific examples, many of which centered on students' experiences in the classroom. The low difficulty level of curricula and subject matter disparity between mainstream and ESL classes Ana describes were cited as a source of frustration common among study participants.
The Resilient Five, after identifying the weaknesses they perceived in our current teaching practices, offered some suggestions for improving the ways in which English as a Second Language is currently being taught:

**Lory:** I think that ESL should be taught only in English, because then students have to pay close attention to what's being said in order to understand. They will also learn new vocabulary every day, and learn to hear the different sounds of the words and how to pronounce the words correctly. It would be all right to speak Spanish every once in a while, but I think that kids will learn faster if they have only ESL [reading and writing] classes in English. Nothing will make them forget their native language, but what students need to learn is how to translate the words in their heads quickly in order to plan what they are going to say. We should only use a language if there is a certain number of students who speak that language, like Spanish is usually the one most often spoken in ESL. Teachers should switch from Spanish to English as soon as the student knows enough so he or she can understand the basic words, but I don't have a really good idea of how long that takes.

Where other participants advocated an English-only approach to teaching ESL, Junior endorsed bilingual education as the best means of narrowing the incongruity between mainstream-ESL content level:
**Junior:** ESL students have fewer opportunities and they don’t learn the same stuff as the American kids do. Teachers should teach these kids the same things that they teach the mainstream kids, but in their native languages, so that they are not at a further disadvantage compared to the native English speakers.

The kids who come from México without knowing English get less opportunities than the white Americans or Chicanos. If I could change the way that English is taught in school, I’d suggest having extra helpers in classes, and short story books for students to write down words they don’t understand to learn new vocabulary. To watch some movies with captions is also a good idea, writing down the words you see and don’t understand to translate later. It would also be a good idea to have students work with partners, in English whenever possible. Activities where students speak as much English are, I think, the best way for them to learn the most quickly.

**Martha:** I think that ESL students should speak only English, because they’ll learn faster. I’ve noticed that the students from other countries don’t have teachers or anyone else in the school who can translate for them, so they have to work harder to learn English because no-one can help them. But when Mexican students know that a teacher speaks Spanish and will speak it with them, they don’t work as hard and they don’t practice what they are learning.

Growing up, I was given the opportunity by my parents to study languages in other countries during summer vacations. Usually the only native English-speaker in these foreign settings and surrounded by individuals eager to improve their own English, I would happily spend the entire summer speaking English, learning nothing.
Unlike myself at that time, however, participants all refrained from taking the "easy way out":

Mayra: Something that's helped me a lot is to practice speaking English, and I do that regularly. Before I felt ashamed and afraid to talk, but I learned that I wouldn't get very far that way. But now on occasion I'm criticized by Hispanic ESL students for speaking Spanish, since I've become used to doing that. I have friends of every race, and this makes me feel happy because in the end I feel a part of their community as well.

Ana: Overall, I think that all Mexican-American kids have to pass through problems of all kinds, but especially if they're ESL students. Because as soon as some Americans hear us, or even as soon as they look at us, they close the door. So we have to look in other places for a job, or for help. That makes many of us really sad, but we have a saying: "Los Mexicanos somos luchadores" [The Mexican people are fighters].

And that's really true. With very few exceptions Mexican people are very good workers, and always do the best that they can. Especially those who come over to the United States, since that's the reason they've come: to work to build themselves a better future.

4.3.2 Participants' Experiences in and Views of the High School ESL Program

Numerous studies\(^{60}\) call attention to the benefits of educating a school's entire faculty on how best to facilitate the academic experiences of ESL students.

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\(^{60}\) E.g., Anstrom (1997); Pines (1998); Rennie (1993).
Such efforts, in the form of in-depth, professionally-facilitated workshops led by knowledgeable experts in the field of ESL, involve not only classroom teachers, but also those with whom these learners might come into frequent contact such as librarians, counselors, secretaries, and custodians.

Espinosa (1995), for example, suggests that all staff "...must understand the key features of Hispanic culture and its impact on their students' behavior and learning styles. It is the educator's obligation to learn as much about the [learners] and their culture and background as possible" Moreover, with the rapidly-increasing number of second language learners enrolling in public schools, "[e]ducating our [schools] to work with language minority students is no longer a preference but a necessity. [E]ducators need to question the extent to which [they possess] self-awareness, an appreciation of diversity, and cultural competency and...work effectively with a variety of students and parents" (Anstrom, 1997, p. 38).

Studies of Mexican-American students\(^6\) suggest that those who are among the more highly motivated tended to earn higher grades. This, in turn, appears to increase the probability of school counselors' offering pre-

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\(^6\) E.g., Tinto (1987).
college guidance and encouragement. High-achieving students were also, perhaps predictably, more likely to go on to become competent members of academic and social communities and to earn some form of credential. While the causal link and direction of this relationship is possibly more related to theoretical speculation than actual data, this fluid interplay between the resilient, motivated learner and a supportive, rich academic environment is, in my opinion, a promising formula for success. A learner-centered approach designed to fortify individual students with academic resiliency, in conjunction with the supportive educational environment described below, might provide support as they progress along the academic path to university.

62 A supportive educational environment might be characterized as demonstrating the following features (Henderson, 1996, p. 9):

- Promotes close bonds;
- Values and encourages education;
- Uses high-warmth, low-criticism style of interaction;
- Sets and enforces clear boundaries (rules, norms, and laws);
- Encourages supportive relationships with many caring others;
- Promotes sharing of responsibilities, services to others, “required helpfulness;”
- Provides access to resources for meeting basic needs of housing, employment, health care, and recreation;
- Expresses high and realistic expectations for success;
- Encourages goal setting and mastery;
- Encourages pro-social development of values (such as altruism) and life skills (such as cooperation);
- Provides leadership, decision making, and other opportunities for meaningful participation, and
- Appreciates the unique talents of each individual.
Collier (1995) contends, additionally, that "...the language needed for learning academic content may require five to eight years or longer, depending on the age and prior educational background of the student." McKeon (1994) furthers that this problem is potentially intensified by the secondary-level's more challenging curriculum, and by the observable tendency for "many secondary-age language-minority students [to] have significant gaps in their prior education." The likelihood of premature dropout may not be as great, then, for the ESL student's Caucasian counterpart who is not confronted daily with these obstacles to success.

Modification of subject matter does not entail lowering expectations. In "lowering the bar" rather than providing the tools for them to experience success, teachers deprive ESL students of the potentially-meaningful experience of struggle. Avoiding this common educational pitfall may involve norming courses' linguistic level of difficulty such that ESL students are required to stretch. The teacher's task is then to modify the level of linguistic difficulty, "adapting information to make it accessible to second language learners (Anstrom, 1997, P. 17)," taking care
not to diminish the richness of informational content of the material being presented.

Padron (1993) criticizes the traditional ESL method of teaching vocabulary through the use of lower-level cognitive skills for its encouraging "learned helplessness." Being forced to master basic language skills prior to being exposed to challenging content, he contends, may limit students' problem-solving and higher-level thinking skills. When taught these skills within the context of real-life situations and examples, however, students not only gain exposure to necessary vocabulary and language skills, but also become the critical thinkers and problem-solvers most teachers strive to effect.

Students' interests must then be a driving force in curricular decision-making; their interests and prior knowledge provide a rich and solid foundation for new information. Chamot (1994) postulates that the ability to employ prior knowledge as a tool in acquiring new knowledge is a skill teachers need to develop with their second language learners. Numerous other researchers additionaly identify learners' perceiving education as a low priority in their lives as a major educational deterrent.

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63 These include Cross (1981), Rogers (1983), and Houle (1980).
While "education for education's sake" is a noble ontological view, to one on a very limited income with a family to support the notion is often less feasible than unrealistic. If institutions of higher education have prioritized securing and maintaining higher levels of Hispanic enrollment, they will then need to actively recruit high school students on site in order to propose college education a desirable and workable goal. The relevance of the specific subject matter to which learners will be exposed must also be clarified, so that students, once enrolled, aren't left wondering, "When am I ever going to use this?".

Like Benard, Rutter (1987) stresses that resilience is a process, rather than a program; thus "[t]he search is not for broadly defined factors but, rather, for the developmental and situational mechanisms involved..." (Rutter, 1987). In other words, as the most prominent resilience researchers suggest, educators might better focus our attention on context than content. Rather than concentrating too much care on the immediate words on the student's textbook, we might better seek to equip that student with the ganas [desire] to continue meeting the on-going externally-imposed challenges her pursuit of a diploma are likely to present.
Ana's journal suggests that a good ESL program provide:

- adequate books
- adequate desks
- enough chairs
- the opportunity for students to work in groups to help one another with difficult work

As a teacher of both language-minority and dominant-group students, I have never had a member of the latter group express any of the above concerns that participants affirmed common among the former group. One newspaper's explanation may help make sense of what participants describe:

"Those the system chooses to save," says the Tribune, "are the brightest youngsters, selected by race, income and achievement." 
(Kozol, 1991, p. 60)

**Junior:** ESL kids don't have any information about how to earn credits; they can't normally register for regular classes, and they don't get any credit for English while they are in some of the lower-level ESL classes. They usually also don't know their counselor. They have less chance of graduating because of all of the mainstream classes that are required, and because they have to pass the competency tests, something about which they are usually not informed.
As Junior and the other participants pointed out, access to certain vital information, readily available to their dominant-group peers, is often denied ESL students; language-minority and children of color are also more likely to attend schools with fewer economic resources and less experienced teachers than predominantly-white schools. Kozol (1991), in his own research, further concluded that

\[ \text{The districts that face the toughest challenges are also likely to be those that have the fewest funds to meet their children's needs...Thus the state, by requiring attendance but refusing to require equity, effectively requires inequality. (p. 56)} \]

In a discussion of students' perceptions of their scholastic experiences as ESL students, I asked participants: "If your brother or sister had just arrived from México, what advice would you give them about how best to succeed at your school?". Students corroborated my own experience that English as a Second Language classes are typically assigned to beginning-level ESL students almost completely without any of their or their parents' input. English as a Second

\[64\text{ See, among numerous others, Arias (1986); Bilingual Education Office (1986); Brown (1980).} \]
Language students are simply presented with their schedules, and expected to go to class.

Oakes (1985) asserts that student placement in programs such as ESL is typically based upon three seemingly reasonable criteria: "...scores on standardized tests, teacher and counselor recommendations (including grades), and students' and their parents' choices" (p. 9). The five participants unanimously expressed disdain for the standardized test, which they take on numerous occasions, and which is used to determine their ESL level placement. This test was not believed by any group member to be an accurate predictor of student ability, potential, or motivation. The ESL placement test is not the only potentially inaccurate examination of these students' achievement and ability; the American school system as a whole functions, to a large extent, based upon students' performance on standardized tests.

English as a Second Language students, in particular, are thus disadvantaged in a number of ways. They must not only excel at culturally-biased, often-puzzling tests written in a foreign language, but also navigate their way through the entire ESL program. It

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65 Students related anecdotes of peers' memorizing the answers to the placement test (which each ESL student takes, year after year, in order to advance to a higher level). They additionally characterized the test as extremely boring and, from their perspective, an inaccurate measure of linguistic ability since every student, from ESL I to ESL V, is required to take exactly the same test.
is not unusual for students whose academic future relies upon such a test to study related skills in isolation, rather than to use what they learn to grow and change in the larger context in which it will ultimately be put to use. It might be fair to conclude that

'[k]ids are learning exclusively through rote. We have children who are given no conceptual framework. They do not learn to think, because their teachers are straightjacketed by tests that measure only isolated skills. As a result, they can be given no electives, nothing wonderful, nothing that touches the spirit or the soul. (Kozol, 1991, p. 143)

Described by Oakes (1985) as a second component in the student placement process, counselor recommendation appears problematic for ESL students. By virtue of the fact that they are rarely even acquainted with their counselors until they are far along in the ESL program, often ready to be mainstreamed, they are at a further disadvantage.

This is the kind of thing our children face. Am I saying that the [schools] underserv[e] this population? You can draw your own conclusions. (Kozol, 1991, p. 92)
Finally, the third factor described by Oakes (1985), student and parent choice, is also in fact a non-factor; it has been my experience that parents' and students' preferences are rarely, if ever, solicited in beginning-level scheduling. Also, in our school district, it is only with a release waiver signed by parents or legal-aged students that they can prematurely exit the ESL program; that this waiver even exists is not common knowledge among ESL students. Well-intentioned and designed to protect students from getting in over their heads by prematurely enrolling in mainstream classes, this document may represent a "freedom ticket" to some students, as well. The two of my students I am aware of who used the waiver in order to jump ESL levels excelled in the higher level courses (I taught both their original classes and their target classes), albeit with a great deal of extra effort. That these students were able to succeed despite their initial low-level placement suggests to me that other highly-motivated might benefit from information about the waiver, which is not widely advertised as an option, as well.

Participants additionally described having had to actively seek information about scholarship opportunities, an option about which all had heard by
chance, rather than having had such information presented to them by school teachers and counselors. Mayra, for example, asserted that had she not taken the initiative to inquire about college information\textsuperscript{66}, she strongly believes that she would never have found out about the opportunity. In upper-level ESL classes, participants related, counselors had permitted them to choose their classes, but they nonetheless had needed more help than they received in selecting those specific courses that they needed to graduate. They also felt that early on in their academic careers they should have been presented with scholarship information, not just to have found out about it by accident.

Many of the experiences the five participants described have been mine as well; advanced academic courses, scholarships, financial aid, and the college application process are neither typically introduced, nor reinforced for this group of students and their parents early or often enough. This results in numerous intelligent, enthusiastic, and capable learners' completely missing out on crucial deadlines and educational opportunities. This also prevents ESL students from being competitive candidates for

\textsuperscript{66}Mayra obtained this information through the Latino Club.
desirable, high-level jobs in the future, making our schools societal sorting mechanisms. It is thus, in my opinion, essential that schools do their best to foster ESL students' high educational goals. Kozol (1991) recalls the words of a student who, thanks to his counselor, almost wound up in the "chaff" bin:

I don't want to say his name...Well, anyway. I feel so disappointed. He tells me, "Choose another job." He gives me all these books that list these easy jobs. He says, "Choose something else." I tell him that I cannot choose because I do not know. "Which one do you want?" he says. I say, "How can I know?" I can't decide my life there in just 15 minutes... (p. 156)

Houle's (1980) research illustrates that an overwhelming number of Mexican-American ESL students are not aware of the educational resources which are in place to help them. In many Mexican-American families, our ESL students will be the first member to graduate high school, and college has not been presented as a goal realistic for them. Kozol (1991) maintains that such system navigation is not, however, a problem shared by dominant-culture parents:
The [college-track] system is, not surprisingly, highly attractive to the more sophisticated parents, disproportionately white and middle class, who have the ingenuity and, now and then, political connections to obtain admission for their children. (Kozol, 1991, p. 59)

Participants' additionally asserted that English as a Second Language students (unlike their mainstream peers), are generally not acquainted with their counselors67; this has been my observation as well. Ana described how she became acquainted with her counselor for the first time when she was a junior, at which point she should have already been mailing off her completed college applications. One counselor, she said, came to speak to one of her classes as a group; that particular counselor was not the one alphabetically assigned to her, so she was advised to make an appointment to ask an individual question. Martha, another exceptional student, described how she similarly had no idea who her counselor was until her junior (third) year in school. Mayra met her counselor during her Sophomore year, when she went to inquire about her options for electives courses.

67 There are currently, at the time of this study, no Spanish-speaking counselors at this high school, although it serves a large Hispanic population.
Prior to that point, she said, she had not only had no idea who her counselor was, but also did not know how to go about making an appointment to meet her.

Neither Ana, Martha, nor Mayra could accurately be described as shy, yet all three described a similar hesitation to aggressively seek out the help they needed in navigating their way through a foreign school system. To me this illustrates that even our most self-confident, high-achieving ESL students may be deterred from taking advantage of the life-impacting opportunities that are common knowledge among their dominant-culture peers. Participants' experiences paint a picture of how

...the system rests on the initiative of parents. The poorest parents, often the products of inferior education, lack the information access and the skills of navigation in an often hostile and intimidating situation to channel their children to the better schools, obtain the applications, and (perhaps a little more important) help them to get ready for the necessary tests...
(Kozol, 1991, p. 60)

Group members described having been left with purely electives left to take towards the end of their
high school careers, since they had eliminated their core graduation requirements early on. Had the five received scheduling assistance earlier on, the heavy academic stress of taking purely required "core" courses might have been alleviated by staggering these highly-rigorous classes with the easier and less-stringent electives of which their final year was primarily comprised. Ana illustrated how a similar lack of academic counseling resulted her sister's losing academic credits; unaware of specific graduation requirements, she had enrolled in numerous course which it ultimately turned out that she did not need, and which did not count in any way toward her graduation. Martha nodded angrily (an emotion I rarely observed in this cheerful and self-possessed young woman) at this, and explained how she had been signed up for four semesters of physical education which she had not needed for graduation. Participants said that, in their experience, if ESL students do not actively speak up for themselves, they often times "get swept under the carpet."

Junior additionally pointed out that the language-minority students do not complete their high school competency tests, which are required for graduation, until after exiting the ESL program. Their dominant-
group American peers have, on the other hand, typically passed theirs (many do this during their Freshman year) long before the ESL students have made their first attempt at passing the test. The other participants laughed in recognition of this scenario, explaining to me that when the English as a Second Language students go to take the competency tests, the students in the room are usually all Mexicans.

Ana suggested teachers explain the structure of the entire ESL program to the students involved in it, as well as the differences in treatment between language minority and majority students. This, notably, was the first occasion on which participants expressed a recognition that institutionized racism might be something that ESL students experience, and that they might themselves have experienced it at school. Returning to the original question, I asked, "OK, so what would you do differently if you were starting over at your school? Or advise your brother or sister to do?" Presenting their individual opinions and experiences, the five agreed upon the following list of recommendations:
1. Go meet your counselor.

2. Find out what classes are important for you to graduate.

3. Learn how to navigate through the system—lunch tickets, and all the information newcomers need, so that you don’t just have to find out by yourself the hard way, through trial and error.

4. Do your best despite what others tell you, or how they try to put you down.

5. Draw a line dividing school issues from issues outside of school. For example: if you have friends outside of school who invite you to skip, always focus on studying when you’re in school. You’re there to study. When you’re outside of school, though, do whatever you want within reason. Don’t let friendship keep you from using good judgement when your friends are trying to control or influence you in a bad way. Some will criticize you for not doing what they try to influence you into doing bad things, saying “You’re hiding under your mother’s skirts” [which Junior said is a taunt commonly used among Mexican teens] if you don’t skip. Ignore them.

6. Participate in scholastic activities, regardless of how few or how many “minorities” are there. School is not just for [dominant-group] Americans; it’s for all who are studying there. Fight and show that you can do it. Try your best to do at least as well as all of the others who are succeeding at your goal.

Further discrediting the merits of the type of tracking practices implemented by most ESL programs, “[l]ow track students have been found to participate less in extracurricular activities at school and...are more
alienated from school and have higher drop-out rates" (Oakes, 1985, p. 9).

I believe that students, especially those as dedicated to academics as the Resilient Five, are educational "experts" by virtue of their extensive experience and personal investment in the system. Furthermore, students are, in my experience, regarded by their struggling peers as a more trustworthy source of information than adult "experts". We adults, in the past, have similarly attached a weightier significance to the professional input of adult "experts" in the field, sometimes listening to students, but rarely giving their voices the power to alter our practices in educating them.

This study was founded on our unanimous agreement that it is students whose lives stand to be most impacted by the quality of educational practices. Further, we contend that by virtue of their daily classroom "field experience," students are trustworthy authorities whose contributions represent a potentially valuable source of information to our educational practices. I contend that not all students perceptions are either accurate or valid; however, I believe that many of their perceptions are the result of their attempt to negotiate, within their own realm of
experiences, understanding their reality. Incorporating students' knowledge in our research and practice, educators might benefit from gaining an additional perspective, while students themselves might perceive a greater sense of investment and meaning in the educational system.

Ultimately [this] means transforming not only our families, schools, and communities but creating a society premised on meeting the needs of its citizens, young and old. Our greatest hope for doing just this lies with our youth and begins with our belief in them. We must know in our hearts that when we create communities wherever we are with youth that respect and care for them as individuals and invite their participation—their critical inquiry, dialog, reflection, and action—we are creating the conditions that allow their innate potential for social competence, problem-solving, sense of identity and efficacy, and hope for the future to unfold...and recreat[ing] a social covenant grounded in social and economic justice. (Benard, p. 5)

The problem of Mexican-American educational underachievement is not context-free for these students; academic exclusion may be viewed as a microcosm of societal alienation. If schools truly are
committed to lowering the minority dropout rate, perhaps society at large will need to recognize that “the challenge [is] interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question.” (Freire, 1980, p.69). When all students’ cultures [will be] truly valued equally, “gradually [all] students [will] come to regard themselves as committed” (Freire, 1980, p. 69). Only then will we have a truly equitable educational system of which we can be proud.

Hurtado (1996) further observes that “being poor, of Color, and also a woman results in daily experiences that create a systematically different relationship to knowledge (including its production, comprehension, and integration)” (p. 372). It follows that if a curriculum of mono-perspective, Eurocentric “truths” is the steady diet of students to whose world it appears irrelevant, not only will they be less likely to learn it, but they may also come to doubt the value of the educational system at large. I believe this perceived disconnection from their own lives and lack of relevance to be a major factor in many students’ decision to drop out of school.
4.4 The Reasons that Mexican-American Students Drop Out of High School

Every human interaction is, or should be, governed by a code of ethics, written or tacit. By extension, every profession operates to some degree under an ethical code or guidelines; accountability for adherence to such a code to a person or agency in a position of authority is a highly-motivating force. Unethical or questionable behavior can undermine public perception of a profession. Teaching, never far from scrutiny of the public eye, may hold a special moral obligation to serve its client, the learner, in the best possible way.

The “product” provided by our schools is most essential: moral, empathetic, and interested citizens emerge from our classrooms equipped and motivated to enact their own positive contributions to the world which we share. “Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone’s task is as unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it (Frankl, p. 172).” To shirk our duties as educators, then, is to deprive

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68 Sic; all male references are directly quoted from Frankl’s (1963) writings, but should be understood to apply to females, as well.
society of inquisitive, persistent, and ethical global thinkers.

Numerous sources call attention to the academic under-achievement of Mexican-American students. The pervasiveness\textsuperscript{69} of the academic failure and drop-out observed among Mexican-American students has, traditionally, been attributed to a variety of socio-cultural factors. These factors, for the most part, tend to place the responsibility for their subordinate educational situation\textsuperscript{70} squarely upon the shoulders of the victims themselves. Genetic, cultural, and linguistic deficit arguments have typically been used to blame the victims of disenfranchised groups for their own "shortcomings", rather than to unfair, oppressive institutional and societal treatment\textsuperscript{71}.

\textsuperscript{69} E.g., Gandara, 1995; Losey, 1997; National Commission on Secondary Education for Hispanics, 1984; National Council of La Raza, 1992; Rumberger, 1983; Valdés, 1996; Valverde, 1987. According to the Congressional Research Service, for example (1986), Mexican-Americans have completed the lowest median number of school years (9.9) and the lowest proportion of high school students have graduated (40.8\%) in the United States. The National Center for Educational Statistics (1989) estimates that national dropout rates stand at 36\% for Hispanics, 15\% for Blacks, and 13\% for Whites.

\textsuperscript{70} Such variables contributing to Mexican-American students' disproportionate lack of academic success have been found to possibly include educational and occupational attainment levels of parents, family income and composition, ethnic and language minority status, and the absence of learning materials in the home (e.g., Arias, 1986; Rumberger, 1983, 1987; Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984).

\textsuperscript{71} Valdés' (1996) discussion of societal practices of linking class, culture, and status (and, consequently, of power), for example, presents a comprehensive and "objective" explanation of these various theories without a specific racial or cultural context.
Perhaps the worst result of such beliefs, says [the Community Service Society] is the message that resources would be "wasted on poor children." This message "trickles down to districts, schools, and classrooms." Children hear and understand this theme—they are poor investments—and behave accordingly. (Kozol, 1991, p. 99)

The term "minority," frequently applied to Mexican-Americans, is somewhat misleading\textsuperscript{72}, and few non-minority individuals are either aware of or immediately affected by the inequities existing between the "regular" versus the disenfranchised student. Directly, a non language-minority person's world is not influenced to any large extent by issues of equity within the confines of the ESL classroom\textsuperscript{73}. Indirectly, however, we should all be concerned, because the students in that room are the future decision-makers and co-inheritors of our country.

The high dropout rate of Mexican-American students has reportedly decreased as a result of the implementation of programs with varying degrees of success, yet students from ESL backgrounds still remain 1.5 times more likely than their native-English speaking counterparts to leave high school without

\textsuperscript{72} Mexican-American, additionally, represent the largest minority group.

\textsuperscript{73} Anstrom (1997), however, notes that we no longer "...face classrooms composed mainly of white, middle-class, English-speaking students (p. 37).
graduating. Furthermore, according to the Census Bureau, the number of Hispanic teenagers between the ages of 16 to 24 rose from 30 percent in 1990 to roughly 50 percent in 1992 (General Accounting Office, 1994). These increasing numbers lend a greater sense of urgency to our facing and eliminating the unacceptable degree of academic failure that these individuals are continuing to experience daily in our current educational system.

Ultimately, "[a]n import issue concerns whether or not [setting high standards for student achievement] will be able to help educators meet the needs of language minority students without punishing them for previous educational neglect or for their linguistic and cultural diversity" (Chris-Green and Solis, 1997). In Oregon, for example, during the 1997-98 school year, of the 10,947 (6.9 percent) students who dropped out of school, over 16 percent were Mexican-American. The estimated four-year dropout rate of 25.6 percent suggests that approximately 60 percent of all Hispanic learners could be expected to drop out during that four-year period (Oregon State Department of Education, 2000).
Our state's increasing efforts to raise academic standards and student performance through the Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) may only serve to exacerbate the failure rate of language-minority Mexican-Americans. The 70-plus percent of students currently failing to meet the state-set benchmarks for earning a CIM are native English speakers. It may be fair to speculate that if the minority of high school students who have earned a CIM were to attempt the same feat in a foreign country and language, they might not enjoy the same successful result. Myriad ethical issues in ESL education abound, and concern for how best to address them is, as the remarkably high drop-out rate indicates, well-founded. This study focuses on how best to increase Mexican-American ESL students' likelihood of educational and subsequent societal success (for which academic success is not only often a precursor, but is also a highly-accurate predictor).

In an investigation of academic success among disadvantaged students, McPartland and Braddock (1993) found that disadvantaged students may have a particularly strong need to believe that school work makes sense for their current and long-term welfare. Matute-Bianchi (1986) corroborates that minority students' "...perception of themselves and others—and
the value of their investment in education" is a major
determinant of their academic success or failure. She
posits further that more successful Mexican-American
students, such as the participants in our study, tend
to "have a generalized understanding that what they do
today [in high school] will serve them well later on in
life (p. 242)." A mechanic-in-training might not
immediately recognize the benefits of studying computer
technology. If, however, the instructor clarifies the
various ways in which computers have become central to
everyday automotive diagnosis and repair, that learner
is likely to view her computer class in a whole new
way.

Researchers continuously suggests (e.g., Anstrom,
1997; Kerka, 1988; Padron, 1993) that the more
meaningful an individual judges information to be, the
more motivated she is likely to be in acquiring it, and
the more successful she will ultimately be in mastering
it. Such perceived meaning is a highly-motivating tool,
encouraging "stick-to-itiveness" even in the face of
obstacles that might discourage less focused
individuals. Context is ignored to such a degree in
some classrooms, however, that Lave (1988) describes
students' feeling it necessary to "...disguise
effective strategies so that teachers believe the
problems have been solved in the approved way (Brown, 1995, p. 7)." Detrimental to all students, decontextualized instruction is ineffective at best, and pointlessly discouraging and frustrating.

In everyday problem-solving activities, people often draw upon their environment to help achieve resolution. Most cognitive activity can only, in fact, be explained in relation to the context in which it occurs. Research\textsuperscript{74} indicates that cognitive activity may best be explained in relation to its context, and when the context of cognition is ignored, it may be difficult for students to see the relevance of what they are learning to their lives. Jarvis contends that learning seldom occurs "in splendid isolation from the world in which the learner lives;... it is intimately related to that world and affected by it" (Jarvis, 1987, p. 11).

An in-depth analysis and attempt at understanding, "Con Respeto" (1996) integrates a review of research related to explanations of school failure with the school practices Valdés maintains are responsible for it. Practitioners and policy-makers responsible for the well-documented educational failure\textsuperscript{75} are portrayed not

\textsuperscript{74} E.g. Knox, 1991; Jarvis (1987).

as intentionally racist, unconcerned or hard-hearted, but as ignorant, well-intentioned educational professionals. Unfamiliar with the Mexican culture, they are at a loss for how best to meet the needs of Mexican children.

The failure of what Valdés (1996) believes to be civic-minded traditional "interventions" such as parent education are discussed in light of their Eurocentrically-biased assumptions, and their lack of a cultural "fit." She suggests several ways in which practitioners' gaining familiarity with the rich Mexican culture might improve their approach to educating its children, but ultimately concludes that there is no easy fix to a complex situation. Given the vast amount of research depicting an educational system that is repeatedly and consistently failing to meet the needs of a rapidly-growing group of students, Valdés' (1996) methodologically-sound conclusions are all the more striking.

American schools have traditionally, tacitly maintained that the blame for Mexican-American students' academic underachievement lies not in our educational practices, but with the victims themselves. Subsequent to her lengthy exploration of what might be done to help Mexican-origin students to succeed in
school, a question more complex than it appears, Valdés (1996) concludes:

We can either advocate that Mexican communities and individuals be helped to make whatever changes are necessary to achieve success, or we can argue that there are already successes among the population in question and that it is the majority society that must change its perspective about human values and achievement. (p. 205)

Parenting and other programs aimed at helping Mexican nationals acculturate, thus lowering the Hispanic drop out rate, thus appear not only absurdly racist, but also overly-simplistic. Exploring the misconceptions educational practitioners and policy-makers hold about Mexican families, Valdés builds a cogent case that their lack of familiarity with a very different culture may do great damage. Parents, believing that they must abandon their traditional child-rearing practices in order for their children to be successful, may make a sacrifice that has costly consequences for the family in the long run.
To be in favor of 'good families' or 'good administration' does not take much courage or originality. It is hard to think of anyone who is opposed to either. To be in favor of redistribution of resources and racial integration would require a great deal of courage—and a soaring sense of vision—in a president or politician. (Kozol, 1991, p. 124)

Valdés (1996) appears to imply that the misunderstandings and misconceptions related to Mexican-origin children run deep enough to make the possibility of a meeting of two very different cultural worlds questionable. Her conclusion is neither optimistic nor pessimistic: "I doubt that well-meaning practitioners, researchers, and policymakers can really level the playing field even if they could change teachers, change schools, and teach Mexican-origin families to become as focused on and as dedicated to their children's school success as middle-class parents already are.... On the other hand, I am not ready to abandon hope" (p. 204). Kozol (1991), however, appears less optimistic:
For many, many students at non-selective high schools, it's hard to know if a decision to drop out of school, no matter how we discourage it, is not, in fact, a logical decision. (p. 59)

Furthermore, Kozol concludes,

Looking at these failure rates again—and particularly at the reading scores of high school graduates—it is difficult to know what argument a counselor can make to tell a failing student that she ought to stay in school, except perhaps to note that a credential will, statistically, improve her likelihood of finding work. (1991, p. 59)

A system whose own professional advocates are so discouraged about its own students' chances at a successful future, is in need of major reform:

**Junior:** I would like to talk about the students who drop out; this isn't hard for me to talk about because I know many people who have. I asked one of my friends why he had quit school, and he told me that school wasn't working out for him—he was always skipping, and he had bad grades, so he wasn't going to graduate anyway.

A few months ago I talked to another friend who said that he had dropped out because he decided to work instead of to study. Another guy dropped out to marry his girlfriend, and someone else dropped out because he was having a lot of family problems. He ran away from home.
There’s a difference between the students who come from México and the ones that were raised here, and how they are related to gangs. The people who come here from México usually really want to study, but their families might not give them the chance to do it. Sometimes they’re given a chance to study, but only for a short period, like six months, a year, or at the most two, and the purpose of this opportunity is to learn enough English to get by.

When people have this goal they pull their children out of school thinking that they have already acquired enough language, or that they are wasting too much time there and not progressing. And sometimes students drop out of school because they are unhappy with the system, which is very different from the one in México. Over time, still other kids become bored with school, get in trouble too often, and decide to drop out. With these students the eagerness to learn becomes replaced by a desire to become independent, and school is no longer important to their goals.

I have thought of dropping out, and the reason for it was that I wanted to work and help my family. But my uncle, the one who doesn’t live with me, told me not to lose the opportunity that he has never had, and then I realized that he was right. So I’m thinking of finishing high school and going to college. I’m a Hispanic person, and I perfectly know the reasons why my people drop out.

Lory: I cook for my family after school, clean the house, take care of my brother and my cousins, help my parents out with translating, doing paperwork and putting the bills together. When my mom sees something interesting in the newspaper, she’ll read it out loud so that I can correct her pronunciation, or she’ll read Disney books to my little cousin Jenny who has been living with us since my aunt got into a very serious car accident. My mom is trying her best to learn English, but mostly she learns at work because she is there most of every day.

I’m going to continue going to school after I graduate from high school because I want the best
things for my baby, and to make my parents proud of me. I’ve done many things along the way that will make it harder for me to do it, but that’s just going to show people even more that I can do it no matter what. I’d really like to use my experiences to keep other kids in situations similar to mine from leaving school.

What will help kids not to drop is to get involved in some type of activities that are really interesting to them, like clubs, community activities. Getting together with other young people to talk about their experiences, or having an older person talk about what he or she went through, and the stupid things they did that took them nowhere can also help.

Some students will want to drop because they are failing courses, and this is where the teachers need to step in and give them support. We should also find ways to show the teens who are thinking of dropping out how hard life is going to be without an education, and how sometime they might feel regret for their decision to leave without graduating. They need to take a good look at who is closing the doors, and who is able to open them.

**Ana:** I’ve been thinking a lot about why so many kids drop out of high school. I think that much of the reason is that they don’t have a lot of communication with their parents or someone else who can help them. Teenagers need someone to ask them about what they are thinking, feeling, their reasons for studying, what their goals are, and sometimes maybe to help them to make new ones. To give them motivation and to make them feel better and strong enough to do whatever they need to do to be successful in the future.

Because really, if you think about it, the best source of support we have is our family, so they’re really very important, especially for students who have just come to this country.
They become confused about many differences, for example, the new language, culture, kinds of jobs, and different style of communicating. And sometimes they don't get a lot of support from their parents, because they have to work all day to make ends meet in low-paying jobs.

The following teacher's words might just as easily be mine, in their accurate portrait of my own Mexican-American ESL learners' situation:

My students also have to work much longer hours than [dominant-group] children to earn money after school. Then there is the lack of health care ... Nonetheless, they have to take the same tests as the [middle class white kids]. (Kozol, 1991, p. 149)

Kozol (1991) furthers our understanding of Ana's words, illustrating how Mexican-American ESL students, with the additional linguistic, scholastic, and societal obstacles and familial responsibilities that they take on daily, live lives worlds apart from their dominant-group peers:

[These are children] who are virtually disjoined from the entire worldview, even from the basic reference points, of the American experience. (p. 72)
Ana: There are many sad situations that cause us to drop out of school. For example, one of the biggest problems is that teenage girls get pregnant, which is very harmful to their futures. Sometimes they do this to create someone to love who will also love them, or they have a child by accident because they didn’t have information about how to protect themselves. Often there is no communication between these kids and their parents, or with their partners. Sometimes these teens simply want to have fun, and have friends in similar situations who also need help.

The change of life from México to here is difficult, and so are the difference in work, culture, and community, school, friends, rules, and how their parents are forced to change their availability for them because they are working. So teenagers feel all of these changes, and sometimes do things that negatively affect their lives.

4.5 The Relationship between Race and Class

Kozol (1991) contends that,

‘[w]hether consciously or not, the system writes off its poorest students’ (p. 99)....The system has aspects of a meritocracy, but merit in this case is predetermined by conditions that are closely tied to class and race. While some defend it as, in theory, “survival of the fittest,” it is more accurate to call it the survival of the children of the fittest—or the most favored. Similar systems exist in every major city. (p. 60)
O'Connor (1997) asserts that "insufficient attention has been given to students who accommodate to the norms and expectations of school and experience academic success despite risk" (p. 597), and that her own study's goal was to "[emphasize] the voice and life stories of six African-American high school students" (p. 597). O'Connor's (1997) work emphasized her students' situation as low-income, societally-disenfranchised individuals, rather than as African-Americans.

Her conclusion that "... oppression and injustice can be actively resisted and need not be interpreted as given...[and this knowledge conveys] the agency that resides (even when dormant) within marginalized communities" (p. 621), might be an over-generalization. It does (as this study strives to do), however, encourage research that could benefit a large number of children whose expectations, achievements, and ambitions might be inflamed, rather than discouraged by the society around them. Many dominant-group

76 Collaborating equally with the Resilient Six, as she refers to them, in order to construct and then build upon their own research questions might have strengthened the study methodologically, as well as have given student participants a greater awareness of their own agency. The resulting data would have been more meaningful to other minority students; they might identify closely with these participant-researchers whose backgrounds so closely resemble their own.

The six youths, then, would then have been closer to achieving O'Connor's (1997) goal of "[providing] a unique opportunity for exploring the biographical factors that may have buffered them against meanings and interpretations which led other, similar youths to give up and lose hope" (p. 605).

77 Participants in this study expressed their striving to do this by means of this project.
individuals contend that society offers equal
opportunity to all of its members, regardless of race
and class; one young lady, however, relates having had
a different experience:

"My mother wanted me to go to
school there and she tried to have
me transferred. It didn’t work. The
reason, she was told, is that we’re
in a different ‘jurisdiction.’ If
you don’t live up there in the
hills, or further back, you can’t
attend their schools. That, at
least, is what they told my
mother."

"Is it a matter of race?" I ask.
"Or money?"
"Well," she says, choosing her
words with care, "The two things,
race and money, go so closely
together—what’s the difference? I
live here, they live there, and
they don’t want me in their
school." (Kozol, 1991, p. 31)

There were times as this project unfolded when I
wondered whether participants would move beyond Ogbu’s
(e.g., 1991, 1992) notion that because they were
significantly better off than they had been in México,
they, as people of color, would continue to meet up
with burgeoning horizons. Despite their having had a
number of mainstream classes sufficient to make an
informed comparison, students initially felt that their
situation as ESL students was not measurably unequal to
their language-majority, mainstream peers'. The fact that often there were not enough textbooks for an entire class, for example, students attributed to clerical confusion; they did not feel that they were receiving fewer resources than their white peers as a result of their being ESL students.

As the following excerpt from my journal of one discussion reveals, about half-way through the study, discussions based upon a shared reading led to analysis of the relationship between race and class. Various ways in which these two variables might interact synergistically in the lives of poor Mexican immigrant children versus poor white children came to the fore\textsuperscript{78}, and the same students who had not seen color-related differences in resources and opportunity were now passionately nodding at one another's statements, and building upon them with further illustrations from their own experience. In this case it was very clear to the group that students need financial resources to be able to stay in school, and that white students, regardless of class, are in a better financial position than poor Mexican immigrants.

After this significant point of students' comparing themselves to majority-group peers and recognizing a

\textsuperscript{78} See Brown (1980); Chapa (1991); Gandara (1995); Oakes (1995) for further discussion of this topic.
difference in opportunity, they began to identify other areas as well. In group discussions, for example, participants unanimously agreed that language is a problem for children who arrive in schools without speaking the language of instruction. The situation is, they described, extremely difficult for these students because they often are unable to understand anything, not even television or radio programs. They are also unable even to talk to anyone except people of the same culture.

Participants described how Mexicans come to this country "blank" of English, and have to start their lives over again. They are frequently motivated to learn "survival English" quickly, since often people will be unpleasant to them based upon their skin color, English language deficiency or a combination of the two. This experience of not being accepted is not, as Kozol (1991) illustrates, uncommon among non-white individuals:

'My mother pushes me and she wanted me to get a chance at a better education. Only one other student in my class was black. I was in the fifth grade, and at that age you don't understand the ugliness in

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Houle (1980) contends that educational difficulty may be the result of a combination of factors including linguistic difficulty, content difficulty, negative experiences resulting from poor teaching practices or discrimination, and students' repeated failures at their attempts to succeed.
people's hearts. They wouldn't play with me. I couldn't understand it. During recess I would stand there by myself next to the fence. Then one day I got a note: 'Go back to Africa'.

'To tell the truth, it left a sadness in my heart. Now you hear them sayin' on TV, 'What's the matter with these colored people? Don't they care about their children's education?' But my mother did the best for me she knew. It was not my mother's fault that I was not accepted by those people.' (p. 35)

Questions such as, "How come you people come here? Why don't you go home?", participants concluded, make many Mexicans want to impress upon the dominant group how being at the receiving end of such racism and hatred feels. Dominant-group Americans might better, participants suggested, make an effort to become better acquainted with Mexicans and try to help them, rather than making them feel inferior, and the need to prove themselves. The group agreed that if dominant group individuals were nicer in their approach racial hatred might not exist; the relationship between cultures would thus improve faster, enabling teamwork in taking on other societal problems.

Group conversation turned to an additional topic suggested by Valdés (1998), a comparison of
difficulties experienced by Mexican immigrant children with those encountered by majority-group children of similar socio-economic backgrounds. Consensus on this subject was that upper-class whites generally enjoy better opportunities because they do not have to work to support themselves to the degree that economically-disadvantaged Mexican students do. Where wealthier students often do not attribute great importance to money and may take it for granted, participants contended that to Mexican immigrants money is very significant to the ability to continue with one's studies.

All of these children say the Pledge of Allegiance every morning. [Wherever they live], they salute the same flag. They place their hands on their hearts and join their voices in a tribute to 'one nation indivisible' which promises liberty and justice to all people. What is the danger that the people in a town...would face if they resolved to make this statement true? How much would it really harm their children to compete in a fair race? (Kozol, 1991, p. 132)

The group described how children in low-income families are often forced to leave school in order to work full-time to support themselves and their
families. The five agreed that poor students are likely to be more highly-motivated than their wealthier peers in school, and less likely to take their education for granted. Participants explained that the former group’s having to make sacrifices in order to continue their education tends to make it all the more meaningful to them,

...and this ever-present contrast adds a heightened bitterness to the experience of children. The ugliness of racial segregation adds its special injuries as well. (Kozol, 1991, p. 74)

Group members strongly and unanimously asserted their opinion, like that of the Tribune, that

'[t]hose the system chooses to save are the brightest youngsters, selected by race, income and achievement.' (Kozol, 1991, p. 60)

Mayra expressed her belief that wealthy people believe that they will forever have the power to control the poor for their own interests, that someone else will always “do the dirty work” for them. Owners of fields in which many Mexicans are working, she illustrated, employ laborers who are paid little and made to feel
powerless. Group members agreed with Mayra that in this way the wealthy are able to maintain their power, providing only those things necessary to their workers' survival. While some wealthy people do make a sincere effort to help poor people, students maintained that more plentiful are others who exploit them. Even in the classroom, perhaps,

'...the high school selection process...create[s] a city-wide skimming process that we can compare to orange juice—our [students of color] are being treated like sediment.' The city, she says, 'is not shaking the juice right.' (Kozol, 1991, p. 108)

In this country, participants explained, Mexican students are likely to have to quit school if they are poor and illegal, since they cannot qualify for governmental assistance programs. The group also noted that undocumented workers in America pay taxes too; these are deducted from their paychecks. That tax money, students explained, goes toward assisting unemployed white people (through welfare support), representing another way in which white people continue to benefit from the labor of Mexican people.
The group nonetheless maintained that their situation here is better than their Mexican compatriots' in México; no Mexican unemployed citizen, they explained, receives any type of government assistance. Mexican schools are very expensive, and the Mexican government, the group affirmed, does not provide citizens with the "free" education, textbooks, and food that American schools provide. Where American minors are legally required to attend school, education in México is a privilege, not a right, thus a student is permitted not to attend if he or she chooses not to do so. Often, to pay for this privilege, parents will come to the United States in order to earn and send back the money required for their children to go to school.

In this respect newly-arrived Mexicans and middle class white parents who defend the status quo agree: compared to their former situations, immigrants generally have little cause to complain. The situation for immigrant children living in the U.S. is indeed typically better than it had been in México. It is still not, however, equal to that of dominant-group children. Gratitude discourages most Mexican parents from wanting to seem unappreciative or disrespectful by complaining about their children's experiences in
schools. The dominant class's attitude often appears to advocate this silence, agreeing that immigrants should be grateful to be here, and should be grateful in silence. Kozol (1991) cautions, however, that

[p]erhaps it isn't fair to say [that the dominant class is] "opposed" [to equal educational opportunity for all children]. A better word, more accurate, might be "oblivious." They do not want poor children to be harmed. They simply want the best for their own children. (p. 108)

For many parents and community members, thankfulness will prevail over taking action on their children's behalf; this, however, is not always the case

... among sophisticated leaders of the poor. "What have things come to in America [asks one mother] when I am told that they are the people I have to trust? If they want to be my 'partner,' let them open up their public schools and bring my children out into their neighborhoods and go to school beside their children...But do not lock us in a place where you don't need to live beside us and then say you want to be my 'partner.'
I don't accept that kind of 'partner.' No one would—unless he was [sic] a fool or had no choice.”

(p. 81)

Lory: The situations of economically-disadvantaged white and Mexican-Americans are not the same. Poor ESL students have to struggle to adjust to a new country, a new language, and new customs. It's harder for them because they are trying to fit in so that they won't be treated differently.

They don't have the same opportunities as [dominant-group] Americans who are in their own country. With more open doors, they know the language, and know how the educational system works without struggling. Well, they will struggle, but not as much as the ESL students.

The other thing is that most ESL students drop out because they need to help out their families. They don't drop out because they don't want to come to school; if they had the choice, they would probably keep on attending so that they could get their education. But poor [dominant-group] Americans drop out because they take pleasure in not coming to school, or simply because they would prefer to earn money instead of studying.

Martha: Who faces more difficulty, poor or rich people? It's obvious that it's the poor, because the poor always have to work, and sometimes they can't go to school because of that. And rich people always seem to have the things that they want, and they don't have to work to get the things that they need. I think that all students living in this country should be able to have the same opportunities, because they will help to do better things for the country as well as themselves.

Junior: I've felt pulled between going to school and helping my family financially. This happened about a year ago, but I didn't drop out because my
other uncle, who doesn’t live with me, told me not to lose such a good opportunity of getting an education.

**Mayra:** I’ve felt that conflict, but I think that if I stay in school, I can help my family economically in the future. And my parents have never asked me to stop going to school in order to go to work to help support my family.

**Lory:** I’ve also had the thought of quitting school to help my family. I saw how stressed out my parents were becoming, and how hard it was for them to get by with the little that they were earning. I didn’t want to see my parents suffer or argue over about stupid things, only because of money.

Sometimes I wanted something but wasn’t able to get it because my parents didn’t have enough, or because they needed the money for something else. I wanted to get my own things, to help them out with some money, and to give things to my little brother. I wanted him to have all he wanted, but it was impossible with the little earnings that I was receiving.

### 4.6 Gangs

Gang members, in particular those who are dropouts, are often responsible for committing destructive and violent acts, and therefore not often likely to arouse public sympathy. Many dropouts are bright students with strong potential who simply “fall between the cracks.” Frequently unable to connect in a meaningful way with their families, and feeling similarly extraneous in
school, they seem to simply disappear overnight. Faces in the classroom are replaced by highlighter score marks drawn across roll books, and, sometimes quickly, they are forgotten. But this situation, now frequent to the point of being unremarkable, is unallowable:

'Gifted children,' says [the principal of the high school], 'are everywhere... but their gifts are lost to poverty and turmoil and the damage done by knowing they are written off by society. Many of these children have no sense of something they belong to. They have no feeling of belonging to America. Gangs provide boys, perhaps, with something to belong to...' (Kozol, 1991, p. 33)

Junior: The reasons that kids become involved with gangs and the reasons that they drop out are different in certain ways. When a kid (most of the time, a Hispanic kid who has suddenly arrived from México) is ignored, treated badly, or both by his family and there's a group of friends who treat him well, respect him, and make him feel a part of them, he will prefer to be with that group rather than with his own family. The nature of gangs has a lot to do with their members' behavior, and that's why some people call their gang their "familia." They are the kids' new family.

The case is different for Chicano gang members, because they have almost always done whatever they have wanted. They have learned how to control their parents, and feel no need for either them or for schools. I would say that these kids ruin their lives because most of them end up
in jail, with a baby, and constantly worried about getting jumped down by a rival gang member. While they're with their friends these people feel pretty tough, but when they are alone, most of them punk out [back down], which is what I call what gangster wanna-bes do. They aren't true cholos, they don’t know how to be. They are cowards, because they think that a true cholo is a person who picks on the weak, and harasses them for where they are from and who they claim [their gang affiliation]. But they’ve got it wrong because a true cholo is one who earns respect by never backing down, not even if he’s alone. He’s down for [willing to defend] his gang, but he never harasses anyone without reason, or makes a show just to impress other people. That’s why I think that most of the cholos these days are just people who are in need of help, love, and attention.

'These children cry out for something more,' the Tribune writes. 'They do not get it.' (Kozol p. 63)

**Junior:** Hispanic gangs are normally joined by young boys who believe that they don't have anything but each other, and they consider themselves as **familia.** The territory they claim is called "**barrio**", and their graffiti is called "**plaqueasos**".

The Hispanic gang members usually call their gangs and the other Hispanic gangs "**cliquas,**" which comes from the English word "**cliques,**" and they call themselves "**cholos,**" which means "**gangster**" in English. When a guy gets into a gang, he has to get beaten up for a certain amount of time, and this is called getting "**jumped in**". When he gets beaten up to get out of the gang, this is called getting "**jumped out**", and this is normally done by two to five gang members against the person who wants to get in or out of the gang.
When a person gets beaten up by a rival gang or some other enemies, he is "jumped down".

Most of the gangs use numbers that represent initials of words, for example 13 is the thirteenth letter of the alphabet, which is "M." "M" is the symbol of the "Mexican Mafia", or 14, which means "Norteño" or "Nuestra Familia" [a Latino gang]. Some gangs have based their names on where they come from. For example, the members of "Sur (South) 13," which means South-Side Mafioso, are mostly sureños [southerners] from México. Some other gangs are named after the hoods [neighborhoods] where they live, for example the "18th Street" or "Barrio Grande Playa". Other gangs base their names on their nationalities, for example "Asian Pride," "Mala Salvatrucha" (a gang from El Salvador), or the Mexican Mafia, while some other gangs choose their names to tell who they think they are or what they believe in, like "Small Town," or the "Brown Courage Cliqua".

Ana: I saw a program about gang members, and found out some new things about their parents. On this program, they talked to old people who had been in gangs for all of their lives, and although some of their children and even grandchildren had been killed, they were still gang members. All of this surprised me a lot.

They showed young people telling their lives, and what made it especially sad was that they finally accepted their faults. Parents on that program asked how they could help their children, so some people on the program gave them their opinions. Some gang members said that they had joined because they had felt sad and alone. They advised parents to give love to their children; the two things they all said are the most important to give kids are love and understanding.

In the village where I was living in México, I never saw a gang, or any fights involving guns. My family taught me that it's not good to fight

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80 Small-town, perhaps-recognizable gang names have been changed for purposes of maintaining anonymity.
with or to hurt others. They never let me touch a
gun or even to see one, because they did not think
that it was appropriate for a child. We weren't
allowed to play with toy guns either, because they
thought we might enjoy guns in the same way when
we were teenagers.

When my grandfather decided to buy one, my
grandmother and I went with him. The seller asked
him for records verifying that he wasn't an
alcoholic, fighter, or criminal. We had to go home, and take those documents back the next day.
But I never even saw the gun he bought because
they would not show it to me.

Now teenagers think that they have the right
to have a gun, but I disagree. Teenagers do not
have to fight, so there is no reason for them to
have one. A gun carries serious consequences. In
my opinion, people who sell guns to kids are doing
a terrible thing, especially if they sell them to
gang members. Without requiring information to
check the character of gun buyers, they are doing
a bad thing for the community and society. They
have to stop thinking about money, and to start
thinking about the world that is going break down
in order for them to become more rich.

Martha: In México, I think it's very easy to buy a
gun or any weapon because you just offer them
money, and they'll sell you anything you want.
Here in the United States I think it's more
difficult, but it's not impossible to get one.

I never heard anything about gang members
until I came to the United States. I think that
there are a lot more gangs here, and a lot more
violence than in México. A year ago I went back to
visit, and there wasn't much change. I didn't hear
about gangs, or fights, and I still have never
heard about any killings there.

There you just see people dressed in baggy
clothes, or like gang members, but they aren't
gang members; they don't even know much about
gangs. I think that they should have more rules to
buy guns here in the United States, to prove to
whom they are selling the guns, and to cut down on
the violence in this country.
**Junior:** Things are getting worse both in México and the United States. You can even see this in children’s play; kids always want to be the robber these days, instead of the cops. During 1989, when “Brown Pride” was created by four guys, things used to be less violent. The gangs used to be formed by teens, and there weren’t any kids involved. Most of the gang members were around sixteen, and whenever there was a problem they used to solve it by fighting one-on-one from the chest, but that gang got backed up by another, and it grew really big.

Then, by 1994 they fought against each other, so it got divided into two sides; one was called “Brown Pride Raza,” and the other “Brown Pride Tokers.” One guy got shot in the leg, and another was hit in the mouth with a baseball bat.

Since these gangs became rivals there have been some shootings, and even killings. All of this gang activity has influenced México a lot because three years ago there wasn’t any gang problem, and now there is. Two years ago I went to México and the teenagers all looked like gangsters, some bald and wearing bandanas. They were even talking about hating each other.

The problem in México is that anyone can buy a gun real easily, and here, too. There’s not much trouble carrying it around in México, and there aren’t many shootings, either. I have just once heard about a gang killing in México, but it was not nearly as violent as the killings are in this country.

Junior’s words help to illustrate a theme that the five frequently brought up in group discussions. Although all participants described having friends or acquaintances who were gang members, only Junior’s peer group was primarily composed of students with gang affiliations. The gang-related picture he paints, thus, is starkly different from what Ana and Martha (who
5. PRIDE IN BEING MEXICAN

The Resilient Five's common pride in their Mexicanism is, in my experience, a pride common among most of their peers as well. In my opinion, our current practice of disallowing students to involve their culture, a significant part of their world, provides them with a theoretical, impractical educational experience. Garza and Lipton (1982) calls attention to the importance of all educators' gaining a familiarity with cultural and educational context in which Mexican-American learners are raised. Both areas may amplify the effects of the social and scholastic experiences that are likely to significantly influence, over time, the personality development of learners. The impact of academic experiences on Mexican-American students is potentially quite powerful, and the fluidity and degree of fit between the classroom and the day-to-day life experiences of Mexican-American children may have a profound influence on their academic conduct, beliefs, and goals.

Ausubel (1967), Bruner (1990), and Gagne (1987) for example, successfully merged knowledge of learning processes with theories of how best to set them into motion. Distinguishing between rote memorization and
its more meaningful counterpart, true learning, Ausubel (1967) noted that because it doesn’t connect with the learner’s cognitive structure, rote-memorized information is quickly forgotten and therefore not of any long-term benefit. Instead, he called attention to the merits of "advanced organizers" which anchor information to be learned in the framework of the learner’s previous experiences. Ausubel’s work, "wherein schemata-structures that organize the learner’s world-view- in turn determine how new experiences are processed (DiVesta, 1987; Greeno, 1980)," demonstrates that the Hispanic ESL student’s culture is an important part of the framework in which meaningful learning must occur. Social context, especially students’ cultural pride, might optimally therefore be recognized, validated, and merged in a way meaningful to their other world, the academic world.

Each classroom environment also possesses its own unique culture which, optimally, has relevance to the larger societal culture of which it is a subset. In my opinion, a good teacher will draw frequently upon all students’ cultures, cultural pride, and previous experiences in order to make learning relevant and meaningful to them, for
[t]he occasion and conditions for use [of learned information] arise directly out of the context of activities of each community that uses the tool, framed by the way members of that community see the world...Because tools and the way they are used reflect the particular accumulated insights of the communities, it is not possible to use a tool [, something learned in the classroom,] appropriately without understanding the culture or community in which it is used. (Brown, 1995, p.3)

This notion may represent a powerful argument in favor of schools' becoming familiar with the culture and communities in which our students live, and in which they will actualize their knowledge. Just as a Phillips screwdriver will not be helpful for use with a Flathead screw, decontextualized learning will be of little use and great frustration to Mexican-American students learning things they will rarely, if ever, put to use.

For all learners, then, "[a]ctivity, concept and culture are interdependent. No one can be totally understood without the other two. Learning must involve all three" (Brown, 1995). A further argument may be made for the importance of such a connection. Students who thrive in an academic setting disconnected from authentic, everyday situations may run a risk of coming
to rely too heavily on features of the classroom context not present outside of it. What students have learned may often only apply to the isolated classroom situation in which it was learned, and they may find themselves unprepared and surprised after exiting the building (Brown, 1995, p. 5). Overall, Freire cautions,

[a] careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrative character. This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified. Education is suffering from narration sickness. (1970, p. 57)

Educators might avoid inducing such nausea by incorporating students' cultural enthusiasm and pride in the classroom as frequently and meaningfully as possible.
**Lory:** I feel more Mexican than Chicana or American, even though I was raised in the United States. My parents have maintained the Mexican customs in our house even though we are far away from my birthplace. They, too, feel proud to be what they are. It doesn’t matter to them that they are different from most of the people here, and they are proud of who they are, and where they come from.81

Sometimes people will tell you that you’re a Chicana because you’re already used to the customs here, and have been here almost all of your life. But I’d tell them that I’m 100% Mexican.

**Ana:** I can also say that I am 100% Mexican, and that even if I live here for the rest of my life, I will live here unchanged.

**Junior:** I identify myself as a Mexican although I was born in this country, because I hang out with Chicanos who speak both Spanish and English, but I also hang out with Mexican guys who don’t speak English well. I’m not afraid to show everyone that I’m Mexican. I believe in La Raza [The Race] and I’m proud to be brown. The problem is that some people associate this racial pride with gang behavior.

Where participants uniformly expressed being proud of their Mexican heritage, all were also acquainted with others who were not. Ana, for example, described how her cousin, born here, likes neither México nor Mexican food, and feels no ties to that country whatsoever. Martha suggested, “If parents don’t talk about México, how will the children know or appreciate it?” Ana pointed out, however, that her family not only

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81 All participants similarly expressed their parents’ pride in being Mexican.
had described to him how life there was, but had taken her cousin to visit México as well. He expressed no interest in going back to the country, or in learning anything more about it.

Members of the group pointed out that some Mexican people deny their "Mexicanism" despite their brown skin, explaining, "My parents are Mexican, but I was born here." Martha described how almost every person born here to Mexican parents with whom she is acquainted self-identifies as American. She related how in church recently, for example, Mexican members of the congregation had been asked to raise their hands. Martha, proudly raising her hand, noticed that her cousin did not, and when Martha admonished her she resisted, saying, "I was born here. I'm American."

Participants described also how during in-class interviews, many students born here of Mexican parents also will tend to self-identify as Americans. Martha and Junior contrasted that, although they were both born here, they consider themselves Mexican.

Of detriment to the many newly-arrived individuals who hopefully turn to them for help, it is not, participants observed, uncommon for Spanish-speaking people to deny speaking Spanish despite their actually speaking it fluently. Describing this fairly common
phenomenon, Ana angrily asked what participants say is a common question in this situation: "Un Mexicano sabe hablar el español, no? [A Mexican knows how to speak Spanish, right?]." She continued, "Ni miran el nopal en la frente [They don’t even look at the cactus when it’s directly in front of their faces]."

To illustrate, Martha described her experiences while one day shopping with her mother. Instructing her how to ask in English for a Spanish-speaking clerk, Martha went off to do some shopping on her own. The Spanish-speaking salesgirl came, repeatedly responding to her mother’s Spanish-posed questions in English. Unable to understand what the girl had been saying to her, Martha’s mother later remarked, "Is this girl stupid or something? She knew I couldn’t speak English!" Additionally describing their parents’ joking that “eating a lot of pizza and hamburgers won’t change their race”, participants illustrated these Chicanos’ disdain of new arrivals and rejection of their own heritage. More than a few of my newly-arrived ESL I students described having experienced such snobbery from both Mexican-origin students and adults. Discussing the situation and how people can change over

82 This saying’s origin, participants told me, is the Mexican flag’s eagle, snake in beak, perched atop a cactus, and the previously-described people’s refusal to acknowledge their culture and their heritage.
time, however my ESL I students adamantly maintained that they would never forget their obligation to ease the difficulty of other new immigrants regardless of how long they will live in this country.

Mayra contributed her opinion that many of the problems they experience are partially or entirely the fault of Hispanics. When, for example, she speaks "Spanglish" (a combination of English and Spanish) as she is accustomed to doing, she says that the lower-level ESL students become angry, and demonstrate an aggressive attitude against her. These students feel incapacitated, she maintains, because they are unable to speak English, and they take their frustration out on her. Martha agreed with this, adding that if English-proficient Hispanic students would speak only English, the Mexicans would likely become angry at them, accusing them of turning their backs on their Mexican heritage.

Mayra says, however, that she often speaks English with bilingual individuals in order to demonstrate to the Americans around her that she can. Thus, she says,  

83 Students stood firm on this point, despite my half-joking suggestion that their less-friendly English-proficient peers might once have said the same thing.

84 This fact brings to mind the previously-discussed "victim as villain" mentality, wherein marginalized groups hold themselves primarily responsible for their own lack of success. I should note that, by virtue of Mayra's strong pro-Mexican advocacy, I was very surprised by her having made this statement.
they can see that it is not easy to ignore or offend
Mexicans on basis of their language deficiency;
speaking English demonstrates to American people that
Mexicans are smart and capable. Chicano-Mexican
problems, she contends, are in part due to the fact
that, unable to speak good Spanish, Chicanos sometimes
think that Mexicans are talking about them. Overall,
however, participants corroborate what research and the
business world well recognize: many of today’s jobs are
bilingual, so fluency and facility using both languages
is important to future success. Students, then, might
best be encouraged to “code-switch” (alternate between
languages mid-thought or mid-sentence) freely in all
arenas as they see fit.

**Junior:** I’ve had many bad experiences in which
people from other razas [races] have tried to put
me and my raza down. Whenever I hear people make
bad comments about Chicanos or Mexicans I answer
them back, and I’m willing to defend La Raza’s
honor. I’ve been developing this feeling of pride
to be Mexican as time has been passing, although I
remember that when I just arrived here, I was kind
of quiet and a little scared.

I also think that Ana is right when she talks
about Mexican-American people who do bad things
that affect people’s opinions about Mexicans in
general. To me chicano and mexicano are the same.
They are both our own people, and we should start
helping each other instead of trying to put each
other down.
Summarizing our discussions on this subject, participants concluded that helping each other to understand our differences would help make the United States more powerful than it is right now. People could improve society by working as a team\textsuperscript{85}. In order to do that, the five postulated, everyone will first need to be equal, something they currently are not.

\textsuperscript{85} Teamwork, within the Mexican culture, is highly honored as contributing to the common good, whereas in this country, competition is regarded as a precursor to success.
6. MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MEXICANS

Noting that much of our discussion focused on what Mexicans are not, I suggested that we discuss what Mexican people are. Building upon one another’s ideas, participants responded:\footnote{Respondants alternated between “we” and “they” in reference to Mexicans at large; for fluidity, the third person will be maintained throughout the following passage.}

“They are fighters, hard workers, good friends to those who help and respect them. We defend our land, our culture...proud. They don’t like when people speak badly of their culture; it’s as if the speakers were inflicting a deep wound upon Hispanics. Quite playful. We’re not apt to hate.”

“If someone offends us, we’re capable of forgiving them and trying to help them if they’re sorry for what they have done. If they want to be friends, we’ll help them and offer them friendship. Americans don’t [always] do that. Americans don’t give Mexicans the chance to communicate how much it hurt to come here, and the reasons why they came. They talk about Mexicans without understanding how much it hurt us to come here...they think Mexicans come totally happy to be here.”
I believe that stereotypes are often rooted in a lack of familiarity with the group being debased; it is also my opinion that as educators we have a tremendous opportunity to ease those frustrations in the venue perhaps most important to the student’s future quality of life, the classroom. Treated poorly at a supermarket, an individual can elect to shop at another. Shabbily-received at one gas station, she might cut up her credit card, and go down the street to another; options, however, are considerably more limited in contending with an educational system in which she has daily negative experiences.

Numerous studies\(^{87}\) suggest that Mexican-American academic under-achievement may be related to a number of factors either individually or in combination; these may include linguistic barriers, previous educational background, socioeconomic status, psychological stress. Negative academic interactions and experiences, in conjunction with these other factors, may also increase likelihood of a student’s decision to prematurely leave school.

\(^{87}\) E.g., Alva (1991) and Padilla (1986, 1988).
The individual experiences, interactions, belief system, family and cultural background, and several other factors will influence what our Mexican-origin students' "know" to be "true." Collier (1995) describes, for example, the difficulties that may discourage

...the individual student going through the process of acquiring a second language in school. Central to that student's acquisition of language are all of the surrounding social and cultural processes occurring through everyday life within the student's past, present, and future, in all contexts-home, school, community, and the broader society. For example, sociocultural processes at work in second language acquisition may include individual student variables such as self-esteem or anxiety or other affective factors. At school the instructional environment in a classroom or administrative program structure may create social and psychological distance between groups. Community or regional social patterns such as prejudice and discrimination expressed towards groups or individuals in personal and professional contexts can influence students' achievement in school, as well as societal patterns such as subordinate status of a minority group or acculturation vs. assimilation forces at work.
These factors can strongly influence the student's response to the new language, affecting the process positively only when the student is in a socioculturally supportive environment.

Demonstration of students' knowledge might not, then, be best gauged by their ability to chant a memorized mantra of irrefutable "facts" the teacher has put forth. A more accurate measure of their academic success could be their demonstrating the ability to take the ever-evolving world-view they have been cultivating, applying it to the ever-changing situations in which they find themselves, in order to "assemble prior knowledge from diverse sources appropriate to the problem at hand" (Ertmer and Newby, 1993). True life-long learners demonstrate the ability to continue to grow; they also remain open to, and critically analyze, the "truths" which others perceive. Ultimately (and frustratingly), however, Kozol (1991) observes,

[f]acts are cited. Editorials are written. Five years later, the same facts are cited once again. There is no sense of moral urgency; and nothing changes. (p. 119)
**Martha:** Sometimes people have had problems with Mexican people and think that we are all alike. It's not like that, because each person is different, and they shouldn't judge all based upon a few. I think that many people have negative misconceptions about Mexicans. Sometimes they think that Mexicans are nasty, but that's not true. Well there are some who are, but that's not to say that all Mexicans are the same. Because to judge someone, you have to consider the insides more than the physical appearance.

**Mayra:** I have motivation to realize my dreams, and I have dreams that I'm realizing every day. That's the reason that I'm here. Many Mexican people think that because this isn't our country, we aren't capable of succeeding here. We already know that to be a Hispanic in this country is to be a nobody.

**Ana:** Some American people don't understand anything about Mexican people, but I think that if they were in our situation, they would better understand us. Many of the people [who interact regularly] with Mexican people understand us, but other people can be so bad or cruel with us. I think that many of us came here just out of dreams to be better. Many people have almost the same dreams, but because of their differences, they become enemies.

Sometimes [in coming here] we have to leave our families behind in México, but the most common problem that we have is that we have to speak English. If we can't, we have to study in order to learn, and to get a good job. So beginning afresh without help or knowing the language is another big problem we face.

Some Mexicans speak English fluently, but won't help Mexicans who don't, denying that they speak any Spanish at all. These people got what they wanted, and forget the people who need their help. I think that they need to remember back to when they were in the same situation, and to be more kind.
I feel like I have to help people, and try to do something about something that's bad for all Mexican people, especially for ESL students. My opinion is that similar problems happen all the time, but we don't protest; sometimes this is because we feel kind of shy because we don't speak English.

I think it's important that we do something for our community, for all Hispanic people who encounter these kinds of problems, so that when they find themselves there, they can understand why [they are being mistreated]. Help with solving economic problems is especially important, because almost every Mexican has come here to find a job.

Sometimes other people try to make us feel bad, which is something we have to put up with day upon day. We all know that it's very hard, but we also know that we're capable of finishing what we begin. When I came here, I never thought about a dream, but now I have many, such as graduating, getting money to help my family and doing something to help our community, too. I really believe in those who want to make a difference in this problem, but it's hard, because so many think badly of Mexicans.

**Lory:** Every time you turn on the television and watch a movie or the news, you see Hispanics or Mexicans dressed like Cholos, killing people, doing drugs, or covered with tattoos all over their bodies. Then other Mexicans then try to do this too, imitating these models in order to be something that they aren't. Sometimes I do understand the [dominant-group] Americans' [perception that we're a bunch of gang-bangers], but at the same time, I get so angry because they are offending my people.

I agree with them that in reality there are many young people who dress like cholos, become like the stereotypes, and get to the point of using drugs and dropping out of school. As I say, we are able to see this in the streets; it's all around us. These people are imitating what they see on television. They want to be "crazy cholos" to show their friends that they're bad, that
nobody can mess with them, but the only thing that they end up doing is casting all Mexicans in a bad light.

These cholos cause people to think that all Hispanics are alike, that we’re all the worst kind of people, actualizing the worst things that people think of us. Most Mexicans are trying to do everything right the best that we can, and at times it feels like it might as well be for nothing. These people also don’t realize that they serve as role models for others, and they don’t know the significance of setting an example for other Hispanics.

To me being a role model means finishing school, earning my diploma, going to college, and having a career in order to get nice things like a nice car and a nice house. I also want to be able to encourage other young people to keep going to school, because without an education they will get nowhere. Instead of being a gangster, murderer, drug addict, I prefer to be someone important in life so that people speak well of me, rather than badly.

The inordinate number of Mexican American students experiencing failure within the American educational system not only calls attention to the insufficient educational opportunities available to Mexican-American students, but also significantly limits their exposure to the successful role models who can function as external sources of inspiration. Lory’s striving to be a role model for her peers, which in many ways she has been, is especially crucial for her Mexican-American and ESL peers. Minority students’ skin color often

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88 As educators we may forget the wealth of experiences and knowledge that our learners (especially our ESL students who are soon to be fluent in two or more languages (and in two or more usually very different cultures) bring with them to the classroom. “It’s quite remarkable how much these
does not match that of any about whom they are being
taught, that of the faces of those adorning the posters
on the walls, or that of those cheering at/playing in
the games for which they must attend mandatory pep-
rallies. For these students school can, over time,
appear pointless, disconnected, and a fruitless
expenditure of effort better directed elsewhere.
Negative interactions with teachers and peers, a
perceived chasm between what they are learning in
school and their life experiences, and limited chances
at socio-economic mobility which their academic failure
portends may all significantly contribute to Mexican-
American students' decision to leave school
prematurely. Their assessment of their scholastic
interactions with majority-group individuals may also
significantly impact what they will come to expect from
their daily interactions with society as a whole.

It is to those thus searching for meaning for whom
a mentor or caring adult can, I believe, be especially
beneficial. Benard (1993), respected specialist in the

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89 It is my opinion that it is extremely important for teachers to teach the words (and their meanings)
of the Pledge of Allegiance, school spirit yells, and other verses with which all students' familiarity
is taken for granted by the dominant culture. What is often perceived by this group as national
disrespect or refusal to participate is often simply ESL students' being unfamiliar with (and
sometimes overwhelmed by), traditional, time-honored American customs.
area of resiliency, identifies the presence of at least one caring and supportive adult in a child’s life as one of three key ingredients to success. Bandura (1990) illustrates the vital assistance that students like Lory provide, explaining that students’ development of “self-belief of efficacy,” or the strength to persist despite failure and rejection, is developed through models like Lory and her peers who “serve as sources of interest, inspiration, and skills. Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raises the observers’ belief about their own efficacy” (p. 327). Thus, the greater the presence of “people like us who make it” (Gándara, 1995, p. 54) for minority students, the greater the likelihood of their believing that making it is a possibility.

Lory: Many [dominant-group] Americans also criticize Mexicans simply for being Mexicans. They ask us why we’re here, and they say that they don’t have any more space for illegal immigrants. That hurts, when they express themselves like that. Sometimes I wish that they were in our shoes so that they could understand us better, and to see how hard we struggle to get around.

As discussed earlier, the three ingredients are (1) caring relationships, (2) high expectations, and (3) opportunities for meaningful participation and contribution.
But we have to be realists, and if we want something, we have to fight hard for it. We have two paths, the right way, or the wrong way. What we need to do, then, is to continue moving ahead, and to demonstrate to the North Americans that not all Mexicans and Hispanics are the same simply because some of them are bad, or because they have had a few negative experiences with Hispanics.

6.1 The Media and Mexican-American Stereotypes

The topic of the media's exasperating the problem of anti-Mexican sentiment in this country was one that ignited an emotional response in participants. Related conversations were secondary in intensity only to our previously-described discussions of individuals' race and class' effects on their opportunity. All participants were able to identify and cite numerous examples of media discrimination against people of color in the music, television, and film industries, and enumerated their consequent frustration:

**Lory**: At the time that I was learning English, having just arrived in California, I saw so much discrimination, like white Americans would refer to Mexicans as "beaners" or "wetbacks". Many Mexicans didn't even understand what those things were, and not knowing that it was an insult to them they would only smile back and keep on walking.

The police also stop people who are Mexican because their color is brown, and the neighborhood is black. One way or another they will be charged
with something, even if they are innocent, and the officers are more likely to be believed.

The worst thing that I have seen or heard, which seems to be on-going, is other cultures' putting down Mexican people because they see them in the movies dressed as cholos, gangsters, killing people, stealing, doing drugs and all kinds of crimes. They think that the Mexican person standing in front of them is like that, having no respect for others.

But that's only because they see a fantasy, or something they imagine. If they really got to know the Mexican culture, they would see that we have respect for the ones who respect us, that we have strict rules for our children, and that these things are very common to our culture.

**Junior:** I agree. All the programs I have watched involving Chicanos are about gangs and bad situations that make them look like criminals in front of people from other races. I've heard in the news a lot about the gangs, and I watched a program last Friday about the biggest gangs in L.A.

The saddest thing is that most of the criminals they show on these programs are Mexicans, and I think that that's why there are a lot of people who don't like us. Part of this reason is that whenever there's a Chicano on TV, they make him look like a criminal. They never show programs about how hard the Mexicans work in the fields, and how they are helping the United States become stronger.

The media's point of view influences gangs, because, for example, there are many companies that sell rap music CDs. This music talks about killing, gangs, and rage against other groups of people. There are many movies, too, that make gangs look attractive.
As discussed earlier, participants unanimously maintained that limiting children's exposure to damaging influences is beyond the control of parents. We felt that parents' best weapon, then, is to instill in their children a value system that clearly stigmatizes risky behaviors such as those to which they may be exposed at school. It is this value system, they postulated, that had enabled participants to withstand the temptations, despite their sometimes experiencing similar stressors to those that had adversely affected the lives of their peers. Participants contended, as in the following conversational excerpt, that students' exposure to drugs, rap music, and offers to skip school do not, a priori, succeed in bewitching their focus away from their future goals:

**Me:** Have you had the feelings that you couldn't go on? Asked yourself, “Should I keep going with school, or should I stop?”

**Junior:** Yeah, but I know that if I stop now, in two or four years I'll regret that decision. What gives me that idea is that some people drop out, and when they try to come back, they can't [because they're either too old, or feel too out of place since their classmates have moved on to higher levels].

I don’t know much about their situation...I don't see them as often as I used to, because they don't come to school anymore, so I get together with them less. So I don’t know much about them.
**Me:** When they'd ask you to skip with them, what did you do?

**Junior:** I said "No", and that was it. They didn't argue with it, or respect me less. Once when one guy asked me, though, to skip class, I said, "Yeah, I’ll go if you’ve got a car", because I knew that the guy didn’t. And then they all got caught, and were busted [in trouble].

**Ana:** I don’t have a lot of friends, but my sisters [and I] are close, and we talk about all of our problems. We explain the consequences that each other’s decisions might have, but we know that each of us has the last word in our own life’s decisions.

**Martha:** I think the same as Ana. I explain [to siblings] that school will help them for the best future, and if you skip, you’ll regret it in the future. My parents say the same. They, also, always tell us that we have the last word [in making our own decisions for ourselves].

**Junior:** I have like three friends who support me [in my efforts to succeed academically], but I see them only rarely. I give my advice to everyone, though. I always tell them to hang in there...not to drop out, or to hang with the gangs that much.

But I always hang with them. One of my friends told me to think about not doing that, that I could really get into trouble. I started to think about the people who have gotten killed.

We have a friend who has all of these tattoos. He’s all obsessed, and wants to get more of them all the time. I know it’s a bad idea, though, because I have a friend who is trying to get them removed, and he’s in a lot of pain and sorry that he ever did it. I also listened to rap music. When I heard the music, I thought about the message.
Me: How did you not absorb the words and messages like a sponge? How do you repel them when, say, other kids are motivated to go out and act out on the violent messages they hear in rap songs? When you hear the rap stuff, what do you all do?

Junior: Do you want me to be honest? It’s, like, normal to me, but I don’t get [absorb] the message. And not all the rap is bad.

Martha: I’ve never heard the music... I wouldn’t know.

Junior (to Martha): Well, if you had a kid who wanted to listen to rap, what would you tell her?

Martha: That the messages are bad, and not to listen. To join a school team, or listen to other [kinds of] music, to talk...there are many other ways.

Ana: I think, like Martha, that it depends on the parents. Junior, do you remember when you started to listen? You did it because your friends did.

Junior: No, my uncle was playing it in the car when I first came to the United States. But I didn’t understand the words [at that time].

Ana: Well, I do what I’ve been taught. I follow in the steps of my family. They never listened to those things, so I never have.

Martha: Me, too. No-one in my family has listened to that, so I never have heard it before.

Junior: No-one in my house listens to it either, but there were people living there before who did.

Me: Can we control that there are drugs, violence, rap in society?

Ana and Martha: I don’t understand the question...Do you mean, what would we do if we were offered them?
Me: Well, interpret the question however you’d like.

Martha: I can control what I do. [All participants nod, appearing to agree that they will not do anything against their value system]

Ana: But there are more of the people doing the bad things than us [who are interested in doing the right thing], and the side with the greater number usually wins.

So we have to give the example to others to follow in our steps, and not follow in theirs. Not to blame them for what’s happening, because we don’t give them the chance to quit when we blame them. To help them, rather than to show them our backs.

Junior: Why are there so many junkies in this world? I see them smoking and doing drugs...you can’t walk in the streets [without seeing it]. My friend got beat up here walking down the street with his girlfriend. He is still traumatized, but continues to dress like a cholo, with the bandana and everything.

Me: ...OK, so Ana, you say that we shouldn’t judge or turn our backs on people who are doing things like being gang members and doing drugs. How should we help them?

Ana: Well, I like to study, and I want a good future. I tell them that they can see me going ahead, and they can see themselves moving backwards, and to look to me for their example, and for advice.

Junior: Kids join up with gangs on the advice of their friends who talk about them, how great they are, and how they will help them when they have a problem. These are the friends who teach them about gang colors, shirts, how to draw gang-related lettering.
The gangster clothing and CD companies make millions of dollars in this way by using kids. I think the final influence that affects kids is the place where they live. If they live in a neighborhood where there are many cholos, it's natural that they're going to decide to become one. They've gotten used to seeing these people, and this way of being seems normal to them. They might also think that they are popular, or "bad" [cool].

I agree with what Ana has said about the Latinos who have ruined their own lives by using drugs, dropping out of school, and getting into gangs. TV, newspapers, and magazines just show the Mexicans and black people as criminals, but they never tell the stories of all of the good Mexican people who want to succeed and get ready to face the future.

Kozol (1991) further suggests that the media's focus on the negative few over the positive majority is a more effective attention-getter, corroborating Oakes' (1985) identification of the damages resulting from academic tracking practices:

Handcuffs draw the attention of the press because they are a graphic symbol of so many other problems. But far more damaging, I am convinced, are the more subtle manacles of racial patterns in assignment and school tracking. Few things can injure a child more, or do more damage to a child's self-esteem, than to be locked in a bottom-level track
...Add to this the squalor of the setting and the ever-present message of a child's racial isolation, and we have in place an almost perfect instrument to guarantee that we will need more handcuffs and, no doubt, more prisons. (p. 119)

Oakes (1985), for example, describes the educational practice of tracking as "...the process whereby students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various classes...students are identified in a rather public way as to their intellectual capabilities and accomplishments and separated into a hierarchical system of groups for instruction" (p. 3). English as a Second Language students, by this definition, are tracked. Oakes (1985) furthers, "...these groups are not equally valued in the schools, and...the essential fact [is] that they are less preferred" (p. 3). And, the researcher (1985) additionally contends, "[t]racking seems to be one of those well-intended pathways that...has some pretty hellish consequences for many young people in schools" (p. 5), seeming "...to foster lowered self-esteem among these teenagers" (p. 8).

That, in my experience, is a fact. Years ago as a college student moonlighting as an elementary school ESL teacher's aide, I happily supervised sugar-repleted
young children at recess. One day a smiling little white boy came up and asked me if I was a teacher. When I told him that I helped in an ESL classroom, he said, "Oh yeah, you work with the retarded kids." I have never forgotten this incident, especially because I found it so bizarrely and distressingly representative of many people's (often the ESL students' own self-perception), discernment of ESL students. It is not, of further detriment, only children who are so thus mistaken:

'We can't keep throwing money,' said Governor Thompson in 1988, 'into a black hole.' (Kozol, 1991, p. 53)

Ethics aside, and from a purely pragmatic standpoint, the outcome of denying equal educational opportunity and thus encouraging the failure of such a large group of individuals, Kozol (1991) challenges, will be ultimately a costly mistake: "'Pay now or pay later'" (p. 52). More importantly, Kozol (1991) questions the ethical basis of decisions involving resource-allocation:

'How much is it worth investing in this child as opposed to that one? Where will we see the best return?' Although [people] rarely pose the question in such chilling terms, it is clear that certain choices have
been made: Who shall be educated?  
Who shall live? Who is likely to return the most to our society? (p. 117)

Over the years several of my ESL students have expressed their feeling “one-down” on their white American peers in a number of situations. I find that even at the more advanced levels of ESL, at least one class discussion and numerous reminders throughout the term are necessary to help counteract the negative feedback with which these students are daily bombarded.

**Junior:** I believe that the people from the news aren’t interested in showing a story about how hard the Mexicans work in the fields, or how the students keep on studying hard even though there’s racism. But whenever there’s a Chicano who is in a gang and the police catch him or his gang doing something bad, he is going to sit in jail for a long time.

For a big crime involving minority criminals, though, that’s when the reporters are going to show up right away. Black people, too, are considered to be gangsters and big criminals for the same reasons, thought to be killing each other and getting arrested constantly. I believe that the cause of a lot of racism is due to television’s and the other media’s focusing on only a few negative cases.

**Ana:** I agree with Junior’s view of the television programs and the way that they show black people and Hispanics as uncaring and irresponsible. When they portray [people of color] that way, doing bad things and using bad language, that doesn’t help young girls and boys. It’s almost like they’re telling kids “Do this; it’s cool”, which is bad in my opinion because they should show good ideas and
ways of being so that we can learn how to achieve those things.

Sometimes the movies are very tasteless, and show Cholos doing bad things like killing people, using drugs and alcohol, and other things. I think that this increases teenagers' desire to try these things. I don't like it, because I think that most of the time Mexicans try to provide positive examples for others to follow.

Sometimes we don’t get it, but if we are smart and learn from our experiences, we are going to understand the examples others try to give us. That way when we are in similar situations and think that there is no solution, we can continue with the help of the people who love us.

**Martha:** Junior and I think the same way about the way the media portray Mexican people. For example, he's mentioned that sometimes many students dress like gang members on videos and television programs that one sees. Sometimes when I go to the store and I want to buy some pants, it's a lot of work for me to find some because they sell mostly baggy, over-sized clothes. I think that sometimes the big companies are to blame for the way kids behave, because they are only out to make money.

Many times people discriminate against others based only upon their style of dress. Sometimes my parents see someone dressed like a cholo and say, "Look at what that person is wearing to school", and they begin to talk about that person whom they really don’t know. I have friends who dress like that, and they're really good people and good students. For this reason I think that people shouldn’t speak badly about them; many Mexicans dress in this way, and aren’t gang members as people tend to think. It’s really the person, and not the clothing, that counts.
6.2 Mexican People Haven’t Come to Steal from the United States

We who have enough money have soulful, romantic notions of how ultimately unimportant money is to a meaningful, fulfilled life. Family, friends, and good health are the important things, we often remark, and in my opinion we are right. But before we can fully enjoy those things, our immediate need for food, shelter, medical care, and a sense of optimism about the future must be fulfilled.

‘Is money really everything?’ I ask [a student].
‘It’s a nice fraction of everything,’ he says. (Kozol, 1991, p. 105)

Ana: We were discussing what we would say in a letter to Americans to help them to better understand our culture, and the reasons that we come to this country. I think that’s very simple, because almost all the Mexicans who come here have come to find jobs, education, opportunities, and with these things, a better future for their families. Because México can’t do this for us; that’s why we come.

To think bad things about us is unfair, because maybe the Hispanic people are working harder than the [dominant-culture] Americans are. I never stop dreaming, and I hope one day all Americans will understand why we come here. I think that if they could understand us, it would help the whole community, because racism and discrimination resulting from the misunderstanding
might be contributing to the problems of many of teenagers' problems.

Despite recent attention to and advances in areas of equal opportunity and multiculturalism, it appears that

'out-and-out racism, [in] our city and our society is institutionalized,' said David Dinkins in 1987, a year before he was elected mayor, 'has allowed this to go on for years.' (Kozol, 1991, p. 116)

**Ana:** Some of us are not strong enough to solve problems like cultural differences, or to live among people who dislike us, who think we are taking something away from them. If my family had not helped me, I would have had problems with these things, too. I probably would have tried to find something to make me feel happy, and to forget my problems. But that's not the case with me, because I am totally sure about my goals, and about the love of my family, who is always supporting me, especially my sisters.

**Mayra:** A lot of Americans think that we've come to take something economically from their country, but I always tell them that we make the economy of this country.

Participants unanimously described being acquainted with dominant-group Americans who were convinced that Mexicans come to America to take resources without contributing anything in return. The group appeared,
during these discussions, to be both saddened and puzzled by this commonly-perceived inaccuracy. Mayra, seemingly less saddened than angry, asserted that without her and her Mexican peers’ parents here to work hard in the fields, white students’ parents, working in their offices, would have nothing to eat.

She described how, walking down the street one day, a white teenager looked at her and told her to “go home” (to México). Mayra recounted her having responded, “The day I and my race go home, your race will starve. Your parents work in an office, right? Mine work in the fields feeding yours.” She went on to describe, as other participants nodded their agreement, how a Mexican, upon seeing someone starving or dying of thirst, will likely help that person. Such generosity and compassion, all five said, are typical of the Mexican culture of which they are so proud. Mayra expressed her belief that dominant-group Americans do not work in fields at all; those, she maintained, working in physically labor-intensive jobs are there for reasons based on skin color. Other participants appeared (based upon their frequently nodding) to agree with these opinions, nodding their heads. Lory concluded by expressing a goal and an appreciation articulated by all participants:
Lory: My parents came to this country to get better jobs, for us to get a good education, and to earn more money. To escape the miseries that we had experienced in México, not to get involved in criminal things like gangs, stealing, or drugs. I have a great appreciation for my parents, because although they have not had the chance to learn English, they told me that I have to learn.

So I pushed myself to the limit to learn because I don’t like to watch my parents suffer and be rejected. I think that I started to really put effort into learning when I had been here around five months. It really depends on the individual, though, because each occupies his or her own world.

6.3 Mexican People Are Hard Workers

Poor children are thought of as unmotivated, noncompetitive, and culturally disadvantaged. But there is another view...it seems that the odds are not quite equal. It turns out that those children who seem to have the least of everything in the rest of their lives most often get less at school as well. (Oakes, 1985, p. 4)

That Mexican immigrants, often economically disadvantaged, have the exceptional work ethic described by study participants is to me a "no-brainer;" for me, equally important as their consistent effort is the cheerful, light spirit with which most
Mexican people I know undertake even the most difficult and unpleasant tasks. To anyone acquainted with these individuals, it is the dictionary-definition of incongruous to attribute Mexican-Americans' low socio-economic status in this country to lack of effort, courage, hard work, or ability. Once-common cultural deficit arguments\textsuperscript{91} appear to still be credible to many, yet these have been, almost to a person, contradicted by the numerous traditional Mexican parents with whom I am acquainted. Nonetheless, however, it often appears that

\textit{[for the possessing class], having more is an inalienable right they acquired through their own "effort", with their "courage to take risks". If others do not have more, it is because they are incompetent and lazy, and worst of all is their unjustifiable ingratitude towards the "generous gestures" of the dominant class. Precisely because they are "ungrateful" and "envious", the oppressed are regarded as potential enemies who must be watched. (Freire, 1970, p. 45)]}

\textsuperscript{91} For a thorough discussion and history of these, see Valdés (1996).
"It has become abundantly clear that real education reform and improvement will remain illusory until all population groups can be drawn into the mainstream of educational achievement" (Gándara, 1995, p. 3). Mexicans highly value "the need to be responsible and persistent" (Trueba, 1998), maintaining "a sense of high standards in whatever [they do]" (Gándara, 1995, p. 32). For many members of this culture, "the role of hard work...cannot be overstated" (Gándara, 1995, p. 31), yet Mexicans remain the most under-educated major group in the United States (Chapa, 1991). Mexican-American students have a dropout rate greater than that of Whites' and African-Americans' combined. These facts might indicate a clear and compelling need for educational reform.

**Mayra:** I believe that working hard is the only way to get what you want in life. I have been a disc jockey at a radio station, translated for a bank, worked at a newspaper, and started a project for students or teenagers who are interested in communications, or would like to be reporters. To me it's very important to work as hard as possible. If people see that you're working hard, they are going to help you more so that you can move ahead in the future.

**Martha:** I think that at least once in their lives everyone asks themselves why things are the way that they are. I think, though, that we need to remember that happiness is not everything in life,
and that we have to continue to work hard no matter what.

During summers I have worked in a cannery, and I've been able to experience many of the injustices that people without higher education go through. I felt an advantage over other people because I am able not only to speak English, but also worked in a more comfortable area. I worked in the laboratory; however, I was still aware of the hard work associated with the low wages. Working in the cannery is something I don't want to do for the rest of my life.

Ana: I used to work with my grandfather planting corn seeds in the fields. Sometimes it was raining, but we had to work anyway. He planted corn, pumpkins, beans, and beets, which we also helped him to pick when they were ripe. My sisters always told me how hard they had worked with him, but I thought that each had had her own experiences, since we had each grown up in different circumstances.

Between the ages of eight and eleven I had to help my grandparents work. My grandfather was a farmer. He had cows and worked by himself, which is why sometimes he took my sisters and me to help him plant. I had to wake up early, go to work, and we worked almost all day. We'd take something with us to eat, and would make a fire to eat it warm. Sometimes I had to miss school to go to work, but mostly I helped on weekends. I always tried hard both to study and to help my grandfather, because I could see that he got very tired working. Everyone in my family advised him to sell his land, but he refused. That's one reason that I admired him: he always liked to do his work by himself.

Sometimes it was hard for me to study because I also had to help my grandmother at home, making fresh tortillas, cooking, and cleaning the house. We always used to make the tortillas very early, so I had to make them before I went to school, by 8 o'clock in the morning. This was not always easy.
I admire my grandparents because they are very strong. I hadn’t thought about them while I was making the decision to move to this country. I regretted that later, because now I am too far away from them.

That’s why I had been thinking about going back to be with them, but now I think that this would not be the best way to help them. I also know that if I went back, everything there would still be the same, and I don’t want that. I want to make a difference, so I that’s why I’ve decided to stay here and to do the best I can to get a good education.

Junior: In México, I used to chop wood sometimes because if we wanted wood for the fire, we could only get it at certain places. Most people had to carry it on their backs or on a donkey’s back, and then would have to chop it. I also herded cows to the pasture where they could eat, brought them food from the fields, and gave them water.

Like Ana, I’ve worked planting seeds, fertilizing them, and harvesting the crops. I’ve also harvested corn and beans, separating the bean seeds from the plants when they were dry. I had a couple of jobs working with people who build houses, too.

The jobs here are very different from the ones in México, because the ones there are heavier, more complex, [require many more hours on the job], and pay a lot less money. That’s also the reason that people are moving here from there, as difficult as it is to cross the border. They still see a better hope, even though they don’t speak English, have to leave their families, and work so hard once they get here.

My grandmother told me that back in the olden days, American employers used to go all the way to México to offer Mexican workers a contract for working a certain amount of time. They would also provide housing for these temporary workers, but when the time came for the workers to go back to México, some of them hid. In those days it didn’t take them much time to become legal, either, because the immigration laws weren’t so strict.
My grandmother tells me that back in those days, immigration used to let illegal people across the border if they would step on the Mexican flag, and promise not to go back. I know that this is true, because I know a man who crossed the border like this.

**Martha:** In México my mom was with my siblings and me all the time. She didn’t work so that she could stay home with us all the time, and my dad came to work in the United States to send money to us. My family, and all of the relatives I have, came to this country to work, and to get a better life.

Now, both of them work, and I don’t know how they do it, but my mom and my dad both spend time with us. And when we were talking about how we came to the United States and telling our experiences, I felt bad because I had never suffered like other people for whom it was very hard to get here.

So many American people never think about what sacrifices Mexicans make to come here, and about all of the things they have to go through to get here. People who cross the frontera sometimes die along the way, and their families never find out anything about what happened to them. Others go through a lot to get here, and then have to suffer further because of the people, sometimes even their own people and family members, who discriminate against them when they get here.\(^{92}\)

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\(^{92}\) Mayra, in one conversation, described arriving to the United States when she was twelve years old, speaking some English (she had taken private English lessons in Mexico), with the desire to learn more. Other Mexicans, English speakers, laughed at her pronunciation, and she said that she felt very bad about that.

While her teachers were helpful to her, Mayra said that her friends and her cousins discriminated against her because of her lack of English, telling her that she was stupid because she didn’t know certain words. She said that she had the capacity to learn, and described herself as much smarter than they. Her poor treatment by her own relatives, she maintained, illustrates that one has to be self-reliant, because family won’t necessarily defend a person. African-American people too, Mayra related, said racist things and made fun of her at school in a particular class; she believes that they treated her badly because they needed to feel superior to her, since at least they were able to speak *English* while she was not.
As Martha and other participants pointed out, unkind people come in all shapes and colors, and are sometimes Mexican.

At a certain point in their existential experience the oppressed feel an irresistible attraction toward the oppressor and his way of life...In their alienation, the oppressed want at any cost to resemble the oppressor, to imitate him, to follow him. This phenomenon is especially prevalent among the middle-class oppressed, who yearn to be equal to the "eminent" men [sic] of the upper class. (Freire, 1987, p. 49)

This semester, for example, some of my Mexican ESL students experienced significant problems being harassed by a group of middle-class, Mexican-origin girls who had formed a sort of gang. Two of my non English-speaking ESL I students described incidents in which they were shoved and cursed at without provocation by these peers with whom they had previously been unacquainted. I reported what they had told me to school administrators, and the belligerent students were called in and spoken to, they however continued, for unknown reason, to "have it in" for the two frightened and confused girls.
When, shortly thereafter, rumors of the two students' possibly getting "jumped" [attacked] at the bus stop began circulating, Lory, familiar with all involved parties, came to the ESL students' assistance and spoke with the antagonistic girls, who finally gave up their harassment. Much to my surprise, the offending students turned out to have been two of my former, high-achieving students; this to me was reminiscent of Freire's (1970) oppressed-as-oppressor paradigm. After being in this country for a year or so and despite maintaining high grades, these girls began to associate with and behave like the gang members with whom they began to affiliate.

The aggressors' inimical mentality strikes me as odd because it seems to me these Mexican-American girls should logically have sought to befriend their companions. This is especially true in light of the fact that new arrivals are already experiencing difficulties relating to their being in a foreign country, school, and culture, and their being bombarded by a difficult new language. The belligerent girls had themselves been ESL students, and their first-hand familiarity with the accompanying struggles and frustration should have resulted in empathetic galvanization. Rather than trying to smooth the way for
their peers, however, the girls were making a conscious effort to promote, rather than alleviate, feelings of fear and doubt among the new arrivals in their attempt to achieve what they had sacrificed so much to secure: an education and a chance at a better life.

Junior described a similar situation in which the attitude of racial helpfulness displayed by the Resilient Five is contrasted by the behavior of racist and cruel others:

**Junior:** About eight months ago I was sitting in the park and some guys were insulting a guy and calling him “indian” and “wetback”, but those guys were half Mexican themselves. So my friends and I decided to help that guy. We told him to ret [challenge] them to fight, and that we were going to back him up. So he retted them, but they punked out [backed down from the challenge] because there were more of us than them. I have lived a lot of bad experiences in which people have tried to put me down, but I’m not that easy.

And a few days ago, I heard two Chicano friends of mine making fun of Mexicans who talk and act like Mexican indians. I told them that it wasn’t right to make fun of them, because they are our people and without Mexicans, Chicanos ain’t nothing. I really made those guys think, but there are other Chicanos I know who are like me and don’t put anyone down, and are always willing to help our people.

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93 The entire ESL I class became aware of their two peers’ situation as it worsened, and experienced discomfort themselves; because the two harassed and the harassers were complete strangers and the victims were among the most kind, hard-working, and popular in the class, the cruelty appeared random, potentially placing all students at risk of similar persecution.
It is not difficult to imagine how such racism (which people of color may encounter from members of all cultures, including their own) might erode even the strongest spirit over time:

Inevitably [such experiences] must diminish the horizons and the aspirations of poor children, locking them at a very early age into the slots that are regarded as appropriate to their societal position. (Kozol, 1991, p. 76)

**Junior**: Since Mexicans have been emigrating from México to the U.S., they have mostly been confined to working in low-wage, physically difficult jobs. It's really sad to see our people working so hard and for so many hours for so little money. These are often very intelligent people who could do a lot better than working in the fields.

They've missed out on the opportunity to get a better job because they made a wrong decision, or never had the chance to make one at all. Their future will be to work an entire day for an amount of money that will only be enough to pay the rent and bills, and to own a car that looks like a piece of junk. This is the point at which people who chose to drop out begin to regret their past decisions, and to recognize how right some of the advice they were given by others had been. When this happens, though, it may be too late to make a lifestyle change.

**Ana**: I think that school will really help us in the future, and I imagine all of the students who don't study or do good things. Maybe now they just want to have fun, but I hope that one day they will not be sorry. They will work, but not in the kinds of jobs they could have had if they had put effort into school, and they will not be good
examples for their children, or make them feel proud. They will also hurt the people who love them the most. Later they will be sorry, and it will be hard for them to face [the consequences of their choices].

We have to take advantage of the opportunities that we are given. We have to know about, and best use, the opportunities which we get. Because in many places there are people who would like to study, but they don't have the chance. In this country so many have the opportunity to do things, but they throw those opportunities away.

6.4 Discrimination Against Mexican People

A United States Commission on Civil Rights' study of Mexican-American students reveals very disturbing trends: (1) teachers tend to direct praise or encouragement at Anglo students 36 percent more often than at Mexican-American students; (2) they tend to build on the spoken contribution of Anglo students 40 percent more often; and (3) teachers tend to ask Anglo students 20 percent more questions than they ask Mexican-American students (Duran, 1983). These findings, if generalizable to the daily experiences of Mexican-American students, call for educational attention and intervention.
Additionally, schools’ policies and practices, including student tracking (e.g., Oakes, 1985), are often born from a core curriculum requiring a successful navigation of the mainstream culture (Bennett, 1984; Finn, 1989). As described earlier, it is not uncommon for students unable to do so to be mis-assessed and placed into a low track on basis of biased standardized tests and procedures (Medina, 1989; Padilla and Wyatt, 1983). Sutman, et al. (1993) further illustrate the detrimental effects students whose intellectual ability is misjudged as a result of second language deficiency:

Schools with large Hispanic/LEP and other minority populations have habitually clustered these students into low ability tracks without consideration of their actual abilities or potential for academic success.

The result of this discriminatory practice is the severe under-representation of minorities in advanced science and mathematics classes, and thus, in careers requiring advanced level science or math skills.
A significant impediment to the education of Hispanic students may involve negative cultural stereotypes which exist among many educators. Studies\textsuperscript{94} demonstrate that it is not uncommon for teachers to associate undesirable characteristics such as lack of intelligence, lack of education, and low socio-economic status with Spanish-dominant students, especially those speaking with strong accents or using non-standard forms of English. This assumptive leap may reflect the way in which American society at large often perceives non-native English speakers; it may also indicate that, as previously discussed, "...setting rigorous academic standards does not necessarily assure that all students will have the opportunity to achieve them" (Anstrom, 1997, p. 6) since other obstacles to academic success may intercede.

Day to day, for example, one can observe people in jobs with a high degree of public interaction, begin to speak more loudly and slowly upon noting heavily-accented speech in people whom they are addressing. Often observable might also be an accompanying change in demeanor. Born to highly-intelligent, highly-educated parents with thick European accents, I have grown up observing people speak slowly, loudly, and

\textsuperscript{94}E.g., Laosa (1982) and Buriel (1983).
rudely to my mother and father, who possess a higher degree of proficiency in several languages than most people (myself included) will ever reach in their lone native tongue. Mexican-Americans may similarly fall victim to being misjudged on a cultural and linguistic basis, and

\[\text{[w]hatever students' intents, and whatever the intellectual advantages of bilingualism, Mexican immigrant students are often viewed as lacking intellectual ability instead of lacking English proficiency. Complicating the issue, immigrants from rural areas in Mexico may have had numerous absences and transfers because of their families' migration patterns. (Romo, 1993)}\]

In the United States, academic achievement is regarded as key to educational attainment and socioeconomic mobility. Contrary to the further stereotypical beliefs of some educators, Mexican-American parents tend to value and encourage education (e.g. Fleming, 1982; Valdés, 1996).

Non-white children are likely to be negatively impacted by educators’ and administrators’ negative attitudes and beliefs about their potential academic ability and socioeconomic mobility. This may, in turn,
become a self-fulfilling prophesy; Ogbu (1988, 1991a, 1991b, 1992) speculates that these students often fail to succeed in school because of the numerous negative educational interactions they are likely to encounter over the years. Academic failure may, in turn, portend to students a gloomy prospect of their future social mobility and success.

Valdés (1996) outlines the various theories to which Mexican-American academic failure has been commonly attributed in the past (e.g., the genetic argument and the cultural argument) have been traditionally used to blame the victims of disenfranchised groups. Such deficit models, as mentioned earlier, have long been used to attribute blame to the victims' failure to their own "shortcomings", rather than unfair, oppressive treatment. As a friend of mine similarly observed,

'[i]n certain ways' he says, 'it's harder now because in those days it was a clear enemy you had to face, a man in a hood, not a statistician. No one could persuade you that you were to blame.'

(Kozol, 1991, p. 26)

95 Valdés' (1996) discussion of societal practices of linking class, culture, and status (and, consequently, of power) is both comprehensive and "non-denominational" in that it explains the theories "objectively", without a specific racial or cultural context.
Our students are extremely perceptive, and

about injustice, most poor children in America cannot be fooled. (Kozol, 1991, p. 57)

Lory: Well, I am aware of some discrimination against Hispanics. They don’t make it look like it, but that is what it is. Many Hispanic people live in apartments where, for example, the stove or plumbing is not functioning correctly. Tenants will go ask the manager to repair them, but are often told that the managers cannot do anything about the problems. Renters are, though, expected to keep paying their rent on time, and are threatened with eviction if they don’t do it. So it seems like they don’t have the right to live in a good place only because they are Hispanics. If they are paying for the place where they have chosen to live, they should have the right to have that place fixed up.

Junior: Before I worked on this project, I thought of racism as only direct discrimination, such as insulting someone, but now I can see that it’s also refusing to employ, not giving information when it’s needed, and denying of opportunities...[Much of the direct] discrimination that I have seen this year has been between gangs. I’m not a racist, and I even hang around with white girls sometimes. But I’m not afraid of anyone, and I don’t let racists put my people down. Sometimes I feel bad about the Chicanos, because some of them are wrecking it for us.

Participants described having, prior to our investigation, intervened when they saw people maltreating their own friends and family members; they
expressed, however, a common initial reluctance to intervene in other situations unless the situation was extreme. As the study progressed, however, the Resilient Five expressed an increasing awareness of racially-based inequity, and a commensurate recognition of what they identified as their nationality-based responsibility to help their Mexican peers when they saw them struggling. Freire (1970) might have been describing the five’s growth when he predicted

> [s]tudents, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge...Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings; and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed. (pp. 68-69)

Martha describes a willingness to intervene in unjust situations despite such interventions’ being somewhat out of character for her. The other four study participants, to varying degrees, demonstrated a similar heart for helping struggling compatriots.
Junior continues:

Generally, in a case of injustice or discrimination like that involving my friends, we will get together and try to do something about whatever the situation was. When it involves my family of friends, I am assertive like this, but when it doesn't, I'm not. I don't want to get involved with problems that don't concern me. I like to help other people, but I always prefer to solve my own problems first.

**Martha:** When I hear about discrimination and injustice I feel bad, so if I know someone who is unjust or who is discriminating against other people, I try to talk to him, and to change his attitude. I'm not very assertive, but when I see someone saying bad things to a non English-speaking Mexican person who doesn't understand what is being said, I will go help him. Aside from those situations, though, I only feel bad about what happens to other people, but usually won’t speak up unless it’s necessary.

I have had many diverse experiences, and I also learn from other people’s experiences. Having a great desire to continue, I have dedication and pride of my cultural beliefs. I carry with me a respect for others, and I acknowledge other people’s differences. I think that one should respect other people regardless of their ethnic background, religion, age, or disability; each individual has his or her unique qualities. In reference to the saying "You can’t judge a book by its cover," just because the cover is not appealing does not mean that it is not an interesting book.

**Lory:** I am assertive, because I like to speak what is on my mind to express myself, to let others know when something bothers me, and to let them know what they can do to make me more comfortable. Or I’ll let people know what they should do to make things better.
My brother and I grew up in a large crowded city with a lot of apartments where many African-Americans lived, and very few Hispanics. So I was pretty much raised among black people, and sometimes that was scary because we were afraid that our family, the minorities there, was going to get beat up, hurt, or jumped, and it did actually get close sometimes.

It even got to the point where we were rivals, but later on when we were friends, they gave us the privilege of calling them a name that not anybody else could say to them because it was an insult. It still is an insult, and it always made strangers around us get scared when we did it, because we were still Mexicans and they were still Blacks.

People who didn’t know us thought that there was going to be a big problem or worse, but they were wrong. That close relationship gave us the chance to be a part of another culture, and for them to want to see how we were.

I believe that I could change something wrong or unfair by getting others together, getting stronger, and by showing that not only am I of a certain opinion, but that others are, too. Because my friends are against injustice, too. Or, it could be that I would just talk to the person who is responsible for the wrong, and try to change that individual. Maybe through that experience, he or she might change opinions.

The willingness to confront an individual’s racism, although uncomfortable for most study participants, was common to all six of us. As will later be discussed, however, even the Resilient Five, where they discerned societal and institutional racism, were unwilling to “take on” these intimidating forces. This may indicate a low likelihood of less-accomplished and self-assured
ESL students' willingness to stand up for themselves when encountering injustice in those venues.

Self-advocacy is often a learned skill, and it is important for students, teachers, and researchers to be very clear on the real personal risk that may accompany social action. Those responsible for maintaining the status quo are often those with the most to lose when confronted by those seeking change. Students, who by comparison are powerless, are vulnerable to the potential personal harm as a result of their search for justice.

Ana: I came here because my uncle came to my house to bring me here from México. I had never thought about leaving my family in México, but we decided within one day to come here. The best thing that I saw here first was my aunt and my sisters. At first I didn’t want to go to school, because I had no idea what I was going to do when someone talked to me. At this time I accepted many things, because I didn’t know how to confront them. For example, there were not many books for students.

In his research of the scholastic situation of students of color, Kozol (1991) recounts similar and numerous incidents of the lack of resources devoted to marginalized students:
Even texts are scarce...’We were short of books for four months last semester. When we got replacement copies, they were different from the ones we already had. So that presented a new problem...’ (p. 28)

As noted earlier, the affected students are not unaware of their inequitable situation:

‘[T]hey don’t say,’ [their teacher] answers, ‘but they know...They don’t comment on it but you see it in their eyes. They understand.’ (Kozol, 1991, p. 88)

Ana continues:

We shared textbooks, and sometimes some of the students would also have to go to the library to study, because there were not enough desks or chairs for us to sit. Also I saw other things, like when students would fight to defend their race. I really believe in those who wanted to make a difference in these problems. But that is hard, because many other people don’t believe what we do.

Sometimes people are afraid to take advantage of their liberty out of fear. In some places, for example, their skin color would represent a risk, so people are afraid to go out, even when they need something. If they have some friends, they ask them to go along with them or just help them. I think it’s terrible to have to be careful in every place one goes, but sometimes our being a
certain race makes us afraid, and this makes us more careful around people of other races.

'How long will it be,' I ask, 'before white children and black and Hispanic children [will have an equal chance in society]? 'How long has the United States existed?' Alexander asks. Janice says 'Two hundred years.' 'Give it another two hundred years,' says Alexander. (Kozol, 1991, p. 106)

It is notable that despite the Resilient Five’s awareness of on-going racial tensions between various ethnic groups, each described remaining optimistic about the potential change, possibly rippling over generations, a single individual’s effort could effect. Alexander’s above prophesy might indeed be fulfilled, a situation beyond any one person’s control. Participants unanimously believed that one person’s effort to assist others, however, might significantly counterbalance the negative consequences of discrimination. An individual’s inspiring just one other to persevere might, we all agreed, have a “ripple effect” with limitless positive outcomes. The five proved their strong commitment to encouraging others in similar academic situations to do as they had done, thereby alleviating the effects of a situation beyond their peers’ direct control.
6.5 The Difficulty in Coming to the United States

The disconnection between the lives of our Mexican-American students' lives and those of their dominant-group peers may be apparent on both the educational and societal fronts; the effects of each of the students' worlds, furthermore, often seep into the other. The additional familial and financial responsibilities imposed on Mexican students, in combination with the lesser amount of educational support they receive, might put these individuals at a distinct disadvantage when competing in all dominant-culture arenas. Navigating various obstacles to reach the United States, Mexican immigrants demonstrate their eager commitment and willingness to being citizens in our society.

Participants described, however, how over time, repeated exposure to discouraging circumstances beyond their control leads them to re-evaluate the merits of their decision to continue on in our educational system. My own experience, research, and understanding of the Resilient Five's descriptions of having met up with and hurdled similar obstacles give me hope for their peers' potential for enjoying similar success in the face of numerous risk factors.
**Martha:** When I came to the United States and started to go to school I felt scared, because I didn't know anyone in the school and I didn't know any word in English. I didn’t like my first day at school because I was alone, but then I started to make friends who spoke Spanish, and didn’t know a word of English either. So I started to learn words in English in ESL I, and was so excited because I wanted to learn.

I did my homework, and started to like school; even during weekends I wanted to be there. Then I moved up to ESL II. At this time I learned a lot of words in school, and then the teacher moved me to ESL III because I had passed the level competency test. When I was in ESL III, I started to change, like I mentioned before, my attitude, and style of dress.

**Ana:** Sometimes when families come to the United States from México or from other places, they feel different from the American people, but this happens because there are many people who make them feel like that. I've seen this happen many places, including school.

In my first year of school I didn’t know how to speak English, I didn’t have even a single friend, and I was so afraid. Many other Mexican people, like we did, come here to find good jobs, a good education, and a better life. Sometimes they don’t have any family here to sustain them while they look for a job. So this is a big problem, because if they don’t speak English, and they don’t know their new environment at all, how are they to ask or know where to look for work?

Investigations into the causes of low parental participation among Mexican parents point to, among other situational factors (including child care and transportation), schools’ making use of written
invitation\textsuperscript{96} rather than the more culturally-effective in-person contact. Additionally, for non-Hispanic ESL students, written notices of important school events, often available only in English, make them less effective still. Often it thus appears to be the case that

[s]chool boards think that, if they offer the same printed information to all parents, they have made choice equally accessible. That is not true, of course, because the printed information won't be read, or certainly won’t be scrutinized aggressively, by parents who can't read or who read very poorly. But, even if a city could contrive a way to get the basic facts disseminated widely, can it disseminate the limitless horizons of the middle class to those who have been trained to keep their eyes close to the ground? (Kozol, 1991, p. 62)

Realistically, given the vast array of nations represented in many ESL classrooms, it would be extremely difficult to send every written parental notice home in every student’s native tongue. It appears that educators must thus make the best effort they can to address student needs given the resources

\textsuperscript{96} As noted earlier, adults who have been working all of their lives in lieu of attending school are not always literate, either in their native Spanish or in English.
of the school. Minimally, then, we might be able to recommend to students where they might find someone to help them in their native language; optimally, native language support should be available to students on-site. Another important and easily-overlooked consideration might be the availability of an on-campus or easily-accessible interpreter to help with the daily living and health-related concerns that we, as native English speakers, often tend to take for granted.

A problem among my own ESL students is often not knowing where to seek medical attention when they and their families are sick, and how to get insurance to help defray the cost of health-related services. As a result these students, whose parents place a high premium on going to school, often attend class while ill and in pain. Not only unable to focus on the information being exchanged, they also frequently infect their peers, and soon an entire class may be miserable and unfocused.

Students will also often bring important letters and applications to Spanish-speaking teachers for help in translating them, and for advice on an appropriate response. For these reasons, among others, it is important to have informed, Spanish-speaking staff members to help students with the mundane needs that
might be significant impediments to learning. Ana pointed out the tremendous difference a teacher whom students perceive as caring can make in an ESL (or any) student's experience. This external source of support, in turn, will likely increase students' motivation to succeed, resulting in a positive cycle:

I have changed since I started coming to school. At first I was nervous, kind of afraid. But when I found out that my sister was going to be studying here too, I thought that everything was going to be more easy and fun.

**ESL I:** First I started in ESL I. There were other students who were new like me, but others had been here the year before we started. I was, and am, very quiet, so I didn't talk. But when the teacher told us that we were there to learn, not because we were supposed to know, that helped me. I wanted to learn English, but I was so shy.

After some time passed everything changed, because there were people who helped us to read and to speak, and to understand what things meant. My sister helped me at lunch, but sometimes I was very confused about my classes. She had some friends and I didn't, so sometimes when she would talk to them instead of helping me, I thought that she didn't care about whether I was confused. I then learned how important it is to have a friend, especially a good friend, to help make school easier.

Participants, throughout the study, described the various ways in which peer support and encouragement had been helpful to them, ways in which they felt they could similarly be helpful to others.
Ana continued:

I always liked to do my homework, and to study when I had tests or quizzes. I also liked to practice reading and writing at home. The only thing that I disliked was that we were in the same classroom during four periods. So the final exams, for example, were really boring, because each one would last two hours, and that was a lot of time.

Having taught four of the six classes that my ESL I students were required to take the year this study was completed, I know firsthand what a challenge it can be for a teacher to maintain students' interest and enthusiasm for such extended periods of time. Fortunately, as previously mentioned, ESL students are typically ebullient individuals who are eager to learn the language of their new home.

**ESL II**: When I started ESL II, I was so excited that I had passed, because it meant that I had learned something. When I was in ESL I, my sister had been in level II, so I had thought that she knew more English; when I changed levels she didn't move up, so then we were in class together. I was even more excited, because I thought that I was going to study and work with her as we had in México, and we helped each other with our homework.

Then two months later another sister entered school, so we were three sisters working and studying together. They are both very smart, but one decided to drop out of school to get married; then the other and my oldest sister had to move,
so she quit school, too. I was really sad, but I can also understand their decisions.

Already in the ninth grade, kids are saying, 'If I have to do this all again, I'm leaving.' (Kozol, 1991, p. 144)

**ESL III and ESL IV:** It was different for me at this level, because by now I could speak more English, almost, than I could understand, although usually easier to understand than to speak. At this point I didn't have too many friends to talk or work with; because I'm so shy and nervous, I didn't speak a lot.

When I changed to ESL IV, I didn't notice a lot of difference; everything, including my classmates, was basically the same. Sometimes when we worked in groups with different kids, we felt more animated about what we were learning, but when we continued working with the same teachers and students, we felt very bored. When, for example, I was with this one teacher almost all day doing almost the same thing every day, I didn't even want to do the homework, because he always bored me. But I decided to study hard to pass his class so that way I wouldn't have to be studying with him again.

The importance of language proficiency to communication is a theoretical concept that seems obvious. To live the daily experience participants describe of being mute, however, is an altogether different and frustrating experience.

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97 I have experienced this also, having spent extended periods of time in other countries.
Ana: Before I learned English, I was always scared that someone would talk to me, because I was afraid that I wouldn’t understand. So, I was very shy with everyone, and when the teacher started asking questions in class, I’d get very nervous. I thought I wouldn’t know the answer, and that everyone would laugh at me. But thanks to the teachers, that never happened to me, because they always helped me with the homework, especially seeing how I was shy, so that I was prepared.

When I was alone at home I always tried to read aloud to learn, so that when we read in class I wouldn’t have to be afraid of mispronouncing things. But I always knew that I could continue to progress in my classes. I think that as Mexicans we need to demonstrate this same ability, our power to study.

Not long ago in one of my ESL classes, I saw a Russian student cheating. She assumed that I didn’t know what she was doing, and that I wouldn’t report her to the teacher. She knew that I saw what she was doing, and when her friend told her that I was watching, she said something like, “Oh, don’t worry,” as though I couldn’t speak enough English to let the teacher know.

So I spoke with the teacher, and told her what had happened, much to that student’s surprise. People think that Mexicans don’t speak English, and that we are mute.” My attitude was “Oh yeah? Watch this!”

As Ana noted earlier, she prefers to show, not to talk. Lory’s fright and discomfort, like Ana’s, were initially greatly discouraging and overwhelming:

Lory: I think the worst experience I ever went through was when I first arrived in California. To me everything was beautiful, but the problem was that I didn’t know the language. It was very difficult for me to communicate with others; I was
not even able to say a simple word like "apple" or "chair". I felt very lonely with no friends, nobody to turn to; nothing, all the time. I'd be crying day after day.

My parents kind of knew a few words, but not enough. Time passed, and my brother and I started catching up with understanding English. At that time I saw so much discrimination, like white Americans referring to Mexicans by derogatory names.

It was pretty hard for me to start all over again in this country, establishing myself in a new place, and adapting to a new country, friends, and school. At the same time, though, the experience really helped me to learn about new things, and to meet new people. I know I have the capacity to be a good student, and I always try to be responsible. Things always come up that can get in the way, like friends who encourage you to skip class, but I do my best and try not to bother other people. I do what I need to, but I also realize that there's no such thing as a perfect student.

Mayra: When I first came I was uncomfortable, too. I didn't know anyone, but now I feel a lot better because I understand the culture and the language.

Martha: When I first started school in the United States, I felt scared and sad because I didn't know anybody. But now I feel comfortable. I have never received any special help like tutoring, and have always worked hard in school to be a good student. I have also been lucky never to have had to choose between going to work full time or staying in school.

As suggested earlier, the relatively minimal degree of success that many of our Mexican-American ESL students experience, in combination with the pressure they frequently feel to financially contribute to their
often-struggling families, often leads students to quit school and go to work full time. The subsequent high dropout rate can result in the misperception that Mexican-origin individuals are "less than" their white peers, and that the resources devoted to their education are wasted. Kozol (1991) describes one encounter illustrating such low expectations:

A businessman said to me flatly in Chicago, ‘If we can teach some useful skills, get them to stay in school and graduate, and maybe into jobs, we’re giving them the most that they can hope for.’ (Kozol, 1991, p. 76)

Students are not unaware of such miscalculated low expectations, and

[perhaps the worst result of [such] beliefs...is the message that resources would be "wasted on poor children." This message "trickles down to districts, schools, and classrooms." (Kozol, 1991, p. 99)

Having begun school with enthusiastic dedication to learning English, Junior describes meeting up with failure and a lack of information that caused him to seriously contemplate quitting school. The experience
he describes below is one that is frustratingly common among ESL students:

**Junior:** When I first started attending school in the United States I thought that I wasn’t going to make it, and that I was only here to learn English. But now school seems to be easier for me, because I know English, and have the proper classes. When I had first arrived, I didn’t know that I was going to attend school; I thought I was going to go to work like everyone else does. But when my uncle told me that I was going to go to school full-time, I was more than happy.

I’ve always been full of eagerness to learn English, and it’s always been easy for me to learn and remember words and phrases. But when I started school, I failed all of my classes because I came in during the last few months of the second semester. I still passed to 10th grade, but I didn’t have any credits, or any idea what a credit even was.

ESL was always easy for me, so I started skipping a lot and began to learn a lot about gangs. I started shutting school out of my life, but when I began to work at the cannery during vacation, I began to realize that I didn’t want to work in a cannery for the rest of my life.

I wanted something better than that, but I didn’t know how I could graduate on time, and I didn’t understand how the credit system worked. I talked to my cousin, and he said that I needed 22 credits to graduate, but that I could get credits through the work experience program.

Seeking out information from peers regarding how to navigate a foreign and complex credit system, Junior gained access to the critical information that is routinely provided to his white peers, and was in large

98 This information is not, in my experience, incorporated in the ESL curriculum.
part responsible for motivating him to continue striving for his diploma. Had he not sought out this information for himself, Junior said he believes that he would not otherwise have been provided the information that he needed, and he probably would have quit school.

Junior revels in disproving the pessimistic forecasts of those doubting his ability to succeed; one such cynic, his own uncle, inflamed Junior all the more to bring pride (and ultimately financial assistance) to his mother (his strongest advocate). Junior is an exceptionally motivated and resolute young man; as educators we cannot assume that in being denied information essential to their success, all ESL students will similarly seek it out for themselves. It has been my experience that dominant-culture students do not typically encounter a similar lack of guidance; perhaps, as Kozol (1991) contends,

[money] buys them truly scholarly instruction from remarkable and well-rewarded teachers, and it also buys them a great deal of thoughtful counseling from well-prepared advisors. (p. 76)

**Junior:** So last year, I began to investigate the different ways that I could make up for the credits that I had missed out on, and since then I've been really motivated to graduate, and have
set some goals for my future. There are some people who can’t believe I’m doing so well in school, because I know a lot about things that aren’t related to school, especially things about gangs.

My uncle has told me several times that my mother doesn’t have much chance of my turning out well, but that’s not true, because I’m expecting to go to college and to get a good job. I know his reasons for thinking this although he hasn’t told them to me; he thinks that I’m behind in credits, still skipping, and without hope of graduating. But I’m sure that as soon as I graduate and show him what I’m made of, he’ll change his mind.

Ana: In my opinion, however, the most important thing is that we want to work to get what we want. In order to meet our needs, we have to do our best, and the most important thing is to know how to tolerate all of the comments we will hear from other people.

Junior, Lory, and Ana, like their two participant peers, described being aware of constant pressure throughout their academic career. Confused, homesick, treated with disdain by some teachers and students, and then presented with the seeming panacea of escaping this hostile environment by quitting school, not one of the five would nonetheless be enticed. Ana concludes:

There is always something that [the dominant culture] won’t understand about our culture, or our economic life. I think that they ought to think about it and then ask us questions, for example, why we came here, how we feel without our families, if we are having our needs met, with or without their understanding of our situation.
It is part of our faith, as
Americans, that there is potential
67)

Ana: The place of immigrants in American society
is kind of different from that of other people
here. When they just arrive here from México not
speaking English, they feel weird. Immigrants have
to learn to talk, write, and read the way they
first had to learn Spanish when they were
children. They usually have to take different
kinds of jobs than they had in México, and there
is a different culture here, too. But I don’t
think we have to change our own culture because of
that.

No matter what people think of us, if we do
our best to show them our power they will be
really surprised. Many people say bad things about
us without even knowing us, so we shouldn’t feel
bad about their hurtful comments. In my opinion
Mexican people are fighters, and we have to go as
far as we can, especially since that is the reason
that most of us have come here.

As described previously, schools’ typically
occasional and fleeting tributes to the Mexican culture
might arguably be better than nothing. I believe that
few could argue, however, that they are effective in
providing the dominant group with any informative or
meaningful understanding of a rich, complex culture.
Annual piñata and taco frenzies likely have little
impact on any student’s day-to-day life, nor does the
occasional Hispanic motivational speaker⁹⁹, as Kozol (1991) suggests:

A local counterpart to Jessie Jackson often gives a motivational address. He tells the kids, 'You are somebody.' They are asked to chant it in response. But the fact that they are in this school, and doomed to be here for no reason other than their race and class, gives them a different message: 'In the eyes of society, you are not much at all.' This is the message they get every day when no celebrities are there and when their business partners have departed for their homes in the white suburbs. (p. 80)

Lory: The place that Mexican immigrants hold in this society, on a scale of 1-10, would be somewhere between 1 and 4. Those are the lowest numbers that they could give them, only because they work in the fields, nurseries, meat-packing plants, and places like that. Those are the types of jobs that no [white] American would want because of the difficulty, low pay, and the few rights those workers have. They would also complain about the number of hours that these workers have to work, many times 12-hour shifts.

The reason that immigrants often take these jobs is they lack the education required to get better work, or don't have any education at all. That seems to be the strongest reason for [dominant-group] Americans' criticism: Mexicans are not prepared, and don't speak English, so they can't even communicate with others. That's why they consider Mexicans poor.

⁹⁹ Even these are relatively rare.
So I think that we have to educate both legal and illegal immigrants. First of all, we are all human beings, and should have the same rights, no matter what. I think this for the same reasons that I think we should not segregate people of color from white people. Groups will be encouraged not to interact with each other because of that, so they are not going to have the chance to learn about different cultures. We all need to learn about others, to see what they are capable of, and to learn from their mistakes in order not to repeat them.

Kozol (1991) illustrates the disheartening isolation that results from fear-inspired “white flight:”

I ask the students, ‘What would happen if the government decided that the students in a nearby town like Fairview Heights and the students here at East ST. Louis had to go to school together next September?’

Samantha: ‘The buses going to Fairview Heights would all be full. The buses coming to East ST. Louis would be empty.’

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100 Olmedo (1993) contends that oral language skills are improved when students engage in interviews and present information to the class. Olsen (1992) furthers, “active listening in a cooperative settings provides a rich language environment for both comprehensible input and practice in speaking that students cannot get in a more traditional classroom environment.” Olmedo (1993) additionally came to the previously-discussed conclusion that involvement of parents and family in students’ education, use of students’ native language in meeting instructional goals, and validation of learners’ culture and experience were all factors critical to language-minority students’ academic achievement.

A large body of research also indicates that ESL students benefit greatly from making use of the vast array of knowledge and experiences that they bring to the classroom. Furthermore, “[l]anguage minority students will benefit by having their contributions acknowledged and respected as integral parts of the curriculum (Anstrom, 1997, p. 130.) Anstrom (1997) also found that “[t]he use of artifacts is particularly effective with students from other countries who may be able to share items that provide a different perspective on history or open up new avenues of discussion (p. 13).”
'What if East ST. Louis had the very best computer classes in the state—and if there were no computer classes in the school of Fairview Heights?'
'The buses coming here,' she says, 'would still be empty.'
When I ask her why, she answers in these quiet words: 'I don’t know why.' (p. 31)

**Junior:** We’ve been talking about the position that the immigrant people have in this country. Unfortunately they are consider by many people as the lowest class because they aren’t legal, or because they don’t speak English very well. There are many cases of injustice against illegal immigrants, who tend to be Mexicans, and that’s because these people, most of the time, don’t speak English fluently. One can see good examples of this at the Christmas tree lot where my uncle works, and the different treatment people get there based on how much English they know.

A guy who used to live with me once asked for how long my uncle had been working in the fields, and I answered, "For over ten years." He asked why my uncle had not been moved to a better position there after so much time; I told him that I didn’t know why he was still working as an average worker and receiving the same amount of money since he’s a hard worker. I haven’t asked my uncle too much about it because I don’t want to make him feel bad, but I know that he’s told me in the past that he’s noticed how the employees who speak more English get longer breaks, and are paid more.
7. CONCLUSIONS

Teachers who believe that learning occurs in the social context and that the social context is both a catalyst for learning and a necessary support for the learner’s development will structure the classroom around challenging and worthy ideas and explorations and will provide opportunities for students to interact with the teacher and with their peers as they explore and shape new meanings. (Livdahl, 1991, p. 58)

In describing how they successfully maneuvered through the barriers to their academic progress, participants revealed in common several traits of resiliency identified by experts in that field. My experience and research predisposed me to believe, however, that the five’s academic experiences, a significant source of our data, would have been similar even with a different corps of researchers. Collaborators expressed our collective hope that perhaps their voices and stories, or maybe a particular account or description, would strike a familiar chord in readers. Hopefully through their recognition of the similarity between the five’s stories and those of
themselves and their peers, readers would be encouraged to persevere and to help others to do so as well.

As previously discussed, this study was conceived by the emancipatory research criteria of true reflection's leading to action (Freire, 1970, p. 52), and participatory research's including investigation, education, and action (Maguire, 1987). Teacher- and student-researchers came together in order to collaboratively negotiate a better understanding with which to give voice to a long-underrated problem, the outrageously high rate of Hispanic academic drop-out; in the process I believe that participants fulfilled each criterion.

Throughout the study students engaged in prolonged investigation and analysis; they were principally determined that their words inform and help teachers, as well as other students. Ultimately, they themselves further extended and transformed this goal to include taking action on behalf of struggling peers and fellow participants. Junior illustrates Maguire’s (1987) three goals in motion:

The reason I decided to participate in this project, and what I think was its purpose, was to take a close look at the problems that the Mexican kids who drop out have. I think that the reason we did in this is that we want to reduce the number of Mexican-American kids who drop out, and we also
want to encourage them not to give up and to keep going. We were also trying, through what we shared, to help show teachers how they can work better with their ESL students, and to listen to the ideas that the students have. One of the reasons I participated was that I also wanted to help my people to be equal in education to the [dominant-culture] American people, so that they can succeed, help their families to succeed, and show people of other nationalities that we can make it, too.

Junior and his peers came to the rescue of Ana, for example, toward the midpoint of our investigation; as she explains below, in the middle of our study Ana became very concerned that her grandparents were extremely sick. Worried about their health, she suspected that they would not ask for her help if they were seriously ill, especially in light of her having recently written them a letter sharing her intent to stay in the United States and attend college. Ana told us quietly at this time that her new plan was, therefore, to return to Mexico to care for her "parents" permanently, possibly prior to graduating high school, and likely in lieu of going on to college. She would, she said, take what she had learned thus far in high school back to México with her to became a teacher. The group unanimously encouraged, and ultimately convinced, her to remain in the United States at least until she had graduated high school, expressing their agreement with what my own parents
once told me: an education is the one thing that no-one can ever take away from you:

**Ana:** I had recently been thinking that the best way for me to show my appreciation to my grandparents for their raising me would be to go back to México to help them, but now I think differently. I now want to study and to be successful, helping them in that way, because they always wanted me to go to school. I think that my sisters and the students here with whom I discussed this helped me a lot.

I would like my experiences to help other people. I think that if they will think about my experiences and my classmates' experiences, this project will help them, and I hope that will happen. Because my wish is that my words or my experiences could help someone.

From my perspective, such social justice is a critical component of good research. Our study was therefore designed to actualize Pizarro’s (1998) condition that “Chicana/o epistemology and methodology [are] integral to the transformation of the [educational system that serves them], and, hopefully, to the empowerment of Chicana/o communities” (Pizarro, 1998, p. 57). Research studies have “…rarely produced research that is participatory and transformative, particularly with regard to Chicanas/os and their concerns related to social justice and educational empowerment” (Pizarro, p. 58).
Social justice as "...both as objective and as process" (Pizarro, p. 57) was thus both a means and an end to our collaboration. Harste (1989) describes research in which students, teachers, and researchers have successfully joined forces to produce theoretical knowledge. He further maintains that educators must "...conduc[t] and repor[t] real educational inquiries in real instructional settings" (p. 6), and that "...in these projects, everyone grows" (p.8). It is, however, Marc Pizarro’s (1998) work to which I primarily credit our study’s methodological substructure.

A high school language teacher of ten years, I value communication, and have always sought to encourage its development among my students. Fascinating to me is the notion that because each of us is unique, the meanings negotiated in an interchange between any two individuals will differ from those negotiated in any other interchange. Often, as many educators might agree, "...the path of educational progress more closely resembles the flight of a butterfly than the flight of a bullet" (Jackson, 1990, p. 166). I therefore believe that this study’s group dynamics, dialogues, and the paths in which they led would have been otherwise had a different group of students participated in this project.
Had I collaborated with a different group of students, however, my professional experience leads me to believe that many of the scholastic experiences participants described might have been similar to the Resilient Five's, and their conclusions similar, as well. I also believe, contrary to what positivists might contend, that the centrality of individual voices in this study represents not a threat to validity, but additional credibility in an investigation conceived from what the literature and dropout rates demonstrate is a clear need for educational reform. Each of this study's five student-researchers came to the project with a different background, and shaped by different events. Our group frequently merged at points of common scholastic occurrence, however, reflecting similar perspectives on their situations despite their unique circumstances.

This is a qualitative study, thus generalizability is not its ambition. I find it noteworthy, however, that despite participants' having been shaped by an array of circumstances in their native countries, they had very similar stories to tell about their experiences in the American educational system, and they interpreted the situations of their Mexican-American peers in remarkably analogous terms. This
fact, in conjunction with the numerous corroborating studies cited throughout this paper, may suggest that the findings of this qualitative research study might be generalizable to the Mexican-American high school ESL population at large.\footnote{O'Connor (1991) calls attention to the academic achievement of six low income African-American high school students who are able to clearly articulate their awareness of their racial and class subjugation. The researcher observes that they refute such researchers' (e.g., Ogbu's 1991) cultural and ecological model. In doing so, they provide hope for students in similar social circumstances that they need not choose between disassociating from their collective identities in order to achieve academic success, or giving up hope altogether.}

Cusick's (1973) validity criterion of one engaged in a similar setting's saying "that is the way it is" (p. 233) was met on numerous occasions throughout this project. I found my notions of student-researchers' situations as Mexican-American high school ESL students corroborated in some instances, and uninformed in others. Overall, however, I believe that students' anecdotal interchanges confirmed a great deal of current research by experts in the areas of resilience, Mexican-American culture, ESL, and oppression.

7.1 Participant Reflections on Our Investigation

**Martha:** What I've learned here is to believe more in myself, that I can be what I want to be. That there are many kids in school who need help, and that I can help them. That others have problems,
not just me. That one needs to look ahead, not to look back. I've also learned that I need to listen more; before I didn't have the patience to listen to other people talk. I have to think about others, and how to help them, and not just to think only about myself. To be more understanding when I'm dealing with another person, because one never knows whether that person has a problem one doesn't know about.

**Junior:** Talking in this project about others' experiences was helpful because it showed us the consequences of what some people do, and so did telling the true stories of Mexican-American people. We should also talk about the Mexican-Americans who aren't in ESL, or don't even go to school, or the Mexicans who came here at a young age only to work, so we'll be able to know the difference between each other and to better understand what they have been through.

I would like to help other Mexican-American students, especially the ones that are about to drop out or are involved in gangs. I want to help them start thinking in another way, and hoping more for their future. I also believe that I can be heard by the people [in our situation] who don't really know what to do. This project is dedicated to helping them, since we have passed through the same problems that they are passing through.

I learned that I can feel success, even though I'm brown and Mexican. I know that I can help ESL students, especially with school-related things that they don't know about like counselors and credits. I've learned that we should be united so that we'll have more power. I've seen that people can start their lives over who have been in gangs, and have done bad stuff. We shouldn't give up, even if the situation is hard.

Our people should be working with intelligence, instead of physical strength, working with computers instead of working in the fields. I see that ESL students need more help [than they're getting] learning English, and they need someone to encourage them. Teachers should
know more about their students, so they can bring more to teaching them.

Before this project I thought that my people were going to keep on being trapped in the same situation of dropping out, having to work in the fields, and being in gangs without receiving any help from anyone. Now I see that people like us still care about them, and we are trying, in this study, to convince them that there’s still hope. I almost always believe that there’s a hope while we’re alive, no matter how hard the situation with which we’re faced.

**Lory:** Journaling was really helpful. Most of us express ourselves in writing better; it’s almost the same thing as talking, but you have more time to think about your words. We were able to give more details about our experiences, to give the reader a better understanding of how wrong some things are so that they could get a clear picture of a specific situation. We also could give answers to readers in similar situations who might be helped a lot by what we wrote.

I’ve realized while participating in this project that different things are going on in other peoples’ lives, not only in mine. But more specifically, I’ve seen that ESL students go through many things. Mexican adults go through a lot, too, but they know how to be strong and are more sensible, less likely to give up if something is not easy. I see that for many there’s a lot of sadness and many problems, and that makes me realize how lucky I am that I have my parents and the commodities that they are able to give me.

Our discussions and writings in this project have been based on our own experiences, so they should help others notice that some situations are common for each one of us. As students in the ESL program we have worked our way up through the different levels of classes, and have also passed through many life experiences that might be helpful to other kids in situations similar to ours.
In my opinion Lory and her peers have established themselves as high school resiliency experts who, throughout this study,

...negotiat[ed] meaning to accomplish real life purposes. Negotiating meaning takes place when a speaker tries to communicate his [sic] thoughts and a listener tries to understand them. Both persons restate, question, explain, and clarify in order to come to a common understanding. (Jameson, 1998)

Ana: I think that we were a good group because we know each other. We were talking about things that maybe we otherwise would never have had the chance to say, so I think that all of these discussions are very important. They helped us to help ourselves and others too, giving us a chance to share our experiences, our thoughts, how important it is to study, and to remind them to always do the best they can. Our discussions here have all been interesting, because I think that in each we have reached a different conclusion. There were different opinions expressed on each topic that we discussed, but the most important part has been that we have shared the conversations.

Ana has suggested the significance of the investigative process as greater than any individual outcome. Ours, correspondingly, were active discussions whose intent was

102 I am revising this document at a local coffeehouse, where, on a graffitti chalkboard I just saw scrawled, "The destination is the journey." Appropriate and timely!
...not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to ‘evaluate’ as the term is normally used...At the root [was] an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they [made] of that experience. (Seidman, 1991, p.3)

Ana continued:

When we had different views about things we discussed, I realized how different people are, and how they will behave in different ways. When we were talking about our friends who are gang members and drug users, for example, I saw how important it is for us to have the chance to change, and to have someone to help us. When people want to change, they need someone to believe in them, and to support them; to make them feel strong and intelligent enough to do whatever they want to do.

I’ve also learned how we can help each other feel better when we feel less than the Americans. But my favorite part was that everyone seemed to discuss the same topics. When I was reading Martha’s journal about her brother’s experiences in middle school, for example, I remembered things that I had almost forgotten about when I had first began high school.

We also all agreed that you should always do your best to achieve what you want, and ignore all of the negative comments of people who doubt or criticize you. Believe in yourself, and focus on what you want; help others even though maybe nobody has helped you.

I think that the way we began the discussions\textsuperscript{103} was the best, because it gave us a clue where to begin; at first we would sometimes sit and think, and couldn’t get moving. Our

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\textsuperscript{103} Breaking out my trusty laptop computer, I would read back to the group what we had discussed the previous day; we then used these conversations as a springboard for further dialogue and journaling.
discussions were always really interesting, and our journals were something that helped us to express or finish the thoughts that maybe we didn’t have a chance to in discussions when others were speaking.

The experiences of others that we heard about made us think about things more carefully than we did before, which could help us in the future, and could help the other teenagers and Mexicans who are experiencing the same things that we did. I hope that they will talk with someone who has worked on this project about their problems, because I don’t think anyone can know what these students are living if he or she hasn’t also lived it.

Listening to the other participants’ opinions was great. Before, I thought that only I had problems, but I learned that everyone here had many of the same ones. We all agreed that it’s important to think always about the future. Communication, we all know, is important to stay informed about things that we might not otherwise have imagined by ourselves. I saw that it’s important to listen to the words and stories of others. I always rely on my experiences to keep me from falling, so I look back often to remember what I’ve learned. But Martha always said, "Don’t look back," so it was interesting to see that difference. Unlike her, I use my past to help with the future.

All of the observations that I made were based on my own life, but I think that almost all of our opinions were the same. Some of our experiences weren’t similar but we all did agree that if we wanted to change something, that we could, because each person has the same power to work hard, and to do his or her best. I think that these discussions were very important, because sometimes we ignore what we have done, who we are, and all of the things that we can do. Personally I think that all of the experiences I’ve had have helped me a lot, because when someone made me feel less than them I felt stressed, and didn’t want to continue with my studies. But now I think differently, that I can do whatever I want to with
or without friends. I just need someone who can teach me, like a teacher.

7.2 Transformation

7.2.1 Student-Participants' Transformation

At the outset of the project, I described to participants Ogbu's (1991) theory of immigrant and caste minorities' consciousness, suggesting that at different periods of time each might be responsible for newly-arrived Mexican ESL students' views of racism, their opportunities, and their hopes for "making it" in the future. Participants unanimously affirmed my perception of recently-arrived students' being typically highly-motivated and optimistic in juxtaposing their new environment with the situations from which they have just come.

I went on to describe how, nevertheless, after a few years of watching their parents struggle without getting ahead (in contrast to their dominant-group peers' relatively high degree of success), these same students may begin to develop a more disaffected attitude and outlook about their future prospects. According to Ogbu (e.g., 1991a, 1991b, and 1992) and
Giroux (1988), they may choose to disassociate themselves, as a result of their feeling increasingly estranged, from mainstream society and its institutions (such as school)\(^{104}\).

Introduced during the preliminary phase of our exploration, this theory was met with polite but blank stares from all participants, who asked me to explain, and then re-explain, what it meant. It became clear to me that their lack of comprehension was not due to my speaking English; it was due, from their perspective, to my speaking Greek\(^{105}\). At the outset, nonetheless,

104 Typically neither notably negative or positive in her narrative and word choice, O'Conor (1991), discussed elsewhere in this paper, selects opinionated adjectives in her praise of the same man whose theories are those with which she takes issue: John Ogbu. Eloquently broaching the fine line between passion and emotion, O'Connor presents a spirited but academically cogent case that “in contrast to the findings of [Ogbu], collective orientations, which are embedded in group identities and theories of making it that contest the dominant theory of upward mobility, do not have to produce maladaptive educational consequences or operate in ways that facilitate social reproduction” (p. 597).

105 I was, subsequent to this particular conversation, quite frustrated because I had “blown my mantle of objectivity,” trying to share with participants my opinion that people of color don’t have the same voice and opportunities as English-speaking Americans do. This notion appeared to come as a complete shock to all but Junior. I was surprised by this, because at the outset of the project we had come to consensus that opportunities, in the form of resources, were less readily available to ESL than mainstream students. The notion (à la Oakes, 1985), of ESL students’ being locked into an academic track, too, did not seem to make much sense to student participants. This led me to question whether they were still in what Ogbu (e.g., 1991a and 1991b) calls the “Immigrant Minority” phase (I described this and Ogbu’s “Caste Minority” concept to them. They appeared politely interested, but the notion did not seem to resonate with them).

When, additionally, I shared my research findings about academic tracking, and the notable lack of students of color’s voice participants did not agree, nor did they see white people’s benefiting from such inequity. It was so odd to observe this after all I have learned about this during my doctoral studies.

Mayra also commented on the fact that college is not everything (although she had expressed her desire to attend); she felt I imply this when I urge my ESL students to apply for scholarships and applications. She was to some extent right, since I certainly don’t think that someone is “less” for not pursuing higher education. I do, however, urge all of my students to fight to move ahead and take advantage of as many opportunities as possible.
Martha and her peers’ description of how, upon their arrival to this country, everything initially appeared new and bien grande (in this context: “larger than life”) well depicted immigrant minorities’ initial joy and optimism in their new home. Everything, recalled each group member, was tremendous: the schools, stores, the city. The five’s being additionally altogether in agreement that scholastic and economic opportunities in this country are superior to, and greatly outnumber, those in their native Mexico\(^{106} \) again illustrated Ogbu’s (e.g., 1991 and 1992) paradigm. Martha expressed a firm conviction that had she not been attending school here, she would likely already have married and had children in México and not gone beyond the “primaria” level of schooling. Junior described how while living in Mexico he had voluntarily cleaned classrooms in order to avoid having to be in class learning; he described how much, by contrast, he is enjoying school here, and how happy he is to be attending classes. Highly motivated and eager to be holding the diploma for which he has worked so hard, Junior continues to demonstrate his seemingly impregnable dedication to learning as the key to a

\(^{106} \) For example, students explained, in Mexico they had been required to pay for textbooks, meals, and other services that in America they were receiving for “free”. In Mexico also, participants contrasted, there were none of the scholastic parent information meetings that their parents could attend now.
successful future. He also may have made the greatest strides in recognizing, despite his gratitude, the shortcomings of our current educational practices as demonstrated by his clear articulation of the numerous obstacles he had overcome in staying on the graduation track.

Appearing to slowly transition into Ogbu’s (e.g., 1991 and 1992) caste minority stage, however, the Resilient Five recounted their gradually becoming bored and frustrated over time. A few months into the study Ana and her peers one at a time began to identify academic experiences that had been both discouraging and beyond their control. Further, they held these factors responsible for some of their peers’ ultimate decision to quit school. As ideas were exchanged and time progressed, all five students, at different rates, began to discuss what they perceived as inequities between their experiences and those of their white peers. The differences they identified became especially pronounced in our discussions of the relationship between race, class, and opportunity: participants voiced unanimous and strong opinions that for illegal students, typically economically disadvantaged, the playing field might be less level than vertical.
Throughout the project students noticeably demonstrated an increasing awareness of their individual ability to increase their likelihood of success through hard work and perseverance. By supporting each other as well as peers with whom they sometimes weren’t even acquainted, group members developed a growing recognition of their power to make a measurable difference in others’ lives. Furthermore, when participants asked me individually about situations in which they judged taking action was warranted, they recognized the effectiveness of clear communication as a means to achieve their goals. While I could hardly have hoped for greater evidence of the study’s success, reminiscent of this high school principal, I did have one further hope:

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107 In a discussion about what “success” looks like to each participant, the following definitions emerged: Junior characterizes success as not to give up, and to keep going until you get what you want. To Ana, success is to keep moving ahead until you feel that you can’t go further. That none of her family had the opportunity to go to school and that she will be the first to graduate she will be the first to do so, she says, motivates her to persevere. Ana described, at a point of flagging motivation, asking her sisters “Why should I continue studying?” They answered, “Look at us; that’s why.” Martha’s parents, she says, constantly tell her to seguir adelante [continue moving ahead], in order to set a good example for her brother and sisters. Her parents, like Ana’s sisters, did not have the chance to study in school, and their encouraging her to go as far as she can, she says, is her primary motivation to move ahead.
After he has enumerated the changes he would like to make, he laughs and looks down at his hands. 'This, of course, is pie in the sky. You asked me what I need so I have told you. If I'm dreaming, why not dream the big dreams for our children?' (Kozol, 1991, p. 33)

Their reflections, based upon their having observed their peers' experiences over time, illustrated that participants readily and immediately recognized the negatively synergistic effects that race and class may have on ESL students' scholastic opportunity. Less immediate was their identification of unequitable distribution of scholastic materials and the services available to those students. Through their exchanging anecdotes, participants were surprised to note that their negative experiences had not been, as they had initially thought, unique to them.

Ana: Listening to the other participants' opinions was great. Before, I thought that only I had problems, but I learned that everyone here had many of the same ones. We all agreed that it's important to think always about the future. Communication, we all know, is important to stay informed about things that we might not otherwise have imagined by ourselves. I saw that it's important to listen to the words and stories of others.
The Resilient Five ultimately did begin to reach the point of recognizing how these negative events might contribute to an overall education quality differential between ESL and mainstream students. I had hoped, however, that participants would by the end of our journey, have developed a greater awareness of Mexican-American ESL students' needs not being met, although such insight might have introduced its own ethical dilemma. In recognizing the unequal chance of success they faced as students of color, and specifically ESL (with access to fewer educational resources) students of color, participants' frustration might have been sufficiently great to cause them harm. Weighing this potential consequence as I envisioned the study's approach, I concluded that rather than feeling debilitated, the five would likely feel strongly motivated to take action on behalf of themselves and their peers. I was proven correct.

The five participants in this project did not reach the "social-action" stage of transformation in which they might have considered agitating for scholastic improvement. Based upon my familiarity with the four of the five, I attribute this not to fear or an unwillingness to confront injustice, but to their gratitude in comparing their scholastic opportunities
with what they had experienced in México. Had the
length of the study been extended, however, I believe
that the participants’ growing awareness, sense of
personal agency, and desire to help others might have
led them to taking such action. Lory illustrates:

I’m realizing since this project that there’s
more racism [than I’d first thought] against
Hispanics. I had only thought that it was happening
to a few, but I’ve heard from others that it’s a
lot more common than I had imagined. Doing this
study, I’m learning about these different
situations.

I think a solution to racism is for us to try
to make things better ourselves as Mexicans. We
need to avoid participating in criminal actions,
keep Hispanics from hanging around on the streets,
and to be working instead of going around like
cholos and gang members, giving all Mexicans a bad
reputation. So what we need to demonstrate is that
we are not bad people, and that we have the same
right to the same privileges as [dominant-group]
American people have.

Ana adds:

We also all agreed that you should always do your
best to achieve what you want, and ignore all of
the negative comments of people who doubt or
criticize you. Believe in yourself, and focus on
what you want; help others even though maybe nobody
has helped you.
"Showing them we can do it," their response to the inequitable situations they slowly became aware of, the Resilient Five demonstrated to the dominant group their ability, power, and strength, and modeled these abilities for their fellow Mexican-American peers as well. This consistently determined mindset that they maintained throughout the duration of the study illustrates both O’Connor’s (1997) research hypothesis and Freire’s (1970) contention that the oppressed need not view their circumstance as unresolvable, and might instead advantageously reframe it as a “limiting situation that they can transform” (p. 33).

Throughout the project I found it a challenge to maneuver the line between “objective researcher” trying not to bias student responses with my own notions, and “concerned teacher,” familiar with and upset by the bigger picture of their situation as immigrant students. I have come to realize, though, that such awareness cannot be crisply demarcated into “awareness” versus “oblivion”; it might be best represented as a progression along a spectrum. Over time I have inched along this spectrum myself, and know firsthand as a member of the dominant culture that such awareness is hard-fought and won, especially for those of us with the most “marbles to lose.” The circumstances in the
United States are indeed often much better for Mexican people than those from which they fled. Their scholastic experience remains, however, inferior and unequal to that of their white peers.

7.2.2 My Transformation

Prior to this study, the works of Freire (1970) and Pizarro (1998) had begun to influence my practice, and this study, for me, affirmed their inspiration. My participation in this project was of great benefit to me, my teaching practice, and consequently to all of the students with whom I have come into contact since. Prior to our collaboration, for example, I had believed myself a student-centered teacher, but I came to realize that my curricula were teacher-, not student-, determined; I had thus been excluding a valuable source of input. The further participants and I progressed in our investigation, however, the more I saw that when our students are invested not only in the execution of interactive and creative lesson plans but also in their design, they have greater interest in, and success with, meeting those plans’ goals.
One of the joys of teaching English as a Second Language is the freedom teachers have to design curricula tailored to their students' specific social and educational needs. Rather than every year unilaterally determining our curricula as I had done every year prior to this study, I asked all of my ESL students to brainstorm what they wanted to learn together as I wrote their suggestions on the overhead transparency. The class then prioritized and accordingly voted on the ideas we had listed, and our semester agenda was decided. Students took the task seriously; the topics they selected were similar to those I would have suggested as a student learning a foreign language, and their enthusiasm was infectious.

Between my designing interactive day-to-day activities that maintained students' interest and their own lively and engaging topics of study, students appeared to feel a greater investment in their own education. As suggested by the Resilient Five's observations throughout the study, the resulting high levels of student motivation's might also diminish the detrimental effects of other obstacles to students' success. Ultimately, then, soliciting students' input in curricular decision-making might help to lower the dropout rate of all of our students.
This study recently helped another of my students in a more direct way. A first-generation Mexican-American student in my senior English class was failing the course at the six-week grading period. Her parents, greatly concerned, came to the school's parent-teacher conferences in order to discuss her inadequate grades. Red-eyed with fatigue and at a loss for what to do, her father explained to me in Spanish how, in order for their daughter to have the educational opportunities they never had in México, both he and his wife have been working long hours at a mushroom cannery since arriving to this country. The couple expressed their frustration with how she was throwing this gift away, and asked for suggestions about how best to get their daughter back on track.

The Monday following the conferences, I brought this dissertation to her class. As the rest of the class was working in groups, I walked over to the young lady's desk with a few pages of the Resilient Five's observations, and a suggestion: "Read this." After finishing the pages she brought them back to me, and when I asked if she would like to read more, she said yes. I invited her (and the other three Mexican-American students in the class) to my classroom during a period when they did not have a class; the girl came,
and devoured the pages I gave her to read, oblivious to the distraction of the boisterous class activity in the background.

The following day, the young lady began turning in the make-up assignments I had suggested to her parents, and she has kept current on homework ever since\textsuperscript{108}. She has additionally expressed an interest in attending a special scholarship seminar about which I told her and the other Mexican-American students in the class, whereas I believe that prior to reading participants' words she had not aspired to post-secondary education.

I also strongly believe that had I, as a teacher and an adult, given this student yet another lecture on the importance of school and studying to her future, she would have smiled politely with a glazed look in her eyes. It was her peers' own words, made credible through shared experience, that made the difference and got through to this student where perhaps no adult's would have. In this student, in the countless others whom I and my colleagues will teach in the future, and in the numerous peers that the Resilient Five are likely to encourage in the future, participants' goals have been brought to life.

\textsuperscript{108} We are in the second semester of the English course as I make the final revisions to this document. The young lady described above currently has a 97 percent, the highest grade in the class.
7.2.3 Our Transformation

We six agreed that, as is often the case in collaborative endeavors, the ideas exchanged over the course of this study helped each of us. The following is a summary of the conclusions we reached as a group with reference to each of our examination's significant themes.

**Resilience:** All five student-researchers in this study were "invulnerable" individuals; despite significant disadvantages, they succeeded under even the most unfavorable conditions. Chosen based upon their having demonstrated characteristics common to resiliency and academic success, the student participants in this study maintained a strong and consistent focus on the ultimate meaning in their lives. They additionally viewed education as an intrinsically motivating, life-long process. The group further credited a combination of personal resources (people's internal attitudes and personality traits that mitigate the negative effects of a potentially damaging environment), and environmental resources (those external sources of

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110 Ibid.
of all parents, the Resilient Five concluded that the best means of promoting young people's ability to avoid problems is to instill in them at an early age a strong, non-negotiable value system. It is this value system to which participants attribute their ability to avoid the temptations, despite encountering similar obstacles, that had adversely affected the lives of their peers.

In México, they recounted, participants' parents had decided that their opportunities would be better in the United States, and had struggled to make a better life in this country education for their children. Although in México a formal education is not necessarily linked to an individual's future success, the Resilient Five's parents were committed to their children's having the educational opportunities none of them had enjoyed, and they worked longer hours in order for participants to be able to stay in school. All student-researchers, strongly appreciative of all their parents' numerous sacrifices on their behalf, felt compelled to demonstrate their gratitude by being studious, responsible, and helpful children. They additionally described their commitment to, in every way possible, setting a good example for their younger

112 In Junior's case, he had been sent by his mother in order to take advantage of greater educational opportunity here.
siblings to follow. Although children are expected to be responsible, capable, and independent at an early age, the family unit, student-researchers summarized, is of central importance in the Mexican culture.

**Teachers and Education:** Education was viewed by all participants as key to their future success in this country, and they described how both they and their families were committed to make the sacrifices necessary for them to get it. The five persisted despite academic frustrations including often-unchallenging, “watered-down” curricula that caused them to fall behind their dominant-culture peers, isolation in the ESL program (which was in effect a “school-within-a-school”), and some teachers and peers who treated them as “less than” because of their skin color, language deficiency, or a combination of the two. Student-participants had not received critical academic counseling until it had been too late for them to benefit from it; as a result, their course schedules had been unnecessarily difficult, and they had missed out on valuable scholarship opportunities. The five described having watched their initially-enthusiastic, newly-arrived peers, frustrated by such obstacles, begin to drop out of school over time, having decided
that their time would be better spent assisting their families financially.

Ana summarized participants' opinions on the following topics, beginning with a description of how ESL students in American schools often feel:

- Shy
- Confused
- Afraid
- Uncomfortable
- Ignored
- Skeptical
- Unable to do their homework
- Unable to understand English
- No longer excited
- Nervous

Ana further suggested that a good English as a Second Language program must provide:

- Adequate books
- Adequate desks
- Enough chairs
- The opportunity for students to work in groups to help one another with difficult work

A good teacher, suggested Ana and her peers:

- Is nice.
- Is understanding.
- Explains clearly.
- Has good communication with students.
- Makes learning fun.
- Helps us with understanding homework.
- Needs to be patient.
- Expects and enforces students' being polite
- Is able to understand cultures, and the problems that they face in the U.S.
• Keeps encouraging her students to succeed.
• Makes students feel comfortable in class, and feels comfortable doing so.
• Is able to be a good teacher, and at the same time, a good friend.

**Pride in Being Mexican:** All participants identify themselves as "Mexican" rather than "American," although two of them were born in this country. Each of the five expressed a strong pride in being Mexican despite their collective agreement that as such they are likely to be looked down upon by the mainstream Americans.

Where some of their peers join gangs claiming in common their Mexican pride, student-researchers in this study chose to demonstrate their own pride by showing the dominant culture that Mexicans are capable, intelligent, and hard-working people. The five were also determined to help their Mexican peers succeed, and to serve as role models and counselors to ease the way of those struggling as they had similarly struggled. In seeking to understand Mexican people and collaborate with them, rather than snubbing them, concluded the group, dominant-culture America would be made stronger, and equality might be possible.
Misconceptions about Mexicans Describing the Mexican people, student-participants summarized:

"They are fighters, hard workers, good friends to those help and respect them. We defend our land, our culture...proud. They don’t like when people speak badly of their culture; it’s as if the speakers were inflicting a deep wound upon Hispanics. Quite playful. We’re not apt to hate.”

They further identified interdependence, generosity, altruism, partnership, and camaraderie as highly-valued attributes common among most Mexican individuals. Nonetheless, said participants, misconceptions about Mexicans abound among white Americans. The situation is exacerbated by the media’s focusing attention on a relatively few gang-affiliated individuals; this perpetuates damaging stereotypes that are then generalized to all Mexican people.

Furthermore, students’ skin color and language deficiency, mistaken for a lack of intelligence or capability, lead some dominant-culture students and teachers to ignore or mistreat them. The group agreed that role models such as the Resilient Five are especially important to counteract the negative effects of such stereotyping; they also provide hope and
inspiration to the Mexican students who suffer as a result of it. Such external sources of support, in conjunction with their own internal drive, might help fortify students, lessen their frustration, and ultimately help prevent them from dropping out of school.

7.3 Reflections on the Study Design

Hind-sight is 20/20, and were I to design this study knowing the specific path the investigation would take and its definitive outcome, I am not certain that I would make many significant changes in its design. I would, in retrospect, have presented Ogbu's (e.g., 1988, 1991 and 1992) notion of immigrant and caste minority later on, perhaps toward the end of the study, rather than introducing it at the study's outset as I did. Additionally, because the concept of institutionalized racism appeared peculiar to the five students, they were unable to discern how its existence might have impacted their educational success. As over time they exchanged anecdotes and noted the similarity between their academic experiences, however, participants began to discern that the negative
occurrences they had encountered might not have been unique to them as they had originally thought.

I believe the group size and dynamic were appropriate; the conjoining of a larger number of participants, especially if they had not previously developed the mutual trust and respect that the Resilient Five shared, might not have resulted in as as honest and open a collaboration. The length of our investigation also appeared to have been appropriate, although somewhat lengthy; during the final weeks of meeting, participants' "data wells" appeared to run dry as ideas, observations, and conclusions became repetitive. Participant "burn-out", particularly at this study's level of intensity, might have been minimized had we met for a shorter period of time. Overall, however, the length of time during which we came together appeared right.

I think that participants' age was well-suited to the mature, thoughtful analysis and ability to contemplate and entertain foreign notions that were essential to this study. Students' possessing a high degree of English proficiency was important as well, so that, either partially or completely mainstreamed, they could compare their dominant-group class experiences with their ESL counterparts. Additionally, the five's
dual-language fluency allowed them to "code-switch" as needed, selecting words best suited to the nuances they wished to convey.

7.4 Suggestions for Future Research

This study originated with participants' shared belief that

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men [sic] pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (Freire, 1970, p. 58)

Student-researchers deemed the problem of their peers' inordinate degree of academic failure sufficiently significant to risk the oppression that might have resulted from their having participated and shared personal information in this study. Some educational practitioners and researchers, too, are frustrated by the extent to which the problem is not being addressed by our schools, exasperation prompting the following emotional declaration from an otherwise restrained chronicle:
We submit this report with a sense of urgency and impatience precisely because of the slow pace of improvement. Hispanics confront too many excuses for the country’s inaction regarding their educational status. Ways to improve the schools that Hispanics attend and solutions to Hispanic dropout are known; they should be implemented on large scale...Only a lack of political leadership, will, and resources keeps the nation from solving the problem; there is no shortage of effective models...That the crisis has remained largely invisible results in inaction and allows the many excuses for doing nothing to go unchallenged. (The Hispanic Dropout Project, 1996, pp. 61-62)

Further exploration into the source of such resiliency in the face of obstacles, such as that demonstrated by study participants, might prove significant to the promotion of resiliency among students at risk of academic failure. Frankl’s (1963) powerful notion that the individual has the ability to determine her individual reaction to a set of circumstances beyond her control, germane to this study, might also help to guide future exploration.

113 It would be disingenuous to exclude the following entry I made in my research journal: “We ended this session with my urging the students not to lose their voice. I said this twice, and described the power they have when they and their parents, in a calm and organized way, try to get issues resolved. I felt spurious saying ‘Don’t lose your voice’, when, in so many ways, these students often don’t have a voice.”
While this study focused specifically upon the experiences of Mexican-American English as a Second Language students, a similar study might additionally benefit English-proficient Mexican-Americans or other students of color. By virtue of their having studied in American schools for extended periods of time, these learners might especially benefit from the encouragement of the internal protective factors common to resilient individuals. As discussed previously, the dropout rate among the minority of Mexican-American students who go on to attend college is also disproportionately high. A study similar to this one at the post-secondary level might therefore prove informative and contributive in promoting Mexican-American learners' resilience in colleges and universities and increasing their attendance there, as well.

Highly informative, additionally, might be a study driven by students like Junior's peers who, frustrated with their scholastic experiences, are on the verge of a decision to quit school altogether. Identification of those obstacles perceived as "the last straw" by these learners, in combination with their exposure to the tools that helped their peers successfully navigate these obstacles, might help to fortify such potential
dropouts with the skills to persist academically. Gándara (1995), for example, found that 51 percent of her respondents, with backgrounds similar to our ESL learners', credited persistence, an individually elective personal resource, as the single factor responsible for their high level of achievement. Hard work and ability, associated with internal protective factors, were identified as the two next most significant factors responsible for their impressive academic accomplishments; these themes emerged repeatedly throughout our own study. O'Connor's (1997) Resilient Six's varied social backgrounds were similarly representative of students' diverse home environments. The combination, then, of this research and participants' observations on this study might be promising; all of our English as a Second Language learners may greatly benefit from being presented with tools similar to those that the Resilient Five used to remain firm in their academic persistence.

Further investigations involving a larger cohort of student participants might render a greater amount of data; the inclusion of family members and school personnel, potentially influential sources of external support in learners' lives, might also enrich further
explorations\textsuperscript{114}. Additional follow-up research might also explore the ways in which the conclusions reached in studies such as this one are put into action. A further study, for example, might investigate the ways in which teachers with whom the Resilient Five’s perceptions were shared went on to modify their teaching practices accordingly, and how their subsequent students fared as a result. A qualitative analysis over time might also reveal the extent to which Mexican-American high school students such as the young lady in my senior English class were inspired to persevere after reading the Resilient Five’s words.

\textsuperscript{114} In inviting the voice of the adults who have traditionally been responsible for scholastic decision-making, however, students’ voices might once again be silenced.
Kerka (1988) maintains that orientation meetings, held either at the outset of or prior to the beginning of the first academic term, can be a highly-effective support to freshmen newly-arrived to a school. It is not a stretch to imagine that these could be geared specifically toward Mexican-American ESL students (or any newcomers to this country) and facilitated by returning students with a similar cultural background. Peer facilitators, most qualified to predict the problems the incoming students are likely to encounter having experienced them first-hand, can provide practical, first-hand solutions for how best to navigate around potential obstacles.

Students such as the Resilient Five who are blazing the educational trail for their family or culture may be especially vulnerable to feelings of alienation from either or both of those support systems, and to feeling out of place in their new academic environment. The not knowing where to go, or whom to ask for help with the myriad of questions (about practicalities to which non-ESL students rarely give a second thought) that participants described may, over time, also become a frustrating barrier between an ESL student and her scholastic success and endurance.

Orientations, optimally conducted in Spanish, might present one less hurdle and one fewer place where students are afraid to ask questions for fear phrasing them wrong and subsequently feeling foolish. Additionally, the sense of home provided by students' being surrounded by their native language may serve as a needed source of comfort. Anstrom (1997), for example, corroborates that "...among the major instructional features impacting the academic success of language minority students in predominantly English-medium settings [is] the opportunity for native language use (p. 31)."

While new students' potentially numerous questions can often best be answered in an orientation meeting,
returning student-advisors should also check in frequently to offer freshmen continuing support and guidance. This additional form of reinforcement will likely prove to be a proactive dropout deterrent to new students’ ever reaching the point of wanting to drop out.

Native-language support can be similarly extremely helpful to all speakers of English as a Second Language. For under-represented groups of non Spanish-speaking ESL students, comparable opportunities for assistance should be provided, with every attempt made to direct students toward native-language resources.

Having laid the foundational premise of the study, and having established similarities between different-achieving racial peers, O’Connor (1997) then differentiates between the two study groups’ perceived loci of control, and their perceptions of their chances at success in what they both perceive to be a racist society. She clearly illustrates the attitudinal difference through her juxtaposition of the summary thoughts of each respondent, one of whom concludes, “Why should we try?” where her high-achieving peer takes a different tack: “We can fight it. If we don’t at least try to break that hold, we never going nowhere. [sic]”

The study of the Resilient Six (as O’Connor nicknamed them) is a refuting of the notion that those marginalized individuals who are able to recognize the educational and societal barriers they face are at risk of “interpreting [their] own life chances as limited and for disengaging from school” (p. 597).

O’Connor begins the study with both a low and high academic achiever participants’ articulation of their situation as Black individuals (illustrated by the kindred term “we”) in a White-dominated society.

The perceptions members of the high-achieving group articulate are remarkably similar, illustrating a commonality of worlds and racial consciousness which lay an important cornerstone of O’Connor contention
that such awareness does not preclude a belief in the possibility for social change. The researcher presents a persuasive case for the importance of her study, and spells out, explicitly, the moment of the questions she posits: "[t]he significance of these questions is highlighted by the fact that for over 20 years researchers have shown that rejection of the dominant theory of status-attainment on the part of low-income and minority youth produces maladaptive educational consequences" (p. 596).

Bruner (1965) describes the importance of discovery in the learning process, noting that it is "in essence a matter of rearranging or transforming evidence in such a way that one is enabled to go beyond the evidence so reassembled to additional new insights" (pp. 607-608). Bruner’s theory of learning is comprised of three “almost simultaneously processes: (1) the acquisition of new information...; (2) transformation, or the process of manipulating knowledge to make it fit new tasks; and (3) evaluation, or checking whether the way we have manipulated information is adequate to the task” (p. 25). These processes further illustrate the importance of Hispanic ESL learners’ being able to bring that knowledge to life by meaningfully connecting classroom concepts with their non-scholastic lives.

Jointly investigated by Valdés and Barrera, a complete ethnographic depiction, aptly titled “Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools,” (1996) examined the influences of family environment on children’s success both within the families as well as in the communities in which the children lived.

“Con Respeto” is a comprehensive, three-year-long exploration of the Mexican culture recounted in a richly-painted portrait of ten recently-immigrated Mexican families. The study’s intent was “to [bring] to life the everyday worlds of ten newly arrived Mexican families” (Valdés, 1996, p. 5). It is a book about "values and beliefs, dreams and struggles, newly
discovered expectations and serious misunderstandings. It is also a book about unfair perceptions and well-intentioned efforts to reform families so that their children can succeed in school" (p. 5).

Valdés' description of female participants' unquestioning faith in and support of educators is reminiscent of Freire's (1970) description of the oppressed's (disenfranchised) internalization of the oppressor (mainstream society's) opinions of them. Freire describes how "they call themselves ignorant and say the 'professor' is the one who has knowledge and to whom they should listen" (p. 49).

Valdés recounts how the mothers of Mexican-origin children in her study echoed much the same sentiment: "Las maestras están ay pa [sic] enseñarles, y ustedes están ay pa [sic] aprender ('Teachers are there to teach you, and you are there to learn')" (p. 153). Some mothers like Rosario, Valdés observed, were "more than willing to do battle with teachers, to talk with high school counselors..." (p. 153), but there was, without exception, a profound respect for education belied by ubiquitous stereotypes of minority parents' indifference to education.

Valdés' findings reflect those resulting from my own years of teaching and familiarity with the Mexican culture is virtually "exact." This additional source of research credibility meets Cusick's (1973) major test of validity criterion of one engaged in a similar setting's saying "that is the way it is" (p. 233).

The researcher paints a comprehensive and solid portrait of the very different context in which each participant (educator, child, parent) is involved, and is overly-accusatory of no-one. Mexican immigrants are portrayed as hard-working, struggling individuals, part of a larger cultural context with which the reader becomes familiar through thick, vivid description. Educational professionals are portrayed as well-meaning but uninformed.
In México, for example, according to Texto Integro del Programa para la Modernización Educativa 1989-1994:

- Approximately 20.2 million adults had not completed primaria (elementary school);
- 700,000 students between the ages of 10 and 14 are not enrolled in school;
- Only 54% of 14.6 million students enrolled in primary school complete this level of study in the normal 6 years;
- More than 15,000 primary schools (20% of total schools) do not offer the full six years of primary schooling;
- The average level of schooling among the Mexican population is 6 years. In 1983, there were only 331 public libraries in the entire country.

Education in México, additionally, is not a predictor of socioeconomic success. Much research of Mexican-American children cites low parental levels of formal education; most note, also, an almost uniform parental commitment to their children’s educational success as a means of economic mobility.

Gándara’s (1995) study, for example, describes her Mexican-American participants as being “people who chose education as a vehicle for social and economic mobility or personal fulfillment” (p. 11) with a strong, internally-generated drive to succeed academically.

Valdés’ (1996) study of 10 newly-arrived Mexican immigrant families, additionally, found that “...most of the adults in the study had not focused on education as a key solution upon which they could depend in order to open up doors for themselves in México. None of these
adults were [sic] acquainted with people who had 'made it' by going to school" (p. 177).


(http://www.ode.state.or.us/stats/index.htm)


Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs: Washington, DC.


8. ENDNOTES

i Kerka (1988) maintains that orientation meetings, held either at the outset of or prior to the beginning of the first academic term, can be a highly-effective support to freshmen newly-arrived to a school. It is not a stretch to imagine that these could be geared specifically toward Mexican-American ESL students (or any newcomers to this country) and facilitated by returning students with a similar cultural background. Peer facilitators, most qualified to predict the problems the incoming students are likely to encounter having experienced them first-hand, can provide practical, first-hand solutions for how best to navigate around potential obstacles.

Students such as the Resilient Five who are blazing the educational trail for their family or culture may be especially vulnerable to feelings of alienation from either or both of those support systems, and to feeling out of place in their new academic environment. The not knowing where to go, or whom to ask for help with the myriad of questions (about practicalities to which non-ESL students rarely give a second thought) that participants described may, over time, also become a
frustrating barrier between an ESL student and her scholastic success and endurance.

Orientations, optimally conducted in Spanish, might present one less hurdle and one fewer place where students are afraid to ask questions for fear phrasing them wrong and subsequently feeling foolish. Additionally, the sense of home provided by students' being surrounded by their native language may serve as a needed source of comfort. Anstrom (1997), for example, corroborates that "...among the major instructional features impacting the academic success of language minority students in predominantly English-medium settings [is] the opportunity for native language use (p. 31)."

While new students' potentially numerous questions can often best be answered in an orientation meeting, returning student-advisors should also check in frequently to offer freshmen continuing support and guidance. This additional form of reinforcement will likely prove to be a proactive dropout deterrent to new students' ever reaching the point of wanting to drop out.

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speaking ESL students, comparable opportunities for assistance should be provided, with every attempt made to direct students toward native-language resources.