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## New Voices in the Old South: Latino Immigrant Students' Experiences at one Georgia Middle School

Lucy Joanna Bush

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NEW VOICES IN THE OLD SOUTH:  
LATINO IMMIGRANT STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES  
AT ONE GEORGIA MIDDLE SCHOOL

by

LUCY JOANNA BUSH

(Under the direction of Grigory Dmitriyev)

ABSTRACT

This research study investigated the experiences of Latino immigrant students as they negotiated and developed their academic identities at one Georgia middle school in Athens, Georgia, U.S.A. Seventy-five students took part in the survey portion of the research study, while six students participated in in-depth interviews that formed the ethnographic case studies of this research. I utilized an ethnographic case study approach (Stake, 1995; 1998) in order to explore how these students' academic experiences influenced the negotiation and development of their academic identities into three distinct forms: *cholo* or low-performing, *medio* or average-performing, and *cabezón* or high-performing.

Each of the case study participants is of Mexican heritage. The students had varied experiences at the research site, leading to the development of differing academic identities. Perceptions of teacher support, self-efficacy, parental involvement, school environment, and availability of extracurricular activities influenced the negotiation and development of said academic identities.

There is substantial previous research regarding the academic experiences of immigrant students, but almost none focuses on the experiences of immigrant middle

school students in their own words. Through the power of their voice, these students heartbreakingly describe discrimination, hatred, and intolerance. They also speak to the innocence of adolescence. Through their words, one discovers an opening to the world they inhabit. It is a world of silencing, shame, marginalization, self-discovery, celebration, and hope. This juxtaposition of positive and negative exemplifies their entire existence. Their words chart a course through which educators can create more supportive and caring environments that nurture academic success for all students.

INDEX WORDS: Ethnographic case study, Immigrant student, Latino student, Middle school student, Academic identity, Identity development, Identity negotiation, Voice

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

To my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in Whom everything is possible. To my parents, Ben and Terry Everett, who instilled in me the desire for lifelong learning and the belief that I can make a difference. To my husband, Jeff Hall, who has faithfully supported and encouraged me throughout the doctoral program. To my brother, Will Bush, who though he is no longer in my presence, lives in my heart. To my doctoral cohort, school family, and friends, none of this would be possible without your love and support. To Itzel, Angie, Alexandra, Jesús, Roberto, and Estela, you have changed my life. To each of those listed above, I will be forever grateful.

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I also want to express my undying gratitude toward all of my students who participated in this study. None of this would have been possible without you. To Angie,



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You shall not molest or oppress a foreigner, for you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If you ever wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry.

*Exodus 22: 20-22*

Do not exploit the foreigners who live in your land. They should be treated like everyone else, and you must love them as you love yourself. Remember that you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the LORD, I am your God.

*Leviticus 19: 33-34*

## PREFACE

“Man, I hate this school!” These words greeted me on my first day as a middle school teacher. I was already leery of my adjustment from high school Spanish teacher to middle school sheltered social studies teacher and this student’s comment did nothing to ease my transition. At the time, I did not follow up the young man’s comment with any reply of my own, hoping that the situation would diffuse itself and we could proceed with our first day of school procedures. While the student took his seat without further incident, his comment was with me throughout the day. As the weeks progressed, the comment moved further and further into the recesses of my mind. However, it continued to surface subconsciously throughout that first year.

In the three years since that comment, I have heard similar sentiments uttered from the mouths of my students, male and female, sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. I have also experienced the opposite reaction from students regarding school. As I began this doctoral program, I was also beginning my career as a middle school teacher. I note this as being distinct from my career as a high school teacher as the two experiences could not have been more disparate and dichotomous. As a high school Spanish teacher, I enjoyed a position of prestige among the faculty at my school, even as a beginning teacher. Some colleagues felt that I occupied an enviable position as foreign language classes were only offered to college preparatory students rather than technical/vocational preparatory students. My content area knowledge was also prized at the school as systems across Georgia were and are having great difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers who possess Spanish (P-12) certification. By parents and community members, enrollment in Spanish classes was viewed as an avenue for taking young adults from a



rural North Georgia community and somehow molding them into more cosmopolitan, well-rounded members of their community. By my students, Spanish class was seen as an exciting novelty, something they had never experienced before.

However, my current position provokes an opposite reaction from faculty and students. I am currently employed as a sheltered-content social studies teacher as I am certified in Social Science (6-12, but recently reorganized by the Georgia Professional Standards Committee into separate content areas, e.g. history, geography, economics, etc.) as well as English to Speakers of Other Languages (P-12). English language learners at the research site do not attend any other social studies class at the school as I teach all three grade levels of ELL students. Also, none of my students who attended elementary school in this district has ever had social studies prior to middle school as this was the elementary class they were pulled out of in order to attend ESOL classes. With virtually no prior knowledge of Georgia's social studies curriculum, middle school social studies classes can become tedious and difficult for ELL students. At this school, I do not occupy a prized position. Many teachers believe that, because many of my students speak in broken English, their minds must be "broken" as well. For many teachers, the only enviable part of my job is the federally mandated class size limit of 11 students. My students are viewed as being deficient in many ways mainly due to their lack of English proficiency.

It is through these two disparate experiences that the seeds of this dissertation were sewn. While my middle school teaching experience has been much more rewarding in terms of student achievement, the educational inequality that many of my students experience causes me to lie awake at night. Their voices ring in my ears at the most

seemingly random moments. I am constantly reviewing my own teaching in light of my experiences and current “best practices.” While completing my Ed.S. thesis at the University of Georgia, I examined high school students’ experiences in Spanish classes. While I learned a great deal about students’ preferences in learning a foreign language during my specialist program, this research study has allowed me to examine students’ beliefs and behaviors with possible life-changing results. This research study is the culmination of three years of experiences as an ELL teacher. These three years have been a time of consternation, exhilaration, desperation, and admiration. They have been as Dickens (1993) noted, “the best of times and the worst of times.”

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Those who steal the words of others develop a deep doubt in the abilities of the others and consider them incompetent. Each time they say their word without hearing the words of those whom they have forbidden to speak, they grow more accustomed to power and acquire a taste for guiding, ordering, and commanding. They can no longer live without having someone to give orders to. Under these circumstances, dialogue is impossible.  
(Freire, 1970, p. 129)

While myriad immigrant groups have contributed to the American social fabric (Takaki, 1993), Latino immigration has had a particularly tremendous impact on the American educational landscape in recent years. Nationally as well as locally, educational institutions have struggled with how to best serve these newcomers. Concurrently, these newcomers have wrestled with how to maintain their identity in their new home while attempting to fend off assimilationist pressures and policies. Latino immigrant middle school students present a unique perspective on negotiating the terrain of their new land while attempting to retain a semblance of their native culture. This is certainly not meant to imply that all Latino immigrant middle school students will have the same perspective, but rather that their perspectives are unique in contrast to those of the dominant society. These adolescents must navigate the tumultuous world of middle school, making decisions that will affect the rest of their academic careers. This study seeks to examine the intersections of culture, language, and identity as they relate to student academic achievement. In so doing, the creation of an academically and emotionally nurturing environment for all students becomes more possible.

## Context of the Study

U.S. society will continue to become more diverse throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Perhaps the most obvious site of diversity will be the nation's public schools. Though currently the majority of schoolchildren enrolled in U.S. schools self-identifies as Caucasian, this will no longer be true in the near future (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Current demographic trends indicate that the U.S. will soon be a minority-majority country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). One of the largest predicted areas of growth concerns English Language Learners (Hamann, 2003).

Currently, the estimated Latino population of the United States is 42.7 million people, making this the nation's largest ethnic minority group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Already constituting 14% of the total U.S. population, Latinos continue to grow in numbers. Approximately one of every two people added to the U.S. population between July 1, 2004 and July 1, 2005 were self-identifying Latinos (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). In the last two years alone, Latinos have had a 3.3% increase in their population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Interestingly, Latino population growth is being attributed more to births within the geographic boundaries of the United States than by immigration (Gaouette, 2006). At this rate, the U.S. Latino population is expected to reach 102.6 million, or 24% of the U.S. population by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Of the current U.S. Latino population, those of Mexican origin represent approximately 64% of the total (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

Georgia has also been the site of phenomenal demographic change. In the last ten years, Georgia's population has grown at a rate of 26%, or approximately 540 people per day (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Latino population has grown tremendously as well. In

2000, only thirteen states reported at least 500,000 Latino residents, with Georgia being one of those states. Surprisingly in a state usually defined by dichotomous racial relations (namely African-American and Caucasian), “nowhere was this unprecedented growth more evident than in the South, which had more than 11 million new Latinos added to its population” (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005, p. 43). In 1990, there were approximately 109,000 Latinos residing in the state, representing 1.7% of Georgia’s population (Rodríguez, 2002). By the year 2000, the Latino population had grown an amazing 300% to 435,000, or 5% of Georgia’s total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In actuality, these statistics are most likely low due to undercounting during Census visits as well as the illegal status of some of Georgia’s Latino population. As with the national Latino population, Georgia’s Latino population is overwhelming of Mexican origin with approximately 275,000 people (Rodríguez, 2002). University of Georgia professor Doug Bachtel has described this phenomenon as “the largest ever sustained mass migration of one group to the United States” (cited in Kirp, 2000). Georgia has also been the site of an increasing illegal immigrant population, surpassing Arizona as the state with the fastest growing illegal population (Campos, 2006). Georgia’s illegal immigrant population has more than doubled during the past five years. From 2000 to 2005, “Georgia’s population of illegal immigrants jumped to an estimated 470,000, an increase of 114%” (Department of Homeland Security, 2006).

As Georgia’s demographical landscape has changed, so has the ethnic composition of our schools. As a teacher to English language learners, the majority of my students over the last three years have been Latino immigrants. While many of them have experienced some degree of academic success, many of them have not. One

indicator of this is the graduation rate. In the Clarke County School District, the graduation rate is calculated based on students who begin at a school in twelfth grade and who actually receive a diploma, actual estimates report the Latino dropout rate for Clarke County hovers around 92% (A. Matheny, personal communication, October 12, 2006). Official statistics report a Latino graduation rate of 35.4%, but again this only counts the students who actually made it to the twelfth grade and received a high school diploma (Duke, 2006). This is not overly surprising as Latinos “have the lowest high school completion rates of any major group in the United States” (National Council of La Raza, 1990). Even less surprising, English language learners are more likely to drop out than “English-dominant” students (Friedenberg, 1999).

Due to the overwhelming teacher turnover rate at my middle school, I am one of the few constants in my students’ lives. For many of them, I am the only social studies teacher they have ever had. I have watched them struggle to navigate the American educational system with both admiration and heartbreak. I am surprised to see the transformation of quiet, shy students to vocal leaders in the ELL classroom and am curious why that transformation does not translate into the regular academic environment. I watch them sit on the sidelines at school, rarely participating in any extracurricular activities. Not one of my students participates in Spectrum, the district’s program for gifted and talented students (Griffin, 2006), perhaps because the district refuses to provide testing in Spanish even though this is allowed by the Georgia Department of Education. I am baffled that they are able to subject themselves to schooling day after day, even when so many of them are academically unsuccessful.

My students live during an interesting time in Georgia's history. Not since Georgia's colonial era has the state seen such a large wave of sustained immigration. Different regions of Georgia have chosen to approach the situation from different vantage points. In Dalton, for example, the community leaders and schools have partnered to create the Georgia Project, a successful initiative that partners Dalton Public Schools with Mexico's University of Monterrey (Hernández-León & Zúñiga, 2000). At the same time, Georgia became the first state to "adopt its illegal immigration law in the absence of any reform legislation from Congress" (Eckenrode, 2006, A01), the Georgia Security and Immigration Compliance Act (SB529). This act requires that any individual using Georgia's public services show proof of U.S./Georgia citizenship in order to receive those services (Georgia General Assembly, 2006). The act also mandates that state employees be legal citizens as well as requiring that companies receiving state contracts or subcontracts verify that all of their employees are legal citizens. Law enforcement personnel are also required to check the immigration status of anyone charged with a felony or with driving under the influence. While the Act does not specifically prohibit illegal immigrants from owning property, there has been speculation that many Latinos may choose not to live in Georgia when the law takes effect in July 2007 (Jarvie, 2006, p. A4). My students are aware of these political changes and many of them took part in local marches in the spring of 2006 to protest these actions (Smith, 2006).

#### Purpose of the Study

Through this research study, I am interested in discovering with my students what it means to live as an immigrant in Georgia today, as well as how we can achieve some measure of social justice, both in the school and the community. For me, this represents

the ultimate form of what Cummins (1996, 2000a) describes as transformative pedagogy. Through the melding of critical pedagogy, multiculturalism, and linguistic knowledge, transformative pedagogy most clearly represents my understanding of curriculum studies through its powers to liberate and transform. Through an examination of the macro- and micro-interactions (Cummins, 1996) that my students experience, together we can move closer to an environment (both educationally and socially) that no longer devalues their cultures or contributions. My students have been provided a platform through which they have been able to share their experiences of what it means to carry a multitude of identities: a Latino, an immigrant, a Georgian, a middle school student, an adolescent, and a member of an American educational community. It is through their descriptions that perhaps a new, clearer understanding of their experiences will result in the creation of a more nurturing, academically successful environment. At the very least, their voices will have been raised in a time that there are myriad attempts to silence them.

#### Research Questions

The general research question is:

- How do the experiences of Latino immigrant middle school students affect their academic success or failure and their development/negotiation of an academic identity?

The specific research questions are:

- How do students' experiences in U.S. schools lend themselves to unsuccessful academic performance (i.e., development of a *cholo* identity)?
- How do students' experiences in U.S. schools lend themselves to successful academic performance (i.e., development of a *cabezón* identity)?



- How do students' experiences lend themselves to mixed academic performance (i.e., development of a *medio* identity)?

### Autobiographical Roots of My Inquiry

This dissertation is the culmination of many of my personal and professional experiences. Looking back, providence has played a large role in determining the selection of this research topic. Growing up on rural Sand Mountain, Alabama, I never experienced a great deal of diversity. There simply was not much racial, economic, or religious diversity. I attended public schools that were all-white and predominantly classified as low socioeconomic status. In my youth, I had never considered privilege because I had truly never seen much difference. When everyone in your area is the same race, has approximately the same socioeconomic status, and attends the same church as you do, privilege becomes difficult to observe simply because you are a member of such a homogeneous group. At some level, no one is more surprised than I am that I now live in a diverse university town, teaching students that in many ways are very different from me. The road less traveled is certainly the one I have taken and I am all the better for it.

The tiny town of Fyffe in DeKalb County, Alabama was my entire world until the age of ten. I lived on the same rural road as my great-grandfather, great-aunt, great-uncle, and a plethora of cousins. My best friend was my second cousin who lived two pastures up the road. DeKalb County was not a place that many people ever left from or moved to. In many ways, it is still an insular space that is caught in a type of time warp. While the surrounding areas are becoming somewhat more diverse due to the presence of poultry plants in neighboring counties, DeKalb County still has approximately the same demographics as it did thirty years ago.

Most of my relatives worked in the omnipresent sock mills or worked in construction. My mother and her sister were the first in our family to attend college. My mother was the first female lawyer in our county and my father, in spite of having a mathematics degree from the University of Alabama, chose to work in construction because it was more financially lucrative for the area in which we lived. Even with two relatively successful parents, I never imagined myself attending anything at the University of Alabama except for football games. While that might seem surprising, I had never seen the need to go to college to better myself. My grandfather and great-grandfather had respectable jobs and were considered to be influential men in our county even though they lacked a great deal of education in the modern sense of the word. As the roads commissioner, my great-grandfather exerted tremendous power in the county while possessing only a seventh-grade education. My grandfather owned one of the most successful construction companies in the county with only a high school diploma. Most of my family worked in mills throughout the county. DeKalb County had a wealth of textile mills and industrial bakeries and these jobs were seen by the community as a worthwhile career. One of my most vivid memories of elementary school concerns my third-grade field trip to the local textile mill. The purpose of the trip was not to see how cloth was made, but rather to show us the hierarchy of the mill. We were informed of the requirements for each job in the mill as well as how one could “make production.” College was never mentioned in my education in Fyffe. My mother had attended the same school that I did and does not recall even hearing college mentioned until the eleventh grade when her English teacher, Mrs. Moses, told her to take the ACT because the local junior college was paying for it. Perhaps the school’s perspective on college has

changed now that many of those textile jobs have moved overseas. However, my cousins continue to graduate from Fyffe School and only two of them in the last ten years have chosen to pursue a college education.

When I was in fifth grade, I moved to Warner Robins, Georgia, which was very different than Fyffe. Home to a major U.S. Air Force base, there was and is a tremendous amount of religious, ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic diversity. It was in Warner Robins that I first recall an awareness of my privilege, though I certainly would not have used that terminology then to describe this recognition. While I was never explicitly taught to recognize White privilege, described by McIntosh (1998) as “an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious” (p. 1), I became cognizant of its presence while in a diverse situation. My privilege afforded me a “pass” (Sleeter, 1994) in certain situations that people of color do not automatically receive.

I attended the University of Georgia after graduation and majored in Social Science Education. There again, providence entered the picture. During my junior year, my undergraduate advisor informed me that due to my lack of natural athletic talent, it would be highly unlikely that I would be hired as a social studies teacher as most are hired primarily for their coaching abilities in addition to their teaching. This same advisor had also mentioned on a previous occasion that my test scores and grades showed that I was “too smart” to be a teacher (J. Napier, personal communication, April 1997). However, if I was determined to continue the pursuit of my education degree, he suggested that I add either a minor in foreign language or exceptional children. Since I had taken four years of Spanish in high school, I chose to pursue a Spanish minor and

ended up with a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish. I decided to continue my education by pursuing a master's degree in foreign language education since the State of Georgia was willing to pay for my degree in this critical need field. It was through a variety of field experiences that I truly developed a love for all things Spanish. I wanted to immerse myself in that world. I watched Spanish television, read Spanish newspapers, and tried to navigate the then-nascent internet in Spanish. It was the struggle of acquiring a second language and truly becoming communicatively competent in that language that would allow me to identify with many of my students on a deeper plane.

My first teaching job was at a rural high school near Athens, Georgia. I was charged with teaching Spanish I-IV to predominantly White, middle-class students. It was here that my eyes were first opened to White privilege as it operates on students throughout the schooling process. Very few African-American students were eligible to take foreign language classes since most had been tracked from middle school into the technical/vocational preparatory track. Students had to be registered as college preparatory students in order to take foreign language classes. In my four-year tenure at the school, I only taught six African-American students in spite of the 34% African-American population of the school. During that same time period, only one African-American student was enrolled in French classes. In fact, the NAACP in that county filed several Office of Civil Rights complaints about the education that African-Americans were receiving in that school. It was here that my eyes were first truly opened and I could see how White privilege operated in very real ways. African-American students were overly represented in technical/vocational and special education classes.

They certainly did not receive the same education that White students at the same school received.

That rural county exhibited the dichotomous diversity that has dominated Georgia's history. In the four years I worked at the high school, there were two Latino students enrolled and neither stayed for more than a year. Imagine the difference in my classroom in Athens-Clarke County, where our school population is 22% Latino. My students are now all Latino, predominantly of Mexican heritage. When I came to this school, I truly felt that I was where I was supposed to be; that all of the pieces had finally come together and I could prove that it was not a fluke that I ended up with a social studies degree, a Spanish degree, and an ESOL endorsement.

At my current school, I am technically the sheltered social studies teacher, but in actuality, my job is so much more. I am counselor, lunchroom helper, translator, friend, and teacher. I am so much more than I was ever allowed to be at my previous job. While I certainly read about social justice in my graduate classes, my job affords me the opportunity to truly search for and try to achieve justice for and with my students on a daily basis. For some students, they have been enrolled in U.S. schools for most, if not all, of their academic careers. For others, this year is their first in the United States. Some are in the United States legally, while others are not. We have lived through the tumultuous boycotts of spring 2006. During that time, my students endured epithets from the African-American students at school, a pamphlet that was distributed to their neighborhoods informing them not to go to school as there would supposedly be a massive immigration raid, and comments by faculty members that they did not deserve to have an education. My students, both legal and undocumented, were targeted by faculty

and students and verbally told to “go back home.” There was also an effort made by many teachers in the building during this time to disallow Spanish language use in any of our classrooms. We have lived through graffiti written about our class and other teachers’ protests over this class. Teachers openly complained during grade level and faculty meetings that they were not sure why our school district was spending so much money to educate students “that didn’t have a right to be here anyway.” When I was hired for the sheltered social studies position, the art teacher’s position had to be eliminated in order to forward-fund my salary. While we had the numbers to earn a second ELL teacher, the state required that my salary be paid through Title I funds for one year to show that the school was serious about needing the second position. Therefore, the school had to pay not only my salary, but my Social Security, medical, and retirement benefits as well. There were discussions about why “those students” had a teacher with a specialist’s degree when most other teachers in the building only had a bachelor’s degree. Showing an ignorance of federal guidelines, several teachers complained that the ELL classes consisted of only 11 students each when there were more than 20 students in most other classes. In spite of, or perhaps because of these experiences, I truly believe that we are working toward one common goal: contributing to the development of a critical transformative pedagogy for my students, for our school, and for our community together.

In my previous job as a second language teacher to predominantly White, middle-class students, my role was seen as enviable by the community. Acquiring a second language was an additive experience that allowed the students to become better-rounded, though acquisition of a second language was not viewed as a necessity but rather a

novelty. In contrast, my job as a second language teacher to Latino students, language acquisition is viewed not as additive but as subtractive, as English acquisition is necessary for successfully navigating American schools (Cummins, 1996). English, in many cases, is seen as a replacement for the students' first language. With Spanish-learners, their efforts are lauded, but they are not expected to truly achieve a native-like proficiency. In order to graduate with a college preparatory diploma in the state of Georgia, one must take two years of foreign language classes. Unlike ELL students, these students are never required to take an exit exam in order to stop taking foreign language classes. They must simply achieve passing grades for two years at which point they will have completed their foreign language requirements. ELL students, on the other hand, are required to take a battery of tests demonstrating their English proficiency in order to exit ELL classes. Some of the participants in this research study have been enrolled in ELL classes for their entire academic careers, sometimes stretching eight years.

For all of these reasons, I am truly committed to achieving a level of social justice for and with my students that will continue long after we have left the corridors of our school building. We have made some strides during the last three years, but there is still much to be done. While beginning at the school level, my students and I hope that through this study we will be able to affect change throughout our district and perhaps our state. At the very least, my students' voices will be heard through this dissertation and that is a beginning.

## Participants

Each participant in this study has been classified as an English language learner (ELL) by the school district where they are enrolled, totaling approximately 75 students. This total includes approximately 65 students that are currently enrolled in ELL classes at the school as well as approximately 10 ELL-monitored students that have exited the ELL program within the last two years but whose academic progress remains monitored by the district as required by federal law. The students vary in age from 10 to 15. I have either taught or monitored the academic progress of each of the participants in the study and during this time, we have developed a level of trust. The school district overall has approximately a 34% teacher turnover rate, with my middle school's teacher turnover rate being even higher (DeMao, 2004a; 2006). This factor alone has deepened the relationship between the students and me, as I am one of only two teachers at the school that has taught them every year. From this group of approximately 75 students, six students were chosen to participate in the in-depth interviews. Six students were chosen to represent ethnographic case studies of the aforementioned groups: *cholo*, *medio*, and *cabezón*. Due to the school district's concerns about potentially invasive research, only six students were selected for the case study portion. This number of students was suggested by the internal research review board for the school district as being the maximum allowed for case study research. These students were selected based on their responses to the initial survey of group members.

Each of the student participants is of a Latino ethnic heritage. All students are from one of the following countries: Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Bolivia, or the United States. However, the population being studied is heavily skewed toward students



of Mexican heritage (more than 93%). The students who were born in the United States returned to Mexico shortly after birth and have only recently returned to the United States. All students speak Spanish as their L1 language. One student from Bolivia also speaks a minimal level of Quechua. Each student is either currently enrolled in at least one ELL class per day (classified as an ELL direct student) or is a monitored ELL student at the school. I have personally taught each ELL direct student involved in the study as well as many of the monitored students.

### Research Site

The research for this dissertation took place at a middle school in a suburban setting in northeast Georgia. The school district is comprised of 20 schools: 13 elementary, 4 middle, 3 high schools, and 2 special program schools (behavior academy and alternative school). The operating budget for the district is \$100,289,785 which equates to a \$9,038 per pupil expenditure. This is a higher expenditure amount than surrounding counties as well as the state (Holloway, 2006). There are 902 teachers in the district, with 522 of them holding advanced degrees (Holloway, 2006). There are 11,886 students enrolled in the school district with an overall ethnic composition of Asian (3%), African-American (56%), Latino (15%), White (23%) and Multiracial (3%) (Holloway, 2006).

The 2006-2007 enrollment for this school is 651 students. The free or reduced lunch rate for this school is 94%. The ethnic composition of the school is as follows: African-American (417 students or 64%), Asian (0 students or 0%), Caucasian (78 students or 12%), Latino (143 students or 22%), and multiracial (13 students or 2%) (Duke, 2006). The graduation rate for all students in the system is 60%, while for Latino

students it is 35%. The graduation rate for English Language Learners in the district is 22%. The absenteeism (those students missing more than 15 days) rate for all ELLs in the school district is 27.4%, while at the research site it is 6.7%.

Table 1: Demographic Data for Georgia, the Clarke County School District, and Spring Middle School

	<b>Georgia</b>	<b>Clarke County</b>	<b>Spring Middle School</b>
<b>African-American</b>	592,735 (38%)	6,656 (56%)	417 (64%)
<b>Asian</b>	46,795 (3%)	357 (3%)	0 (0%)
<b>Caucasian</b>	748,717 (48%)	2,734 (23%)	78 (12%)
<b>Latino/Hispanic</b>	124,786 (8%)	1,782 (15%)	143 (22%)
<b>Native American/Alaskan Native</b>	15,598 (<1%)	0	0 (0%)
<b>Multiracial</b>	31,197 (2%)	357 (3%)	13 (2%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	1,559,828 students	11,886 students	651 students

Sources: State of Georgia K-12 Report Card, Clarke County State of the Schools Report, and Spring Middle School Demographic Data Report

While the graduation rate for Latino students in general and ELL students more specifically is appalling, these statistics are somewhat misleading as the graduation rate in the Clarke County School District is calculated not by tracking the 9-12 high school participation by the student, but by counting those students who are present at the beginning of twelfth grade and who actually receive a diploma. There is no record of students who began at the high schools in the ninth grade but chose to drop out before their senior year. This trend is not unique to Clarke County, but is generally true nationwide (S.A.L. Beck, personal communication, November 19, 2006). This calculation does not include students who withdrew from the school system and never re-enrolled at the other high school in the district. If a parent withdraws his/her child and

indicates that they are enrolling the student in an out-of-county school, there is no follow-up to ensure that the child did in fact enroll in another school. This also does not take into account those eighth graders who completed their middle school education but never enrolled at any area high school. According to internal documents, the actual Latino dropout rate is approximately 92% (internal memo, Clarke County School District).

The research site has experienced the demographical shift that has been seen in schools throughout north Georgia (Whitfield, 2006). When the school opened 11 years ago, the ethnic composition of the school was predominantly Caucasian (74%). However, approximately four years ago, the school saw a surge in its Latino enrollment, mostly due to the presence of poultry plants and low-income housing available in the school's attendance zone. Also during this time, the school district eliminated its school choice initiative in which students could live anywhere in the county and choose the middle school they wished to attend. Currently, the only school choice available in the school district is that which is mandated for needs improvement schools under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Like many schools across the nation, we at Spring Middle School have struggled with how to effectively accommodate our English language learners. Some initiatives have been successful—the school district's partnership with the University of Georgia's Center for Latino Achievement and Success in Education (CLASE) (DeMao, 2004b) ; the creation of sheltered-content classes at both the middle and high school levels (Gersten & Baker, 2000; Faltis, 1993); the creation of heritage language classes (Matthews & Matthews, 2004; Cummins, 2001d); and the presence of a bilingual Family Engagement Specialist who serves as a liaison between the school, home, and community (Ibarra, 2004; Takanishi, 2004; Greenberger, Chen, & Beam,

1998). Other initiatives have not been as successful. One issue that our school district is particularly struggling with at present is our disparate Latino dropout rate. This is not a problem unique to Clarke County (Delgado Bernal, 2000; García, 1994; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; Lehr, Hansen, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2003). Across the United States, Latino students continue to drop out in exceptionally high numbers. Only a relative few go on to college and an even smaller number earn college degrees—this at a time when a high school education is indispensable as a gateway to higher learning. (Nieto, 2002, p. ix)

More specifically, Latino children attending public schools in Georgia are less likely than anywhere else in the country to graduate on time, if they are able to graduate at all (Salzer, 2001). Greene (2001) found that 68% of Latino children in Georgia's class of 1998 did not earn a diploma. This graduation rate proved to be the lowest in the nation. In fact, while many southeastern states (i.e., Alabama, Tennessee, and North Carolina) had low Latino graduation rates, none were as abysmal as Georgia. This is not entirely surprising as Georgia has the worst overall graduation rate for all races, with Caucasian graduation rates being the lowest in the nation (61%) and African-Americans holding the third-worst graduation rate (44%) (Greene, 2001).

From a geographical standpoint, the school is fairly isolated as it is located in an unincorporated area of the county near the town of Winterville. When the city of Athens and Clarke County chose to consolidate their governments in the early 1990s, the town of Winterville chose not to join the consolidation. Prior to consolidation, “most residents of Clarke County also lived within the city limits of Athens” (Carl Vinson Institute of Government, 2007, ¶5). During this time, the Athens' city population was 89,019 with

192 people residing in the city of Bogart and 995 residents living in city of Winterville (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990). As such, there were several attempts to consolidate the city and county governments. These attempts resulted in referenda in 1969, 1972, and 1982. Voters within the city limits of Athens approved the referenda each time, but voters in unincorporated areas of the county as well as in the cities of Bogart and Winterville rejected each referendum (Carl Vinson Institute of Government, 2007, ¶5). The most recent consolidation effort took place in 1988. In 1990, “the General Assembly provided for a referendum on the unification of Clarke County and Athens into a single entity known as the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County (Ga. Laws 1990, p. 3560)” (Carl Vinson Institute of Government, 2007, ¶5). At this point, the town of Winterville “chose not to be a part of the unified government and thus was allowed to retain its charter as a separate municipality” (Carl Vinson Institute of Government, 2007, ¶5). In speaking to one lifelong Winterville resident, the citizens of Winterville “didn’t want our town to be swallowed up by Athens. We just don’t think the same way they do” (B. Bowman, personal communication, November 7, 2006). In August 1990, the county and city held two separate referenda in which voters approved the consolidation merger. Athens-Clarke County officially came into existence on January 1, 1991. The cities of Bogart and Winterville are still considered separate, sovereign municipalities.

Today, Winterville is a small community and is financially unable to provide many of the services that the larger consolidated government is able to provide (i.e., bus services, garbage pickup, etc.). Our school is not served by the consolidated government’s bus line, so students are not as mobile as students at other middle schools in the county. There is also a decidedly different demographic composition in the town

of Winterville in comparison to the school's demographics, which has led to some tensions in the community. The town of Winterville has never embraced the school as "their" school. Therefore, community support has been more than lacking. Other middle schools in the county have a multitude of Partners in Education, while we cannot even persuade the manufacturing facility across the street to partner with us. When visited by a school representative, an official at the plant indicated that they have already partnered with a middle school across town. In the early days of the middle school when the school population was relatively Caucasian and middle-class, the school had many partners in education. However, as school choice was eliminated and the school's population became less Caucasian and affluent, many of the partnerships floundered. In talking with one local business owner, she chose not to renew her partnership because she had read in the newspaper about the "hundreds of thousands" of dollars the school receives in Title I funds and no longer felt that her financial support of the school and its programs was needed (P. Smith, personal communication, November 7, 2006). Many of the residents of Winterville sent their children to private school as soon as the demographics of the school began to change (D. Johnson, personal communication, August 9, 2006). This has led to even greater resentment of the school and its population.

The research site is also undergoing a great deal of change as mandatory restructuring faces the faculty if AYP is not achieved this year. The school has a new administration this year and has added a professional learning consultant as part of the restructuring plan. Many staff members left at the conclusion of the last academic year and many more are expected to leave at the conclusion of this year. It is in this state of flux that I attempt to undertake this research study.

## Ethnographic Case Studies

This research is grounded in the theoretical framework of transformative critical pedagogy as developed by Cummins (1996, 2000a, 2000b), explored through ethnographic case studies as described by Stake (1995, 1998). The theoretical framework also includes other proponents of transformative critical pedagogy such as Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) and Nieto (2004). By using what Stake (1995) calls the “collective case study” approach, I will attempt to use six cases in order to “investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition” (p. 138). More specifically, I am interested in using these ethnographic case studies in order to draw generalizations about Latino immigrant middle schools students’ navigation of the American academic environment and how their experiences translate into either academic success or failure.

## Composing Field Texts

Composing field texts included the following: a student reflective journal that was written in daily during the students’ social studies class as well as other times throughout the day self-selected by the student, a teacher reflective journal, observations of students in both the ELL classroom setting and regular education settings, and student oral interviews. Students were asked in their journals to simply describe how they were feeling about school that day. They were able to include examples of positive and negative situations that they have experienced that day. The students could use their journal as an avenue to express any successes or difficulties that they were experiencing in their life outside of the classroom. Each of the students had the option to use their iPod instead of writing in their journals daily. Over the course of the Title IID wireless grant we received, students have typically chosen to write in their journals using

traditional paper and pencil methods. However, as students have become more comfortable with their iPods, this has begun to change. Already many of the eighth grade students opt to use their iPod rather than pencil and paper. Whichever medium they chose, their journals allowed me as a teacher/researcher to check on their progress as well as address any problems that might have arisen during the course of the day. The journals provided the greatest degree of insight into the lives of my eighth grade students as we have been together for their entire middle school careers and we have had all three years to establish a level of trust. The teacher journal has been utilized to reflect upon the events of the day (lessons, disciplinary actions, insights, etc.) as well as observations in order to more accurately describe and provide a fuller picture of each of the students.

Students were also asked to participate in a survey aimed at predicting the dropout potential of middle and high school students (Weber, 1990). This survey will be discussed in greater detail later. The purpose for the survey was to (1) ascertain the group's beliefs and attitudes toward dropping out and (2) provide a more objective means of selecting students for the interview portion of the research study. I did not want my preconceived notions about students' academic attitudes to color my selection of those students who were chosen to participate in the interview portion. In utilizing the survey, I was able to select two students who showed the highest tendencies toward dropping out, two students who showed the lowest tendencies toward dropping out, and two students who appeared to be undecided based on their survey scores. Students were given the surveys during extended learning time (ELT) class after participating in a demonstration of how to complete the survey in either their ELT or social studies class. Students were able to self-select the language of the survey in order to answer the questions in the



language they felt most comfortable expressing themselves. After all surveys were completed and received in my dropbox, I downloaded them electronically and began to tabulate the results. Upon completion of the result tabulation, the six students previously described were approached and asked if they wanted to continue their participation in the research study by completing an in-depth interview. I wanted to ensure that the students with extreme scores in each group wanted to continue with the process. Although all had assented that they would complete the interview if so chosen, I also wanted to assure the students that if they had changed their mind about further participation, that there were absolutely no punitive measures. Each of the six students agreed to continue their participation via the interview portion of the research study.

The interviews were digitally audio-recorded using three recorders: a digital recorder that was placed on the table, a lapel recorder that I wore, and the hard drive of the students' iPod using the iTalk feature. As mentioned previously, the students were able to use the iTalk feature of their iPod in order to record thoughts or feelings that they had. I chose to include this method of recording our interviews as the students are already quite comfortable with using iPods in their Program for English Language Learners (PELL) classes, and the presence of the iPods should not have inhibited the interviews at all. The interviews took place in my classroom before and after school as well as during the students' Extended Learning Time class. The three individual interviews varied in time depending on the quantity of questions asked as well as the length of student responses. All field texts have and will remain confidential as the students utilized pseudonyms that they self-selected. For the purposes of anonymity, I retained all copies of the interview at my home and I have personally transcribed them.

## Significance of the Study

If current educational trends hold true, our schools will become more diverse as the years go on. At the same time, the teaching force will remain predominantly White and middle-class. This is not to imply that simply being either White or middle-class is automatically problematic in the classroom or precludes one being an effective teacher, but rather that our identities shape who we are and who we become as teachers. We simply cannot leave our identities at the classroom door. White teachers in particular must recognize and combat their own societal and academic privilege as it is “especially important...for White teachers to recognize their complicity in creating and supporting the conditions of schools that lead to failure for so many students of color” (Nieto, 1999b, p. xiii). Sleeter (1999) warns us,

I do not believe that most Anglo teachers see themselves as colonizers, and that most do care about the students they work with. At the same time, most Anglo teachers do not view racial and ethnic relations within a political perspective, and take for granted beliefs in the superiority of U.S. society, predominance of European and Euro-American culture, and the pragmatic utility of fluency in English only. (p. xviii)

If White teachers fail to recognize their complicity as Nieto (1999a) demands or view their societal position from a political perspective as Sleeter (1999) exhorts, then their lack of privilege recognition combined with a lack of knowledge about Latino culture can lead to devastating implications for our Latino students. Teachers must also investigate the context and extent of educational experiences on the development of their own academic identities. In doing so, perhaps teachers will become more aware of their role

in the development of students' academic success. In addition, we as teachers can then limit the experiences that lead to the development of identities that result in academic failure.

Due to the mandates of No Child Left Behind, accountability has reached extreme proportions. As more and more Latino immigrant students enroll in U.S. schools, the probability that they will constitute a viable subgroup for measuring Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) becomes greater. If schools are not actively engaged in the fight to make education a positive and rewarding experience for these students, we should not be surprised if Latino immigrant students fail to experience academic success. As a teacher at a school that is currently classified as Needs Improvement Year Four, I am well aware that if we do not make AYP this year, I will be forced to reapply for my job due to the mandated restructuring of the research site by the school district and the Georgia Department of Education in accordance with the mandates of the No Child Left Behind legislation. It would behoove teachers at my school (and teachers everywhere) to investigate the role of identity development in academic success as well as the educational experiences that play a role in the negotiation and development of said identities in order to make students' time at school more relevant, meaningful, and applicable to their lives.

Another area of concern, particularly for secondary schools in Georgia, is the Latino dropout rate as Latinos "have the highest rate of dropout of any major population group in the U.S." (Friedenberg, 1999, p. 70). Many Latino students that I teach do not automatically proceed to high school but rather immediately enter the workforce following their completion of the eighth grade. This is not an unheard of phenomenon

among recent immigrants to Georgia (Hernández-León & Zúñiga, 2000). This tide must not only be stemmed simply from social justice and educational standpoints, but in such an age of accountability, dropout/completion rates constitute a portion of the accountability measures in the formulation of AYP as well as affecting the school report cards that are issued annually by the Georgia Office of Student Achievement. Little research currently focuses on the dropout decisions made by middle school students, rather focusing on the decisions students make once they reach the high school level (Nieto, 2002; Flores-González, 2002).

My research will allow for a more thorough investigation of Latino immigrant students' academic identity development as much of the previous research (Nieto, 2004; Flores-González, 2002) has indicated that identity is central to students' educational experiences, but focuses on identity development at the high school level. There is little research focusing on the academic identity development of Latino middle school adolescents, which interestingly is the most fervent period of identity experimentation (Takanishi, 2004). Much research (i.e., Nieto, 1999b, 2002; Flores-González, 2002) regarding identity development disregards the student's middle school experiences as impacting their academic decisions, instead choosing to focus on high school tracking (i.e., college preparatory, technical preparatory, general education, vocational education, etc.). Many of my students are making academic decisions much earlier than high school since many of them are never even making it to that level of education. Therefore, it is imperative that we begin to examine the middle school experiences of these students in order to explore the rationale behind their academic decisions.

This research will allow district-level/middle school administrators, support personnel, and teachers to understand more fully what is occurring with regard to Latino students at middle schools in the Southeastern United States. In many Southern communities, the influx of Latino immigrants is a relatively new phenomenon (Cowan, 2006; Eckenrode, 2006; Feagans, 2006; Folsom, 2006; Ghezzi, 2006; Russakoff, 2006; Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005; Wainer, 2004; Hamann, 2003; Hegland, 2005; Macdonald, 2004; Hernández-León & Zuñiga, 2001, 2003; Rodríguez, 2002; Duchón and Murphy, 2001; Engstrom, 2001; Guthey, 2001; Studstill & Nieto-Studstill, 2001; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Álvarez, 2000; Kirp, 2000; Torres, 2000) and this research could better prepare community institutions such as schools to create educational environments that will support the development of academically successful identities for these students.

Most importantly, this study provides a space for the voices of my students to be heard. Too many times, their voices have been silenced or ignored. With this forum, I believe that my students will have the opportunity to affect change for themselves. They will have the chance to voice their concerns and causes for celebration. In speaking out, my students will be able to educate educators about Georgia's changing classrooms and how teachers and students can create educationally successful environments together, for not only Latino students, but for all students in Georgia. This study will move my students from the sidelines onto the field and hopefully legitimize many of their concerns and successes. My students will become true stakeholders in their own educational process.

This study is also important in that its focus is on middle school students. Too often in academic research, middle school students are forgotten in the equation with the majority of research focusing on either elementary or high school students. By providing a forum for middle school students to discuss their academic experiences, the weaknesses and strengths of our educational system can be seen through another set of eyes, the eyes of a middle school student. By providing another perspective, we can move more honestly toward an education that is liberating to all.

#### Challenges of the Study

While this study could potentially yield significant results, several challenges must be acknowledged. This study has been conducted at a singular site. The population demographics in the school district, in which the research takes place, lend themselves to study only at this one school. Other middle schools in the district have much smaller ELL populations and do not provide the breadth of ELL services that are available at the research site. Also, there are a relatively small number of participants as there are only 75 ELL direct or monitored students at the research site. Some of the students who participated in this research study have already moved to another school or have returned to their home country. All of the students are of Latino ethnic heritage; however the population being studied is heavily skewed toward students of Mexican heritage (more than 93%). All students are currently or recently enrolled in ELL classes. There are few Latino students represented who are enrolled in regular education classes for the entire academic day. Each student represented in the study currently receives or has received at least one segment of PELL and may receive other services (second segment of PELL, exceptional children classes, remediation classes, supplemental English language arts or

mathematics classes, etc.). Unfortunately, at this time, no ELL student or any regular education Latino student at the research site has qualified to receive gifted services (Griffin, 2006).

When choosing to utilize ethnographic case studies in a research study, there are dangers that must be acknowledged. Nieto (2004) warns,

Before undertaking your own case studies, however, you need to think carefully about the ethics of doing this kind of research. All research is fraught with problems of intellectual integrity and case studies are no exception. Thus, for example, you need to think about your own identity and how it might influence the person you interview, particularly if she or he has an identity different from yours. What biases do you bring to the interview? How does your identity influence your attitudes toward him? How might your voice, inflection, facial gestures or postures affect her answers? How might you inadvertently be putting words in his mouth? How might you be manipulating her thoughts? (pp. 19-20)

Throughout this research study, I have taken these words of caution to heart. I have tried to address each of the potential pitfalls described by Nieto (2004) while being honest with myself and my students about this research study. As their teacher, I am unable to remove myself to the point of objective researcher, and instead label myself as a participant-researcher, fully acknowledging my potential biases in this research. I have taken great pains to ensure that my position as their teacher does not overly affect these students' responses. In my opinion, my position as their teacher allowed them to open up and reveal themselves to a greater extent because we do have a history together. Our time together has bonded us together as much more than teacher and student. I have

taught various members of their families, and have been present at some of the most exhilarating and disastrous times of their lives. This cannot be excluded from the equation. I realize that this closeness lends itself to a lack of objectivity that some might raise as a challenge to this research. I, however, believe that this degree of subjectivity has made this research much more real and relevant. Some might argue the possibility that some students provided the answers that they believed I am looking for in order to please me, while other students deliberately provided false answers in order to be viewed as not attempting to please me. However, it is my belief that I know the students well enough that the potential for this occurring was limited at best.

Another challenge is the lack of parental involvement in this research study. While I examined several possible avenues for including parents in this study (Carger, 1996; Valdés, 1996), the recent hostile political environment has caused a great deal of fear among the parents of many of my students. Many of them are afraid of repercussions should their immigration status somehow be revealed. Despite my reassurances that their legal status would in no way be revealed through this research study, the fear was simply too great for many parents. Of the parents who volunteered to participate, all are legally residing in the United States through either work visas or naturalization. I was hesitant to use these parents as sources of information in fear of further reinforcing the stigma between legal and illegal immigrants that is already present in the school. Therefore, I purposefully chose not to reveal a great deal of information about the parents involved in this study in order to allay their concerns regarding

Another possible challenge relating to this research study exists depending on the audience of this dissertation. I am not of the same ethnicity as my students. For some



audiences, this is possibly problematic. As I am not Latina, there is some concern with whether I can truly understand the realities of my students. However, throughout this research study, I have attempted to authentically communicate the experiences of my students in order to bring about a positive change at the research site.

As I have mentioned previously, there are many issues of power that must be addressed when discussing education generally and more specifically, ELL students. Georgia's current political climate is not tolerant of many of the research participants and their families and this intolerance can easily transfer into the educational setting. Education does not occur in a social vacuum, as it is neither "neutral nor apolitical" (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998, p. 375). I understand that this dissertation will not change the culture and climate of the research site or the school district overnight, but I also believe that the more the students' voices are heard, the less they can be ignored. While I may be limited in changing the climate only at the research site in question, it is my hope that this change will spread to other schools in the district. Already, teachers and other students at the research site are beginning to notice ELL students in a different light. Students are discovering their voice in talking to their other teachers about this research study and in turn, those teachers are coming to ask questions about what exactly it is that we are doing. While that is not solely due to this dissertation, the reflective nature of research for all participants has worked to bring about positive change. The school climate for my students is much different that when we began three years ago. It is my prayer that positive change will continue long after my students and I have left the research site.

While several limitations have been noted and addressed, I believe that the data collected and analyzed from this project will provide the opportunity for students, parents, teachers, and community/educational leaders to more fully understand the role of identity development as it relates to academic success. I also believe that this dissertation will provide an opportunity and outlet for the voices of my students to be heard. The more these students voice their concerns, the harder they will be to ignore.

### Overview of Self-Identities

Throughout this research study, there are multiple references to three self-identities: *cabezones*, *cholos*, and *medios*. In order to better understand each self-identity, a brief description of each follows:

*Cabezón*—Spanish word literally meaning “large head” or in the vernacular of many middle school students, a “nerd”. This word can also mean “pretentious” or “conceited.” Many students at the school associate *cabezón* behavior with “showing off.” These students regularly participate in extracurricular activities, seek out opportunities for academic enrichment, and experiment with and use English on a daily basis. In the three years that I have spent with the students, the word *cabezón* has been somewhat appropriated by the academically successful students and does not always have a negative connotation.

*Cholo*--a gangster, either figuratively or literally. The students easily interchange the words *cholo* and *sureño*. For many of our Mexican students, membership in the street gang Sur 13 is commonplace. According to the National Alliance of Gang Investigators' Associations (2006) , Sur 13 is a Mexican street gang (Sur--meaning “south” or “south of the border”; and 13 representing “M”, the 13th letter of the alphabet, signifying Mexico)

whose associations extend throughout 31 states. Sur 13 is part of a larger Mexican street gang network known as La Gran Familia. A more recent addition to the Athens gang scene is The Latin Kings. Several students at the school profess allegiance and membership with one of the two street gangs. These students tend to not be as successful at school and tend to drop out. For the time that they do remain in school, they have chronic behavior problems and spend much of their academic time attempting to recruit other students into the gang. Perhaps the most visible indicator of the cholo identity other than gang-affiliated clothing is the refusal to speak or conduct academic discussions/transactions in English.

*Medio*—literally meaning “middle.” These are students who are not easily classified into either the *cholo* or *cabezón* category. These students display characteristics of both groups during their academic activities. This is not a word that the students use to refer to themselves, rather it is a somewhat artificial construct for the purposes of this research study.

#### Definition of Terminology

ACCESS for ELLs—Criterion-referenced test developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C. and adopted for use in Georgia during the 2005-2006 academic year. The test measures the ELL student’s proficiency in academic English with regard to the content areas of language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. This test is also used as an exit exam for ELL students. Students must achieve a Level IV score in order to exit the ELL program. This test is only given in English though ELL students are allowed the testing accommodation of having some portions of the test read aloud to them in English.

Criterion-Reference Competency Test (CRCT)—High-stakes test used to determine Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The CRCT is mandated by Georgia’s A+ Educational Reform Act of 2000 in that all students in grades 1-8 are required to take the CRCT in the areas of Reading, English/Language Arts, and Mathematics. Students in grades 3-8 are additionally required to take content area tests in science and social studies. Students’ scores in Reading, English/Language Arts, and Mathematics are used to determine promotion/retention. If a student fails any of the aforementioned content areas, the student must attend remediation during the summer and retake the CRCT. If the student fails the CRCT again, the student is retained. The purpose of the CRCT is to measure how well the students have learned the material set forth by the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) and Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). The CRCT is not a norm-referenced test such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. This test is only given in English though ELL students are allowed the testing accommodations such as having the test read aloud to them in English and taking the test in a small-group setting (defined as no more than 11 students per testing group). ELL students may also received the accommodation of extended testing time.

Dropout Prediction Scale (DPS)—This scale forms the basis of the survey given to research participants. The DPS was developed by J.M. Weber at the Center on Education and Training for Employment at The Ohio State University. Weber based his scale on 13 dropout identification procedures that are used throughout several states. In examining the dropout identification procedures, Weber was then able to identify three general factors that can be helpful in identifying potential dropouts: school-related factors, personal factors, and home-family factors. This scale has been utilized in many

studies, most notably by Friedenbergr (1999) in the examination of Hispanic dropout prediction.

English Language Learner (ELL)—For the purposes of this research study, a student who receives supplementary services in order to become proficient in written and oral English. ELLs can receive either direct services (supplemental English Language Arts, sheltered content classes, etc.) or monitored services (student attends regular education classes and academic progress is monitored by the ELL teacher; student is on a consultative basis).

Extended Learning Time (ELT) class—At the research site, this is a 45-minute class at the beginning of the day that each student takes. Depending on their previous Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) scores, students are placed into either extension or remediation classes. Extension classes offered during ELT provide topics of study such as Asian art, current events, book clubs, and advanced business education. Students who do not qualify for extension classes are instead placed into remediation classes which consist of skill-and-drill exercises concerning either language arts or mathematics.

Georgia Performance Standards (GPS)—A continuation of the mandates of Georgia's Quality Basic Education Act of 1985, the GPS were developed in order to pare down the breadth of material covered in Georgia's K-12 curriculum. The GPS differ from the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) utilized previously in Georgia's schools by going into greater depth in content areas rather than superficially covering a large amount of material. The GPS are applicable to the content areas of English Language Arts, Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies. The CRCT and the Georgia High School

Graduation Test (GHS GT) measure how well the students have acquired the content set forth by the GPS.

Home Language Survey (HLS)—Survey given at the Parent Information Center to all students enrolling in a district school. The HLS asks which language(s) the student speaks in the home, the native language(s) of his/her parents, and any language(s) other than English that the student has been instructed in while attending school in another state or country. If the student or parent indicates anywhere on the form a language other than English, then the student is automatically given a Language Assessment Battery (LAB) to see if he/she qualifies for participation in PELL classes.

Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)—K-12 norm-referenced test used by the State of Georgia covering vocabulary, word analysis, reading comprehension, listening, language, mathematics, social studies, science, and sources of information. This is a qualifying test used by the school district for entrance into the gifted program and exit from the ELL program. This test is only given in English, though ELL students are allowed the testing accommodations such as having the test read aloud to them in English and taking the test in a small-group setting (defined as no more than 11 students per testing group). For the mathematics portion, ELL students can receive a testing accommodation which allows them to use scientific calculators on the exam.

L1—refers to the native language spoken by a person. In this research study, the L1 of all participants is Spanish.

L2—refers to an additional language spoken by a person. In this research study, the L2 of all participants is English.

Language Assessment Battery (LAB)—K-12 English proficiency test developed for use in the New York City School System. This test is approved by the state of Georgia as a qualifying test for entrance into and exit from the ELL program. There are four levels to the test (I, II, III, and IV). All students in this research study are required to take the Level III test to exit the ELL program. There are four sections to each test: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. All sections of the LAB with the exception of speaking are administered as a whole-group assessment. An ELL student must reach the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile on the LAB in order to become eligible for exiting the ESOL program. This test is given in English only though the test may be read aloud in English as a testing accommodation.

Limited English Proficient (LEP)—Category used by No Child Left Behind high-stakes testing. LEP students are also known as ESL (English as a Second Language), ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages), and ELL (English language learners). LEP students receive either direct or monitored services from the Program for English Language Learners (PELL). These students form a viable subgroup for the calculation of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) when there are 40 or more LEP students at one school for a full academic year (FAY).

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Testing—an adaptive achievement test created by the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) utilized for the first time in the 2006-2007 school year in the school district in which the research study takes place. The achievement test covers the areas of mathematics, reading, language usage, and science. Each student takes the test on a computer whereby the difficulty of the test is individual and adaptive to each student's individual answers. No two students see the

same test questions. If the student answers questions correctly, the test questions become more difficult. If the student answers questions incorrectly, the test questions become easier. MAP testing occurs three times during the academic year. MAP testing is aligned to the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). MAP is also an accepted qualifying test for placement in the school district's gifted program as well as exiting the district's ELL program. This test is given in written English only. ELL students are afforded NO accommodations for this test even though the scores from this test are now used as a portion of the multi-criterion identification process for the county's gifted and talented program. Previously, ITBS scores were a portion of the identification process and an ELL student's scores could be submitted for gifted identification even if he/she had received accommodations on the test.

Program for English Language Learners (PELL)—State-funded program for ELLs in grades K-12 mandated by Georgia School Law Section 20-2-156 Code 1981, Sec 20-2-156 that was enacted in 1985. PELL is also funded by federal Title III funds which allow local education agencies (LEA) to supplement their state-funded ELL program. PELL is moving toward GPS just as other content areas are. PELL varies from district to district. At the research site in this study, PELL includes supplemental language arts classes offered as a connections class, sheltered social studies, sheltered mathematics, and study skills remediation during extended learning time.

Quality Core Curriculum (QCCs)—Mandated by Georgia's Quality Basic Education Act of 1985, the Quality Core Curriculum provided the content to be covered in all academic areas. The QCCs are now being phased out and replaced with Georgia Performance Standards. However, the social studies area content being assessed by the



CRCT and Georgia High School Graduation Test remains guided by the QCCs rather than the GPS throughout the 2006-2007 academic year.

Sheltered content classes—Classes provided to ELLs at the middle and high school levels that simultaneously address the students' need to learn content and acquire English. ELLs are responsible for passing statewide content area assessments that are given only in English. Students that have been in U.S. schools for less than one academic year are granted a deferment whereby they are only required to take content area assessments (e.g., CRCT) in mathematics. However, as the students enter their second year of U.S. schooling, they must meet the same academic requirements as their native-English speaking peers. Sheltered content classes provide an avenue by which students are exposed to the material while in smaller classes with an instructor trained in ELL methodology and pedagogy. Students work to improve their English proficiency while learning content area material. At the research site in this study, ELLs are able to take sheltered-content math and social studies.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I explore six areas of research that are relevant to this research study: (1) Georgia's history of immigration, (2) deficit theory and resistance, (3) Mexican "internal settler colonialism" and education, (4) Mexican resistance to cultural hegemony in education, (5) White teachers and multicultural students; and (6) transformative critical pedagogy. Each of these areas provides vital historical insight into the academic experiences of today's Latino immigrant student.

#### Georgia's History of Immigration

"...although we have never been a nation of just Black and White, this image—for historic and other reasons—is a difficult one to dislodge" (Nieto, 2004, p. 204).

Historically speaking, Georgia has had a binarist racial composition since Lúcas Vásquez de Ayllón founded the mission outpost of San Miguel de Gualdape in the 1500s (Hudson & Tesser, 1994). However, the categories of Spanish and Native American are not the typical dichotomous racial compositions historically associated with Georgia. Prior to this historic Spanish incursion, Native Americans comprised the population of Georgia. While each Native American epoch (Paleo, Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippian) saw the advent of more Native American tribes, Georgia's population was primarily comprised of Mississippian epoch Yamacraw Native Americans when the Spanish arrived (Jackson, Stakes, Hepburn & Hepburn, 1999). The Spanish exploration of Florida and the ensuing establishment of Saint Augustine as the first permanent European settlement in the United States began to incite jealousy among the English who also sought to establish colonies in the New World (Hudson, 1997). As the English began to pursue this goal, an immense distrust of the Spanish motives in the New World

intensified (London, 2005). The English moved south from James Town, establishing a successful port at Charles Town, Carolina. It is during this time that one begins to see the first true demographic shift in Georgia's history. King George II needed to establish a buffer between the wealthy shipping port of Charles Town and the "Catholic infidels" located to the south in Florida. The Spanish were beginning to make incursions into what is present-day Georgia when they established the city of Saint Mary's, today one of Georgia's southernmost cities. Ayllón had also attempted to establish a Spanish colony in Georgia in 1526, but the colony survived only 33 days before collapsing as many of the settlers were actually slaves from Hispaniola who had been forced to join Ayllón on his journey. Ayllón himself became sick and died during this venture and with no one in charge of the colony, the settlers fled into the surrounding wilderness with some attempting to find their way back to Hispaniola (Jackson et al., 1999).

The Spanish carried out yet another expedition through the South in 1540 when Hernando de Soto and an army of 600 Spanish soldiers moved north from Florida into Georgia while searching for gold. While the Spanish did stay for long periods of time in various chiefdoms throughout Georgia, they did not actually establish their own settlements (Coleman, 1991). De Soto and his men wrote prolifically of the Native American chiefdoms that they encountered, perhaps not realizing that the interaction of the Spanish and Native cultures would eventually lead to the destruction of the Native cultures through disease and greed (London, 2005).

The Spanish were able to establish a colony (the De Luna colony near present-day Chatsworth) in North Georgia in 1549 by utilizing the information gained from De Soto's previous trek through the region. This settlement was meant to be a mission outpost, but

instead it became a military fort occupied by 140 soldiers and 2 Dominican friars (Worth 1998a, 1998b). This colony merged with the Coosa chiefdom in order to combat rebellious Coosa tribe members in present-day Tennessee. After the conflict was over, the Spanish decided to return to Florida, abandoning their post in north Georgia (Worth, 2006).

After the failure of the De Luna colony, the Spanish attempted several more expeditions with none of them being particularly successful. The last exploratory expedition by the Spanish occurred in 1645-1646 when soldiers were sent into southwestern Georgia and southeastern Alabama. The Spanish were again unsuccessful in establishing any sort of permanent settlement and retreated to north Florida. The English also sent exploratory expeditions into north Georgia from their base in Charles Town, but no official English settlement occurred in Georgia until February 12, 1733, when Oglethorpe landed at Yamacraw Bluff.

Unfortunately, many of Georgia's students are under the false impression that Georgia actually began with the arrival of Oglethorpe on Georgia's shores (Hudson & Tesser, 1994). Oglethorpe in actuality represents the beginning of successful *English* (my emphasis) exploration and settlement of Georgia (Jackson, et al., 1999). While Oglethorpe had many motivations for the colony, the three primary reasons for the colony's establishment were: (1) charity as a haven for the worthy poor, (2) economic as a mercantilist outpost of the English crown, and (3) military as a buffer between the Spanish in Florida and the successful port of Charles Town in Carolina (London, 2005). All of the reasons were given in order to obtain a charter from King George II to legally establish the colony, but for the English crown, the economic and military motives held

the most promise (Spalding, 1977). Oglethorpe gathered a crew of 114 men, women, and children in order to set sail for Georgia (Blaine, 1994). After a two-month voyage on the ship *Anne*, the future colonists rested briefly in Charles Town before moving southward toward present-day Savannah (Coleman, 1991). While Oglethorpe sent out an expeditionary team to evaluate the situation, the others stayed behind in Port Royal, Carolina, which was at that time England's southernmost fort (Todd, 1977). The expeditionary force moved seventeen miles up the Savannah River to a location known as Yamacraw Bluff, where they encountered Native Americans. However, these Native Americans were not hostile and within days, the Yamacraw leader Tomochichi and Oglethorpe had struck a friendship (Jackson & Spalding, 1984). Oglethorpe, the colonists, and the English militia and slaves from Carolina began to clear the pine forests in order to create the planned city of Savannah. Oglethorpe desired an "orderly" society—one with planned city squares and one without the vices of alcohol, slavery, and lawyers (Coleman, 1976). It would be the ban on slavery that would cause the greatest consternation among the colonists (Reese, 1973). The vocal group of colonists complaining of Oglethorpe's restrictions was known as the Malcontents. They were relatively wealthy and would have been able to purchase both slaves and land but for Oglethorpe's restrictions. Also at this time, English colonists in Carolina did not have to operate under the same restrictions. Slavery was prolific in the Carolina colony. The Malcontents organized in order to officially protest the restrictions, with the first official public complaint lodged in 1738 (Coleman, 1976). While their protests were not met with immediate action, the Trustees did allow slavery in the Georgia colony beginning in 1750

(Ver Steeg, 1960). This would begin the first importation of slaves from Africa and would rupture the dichotomous White European/Native racial composition of Georgia.

Immigration during the colonial period included predominantly European immigrants and African slaves. The majority of White immigrants came to Georgia due to the availability of inexpensive land which was obtained through both legal and illegal avenues from the Yamacraws (Coleman, 1991). During the Trusteeship period,

an overwhelming majority of Georgia immigrants—more than 3,000 in number—arrived from Europe. Around two-thirds of these pioneers were funded by the Trustees, who offered them a passage across the Atlantic, provisions for one year, tools, and a tract of land in return for their labor. (Marsh, 2006, ¶2)

Many of these “ethnic” settlers began to settle in outposts according to their ethnic identity (Coleman, 1976). The English settled in Savannah, German Salzburger established Ebenezer, and Highland Scots began Darien (Jackson, et al., 1999). There were also other immigrant groups present during the colonial period: Swiss, Moravians, Irish, Italians, Russians, and Spanish and Portuguese Sephardic Jews as well as German Ashkenazic Jews (Laderman, 1996). The separateness of the immigrant communities was not sustainable as one-third of settlers had died by 1752 (Davis, 1976). Much to the Malcontents’ chagrin, many immigrant groups began intermarrying simply in order to survive (Jones, 1992). There were also military events that seemed to gel the Georgia immigrants into a cohesive group, most notably the Battle of Bloody Marsh in 1742. Even Spanish-speaking Sephardic Jews were grouped in with the English as the battle lines were drawn between the Spanish and the English over Georgia’s southern lands.

Oglethorpe's troops defeated the Spanish at the Battle of Bloody Marsh, sending the Spanish into retreat south of Georgia's present-day southern border.

Also during this time period, thousands of African slaves were imported into the colony. As mentioned previously, more than one-third of the colonists had died and as such, the colony's population needed to be bolstered via the importation of slaves. During one phase of the colonial period (1752-1773), "Georgia's colonial population [of slaves] spiraled from an estimated 3,500 in 1752 to around 29,000 in 1773" (Marsh, 2006, ¶7). This upsurge in slave importation countered the decline in White immigration to Georgia during the Seven Years' War in the late 1750s. Due to this war, potential colonists feared making the Atlantic voyage necessary to come to Georgia as well as a general lawlessness in the new colony following the departure of Oglethorpe and the Trustees. Once the war was resolved, immigration began to flourish in Georgia again with colonists moving in from the Carolinas. Interestingly,

Georgia's leaders, fearful of becoming overrun by unruly single white males, battled doggedly to ensure that their preferred brand of settler was encouraged—what Governor James Wright described as 'the Middling Sort of People, such as have Families and a few Negroes.' (Marsh, 2006, ¶10)

Toward the end of the colonial period, many White Georgians had begun to form a collective identity, no longer identifying themselves as British subjects, but rather as Georgians (Jackson, et al., 1999). Through communication with other "American" colonies, Georgians had begun to form an identity that extended beyond Georgia's borders and included a new "American" identity that would be necessary for the American Revolution to occur (London, 2005).

After the American Revolution, immigration to Georgia tapered off to a great extent with the exception of Irish immigration. With the exception of the Irish, most immigrants tended to arrive from western-European nations and did not retain a great deal of their native culture, instead assimilating into the great American melting pot (Mobley, 2006). In some histories, the Irish immigration influx was considered the first non-white voluntary mass migration to the American South, particularly Georgia. Voluntary is a term that can be argued as many scholars (Griffin, 2001; McKinley, Von Koppenfels, & Laczko, 2001; Laxton, 1998; Miller, 1988) assert that many Irish were left no option other than migration due to economic conditions brought by the potato famine as well as a climate of political persecution perpetrated by Great Britain. Others such as Kenny (2003) argue that the Irish could have remained in their native land and in fact, made a conscious decision to move to the United States. In this study, voluntary is used to differentiate this somewhat voluntary Irish migration from the wholly involuntary migration of African slaves to the American South.

While being viewed as non-White, many Irish had the advantage of already being able to speak English when they arrived on U.S. shores. In some ways, the South functioned as a mirror of Celtic society (Quinlan, 2004). Through the use of familiar social hierarchies and a heavy emphasis on religion, many Irish found it easy to relate to their new homeland. However, this is not meant to imply that the integration of the Irish into the South was without difficulty. Our collective memory of the Irish experience has fallen to a romanticized revisionism. Even today, the Irish occupy a somewhat nostalgic place in the history of the American South, particularly Georgia. This mystical place is epitomized by Gerald O'Hara and his family in Margaret Mitchell's (1936) quintessential



Southern novel, *Gone with the Wind*. Mr. O'Hara's character retains his deep love for his native Ireland while still demonstrating a great deal of love for his adopted homeland of Georgia. According to Gleeson (2000), "paradoxically, then, their retention of a strong 'Irishness' actually advanced their integration" into the predominantly White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) culture of the South (p. 8). It was this "transformation from strangers to Southerners" that defined the immigration experience of many Irish (Gleeson, 2000, p. 8).

This nostalgic trip down memory lane serves to erase the tremendous difficulties experienced by many Irish upon their arrival in the United States. For many, they occupied the lowest rung on the economic ladder. For those who were recently arrived, back-breaking menial work met them daily from dawn until dusk. Irish were often hired for dangerous jobs that plantation owners did not want to risk their slaves' health or lives to accomplish. According to Gleeson (2000), the Irish were often made "to do work...that was death on niggers and mules" (p. 66). Perhaps as a justification for treating the Irish in this manner, some members of Southern society argued that the Irish actually occupied a lower caste than African slaves. Whatever the motivation of the native Southerners, many Irish endured the indignity of their jobs in hopes of one day attaining the ideal planter status (London, 2005). In the meantime, the South was ready to welcome the Irish into their midst as "to many natives, the Irish in the South were a valuable part of the economy" (Gleeson, 2000, p. 54).

In Georgia, most Irish chose to move to cities rather than remaining in the backcountry (London, 2005). Savannah, Augusta, and Atlanta were home to significant numbers of Irish immigrants. This tendency to settle in cities was mirrored throughout

the South as the majority of Irish were found in urban areas and the only rural areas in the South with a “significant” Irish population were those along railroad lines or that needed the Irish for public works employment (Gleeson, 2000). In Georgia, there tended to be distinct Irish sections of towns as the Irish neighborhoods provided a sense of security in a foreign land. It was in these neighborhoods that a great deal of politicization took place in the formation of Hibernian societies as well as militias (London, 2005; Gleeson, 2000). Many Irish arrived in America already highly politicized due to their oppressive history with Great Britain. Their close-knit neighborhoods provided further opportunity for them to remain segregated to a certain extent while simultaneously developing social structures (i.e., militias) that would allow them to integrate into the native societal structure.

Just as many of Georgia’s recent immigrants maintain an interest in their homeland, “the Irish southerner remained interested in Ireland on both a personal and national level” (Gleeson, 2000, p. 55). Many Irish maintained contact with Ireland and constantly searched for ways to bring more members of their families to the United States. While keeping one eye on Ireland, the Irish Southerner also kept the other on Southern society. The antebellum period of the United States was marked by heated debates over the issue of that “peculiar institution” of slavery. It was in this argument that Irish Southerners were able to speed their acceptance into mainstream Southern culture. By supporting the South’s argument of states’ rights, the Irish assimilation into Southern society was becoming more complete. There had always been a strange, strained relationship between the Irish and the slaves, mainly due to economic reasons. By not opposing slavery, the Irish were more easily able to climb the Southern social ladder. If slavery were to be eliminated, the Irish were afraid that they would move back

down the social ladder. Also, by sharing the social views of the native Southerners, the Irish were better able to own slaves, which in turn moved the Irish even further up the social ladder. Slavery allowed the Irish an avenue for both financial and societal prosperity. In the eyes of many White Southerners, slavery served as a means for the Irish to be seen as “white” members of society rather than as “Irish.” This is not to imply that there was a distinct societal chasm between all Irish and slaves. In fact, newly arrived Irish continued to work side by side with many slaves.

The dual issues of states’ rights and slavery allowed many Irish to become even more politicized. The antebellum Southern economy was solidly founded on the bedrock of slavery. Due to the South’s dependence on slave labor, the Irish were able to enjoy a greater level of economic freedom and prosperity than they had in their native land (Greenberg, 1998). The issue of states’ rights strengthened the bonds connecting the Irish to the South. Many Irish in the antebellum period connected the South’s antebellum states’ rights arguments to Ireland’s struggles with Great Britain (Gleeson, 2000). This connection allowed for a dualistic identity: the Irish were able to maintain their Irish heritage while simultaneously embracing their “newfound Southernness” (Gleeson, 2000, p. 125). It comes as no surprise, given the Irish struggle against Great Britain, that overwhelming numbers of Southern Irish supported secession (London, 2005).

As the Civil War grew more and more unavoidable, white skin became an important commodity in American society, particularly in the South. Willingness to fight for the South’s cause was also valuable. Many Irish in the South volunteered to fight as members of the Confederate army. For example, Georgia had so many Irish volunteers that both Savannah and Augusta had enough volunteers to form their own companies

(i.e., the Jasper Greens militia from Savannah) (London, 2005). The Civil War proved to be a divisive issue between Northern Irish and Southern Irish. The Southern Irish sympathized to a great extent with the Southern fight for independence through linking it to their own country's struggles with Great Britain. Interestingly, the Northern Irish also used their native land's struggles with Great Britain as motivation for their views on the American Civil War. The Northern Irish did not favor Southern secession as they believed it weakened the United States as a whole. They asserted that a strong United States was necessary to exert pressure on Great Britain to stop persecuting Ireland and that a unified U.S. was vital in any challenge put forth to England.

While the only true vocal opposition to the Irish in the South came courtesy of the Know-Nothing Party of the 1850s, this anti-Irish movement was virtually ignored in the South. However, at the end of the Civil War, the Irish were afraid that anti-Irish sentiments could indeed again arise during Reconstruction. This fear was unfounded as by the end of the Civil War, the Irish integration into Southern society appeared complete. Through their participation in the political process, by being financially able to own slaves, and by taking jobs that others were unwilling to take, the Irish became a part of Southern society. I have to look no further than my own family to see proof of a complete integration into said Southern society.

The largest immigration into Georgia in recent memory has been from Latin America (London, 2005). In a region where separate drinking fountains segregated by race are a not too distant memory, Latino immigration has, at times, confused a South used to dealing with binarist race relations. Spurred by the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games, affordable housing, and the preeminence of carpet manufacturing, poultry

production, and agriculture, many Latinos have made their home in Georgia. During the 1990s, Georgia's Latino population grew more than 300% (Kirp, 2000). The labor stream from Latin America still runs to communities such as Dalton, Athens, Tifton, Vidalia, and Gainesville, with the majority of Georgia's Latino immigrants hailing from Mexico (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005). During the 1980s, Georgia's chicken processing plants began to look to migrant workers from Latin America in order to meet the country's ever-increasing demands (Guthey, 2001). In the poultry plants, migrant workers found more stable, if less safe, employment than they had previously experienced (Griffith, 1995). The wages to be earned in the poultry processing plants also attracted more migrant workers to the region as the poultry work was a more reliable form of employment than following the seasonal crops around the state and the region. These workers became such a staple in poultry processing plants that poultry companies began recruiting them via billboards in Mexico, advertisements placed in Mexican newspapers, and recruiting trips sponsored by the companies (Guthey, 2001).

The 1996 Centennial Olympic Games held in Atlanta also served as a beacon to attract international visitors for many reasons. For many in the Latino community, the Centennial Games provided high-paying jobs without the burden of having to prove one's legal status (Russakoff, 2006). The 1996 Olympics generated such a need for buildings and improved infrastructure that the labor needs simply could not be met by Georgia's legal labor force (Russakoff, 2006). Mainly through word-of-mouth, Latinos began arriving by the thousands looking for work in the years leading up to the Games. Combined with Atlanta's relatively inexpensive housing market, the labor shortage spelled economic prosperity for many Latino immigrants (Hernández-León & Zúñiga,

2003). Many immigrants during this time not only emigrated from Latin American countries, but also from other American states (U.S Census Bureau, 2000). Construction work was readily available not just for Olympic venues, but via the housing boom throughout metro Atlanta and north Georgia. During the 1980s and 1990s, Atlanta also saw the massive growth of another immigrant group, the Northern transplants. Many of these transplants were able to sell their relatively small houses in the northern United States for a great deal of money, move to the South, and afford to build “McMansions” with the profit from their previous houses (Hernández-León & Zuñiga, 2003). This also contributed to the massive house building boom of the 1990s. Along with home construction, associated businesses such as landscaping grew exponentially (Russakoff, 2006).

However, the most dramatic immigration occurred just an hour north of Atlanta, in the mountain town of Dalton. History buffs may associate the town of Dalton with the tremendous destruction it experienced during Sherman’s March to the Sea (Coleman, 1991). Today, however, Dalton is king of carpet (Hernández-León & Zúñiga, 2003). In fact, “practically all domestically manufactured carpet comes from Dalton and nearby communities” (Hamann, 2003, p. 3). In many respects, Dalton has become the model for Latino immigration in Georgia, both as a positive and a negative one (Russakoff, 2006). Dalton has implemented many progressive programs in order to deal with the rapidly changing demographics, but simultaneously xenophobic attitudes remain prevalent. These two extremes are addressed by Suárez-Orozco (1998) as positive attitudes toward immigration representing community renewal and negative attitudes representing community decay.

As the Latino population of both Dalton and Whitfield County grew, local leaders realized that a traditional approach to education would not adequately serve the rapidly growing ELL population in the local schools (Hamann, 2003). Of particular concern was the issue of integrating newcomers into the community (Dentler & Hafner, 1997; Romo, 1997) when there were so few teachers trained in ELL pedagogy and methodology (Varisco de García & Garcia, 1996). The Latino school age population shocked many in the surrounding areas “as Dalton Public Schools’ Hispanic enrollment grew sharply—increasing from less than 1 percent in 1987 to become the first majority Hispanic district in Georgia by 2000-2001” (Hamann, 2003, p. 9). Dalton then embarked on a progressive journey known as the Georgia Project in which local schools were partnered with the Universidad de Monterrey in Mexico. It was through this partnership that Mexican teachers have become employed as teachers in the Dalton Public Schools. The partnership also provides exchange opportunities for American teachers in Dalton to visit Mexico as part of a summer internship that focuses heavily on intensive language instruction and school visits (Hegland, 2005). While this program has been relatively successful, its continuation is jeopardized by lack of federal funding. While some members of Congress like Representative Sanford Bishop (D-GA) see the Georgia project as “turning an immigration lemon into lemonade,” other members do not share these sentiments and instead assert that the Georgia Project encourages illegal immigration (Poole, 2007, p. A1). As immigration has become a top legislative concern in recent months, executives associated with the Georgia Project surmise that their funding cuts are due to heightened political sensitivities regarding projects that might benefit illegal immigrants. While the members of the Georgia Project persist in the fight

for the continuation of their program, only time will tell if this successful program will carry on its initiative to improve the educational outcomes and opportunities for many of Georgia's Latino children.

The Georgia Project's successful initiatives have not expanded beyond the northwest Georgia mountains, and much of the rest of the state's Latino school children continue to languish in toxic educational environments. According to Wainer (2004), "the lack of resources devoted to educating Latinos in emerging immigrant communities is generating negative educational outcomes and de facto segregation in the South" (p. 1). Many school districts in the South are still haunted by the legacy of segregated schools, many of which did not integrate until the early 1970s. The ghost of segregation still lingers in many Southern communities and the sudden increase in Latino population has dredged up many painful memories that many would just as soon forget (C. Green, personal communication, January 11, 2007). Many school systems today are struggling to meet the needs of their newest students in the same way they struggled to meet the needs of newly-integrated student bodies of the 1960s and 1970s. The sudden demographic change that many Southern schools are experiencing has left schools scrambling for resources in order to meet the educational needs of their newest students. Schools are also finding their roles changing in the midst of this demographic shift. Many schools, like the research site in this study, have found that they could not simply address the educational needs of the students, but also needed to address the needs of the family. For example, the research site in this study regularly conducts information sessions regarding topics such as renters' rights, immigration law, federal and state



assistance, and job skills seminars. The school has become somewhat of a “community center” as described by Wainer (2004, p. 3).

Many Americans are unaware that the majority of Latino immigration is occurring in the South (Wainer, 2004). When one thinks of Latino immigration, common locations that one might think of include California, Texas, and the southwestern United States in general. In fact, according to recent U.S. Census Bureau figures (2000), nine of the ten fastest-growing Latino counties in the United States are found in the South. Latino population is surging in counties that previously had little or no Latino population prior to recent years. Years ago, one could not have predicted the dramatic increase in Latino population. Yet today, it is common to have Latino neighbors in many counties of Georgia. Athens, Georgia, is not traditionally thought of as having a large Latino population, but the research site has a predicted Latino enrollment for the 2007-2008 school year of approximately 36% (internal memo, Clarke County School District, February 1, 2007).

This demographic change has led to a number of studies investigating many aspects of these emerging immigrant communities (Bach, 1993; Gouveia & Stull, 1997; Torres, 2000; Murphy, Blanchard, & Hill, 2001; Suro & Singer, 2002). A common recurring theme throughout each of these studies is the U.S. labor shortage for low-skilled jobs and the willingness of new immigrants to fill these jobs. Wainer (2004) posits, “it is no coincidence that the economic boom of the 1990s was accompanied by an immigration boom” (p. 8). Not surprisingly, Latino immigrants to Georgia moved to communities that desperately needed them to fill jobs. According to U.S. Census Bureau (2000) data, the majority of Latino immigrants found work in low-skilled/service jobs.

For example, in Hall County (Gainesville), Georgia, the population was approximately 20 percent Latino in 2000, yet Latinos comprised 90 percent of all workers in Hall County meat processing plants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The same holds true in Athens, Georgia, where this research was conducted. This new immigration has tended to divide communities in half, with industries that rely on immigrant labor promoting immigration and others railing against immigration and the loss of “American” jobs (Engstrom, 2001). Regardless of the political position one takes regarding immigration, federal law dictates that one’s immigration status is not pertinent to receiving an education (*Plyler v. Doe*) and that schools must provide services to those students not proficient in English. According to the Supreme Court ruling in *Lau v. Nichols* (1974),

There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education. Basic English skills are at the very core of what these public schools teach. Imposition of a requirement that, before a child can effectively participate in the educational program, he must already have acquired the skills is to make a mockery of public education. We know that those who do not understand English are certain to find their classroom experiences wholly incomprehensible and in no way meaningful. (cited in Crawford, 1992a, p. 253).

Even with these protections, Wainer (2004) asserts that the integration of Latino immigrants into American educational institutions, particularly in the South, has been “deeply flawed” (p. 9). This, at a time, when the challenge of educating immigrant

students, “particularly those of Latino heritage, in U.S. schools has never been greater” (Nieto, 1999b, p. ix).

Georgia has been noticeably unprepared for the recent demographic shift (Dale, Andretta, & Freeman, 2001). Nowhere has this lack of preparation been more apparent than in the educational sector (Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002). While the mid-1990s saw the schools reacting to the “initial immigration shock,” most schools have moved beyond this preliminary reaction and have improved their educational initiatives concerning Latino students (Wainer, 2004, p. 12). This is not meant to imply that Southern school systems are no longer struggling with how to best serve their Latino immigrant students, but rather that said systems no longer appear to be paralyzed by the demographic shift.

While many Southern school districts do not have Spanish-speaking teachers or teachers trained in ELL methodology, the research site in this study is not afflicted by such problems. In fact, the research site is the only middle school in the district to offer sheltered-content courses for ELL students and is also the only middle school to employ Spanish-speaking ELL teachers. If anything, the research site seems to suffer from an overabundance of services to ELL students: sheltered-content social studies, sheltered-content mathematics, ELL/language arts connections, and ELL extended learning time. Many ELL students receive so many ELL support classes that they are not effectively integrated into the mainstream classroom via their participation in regular education classes.

## English as a Colonial Language

In examining English as a colonial language, we must understand that American culture “not only produced colonialism but was also produced by it” (Pennycook, 1998, p. 19). The spread of the English language has always been a primary component of the United States’ colonial policy (Young, 2003). Wherever the American empire has spread, so too has English. It has been seen as a tool to aid in the spread of American culture (Young, 2001). However, English has not simply been utilized to colonize far-flung holdings beyond the United States’ geographic boundaries, but also limited English proficient immigrants, particularly Mexicans within the boundaries of the United States (Masud-Piloto, 1995). According to Singh (1996), it is this colonial paradigm that continues to define marginalized and subordinated groups (i.e., Latino immigrants) as others. It must be understood that language does not occur in a social and cultural vacuum (Omaggio Hadley, 2000). Teachers as well as society at large should be “looking at the context in which education takes place, and not separating it from issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and also the stratification that we have in society” (Trueba, Takaki, Muñoz, Nieto, Andersen, & Sommer, 1997, p. 173). Society must be willing to admit that “our schools exist in a society in which social and economic stratification are facts of life, where competition is taught over caring and where the early sorting that takes place in educational settings often lasts a lifetime (Nieto, 1995, p. 18).

Language is frequently mentioned in postcolonial studies (Pennycook, 1998; Dmitriadis & McCarthy, 2001; Young, 2001, 2003). Throughout the history of colonization, colonizers have typically forced their language onto the inhabitants of the land they colonized, forbidding those inhabitants to communicate in their native, or L1,

language (Young, 2001). In these colonial systems, colonized inhabitants are punished for any sort of communication in their native language, particularly within the educational setting. Colonizers hoped that this would ensure the eradication of the inferior native language, allowing a more complete domination of colonized people. Writers such as Kenya's Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1989) describe English as a type of "cultural bomb" that continues to erase memories of pre-colonial structures and functions as a means of establishing colonialism in a more dominant manner.

Languages exist and function in a hierarchy, which according to Young (2003), are traditionally thought of in terms of original/superior or copy/inferior (p. 140). In a colonialist structure, the colonial language becomes more powerful, eventually devaluing the native language it is attempting to replace. This virulent structure replicates itself daily in the PELL classroom. The heroes, mores, folkways, customs, holidays, and language of the student's native L1 culture are systematically erased and destroyed by an all-encompassing curriculum that values English and demands its supremacy over other languages. As a PELL teacher, there are times that I feel as though my role in my students' education is an immoral one due to the aforementioned destruction. However, one cannot ignore that an important component of education is language. Every academic measure of achievement (ITBS, CRCT, LAB, ACCESS, MAP, Georgia Writing Assessment) that the colonized will face will be composed in English. English is the medium through which schooling is conducted. The native language is not allowed and eventually becomes confined to home life rather than any situations of power. Tollefson (2000) maintains that "a fundamental purpose of language policies is to manage language conflicts in multilingual situations. In this sense, language policy has

one of the same aims as the utopian dream of a single world language—reducing language conflict (p. 14). This is further evidence that schools are meant to serve the interest of the group by which they are run (McClaren & Farahmandpur, 2000).

It is through this erasure of native language that the colonized begin to lose their native identity, which is eventually supplanted by a colonizer-constructed identity (Young, 2001). The history, language, and customs of the colonized are consumed by the colonizer's dominant culture until only a hybrid of the two differing cultural systems remains (Weaver, Anijar, & Daspit, 2003; Young, 2003). A sense of isolationism floods the colonized as they are inundated with images and schemas that other their native culture. Their isolationism grows to such an extent that eventually the colonized no longer can distinguish nor differentiate between the native L1 culture and the colonizer's L2 culture. At that point, the colonizer has succeeded in its ultimate goal: white minds wrapped in brown skins (Young, 2003). "Schooling" becomes the manner in which previously marginalized, othered segments of society gain access to membership in the colonizer's society, completing the colonizer's desired outcome (Young, 2001).

#### Mexican "Internal Settler Colonialism" and Education

Colonialism and post-colonialism tend to be viewed by most social scientists as phenomena that occur outside of one country's borders and being imposed on the inhabitants of another country (Pennycook, 1994, 1998; Phillipson, 1992; Lynch, 1989). American colonialism tends to be seen in the same light. Due to the overwhelming presence of Mexican participants in this research study, some light must be cast on the uniqueness of this group to the traditional colonial argument. In dealing with the exceptionality of Mexicans in this postcolonial argument, one must first understand the

circumstances that fostered the degree of exclusivity. Mexicans bear the history of forced incorporation of the northern portion of their territories, including their territories' inhabitants, into the United States following the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848 (Zinn, 1999). According to many scholars (Loewen, 1995; Meyer & Sherman, 1995; Zinn, 1999), this war occurred under the guise of manifest destiny, "an obnoxious, arrogant, and obviously false belief that the United States had the 'God-given right' to expand its national borders from the Atlantic to the Pacific" (Masud-Piloto, 1995, p. 56). As a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Mexican government

confirmed United States title to Texas and ceded the huge California and New Mexico territories as well. In return Mexico was to retain everything south of the Rio Grande. The United States agreed to make a cash payment of \$15,000,000 to the Mexican government and to assume \$3,250,000 in claims that United States citizens had against that government. For a total of \$18,250,000—less than one year's budget—Mexico's territory was reduced by half. (Meyer & Sherman, 1995, p. 351)

The ensuing colonization of the Mexican people continues to this day. Falcón (1995) suggests that the distinctive colonization that occurs was not colonization in what she terms "the classic sense," but rather this form of colonization has been deemed "internal settler colonialism" (p. 115). This type of colonialism differs from classical colonialism "in that it entails not the subordination of a distant land, but the conquest and colonization of a contiguous territory" (Falcón, 1995, p. 115). Falcón (1995) also asserts that the "internal settler colonialism of the Mexican people by the United States began at the point of occupation of half of Mexico's national territory" (p. 115).

In a colonial sense, the United States has attempted to subordinate the Mexican population through the American educational system (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2000). Through a thorough examination of this educational system, its flaws and disparities can be seen. Many of these disparities fall along racial lines and are the function of a colonial education (Young, 2001). U.S. educational policy has served to simultaneously segregate Mexicans and assimilate them (Falcón, 1995). The primary weapon of enforcing assimilationist policy has been the curricular content of American (read U.S.) schooling. The educational content of the U.S. educational system centers itself on a Eurocentric worldview (Loewen, 1995). The right to native-language L1 instruction for Spanish-speaking students is not and has not been supported by American society at large as evidenced by support for English only laws (Crawford, 1992b). English is “the de facto official language of the United States and education occurs in that medium” (Falcón, 1995, p. 122). The exclusivity of English continues the colonial education of Mexicans and contributes to their assimilation and conformity to the dominant WASP American culture.

As a byproduct of colonization, the colonizing nation typically imposes its own form of schooling within the colonized land and among the colonized people (Young, 2003). By establishing the colonizer’s form of education as supreme and all-encompassing, the colonizer hopes to further its dominance over its colonies. As mentioned previously, assimilation as a goal becomes imperative as a function of a colonial education. It is through this means that the colonizer gains mental control over its colonies. By establishing a colonial educational structure in schools, the colonizers are stripped of their own indigenous learning structures and are inculcated and



indoctrinated into the learning structures of their oppressors. In doing so, the colonizer's ultimate goal is achieved: the "civilization" of the native (Young, 2003).

Many scholars (Lowen, 1995; Meyer & Sherman, 1995, Zinn, 1999) assert that the basis for this colonial education is founded in the American ideal of manifest destiny (referred to earlier as a contributing factor to the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848), a concept that receives an inordinate amount of attention in Georgia's social studies curriculum (Georgia Department of Education, 2004) as well as American history textbooks at large (Loewen, 1995). The notion of manifest destiny posits that Americans (namely western Euroimmigrants) have a divine right to conquer other peoples. The textbooks used in American classrooms each day both legitimize and justify the divinity of this concept (Loewen, 1995).

The curriculum also puts forth the values of western Euroimmigrants as those to be modeled. This is accomplished through the reverence of western Euroimmigrant heroes and nationalistic policy. For instance, if one examines the ELL curriculum for the state of Georgia, one will find standards indicating that "American culture" should be taught. According to the standards, students will "acquire basic knowledge and understanding of United States' culture, including traditions, customs, and beliefs" (Georgia Department of Education, 2004). Not only are students asked to understand the basic significance of American holidays, but are asked to "explore *traditional* (my emphasis) American games, poems, songs, dances, fables, fairy tales, and nursery rhymes" (Georgia Department of Education, 2004). This is not surprising given Beck & Allexaht-Snider's (2002) observation that from 1995 to 2003, "Georgia has had a state school bureaucracy filled with intolerance for, and short on research-based

understandings of, one of the fastest-growing segments of the state student population” (p. 46). They further conclude that, based on the Georgia Department of Education’s actions, “the purpose of English language learner education is rapid ‘Americanization’ of the immigrant children of Georgia” (Beck & Alleksaht-Snider, 2002, p. 52). According to Georgia’s Quality Core Curriculum, teachers are also to instruct students on how to “function appropriately within school and community settings” and to help students “compare and contrast home culture behavior to American school and community values” (Georgia Department of Education, 2004). This comparison replicates the superiority of American culture while reinforcing the inferiority of the student’s native culture (Pennycook, 1998). The ELL curriculum, which greets all immigrants as their first experience of American schooling, serves to a large extent as an indoctrination and inculcation into teaching them the superiority of American (read WASP) culture to that of their native culture (Young, 2001). Mukherjee (1986) argues that

in ESL (English as a Second Language) the puerile structure of content was not and is not about transmission of skills or critical understanding of concepts. It is geared to receiving situational instructions and learning how to assimilate as an ‘object’ into a structural order, into a value order, into a cultural order, into a linguistic order, and above all, into a racist order. (p. 44)

Spack (1997) also reinforces that argument by stating that English language teaching is based on a belief that the target language culture is regarded as “the norm from which students are deviating” (p. 767). This colonial position also “trumpets the benefits of English over other languages, suggesting that English has both intrinsic (the nature of the language) as well as extrinsic (the function of the language) qualities superior to other

languages” (Pennycook, 1998, p. 137). Phillipson (1992) shares a similar concern over what he terms “linguistic imperialism”: “the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages” (p. 47). The dominant role of English is therefore maintained through the educational structure present in the United States. It is in these educational settings in which students’ native cultures are continuously devalued that painful educational experiences “tend to be the norm rather than the exception when the language or language variety students bring to school is constructed as a problem to be resolved or fixed” (Cummins, 2000b, p. 249).

While progress has most certainly been made in the areas of cultural sensitivity and ELL teaching, there is no doubt major concerns still exist (Pennycook, 2000). When discussing today’s ELL curriculum, “mainstream educational thinkers, particularly in the United States, have tended to draw a bright line of distinction between the established school curriculum and the teeming world of multiplicity that flourishes in the everyday life of youth beyond the school” (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001, p. 2). The incongruity of the student’s lived experience and the educational environment creates a disconnect that further serves as a tool of domination and assimilation (McLaren, 1994). In actuality, two schools exist within each school building, “one which effectively cultivates its mainstream students, while the other merely warehouses its newcomers” (Valdés, 2001, p. 113) with immigrants functioning as “a caste-like minority” (Howe, 1997, p. 74). Valenzuela (1999) agrees,

The ‘track’ within the regular track program subdivides ESL and non-ESL youth, creating a ‘cultural track’ that separates Spanish-speaking from English-speaking

students. Youth in the former program are destined to be shunted into regular-track classes; ESL honors courses do not exist. Thus, after acquiring fluency in the English language, ESL youth typically experience only horizontal movement. (p. 31)

In many instances, these newcomers perform at a lower level than their native peers because they are served at a lower level (Valdés, 2001, Valenzuela, 1999; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). Mexicans and Mexican-Americans can put forth “a concerted effort to foster full academic integration and guarantee equality of access to instructional opportunity” (McCarthy & Willis, 1995, p. 82). Mexicans and Mexican-Americans must continue to “make salient connections between knowledge and power” (McCarthy & Willis, 1995, p. 83), while also acknowledging that the “organization of schooling has been historically implicated in the devaluation of the Spanish language, Mexico, and all things Mexican” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 27). Deculturalization as described by Spring (1997) must also be confronted and evaluated. In doing so, the dual school system described by Valdés (2001) will gradually erode and disappear (Dimitriadis & McCarthy, 2001).

We must understand that classrooms are not simply isolated spaces, but rather “sociopolitical spaces that exist in a complex relationship to the world outside” (Pennycook, 2000, p. 91). However, if American society and education are truly committed to democracy, according to Macdonald (1995), “there is no alternative but to respect the individual in his/her cultural difference and provide for each person’s development through his/her life history and unique characteristics” (p. 134). Until we

decolonize the educational experience of Mexican students, this alternative is doomed to fail.

### White Flight, Urban America, and Educational Implications

Urban America provides different representations for different people. On one hand, it represents an escape from the provinciality of small-town America, providing opportunities for the establishment of a better way of life (Haymes, 1995). On the other hand, urban America represents exclusion from civic participation (M. Stakes, personal communication, October 19, 2006). A third context for understanding urban America is via the context created by the unemployment, low wage work, and lack of housing typically found there (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilis, 2005). Regardless of the context one adopts to view urban America, this environment has created a unique way of life for its inhabitants.

An important component of urban America is its institutions of education. The educational landscape of America's urban centers has changed tremendously in the last two generations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). The exodus of white Americans from urban centers has drastically impacted its schools (Kruse, 2005). Prior to the 1960s, one would find that "major urban school districts had enrolled a heavily white, ethnic, working class student population" (Carlson, 1998, p. 280). The primary goal of educating these students was in preparation for manual labor employment after high school (Willis, 1977). In many ways, Athens-Clarke County and its schools are classified as urban in many respects. While the physical location of the school is suburban, the school's population has been described as urban as well as poverty-stricken (Partners for a Prosperous Athens, 2007). In fact, Athens-Clarke County is currently classified as one

of the five poorest U.S. counties its size (with a population of between 100,000 and 125,000) with the other four being counties located along the Texas-Mexico border (Partners for a Prosperous Athens, 2007).

Athens-Clarke County’s educational attainment as a whole ranks below the state average. The following table illustrates several educational indicators:

Table 2: Educational Data Comparing Clarke County Schools and Schools Throughout the State of Georgia

	<b>Athens-Clarke County</b>	<b>State of Georgia</b>
Overall graduation rate	60.5%	69.4%
Dropout rate (9 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade)	8.1%	5.0%
Absent from school more than 15 days	14.9%	10.6%
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade CRCT scores (meets or exceeds state standards)		
Reading	61.0%	83.0%
English	66.0%	80.0%
Mathematics	54.0%	69.0%
Social Studies	74.0%	85.0%
Science	60.0%	74.0%
11 <sup>th</sup> grade Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT) (meets or exceeds state standards)		
English	91.0%	95.0%
Mathematics	89.0%	92.0%
Social Studies	78.0%	84.0%
Science	64.0%	68.0%
SAT scores (average)	989	989
ACT scores (average)	19.1	20.0

(Matt Bishop, The University of Georgia’s Initiative on Poverty and the Economy, 2006)

Today’s classroom differs from that described previous by Carlson (1998) as heavily “white ethnic” (p. 280). According to Dimitriadis & McCarthy (2001), “it is now

not unusual to encounter classrooms in which the minority child is Anglo-American and in which English is effectively supplanted by Spanish, Armenian, Chinese, Korean, or Ebonics” (p. 5). This phenomenon has been occurring in Georgia since desegregation (Kruse, 2005). At the beginning of white flight, White Georgians abandoned urban centers, leaving schools and other institutions to Black Georgians, who at that time were the dominant minority. In recent years, an anomalous occurrence has happened, particularly in Georgia’s urban centers. While Whites are no longer abandoning urban centers as places to live (i.e. Atlantic Station in Atlanta), they are most certainly abandoning public schooling as an educational opportunity for their children (Kruse, 2005). In fact, urban areas of Atlanta and Athens have seen a gentrification of predominantly minority neighborhoods as Whites rush to reclaim downtown areas (Kruse, 2005). However, when the closing on the house is completed, Whites are not rushing to enroll their children in the nearest public school. Rather they are choosing private academies whose rolls typically reflect people of a like color and socioeconomic status (Kruse, 2005).

For instance, if one examines U.S. Census data for Athens-Clarke County, Georgia, one finds that its racial composition is 64.9% Caucasian, 27.3% African-American, and 6.3% Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). In the census, the entire county is classified as an urban area. Athens-Clarke County is somewhat unique in that the county and city unified their governments in 1990 and continues to operate under a consolidated government framework. Therefore, when one refers to any statistical or demographical data, there is no distinction given to Athens as a city and Clarke as a county. Yet when one looks at the public school demographical data, the school system’s

racial composition is as follows: 23% White, 56% African American, and 15% Hispanic (Holloway, 2006). This is not indicative of the racial compositions of the state's K-12 school system as a whole. If one examines the state's educational racial composition, one sees that Whites comprise 48% of the public school system participants, with African Americans comprising 37% and Hispanics comprising 8% (Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2006). This same trend is not observed if one examines the private school situation in Athens-Clarke County. Ten private schools operate within the geographic boundaries of the county (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Of those, the lowest percentage of white students is 91% (L. James, personal communication, July 1, 2006). These statistics again illustrate that while Whites are no longer abandoning urban centers as places to live, they have most certainly abandoned public schools as a place to educate their children. While this is not confined to urban and suburban areas of Georgia, it has come to heavily impact these areas' school population and level of local support.

As a result of white flight, one might assume that minorities now have more control of local schools as they are the majority shareholders of these institutions. However, it is in these urban centers that minorities are disempowered most (Carlson, 1998). According to Carlson (1998),

African Americans and Hispanics were drawn to America's major urban areas because they were seeking 'space' within a highly oppressive society—space to assume control of their own institutions, and thus reclaim those institutions from the control of a repressive white power structure. (p. 282)

In effect, the state has neutralized the minority power concentrated in urban areas via basic skills reform movements and educational excellence initiatives (Shriberg &



Shriberg, 2006; Valenzuela, 2005). By being forced to comply with state funding guidelines and procedures as well as teaching to state-mandated tests, “local or community control of urban schools is more formal than substantive or real” (Carlson, 1998, p. 283). With the additional threat of state takeover of failing schools, the move by African Americans and Latinos to claim the schools is effectively neutralized (Valenzuela, 2005).

Once again, minorities are rendered voiceless in the educational process of their own children (Haymes, 1995). This lack of voice doubly strikes the Latino community in urban areas of Georgia and throughout the nation. More often than not, Latino parents have not been subjected to the same colonial discourse (as they have not attended U.S. schools) that their children have and are therefore unable to speak out against the machine that threatens to consume their children and their way of life (Young, 2001).

#### Deficit Theory and Resistance

By examining the assimilationist position of the American educational system through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can better understand that schools have functioned as “agencies that reproduce, ensure, and perpetuate the control of the dominant group” (Gutek, 2004, p. 225). The educational system continues to maintain “white patriarchal privilege—a privilege inextricably bound up with nationalism, imperialism, and the state” (McLaren, 1994, p. 278). Nor can one deny the fact that our education system functions to maintain capitalism as a viable economic and political structure in this country via a vicious cycle of social class reproduction as “schools and the people in them are not passive mirrors of an economy, but instead are active agents in the process of reproduction” (Mickelson, 1987, p. 84). Our schools present what Galeano (2000) deems

the “banquet,” with plenty for all to partake, when in actuality the banquet masquerades as another event which is inherently unequal and is utilized to further maintain social class status. In fact, it is

our emphasis on equality of opportunity [that] is seen primarily as an ideology used to support existing structures of inequality and to provide a rationale for the upgrading of the occupational structure, which is essential to the continued viability of our capitalist system. (Milner, 1972, p. 16)

This is a fact that is not lost on students. Adolescents are much more perceptive than most adults believe (Illich, 1996; Oldfather & Thomas, 1998; P. Oldfather, personal communication, January 23, 2007). They are also easily able to discern underlying motives (Takanishi, 2004). The motive of social reproduction is clear to them:

Many students, especially those who are poor, intuitively know what schools do for [and to] them. They school them to confuse process and substance. Once these become blurred, a new logic is assumed: the more treatment there is, the better are the results; or, escalation leads to success. The pupil is thereby ‘schooled’ to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new. (Illich, 1996, pp. 23-24)

Valenzuela (1999) concurs, “They [the students] oppose a schooling process that disrespects them; they oppose not education, but *schooling*” (p. 5). One cannot deny that the purpose of academic social reproduction is to maintain a Eurocentric dominance in American society (McLaren, 1992). Frequently, the attempt to maintain this dominance is via a policy of assimilation targeted at minority students (McLaren & Faramandapur,

2000). The assimilationist position implies that Latino/a students, and all students of color, are somehow deficient. In order to remove the deficiency, the students must be remade in the likeness of WASP culture. According to San Miguel and Valencia (1998),

Deficit thinking refers to the notion that students (particularly of low-income, racial/ethnic minority background) fail in school (e.g., perform poorly on standardized tests) because such students and their families have internal defects, or deficits, that thwart the learning process. For example, this thinking maintains that Mexican American students who experience school failure do so because of limited educability, poor motivation, and inadequate familial socialization for academic competence. Deficit thinking is founded on racial and class bias that ‘blames the victim,’ rather than examining how schools are structured to prevent students from learning. (pp. 342-343)

This model of “deficit-thinking” continues to plague students in American classrooms today (Flores-González, 2002). Unfortunately, this view is affirmed during many teacher education programs that fail to combat the cultural deficit model that continues to dominate many educational institutions and subjugates minority students (Delpit, 1995). Nieto (1997) posits,

Teacher education programs...have been mired in assumptions about the necessity for assimilation and the role of schools as the standard bearers of a traditional and unchanging canon. In many teacher education programs, students of dominated cultures have been viewed as walking sets of deficits rather than as having cultures, languages, and experiences that could be helpful in their own learning and that could enrich the curriculum of all youngsters. (p. 187)

Not only does this limit what the teacher brings ideologically to the classroom, but it also limits what she believes her students are capable of doing and achieving in the classroom.

Too often, educators

perpetuate the old dangerous myth of ‘cultural deprivation’ among poor children of color. This myth serves only to have middle-class teachers ‘feel sorry’ for ‘those kids,’ resulting in minimal demands for high-quality work and low expectations for academic success....Teachers are not viewing their students as real people who are complex individuals with potential for great talent and human weakness. (Katz, 1996a, p. 77)

This same rhetoric finds its way into American educational policy that maintains as its primary goal to reproduce the social classes in that Latinos will continue to occupy the lower rungs of American society (McLaren, 1995b). In fact, “Latino students face teachers who perceive them through the stereotypes of ‘gang-banger,’ within a system of tracking that places them as non-native speakers of English in the bottom rung” (Katz, 1996a, p. 83). Also, these students are frequently labeled, and therefore regarded, as “‘limited English proficient’ rather than ‘Spanish dominant’ or as potentially bilingual” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 173). It is through this lens that “their fluency in Spanish is construed as a ‘barrier’ that needs to be overcome” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 173). This barrier is most often seen in terms of Adequate Yearly Progress (Valenzuela, 2005) in which the students’ lack of English abilities hurts the school’s ability to reach AYP status.

## Mexican Resistance to Cultural Hegemony in Education

As previously established, the Mexican community functions as an internal settler colony of the United States and as such must begin the process of decolonization (Falcón, 1995). The primary means by which Mexicans are kept subordinate is through the asymmetrical power relations perpetuated by the American educational system (McLaren, 1995a). By using the educational system as a weapon to assimilate a people, Mexicans have effectively lost their right to self-determination (Masud-Piloto, 1995). It is imperative that Mexicans turn their eyes inward and examine their colonial past (Young, 2003). They must utilize the discontentment bred during their colonial education and shape for themselves a new identity apart from that given to them by their colonizers (Young, 2001). They must in effect establish a *reconquista* movement, not to violently take back land or territory, but to take back their language, customs, and identity that were taken from them so long ago (Falcón, 1995). Only in doing so are the colonized able to discard the harmful effects of their colonial education (Young, 2001).

Mexicans must *reconquistar sus voces* (reconquer their voices) in society at large, but with particular rapidity in matters of education (Young, 2003). They must demand a shift from the functional literacy and higher-order curriculum imposed throughout the nation to a “democratic-progressive discourse [that] would reconceptualize the curriculum around notions of ‘critical literacy’” (Carlson, 1998, p. 285). To further flesh out this notion of a new discourse, Carlson (1998) claims that the “discourse should suggest a capacity for discursive reflection on one’s own identity formation with a culture characterized by struggle and change along a number of axes, including class, gender, race, sexuality, etc.” (p. 285). Others such as Cummins suggest that by providing a

multicultural education, society “can promote the cultural emancipation and social amelioration of minority youth” (cited in McCarthy, 1990, p. 51). In promoting an emancipatory multiculturalism, society would “foster the universal respect for the individual ethnic history, culture, and language of the plurality of students found in American schools” and this would therefore “have a positive effect on individual minority self-concepts” (McCarthy, 1990, p. 51). In providing this type of curriculum, teachers could combat the dissonance and alienation that Mexican students have experienced as a result of their colonialist education (Falcón, 1995). Regardless of the structure ultimately chosen in this fight, a new educational educational structure must be chosen, one that unites those previously isolated by colonialist policy (Young, 2001).

Mexicans must also be willing to recognize the political nature of language itself.

Dua (1994) argues that

it must be realized that language is basically involved with class, power, and knowledge. Unless the newly emerging classes...organize themselves into counter-hegemonic struggle and fight for a different political, social, and cultural arrangement of power and knowledge, they will not only fail in constraining the expanding and strengthening hold of English but also contribute to the marginalization of the languages and cultures. They will thus betray the cause of both the language and cultural renaissance and the destiny of [hu]mankind. (p. 133)

Mexicans must also argue that the use of native language in the educational setting is their right. According to Tollefson (1991), “a commitment to democracy means that the use of the mother tongue at work and in school is a fundamental human right” (p. 211).

Another avenue for change is what Pennycook (1998) terms “postcolonial performativity.” In this notion, Pennycook advocates a political understanding of the role of English in the world as well as how it is used and changed. Canagarajah (1999) discusses a similar idea in which a political understanding is required, while simultaneously demanding a contextual understanding of English, as well. If one follows the advice of both Pennycook and Canagarajah, one will be better able to understand and deconstruct the appropriation of the English language contextually, allowing Mexicans to further dismantle the colonial structure present in the schools (Falcón, 1995).

Mexicans must also begin a process of decolonizing their identities (Young, 2003). Identity is not simply checking a box to describe the color of one’s skin (Dutro, Kazemi, Balf, 2005; Salaita, 2005). For too long, the colonial structure of the United States has been allowed to dictate what identity is for all people, not simply Mexicans (Zinn, 1999). Simón Bolívar, the great liberator of Latin America, faced the same challenge in 1819 when he was given the task of integrating a set of people “best characterized by their racial and cultural mixture” (Masud-Piloto, 1995, p. 55). Bolívar exhorted his fellow *criollos* to consider their complex identities:

Let’s keep in mind that our people are neither European nor North American, more a composite of Africa and America than an outgrowth of Europe, for even Spain ceases to be European by its African bloodline, its institutions, its character. It is impossible to determine properly what human family we belong to. Most Indians have been annihilated; the European is mixed with Indians and Africans. Born in the same womb of foreign fathers differing by blood and origin, we also

differ according to skin color. This difference has repercussions of transcendental proportions. (cited in Masud-Piloto, 1995, p. 55)

Imagine the identity crisis that occurs for all Latino students when they enter the doors of American schools. Self-definition becomes a swirling sea of confusion, buffeted by the need for definition by the educational system:

Migration to the United States changes the ways Latin Americans define themselves and others define them. A girl growing up in El Salvador may have a strong sense of her national history and land. When she emigrates to the United States, she is suddenly called ‘Latina’ or ‘Hispanic’ by school officials, government workers, classmates. For the first time in her life, she becomes a ‘minority,’ a term meaning ‘less than,’ the victim of racial and ethnic discrimination. (Katz, 1996b, p. 606)

When one reads the words of Bolívar and Katz, one can see why the label “Hispanic” (as classified by the U.S. Census Bureau does not begin to do justice to the identity of a people with such a varied history and culture. Mexican and Mexican-American students have a distinct immigration experience in that some students’ families *became* “American” when a geopolitical boundary was redrawn (Meyer & Sherman, 1995). Others have crossed what can be considered an arbitrary boundary decided more than a century ago by politicians (Falcón, 1995). As teachers, we see many of these students actively seeking an identity that means something to them or one that allows them to move through or out of the educational system depending on their desires.



## White Teachers, Multicultural Students

No longer can U.S. society define race relations in terms of Black and White. This simplistic, binarist, reductionist view no longer holds true in today's diverse society (Nieto, 2004). Nieto (2004) admits that "although we have never been a nation of just Black and White, this image—for historic and other reasons—is a difficult one to dislodge" (p. 204). While classrooms across the country are becoming more culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse, the teaching force in the United States, and Georgia in particular, remains overwhelmingly White (Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2006). In fact, 4 out of 5 teachers is White, with Latino teachers comprising less than 1% of certified PK-12 teachers in Georgia (Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2005).

White voices must become a part of the multicultural debate (Nieto, 2004; McLaren, 1995b, 1997). For Nieto (2004), the absence of White voices from the multicultural education discussion is alarming. Whiteness itself must be addressed because in many instances, Whiteness is defined as the norm against which ethnic minorities are measured (McKenna, 1997). Simply using the term "minority" implies an inferiority or deficiency when measured against Whites (Valenzuela, 1999). Nieto (1999a) suggests that in order to include Whites in the multicultural discussion requires that we begin by "defining Whites as 'ethnics' who have their own histories and identities" (p. xiii). In failing to do so, "it is too easy to characterize Whites as normal and others as 'different' or 'exotic'" (Nieto, 1999, p. xiii). Nieto (1999) argues that it is *particularly* crucial for White teachers to be involved because they [are] needed to reflect on what it means to be teachers of African American, Latino, Asian, and

American Indian students; They [are] needed to consider what it means to be *both* White and multicultural and *both* White and anti-racist. (p. xiii)

Whiteness is something that is unavoidable for the White teacher and she must be willing to confront it as McLaren has:

My whiteness (and my maleness) is something I cannot escape no matter how hard I try. Early economic hardship cannot eradicate my whiteness because as Mike Dyson notes, there is always a ‘negative culpability’ on the part of whites, in the form of pleasure that some poor whites derive from not being black. Poor whites (whites in general) still occupy a privileged space on the comparative racial taxonomy. In pursuing these questions, in living my own life as a traitor to whiteness, I cannot become lazy by failing to interrogate the epistemological, political, and ethnical assumptions of my own practice. If all whites are racists at some level, then we must struggle to become anti-racist racists. We must always rethink our positionalities, platforms, and affiliations, without defaulting the main game, which is to resist and transform the market system based on the maximization of corporate profits. After all, it was this system that enslaved millions of Africans in the United States and still disproportionately exploits people of color worldwide. (cited in Fischman, 1999, p. 2)

McLaren (1997) has also explained that “whiteness has located itself in those discourses of the public and popular in such a way (whiteness is everywhere and nowhere) that our definition of the normal and the commonsensical has been colonized” (p. 46). It is precisely through this normalization of Whiteness that othering occurs and Whiteness becomes invisible. Therefore, Whiteness as a normal hegemonic construct must be

eradicated. This represents the goal of critical multiculturalism: “A critical multiculturalism foregrounds *whiteness* as an ethnic category parasitic on *blackness* so that whiteness ceases to serve as an invisible norm against which we measure the worth of other cultures” (McLaren, cited in Steinberg, 1995, p. 141). We must identify Whiteness as “a cultural disposition and ideology linked to specific political, social, and historical arrangements” (McLaren, 1997, p. 8). For if multicultural education is to truly be effective, it must challenge the “white, Anglo, heterosexual male of bourgeois privilege” (McLaren, 1997, p. 214).

As America’s teaching force hopefully becomes more diverse and more accurately reflects the demographics of our students, teachers of all races and nationalities must be willing to argue for and facilitate change from within (Casas, Furlong, Solberg, & Carranza, 1990). Unfortunately, that has not happened frequently during the course of American education, but rather “the professional educational community has largely responded to our crises with characteristic opportunism, timidity, and accommodation, exercising their skills to meet the demands of the dominant political forces” (Purpel, 1999, p. 188). Purpel (1989) also argues that teachers must possess a self-reflective attitude if they are to affect change:

As educators we must also confront ourselves as both oppressor and oppressed. We must have the courage not only to examine the nature and impact of culture but also to consider how we as individuals reflect the values and norms of the culture. As educators we often are the system, even as we are both its cause and effect. (p. 63)

This is certainly not meant to suggest that educators alone can deconstruct the colonial structures, but that while bearing some responsibility for the continued existence of colonial structures, they must also be actively engaged in its dismantling.

### Transformative Critical Pedagogy

“Defining critical pedagogy is not easy; however, living it is harder”  
(Wink, 2005, p. 68).

According to Apple (1999), educational knowledge originates from the dominant culture of a society; therefore, education can never be neutral. Due to its lack of neutrality, schooling functions to legitimize the cultural forms that the dominant culture deems as desirable. As education is a political process, there are inevitably winners and losers, with those students who are not of the dominant culture typically losing. For those students not of the dominant culture, they experience a great deal more vulnerability to the potentially harmful effects of being educated in a society that considers them to be a minority or inferior in comparison to those belonging to the dominant culture. Everything from administrative decisions to the setup of the school day to the classes that are offered favors those students from the dominant cultural background. For many of the students in this study, subjugation throughout their school day is a common occurrence. Critical pedagogy plays an important role in stemming this tide of social injustice by “demanding social justice and educational equality for all participants” (Kincheloe, 2004). One of the ways that teachers are able to accomplish this is by becoming researchers of their own students (Kincheloe, 2004). This project has accomplished a great deal for me: I have been better able to understand the problems, challenges, and struggles of my students more clearly than ever before. By truly listening to their concerns in their own words, I have been moved to levels of empathy and action

that I never dreamed possible. By researching with my own students, I have moved beyond a superficial understanding of their struggles. No longer can my students' experiences remain within the confines of the school building, but must be disseminated to the world beyond the school walls so that my students' voices may live beyond this repressive environment. By using a transformative critical pedagogical theoretical framework, both my students and myself have gained a greater level of understanding regarding the political nature of our school and the power plays that occur daily which privilege some students while subjugating others.

Critical pedagogy also attempts to illuminate the experiences of those who usually do not inhabit the spotlight, rather remaining on society's sidelines. Teachers who affirm a critical pedagogy seek those voices that have previously been excluded from the larger conversation while seeking to unsilence those who have been silenced (Weis & Fine, 2005). Through this inclusion, one can better understand two vital components of critical pedagogy: resistance and agency. Resistance is a normal reaction to subjugation in any form. However, while resistance is a critical piece of the puzzle, we cannot allow either our students or ourselves to remain in this stage forever. Once teachers themselves have reached a level of agency, they must then help their students move beyond resistance to agency so that their voices are heard from the sidelines while simultaneously allowing them to move from the margins into the mainstream. This transition from resistance to agency is especially important because many times, students have become so oppressed by the dominant culture that they begin to see the world, and themselves, through the oppressors' eyes (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 73). Cummins (1984, 1989, 1994, 1996, 2000a) discusses this dualistic nature of critical pedagogy, resistance, and agency, as having dual

possibilities of oppression and liberation. It is through his transformative critical pedagogy that we begin to see the possibility of the latter in our classrooms. We must heed the dual purposes that transformative critical pedagogy can provide. By incorporating both critical pedagogy as well as multicultural education, transformative critical pedagogy has the ability to empower students to move beyond their current situations. Gay (1995) considers multicultural education and critical pedagogy to be “mirrors” of each other: “The ultimate purpose of both [multicultural education and critical pedagogy] is to empower students and transform schools and society for greater freedom, equality, and justice within the contextual realities of cultural pluralism” (Gay, 1995, pp. 181-182). Cummins (2001a, 2001b, 2001c) moves transformative critical pedagogy even further by demanding that linguistic incorporation be a part of the framework. This is vital as this provides what Pennycook (1994) calls “the framework of critical pedagogy and critical language awareness” (p. 297). By working within a transformative critical pedagogy framework, one is able to view schools “not as sites where a neutral body of curricular knowledge is passed on to students”, but rather as “cultural and political arenas within which various political, cultural, and social forms are engaged in constant struggle” (Pennycook, 1994, p. 297). This argument by Pennycook (1994) lends itself to Apple’s (1999) previously mentioned argument regarding the apoliticalness of schooling. Pennycook (1994) posits that language does not occur in a vacuum either and that linguistic inequality undergirds the crux of educational inequity. Pennycook’s (1994) argument also brings us closer to the heart of transformative critical pedagogy, what Fairclough (1992) calls “critical language study” (p. 7). According to Fairclough (1992), critical language study is “an orientation towards language [that]

highlights how language conventions and language practices are invested with power relations and ideological processes which people are often unaware of” (p. 7). All of these cultural, social, and political forms combine to form Cummins’ (1996) concept of empowerment. Cummins (1996) describes empowerment in a top-down formula. As teachers we should not expect to empower our students without first empowering ourselves. After reading Cummins’ work, I am surprised that his work has not been a more central focus in our curriculum studies program as his notion of empowerment seems to lie at the heart of this program: the search for social justice and empowerment of our students and our society through the empowerment of ourselves. Perhaps this is not terribly surprising as Wink (2005) declares that “Cummins’ framework is vastly underrated and underused” (p. 112). As Kincheloe (2004) has stated, “there is not one critical theory” (p. 48), and Cummins’ work seems to have been lost among other more dominant voices in the field, such as McLaren and Giroux. However, Cummins’ gentle exhortations toward cultural and linguistic empowerment and equality may be more palatable, if less grandiose, than McLaren’s call for destruction. Yet even McLaren (1995a) advocates the inclusion of critical pedagogy into multicultural education because “multiculturalism without a transformative political agenda can be just another form of accommodation to the larger social order” (p. 42). Cummins, too, combines multicultural and critical education to constitute a transformative critical pedagogy that does not allow one to stay in the same place. One is forced to move beyond oneself and view the political role that one plays in society. It is the marriage of multicultural education and critical pedagogy that demands that our educational practices

set out to imperil the familiar, to contest the legitimizing norms of mainstream cultural life, and to render problematic the common discursive frames and regimes upon which ‘proper’ behavior, comportment, and social interaction are premised. Together, they [multicultural education and critical pedagogy] analyze extant power configurations and unsettle them when such configurations serve to reproduce social relations of dominance. (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995, p. 7)

It is this pedagogy that potentially provides for a transformative, rather than traditional, education. It is also this pedagogy that seeks to function as an emancipatory tool through the empowering of previously subjugated people. By exposing the political and social forces that attempt to dominate certain sections of society, empowerment becomes a real possibility for those previously dominated. One way that empowerment becomes possible is through the realization that language, like education, is not neutral. Our language defines who we are. This is a constant refrain in many of the interviews and journaling experiences I conducted with my students: “*Spanish is who I am. It’s my language.*” It is an inseparable part of one’s being. Cummins (1996) recognizes this and elevates linguistic awareness as a central tenet of empowerment. Simultaneously, Cummins (1989) demands that we recognize empowerment as an examination of the power that one currently possesses as well as an analysis of how one uses one’s power. It is through this analysis that one begins to negotiate his/her identity (Cummins 1996). Education is a central component in the development and negotiation of one’s identity. As Freire notes, “The process of learning is inseparable from individual empowerment and social change” (cited in Kincheloe, 2004, p. 73). Steinberg & Kincheloe (1997) maintain that this learning process is typically difficult as “production and transmission



of knowledge is always a struggle” (cited in Kincheloe, 2004, p. 56). In many instances, the dominant culture of schooling has subsumed the identities of the subjugated culture to the extent that students have become oppressed to such a degree that they have begun to see the world (and themselves) through their oppressors’ eyes (Kincheloe, 2004, p. 73). This too becomes a frequent refrain in the students’ interviews and journals. They have adopted the identities of the dominant culture that tells them they are worthless, dumb, and dirty. Freire (1970) identifies this adoption as “cultural invasion” and describes the process in this way:

In cultural invasion it is essential that those who are invaded come to see their reality with the outlook of the invaders rather than their own; for the more they mimic the invaders, the more stable the position of the latter becomes. For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convicted of their intrinsic inferiority. Since everything has its opposite, if those who are invaded consider themselves inferior, they must necessarily recognize the superiority of the invaders. (p. 151)

However, all hope is not lost. Cummins (1996), like Giroux (1991), sees the potentially destructive nature of schooling as having the dual possibilities of both oppression and liberation. Cummins (1984) argues that the power relations between dominant and minority groups “appear to exert a major influence on school performance” (p. 5).

Usually resistance to cultural invasion manifests itself in the educational arena in one of two ways: resistance whereby the dominated student attains academic excellence (Zanger, 1994), or whereby the dominated student withdraws completely from the educational arena by dropping out (Darder, 1991). The goal of transformative critical

pedagogy is to lessen the possibility of oppression while increasing the potential for liberation.

Cummins' (2001) concept of empowerment focuses on the individual at first, rather than the larger societal group, as he argues that the individual must first become empowered before s/he is able to empower others around them. Self-perception plays a large role in the concept of empowerment. If one perceives herself as powerless, she is that. She cannot control how others view her, but she is more than able to control her self-perception. In its applicability to schools, Cummins (1996) insists that both teachers and students have vitally important information and histories to bring to the transformative critical pedagogy model of empowerment.

One component of Cummins' (1996) empowerment framework centers on what he calls "coercive and collaborative relations of power" (p. 14). According to Cummins (1996), "coercive power relations refer to the exercise of power by a dominant group (or individual or country) to the detriment of the subordinated group (or individual or country)" (p. 14). Coercive power relations assume that there is a finite amount of power in the world and that the more that one group has that power, the less power is left for other groups. From the coercive power relations viewpoint, the dominant group views the subjugated group as being inferior and deserving of their lower societal status. In turn, by rating the subjugated group as lower, the dominant group is automatically elevated to a superior position in relation to the aforementioned subjugated group. However, collaborative power relations "operate on the assumption that power is not a fixed pre-determined quantity but rather can be *generated* in interpersonal and intergroup relations" (Cummins, 1996, p. 15). It is through this generation of power that an

individual has the potential to become empowered and change not only his/her social standing, but the societal standing of his/her group. A key tenet of collaborative power relations is that the power is shared among the collaborative individuals of a group or society. Cummins (1996) deems collaborative power relations to be “*additive* rather than *subtractive*. Power is *created with* others rather than being *imposed on* or *exercised over* others” (p. 15).

Empowerment in the educational setting occurs through the establishment of collaborative power relations. When an environment of collaboration is developed, students are better able to nurture the necessary abilities to experience educational success. They buy in to the educational agenda as they see the potential benefit for themselves. As a member of a collaborative environment, the students can move beyond insecurities about their identity as their identities have already been validated through the students’ participation in the creation and sharing of power. They have become valued members of the classroom and can progress to true learning. They have become stakeholders in their own education and are able to see the potential rewards related to academic success. These collaborative power relations are essential for establishing what Hall (2001) deems a “community of learners.”

This is not meant to imply that this is an easy process for either the teachers or students involved. Negotiation of identities in the classroom can, in fact, be a perilous proposition. First, one must acknowledge that our identities are not fixed, but rather dynamic entities that have many facets to their composition. Cummins (1996) notes that:

There are multiple facets to our identities, some of which are difficult or impossible to change (e.g. gender, ethnicity) while other facets may be more

malleable or subject to modification as a result of our experiences (e.g. core values, political affiliation, sense of self-worth in relation to intelligence, academic achievements, talents, attractiveness, etc.). (p. 16)

It is also important to note that the negotiation of identities is not only occurring with the students, but with the teachers as well. It is through our interactions with our students that our own identities are negotiated. Cummins (1996) views these “role definitions” as vital to our interactions with our students, and ultimately our perception of their potential for academic success. Our interactions with our students are central to what Cummins (1996) calls

a triangular set of images:

- An image of our own identities as educators
- An image of the identity options we highlight for our students; consider, for example the contrasting messages conveyed to students in classrooms focused on critical inquiry compared to classrooms focused on passive internalization of information;
- An image of the society we hope our students will help form. (p. 16)

Each of these images forms in my mind a three-legged stool, each functioning to uphold our overall goal of student success. However, much like a stool, if one of the legs is removed, the stool ceases to serve its function. Likewise, if one of the abovementioned criteria is removed, no longer are we effectively able to focus on student success and the development of collaborative relations of power. As educators, we must constantly question the aim of our profession and actively inquire as to the overall goal of American education. Is it simply to maintain the status quo so that those currently in power

maintain that power? Or it is to arm our students with a critical knowledge that allows them to transform the world they live in, thereby creating a space for equality for all? It is precisely in these questions that the heart of subtractive (coercive) and additive (collaborative) power relations lie. Cummins (1984) argues that collaborative power relations are the primary avenue through which a true paradigmatic shift can occur, a shift that will allow our students to be educated rather than schooled as it is through students' interactions with their teachers that language minority students are either "empowered" or "disabled" (p. 58).

Another important component of Cummins' (1996) empowerment model focuses on what he calls "micro- and macro-interactions" (p. 17). These interactions are vital to the identity negotiation of all involved in the educational process. As Wink (2005) notes,

What we do matters. The connections that we create in classrooms are central to students' growth as they negotiate their own identities, and we, while learning with them, continually negotiate our own identities. These interactions trigger a process whereby students create their own sense of self. (p. 115)

Cummins (1994) reminds us that neither micro- nor macro-interactions are ever neutral. Macro-interactions are those interactions which focus on "relations of power in the wider society" (Cummins, 1996, p. 18). They "represent a primary determinant of school success or failure for culturally diverse students" (Cummins, 1994, p. 365). Micro-interactions between teachers and students, on the other hand, "constitute the most immediate determinant of student academic success or failure" (Cummins, 1994, p. 365). DeVillar & Faltis (1991) agree that student success, on an individual level, is directly

related to the interactions the student has with fellow students and her teacher during the learning process.

Macro-interactions suggest that subjugated groups that “fail academically have generally been discriminated against over several generations” (Cummins, 1996, p. 137). Typically this discrimination has manifested itself in either adoption of the dominant group’s belief that the subjugated group is indeed inferior, or a complete rejection of the dominant group’s values. Both are detrimental to the minority student. By either accepting the label of inferior or actively resisting the values set forth by the dominant group, both actions typically signal academic failure. These societal macro-interactions also influence the teacher in the way that she interacts with all students, not simply those of the subjugated group. It is through the interactions of teachers and students that teachers assume what Cummins (1996) calls their “educator role definition” (p. 141). This role definition can manifest itself either positively or negatively. In a positive vein, students are empowered through their interactions with their teachers. Negatively, however, those same students may be disabled through those same interactions. Cummins (1996) notes,

These interactions are mediated by the implicit or explicit role definitions that educators assume in relation to four institutional dimensions of schools. These four dimensions, namely language/culture incorporation, community participation, pedagogy and assessment represent sets of educational structures that will affect, but can also be influenced by, educators’ role definitions. (p. 141)

When examining linguistic and cultural incorporation into the classroom, teachers must ask themselves whether their classroom practices are additive or subtractive. Do these

practices encourage pride in one's culture? Do we as educators value the linguistic diversity our students bring to our classrooms? Is it the goal of our classrooms to take bilingual students and transform them into monolingual English students at the end of their U.S. academic career? All of these questions should be considered when evaluating the level of linguistic and cultural incorporation into the classroom. Teachers must also be aware of community participation. We should ask: Does our school welcome all families and community participants? Do our actions exclude some groups while empowering others? Is our school truly an inviting place for all stakeholders in the students' education? Cummins (1989) argues that by involving parents as part of the school culture, language minority students are empowered. Pedagogy necessarily comes to mind as our beliefs about learning affect all educational outcomes in our classrooms and schools. Do we truly believe that all students can learn or is that simply a part of the mission statement we were told to memorize for the accreditation committee? Are we truly educating our students? Cummins (1989) suggests that empowering students means "liberat[ing] them from dependence on instruction in the sense of encouraging them to become active generators of their own knowledge" (p. 63). Are we purveyors of the "banking system" of education as set forth by Freire (1970) in which students are empty vessels to be filled with our knowledge? Assessment of school programs is also central to understanding the institutional dimensions of schooling. In this type of assessment, we must analyze our own role as educators and understand our place in the educational system. Are we truly advocating for a liberatory and transformative education for our students? Or are we too busy making excuses for maintaining the status quo? Cummins (2001c) argues that cultural and linguistic incorporation that is additive rather than

subtractive, community participation that is collaborative rather than exclusionary, pedagogy that is interactive and experiential rather than transmissive, and assessment that is advocacy-oriented rather than legitimization-oriented will lead to empowered, rather than disabled, students. This is a vital distinction because “empowered peoples are more difficult to exploit” (Cummins, 1989, p. 113). Imagine the possibilities of educators truly advocating to empower their students. Cummins (1994) warns of a society that continues to disable its students: “By disempowering and subordinating one group, you’re really subordinating all groups” (p. 367). Whatever avenue teachers choose to take, they must ultimately account for their interactions’ outcomes because “when powerful relationships are established between teachers and students, these relationships frequently can transcend the economic and social disadvantages that afflict communities and schools alike in inner city and rural areas” (Cummins, 1996, pp. 1-2). Likewise, negative relationships and interactions between students and teachers can have just as powerful outcomes though certainly more detrimental to the student and teacher alike.

Cummins’ (1996) transformative critical pedagogy demands both social justice and educational equality for all participants, for when one group is subjugated, all are subjugated. In enacting this transformative critical pedagogy in our schools, we must first be willing to examine the institution of schooling and acknowledge that in its current form, schooling favors students from the dominant group. Only in this acknowledgement will we be able to move to one of critical pedagogy’s central goals: the alleviation of human suffering (Kincheloe, 2004). In order to achieve this goal, we as educators must be willing to implement a pedagogy that prevents students from being hurt (Kincheloe, 2004). In order to implement such a pedagogy, we must be willing to recognize the



unique abilities of all of our students, while simultaneously working toward a pedagogy that does not value one student group's knowledge over that of another group. It is not surprising that in many instances, ELL students' culture is often viewed as inferior in light of the dominant (read: superior) native English-speaking group. In order to combat this devaluation, teachers must ensure that these students' knowledge is incorporated into the curriculum.

Critical pedagogy provides a platform for those voices that have been previously overlooked or excluded. Not surprisingly, a central theme of those voices is oppression (Kincheloe, 2004). Transformative critical pedagogy allows for the exploration of what Anzaldúa (1987) deems "the borderlands." For Elenes (2003), the borderlands represent "the discourse of people who live between different worlds. It speaks against dualism, oversimplification, and essentialism. It is, a discourse, a language, that explains the social conditions of subjects with hybrid identities" (p. 191). These hybrid identities are what Hall (1991) has defined as "new ethnicities" which force a change in traditional linear thinking about race. Transformative critical pedagogy creates what Bhabha (1990) calls "a third space." This third space "opens up possibilities for new structures of authority, and new political vistas and visions" (McLaren, 1992, p. 127). For Perez (1993),

one of the racist, dominant culture's most effective ideological strategies has been to educate us *all*—minorities and non-minorities—to the national myths of equality, democracy, and freedom for all. We are taught that these principles are attainable realities in the U.S. and furthermore, as minorities we wish that this were true. (p. 276)

The perpetuation of these myths demands that minorities conform to majority behavior if they wish to attain this equality as assimilation becomes the avenue for avoiding cultural and social inferiority (Flores-González, 2002). Schlesinger (1992) presciently spoke of the need of a common language and culture in order to avoid the Balkanization that has occurred in Europe. These arguments have taken further hold in the post-9/11 world (Schlesinger, 2004). Transformative critical pedagogy allows for the movement beyond the unification argument toward a society where all are truly free and equal (McLaren, 1997), by utilizing one's experience "as a resistive measure against Anglo-American economic domination and ideological hegemony" (Calderón & Saldívar, 1991, p. 4) as well as educational dominance as argued by Cummins (1994).

Transformative critical pedagogy also attempts to move marginalized groups from the sidelines of society (Elenes, 2003) by reconciling the disjointed identities of the marginalized (McLaren, 1997). This is of particular importance as marginalization can lead to paralysis:

Alienated from her mother culture, 'alien' in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self. Petrified, she can't respond, her face caught between *los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 4)

It is the negotiation of these in-between spaces that lead to a type of double consciousness as described by DuBois (1996). Anzaldúa (1987) chooses the term of "dual identity" rather than double consciousness, but similarities between Anzaldúa's *mestizaje* notion and DuBois' description are striking though from different perspectives:

A kind of dual identity—we don't identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness. I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. *A veces no soy nada ni nadie. Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy.* (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 63).

It is this negotiation of space, of the borderlands, that transformative critical pedagogy addresses as it focuses on “developing a democratic public philosophy that respects the notion of difference as part of a common struggle to extend the quality of public life” (Giroux, 1991, p. 28). It is the pedagogical freedom offered by transformative critical pedagogy that allows educators to move beyond the traditional societal confines of the classroom:

What is being called for here is a notion of border pedagogy that provides educators with the opportunity to rethink the relations between the centers and the margins of power. That is, such a pedagogy must address the issue of racism as one that calls into question not only forms of subordination that create inequities among different groups as they live out their lives, but...also challenges those institutional boundaries that have historically masked their own relations of power behind complex forms of distinction and privilege. (Giroux, 1991, p. 135).

By rethinking these relationships, teachers are better able to “decenter the center” and allow students to value and celebrate their own unique perspective without conforming to assimilationist pressures (Nayaran & Harding, 2000). This understanding of one's

experience is crucial as “all cultural identities presuppose a certain narrative intentionality and are informed by particular stories” (McLaren, 1995a, p. 89).

Cummins (1989, 1996) has also demanded that empowerment become part of the common language of multicultural education and transformative critical pedagogy. Part of this empowerment revolves around naming: “Critical pedagogy and multicultural education question how we name and construct ourselves as well as others. Naming brings visibility and existence to that which was formerly hidden or kept silent” (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995, p. 18). Empowerment can also come through the dismantling of Whiteness power constructs (McLaren & Muñoz, 2000). Giroux (1991) also calls for a recognition of White privilege and identity markers as a means of decentering said privilege:

My own politics of location as a white, academic male positions me to speak to issues of racism and gender by self-consciously recognizing my own interests in taking up these practices as part of a broader political project to expand the scope and meaning of democratic struggle and a politics of solidarity. Border crossing in this instance is part of an attempt to further rupture a politics of historical silence and theoretical erasure that serves to repress and marginalize the voices of the Other. (p. 125)

All facets of transformative critical pedagogy can be applied to any of the students we serve in our classrooms daily, but Cummins’ work is especially applicable to the students in this research study, those who are learning English as an additional language. One reason for this applicability is transformative critical pedagogy’s recognition of “the historical patterns of underachievement among marginalized groups to the devaluation of

identity that has typically been played out in the interactions between educators and students” (Cummins, 2000a, p. 246). For many ELL students, the devaluation of their linguistic and cultural identity indeed leads to a devaluation of their academic identity as well (Cummins, 2000a). This is not meant to imply that all teachers devalue the linguistic and cultural identities of their ELL students. In fact, when teachers encourage students to maintain and continue to develop their linguistic, cultural, and academic identities, they further validate these identities in the larger society, “challeng[ing] the perception...that these attributes are inferior or worthless” (Cummins, 2000a, p. 246). Also, through Cummins’ analysis of coercive and collaborative relations of power, he places the onus on educators to “collectively explore ways to resist the potentially negative effects of cultural and linguistic bias against ELL students” (Cummins, 2000a, p. 248). This particular theoretical framework is of vital importance to this research study as Cummins’ (2000a) asserts that “the process of identity negotiation is fundamental to educational success for all students” (p. 254). Transformative critical pedagogy also “uses collaborative critical inquiry to enable students to analyze and understand the social realities of their own lives and of their communities” (Cummins, 2000a, p. 260). The analysis in this research study has been a first for me and many of my students. Through the voicing of their schooling experiences, we have been able to begin to better understand the relations on a school level through our analysis of our discussions.

My students can no longer be failed by traditional multiculturalist approaches. Transformative critical pedagogy offers the most comprehensive approach of empowering them to succeed in the educational system that they face every day.

Through Cummins' (1996) concept of empowerment, my students and I have the opportunity to collaboratively create an environment in which we can all succeed.

### Recent Research Regarding Academic Success

This research study attempts to bridge the gap concerning Latino middle school students and academic success. The majority of recent research (Daniel, Walsh, Goldston, Arnold, Reboussin, & Wood, 2006; Kemp, 2006; Suh & Suh, 2006; Bemak, Chi-Ying, & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005; Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Golden, Kist, Trehan, & Padak, 2005) regarding academic success and dropout prevention rarely includes middle school students. This research implies that the decision to drop out is made at the high school level with little attention given to the impact of students' earlier educational experiences. The exception to this occurs in the field of special education (e.g., Cobb, Sample, Alwell, & Johns, 2006; Reschly & Christenson, 2006) where students' elementary, middle, and high school experiences are taken into account when discussing the factors that lead to dropping out among special education students. While research exists regarding the academic achievement of Caribbean immigrant middle school students (Mitchell, 2005), it is limited to first, second, and third-generation students from the Caribbean island nations but not other nations of Latin America such as Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

There is also a dearth of research regarding the academic experiences of Latino students in general, but even less regarding recent immigrants to the South. While Cavan (2006) examined the language, culture and identity development of three female immigrant students in suburban Atlanta, the focus centered on the high school experiences of the students. Most research (Dale, Andreatta, & Freeman, 2001; Duchon

& Murphy, 2001; Engstrom, 2001; Guthey, 2001; Hernández-León, & Zuñiga, 2000, 2003; Jones & Rhoades, 2001; Studstill & Nieto-Studstill, 2001) concerning Latinos in the South tends to focus on the employment opportunities and experiences of adult immigrants with little attention given to the academic experiences of the children who come with them. This research attempts to draw the focus on these students' unique experiences in American schools.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

“There are two kinds of educational research, that which is done to teachers and kids and the other that is done by teachers and kids” (Manning & Harste, 1994, p. 3).

#### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research is transformative critical pedagogy as exemplified by the work of Jim Cummins (2000a, 1996). It is transformative critical pedagogy’s insistence on a blending of critical pedagogy and multiculturalism that best allows for an examination of the “coercive and collaborative power relationships” that greet these students when they enter school (Cummins, 1996). Transformative critical pedagogy allows both teachers and students to “empower students, and transform schools for greater freedom, equality, and justice” (Gay, 1995, pp. 181-182) through examining how knowledge is produced, by whom knowledge is produced and by understanding how and why knowledge is disseminated (McLaren, 1994) through an intensive examination of language practices (Cummins, 2000a). The key component of transformative critical pedagogy is empowerment (Wink, 2005). For Cummins (2000a), “transformative pedagogy is realized in interactions between educators and students that attempt to foster collaborative relations of power” (p. 246). It is through these interactions that identities are negotiated. This is critical as students’ identity options are expanded through collaborative power relations (Cummins, 2000, p. 263). This theoretical framework also demands the active transformation of both teacher and student as together they strive for social justice (Farahmandpur, 2003, p. xv). This transformation can be achieved through an intense examination of what Anzaldúa (1987) calls the “borderlands,” described by Elenes (2003) as “the discourse of people who live between different worlds” (p. 191). It



is precisely this in-between space that Anzaldúa (1987) refers to as “*los intersticios*” that I wish to explore (p. 63).

### Ethnographic Case Studies

The rationale for the use of surveys and interviews in this research study is that both would better allow for the construction of an ethnographic case study of six ELL Latino immigrant students. As Stake (1998) suggests,

The purpose of the case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case. Criteria for conducting the kind of research that leads to valid generalization need modification to fit the search for effective particularization. The utility of case research to practitioners and policy makers is its extension of experience. The methods of qualitative case study are largely methods of disciplining personal and particularized experience. (p. 104)

Each of these students has an important story to tell. The use of case studies allows a larger audience to discover and better understand how people make sense of their lives (Brown, 2000) while simultaneously allowing for a better understanding of “human behavior and experience” (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998, p. 34). According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), “studies focusing on society and culture, whether a group, a program, or an organization, typically espouse some form of case study as an overall strategy” (p. 61). By observing and interviewing students in the classrooms they regularly inhabit, the researcher is provided with a context that allows for greater understanding of the subject. Bogdan & Bilken (1998) assert that “qualitative researchers go to the particular setting under study because they are concerned with context. They feel that action can best be understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs” (p. 5).

Case studies allow one to better understand the daily occurrences of the classroom (Silverman, Welty & Lyonm 1994; Lundeberg, Levin, & Harrington, 1999). Nieto (2004) believes that case studies allow

students [to] ‘think out loud’ about what they like and dislike about school, about teachers who have made a difference in their lives, about the importance of culture and language in their lives, and about what they expect to get out of school. (p. 11)

I believe I have achieved similar outcomes through this research study.

#### School Portraiture

The school district I teach in is classified as urban/surburban by the U.S. Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). The county is geographically the state’s smallest county in terms of land area. While schools are not separated geographically by a great distance, the district’s schools differ greatly in terms of demographics. The district’s White student population is concentrated most heavily at the elementary level. The beginning of middle school is when we begin to experience the greatest amount of white flight, with many White parents opting to enroll their children in the area’s private schools. There is no tracking per se in the school, however special education and ELL students are separated from the regular education setting for most of the day. The same does not hold true for the school’s gifted students as they receive collaborative services through the science and social studies classes rather than using a pull-out model. All students are eligible to participate in the Pathways to Success after-school program which provides the students with a snack, free tutoring, and free transportation to their homes. All free/reduced lunch recipients at the school are also eligible to receive free

supplemental educational services after school due to the school's needs improvement status per No Child Left Behind.

This is the 11<sup>th</sup> year that the school has been open. The present enrollment at the school is 651 students with 94% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch. There are currently approximately 75 ELL (monitored or direct) students. The school has experienced an extreme demographical shift in the past four years (Duke, 2005). During the academic year 2001-2002, 84% of the student body self-identified as Caucasian, with less than 1% self-identifying as Latino. There were also no identified ELL students at the school. Currently, Caucasians comprise 12% of the school with Latinos comprising 22%. This is partially due to the influx of Latino immigrants to this area of the school district as well as the elimination of school choice.

One of the major problems facing this middle school is the lack of parental and community support we currently receive. Ironically, when the school first opened, it was the most chosen school in the district (internal memo, Clarke County School District). There was a great deal of parental support and there were several partners in education. However, as school choice was eliminated and students were forced to attend schools within their attendance zone, the middle school saw a large increase in its minority population as well as an overall lower socioeconomic profile. This is also the only middle school within the school district classified as "needs improvement" by No Child Left Behind. This has allowed parents to move their children to another middle school in the district if they so choose. This has also decreased the amount of parental involvement. This year's Parent-Teacher-Student Organization consists of five parents in addition to all teachers at the research site as membership is mandatory for us. Many

parents at our school also work multiple jobs, leaving little time for volunteering or participating in their children's school activities.

The school is located in a geographically rural/suburban section of the county. Agricultural fields surround the school with the exception of a nearby manufacturing plant within sight of the school. However, within five miles of the school, many of the communities' manufacturing plants (fiberglass, insulation, Kevlar, etc.) belch smoke into the sky. Many parents are employed at these manufacturing facilities as well as local meat-processing plants.

The school has been severely impacted by No Child Left Behind. For the past two years, art and music classes were replaced by supplementary math and language arts classes. Pedagogical freedom has been replaced by a Learning Focused design (Thompson & Thompson, 2005) while lessons have been supplanted by *Georgia CRCT Coach Book* (2002) summaries and practice tests. Mandatory restructuring looms on the horizon. Instructional monies must now be spent to hire outside professional learning consultants.

Perhaps there is hope with restructuring. The approach that the school district has taken toward restructuring is to require teachers at a restructured school to sign a two-year contract rather than the standard one-year contract as an attempt to staunch the tremendous teacher turnover at these schools. With new leadership and a new teaching staff, perhaps community involvement will be greater. The future teachers and administrators of this school must become more aware of the needs of our immigrant students in order to establish successful schools. In my estimation, however, I do not believe that restructuring will best benefit our students. As the impending takeover draws

ever nearer, the veteran teachers at the school have begun to apply for employment at other schools in the district as well as other school systems. Many believe that they should not suffer the indignity of being forced to reapply for their job, and that through this re-application process there is some admission of failure on their part. Some teachers simply do not want to be bothered with the extended contract and increased paperwork that go along with mandated restructuring. Some teachers are worn down by the constant references to CRCT scores and Adequate Yearly Progress and are either leaving the profession altogether or are opting for employment at schools that have made AYP. Unfortunately, I believe that our students will be left with highly-inexperienced teachers that are not readily able to handle the myriad needs of our students. Previous restructuring efforts at a feeder elementary school left the school with few veteran teachers and an overwhelming majority of first-year teachers (F. Kent, personal communication, January 17, 2007).

As mentioned previously, PELL classes have been offered for the past four years at the school as required by both the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI) and the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Lau v. Nichols*. Students are tested for inclusion in PELL classes if another language is listed anywhere on the Home Language Survey. While at the Parent Information Center, students are given the Language Assessment Battery. Students that score above the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile are not eligible to receive PELL services. Parents or students may also request that the student be given the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). The student must score at the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile or above on the ITBS in order to not receive PELL services. Once a student becomes enrolled in the PELL program, there are two ways that he/she can exit said program: (1) parental waiver of

PELL services or (2) testing out. All PELL students are given the ACCESS for ELLs test in the Spring of each year. If a student scores a 5.0, then a Language Assessment Conference (LAC) is held and teachers, parents, and the student decide whether or not the child should continue to receive some services. The ELL students in this research study run the gamut of PELL experiences. There are 8<sup>th</sup> grade students represented in this study that have attended schools within this school district for eight years who still have not exited PELL classes as they have not achieved a high enough score on any standardized assessment. There are also students represented that were in the program for two years, scored well on the assessment, and are currently enrolled in all mainstream, regular education classes. For those students that do exit the program, their academic and social progress is monitored for two years by one of the PELL teachers at the school.

Currently ELL students at the school can receive up to four segments of PELL classes each day. While the school can only earn FTE (Full-Time Equivalency) funding on two of those segments, the school district has chosen to serve the students more segments rather than less. Currently low-performing ELL students (classified by the school as students that failed a section of the CRCT by more than 20 points) are enrolled in a study skills class during the Extended Learning Time offered by a PELL teacher at the school. Newcomers (students that have been in U.S. schools for less than one year) are enrolled in an intensive English acquisition class during this time. ELL students also receive an additional English/Language Arts course as one of their two connections or elective classes. The school is also the only middle school in the district to offer sheltered-content courses for PELL students. A sheltered course is one that is designed

so that students work on grade-level content material while simultaneously receiving scaffolded English acquisition instruction from a PELL teacher. The PELL teacher makes the grade-level content material accessible to the ELL through either bilingual instruction or modified content while concurrently working to improve the student's English language skills. The goal of the sheltered content class is to acquire both content material and English language skills. Valenzuela (1999) describes sheltered-content classes in this way:

If these students [ELL students] are lucky, however, they may get placed in ESL content-area courses. Content-area ESL courses cover the same material taught in the regular track curriculum, but the former are taught by ESL-certified teachers skilled at working with Spanish-speaking populations and trained in ESL methodologies like cooperative learning, the use of manipulatives, whole language learning techniques, and so forth. (pp. 180-181)

Valdés (2001) does not have the same idealistic notions as does Valenzuela (1999) regarding sheltered-content classes as she asserts that

those students...will receive at best, a limited education consisting of continuing ESL courses and a few subject-matter classes—designated ESL science, ESL social studies, or 'sheltered' math—in which the subject matter normally studied in mainstream classes is only studied partially. (pp. 6-7)

Currently, students are able to enroll in sheltered mathematics and sheltered social studies courses at the school.

ELL students at the school are allowed classroom accommodations similar to the modifications/accommodations afforded to special educational students via their

Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Some typical accommodations for an ELL are receiving extended time on assignments, shortened assignments, and tests that are read aloud. In fact, these accommodations must be followed in the regular or PELL classroom setting in order for these accommodations to be considered valid by the Georgia Department of Education on any standardized test (CRCT, ITBS, Georgia Middle Grades Writing Assessment, Georgia High School Graduation Test, Georgia End of Course Tests). As all PELL teachers at the school teach a full academic load (three academic courses in addition to one extended learning time course), there is little opportunity for oversight to ensure that regular classroom teachers are actually providing the accommodations mandated for the students. This occurs with respect to special education students' accommodations as well. This lack of support in the regular education classroom is one of the reasons that ELL students at the school experience so little academic success in the mainstream classroom. If academic support is only occurring in the PELL classes, the ELL student is at an increased risk of failure in the regular education setting.

### Participants

This study involves 75 English language learners (both direct and monitored) ages 10-15 from a public middle school in northeast Georgia. The school system is comprised of 20 schools (13 elementary, 4 middle, 3 high) with an approximately enrollment of 12,000 students. The research site school of approximately 650 students is located in a suburban setting near a major university. All of the participants share the following characteristics:



1. All of the students participating in the study have been identified at some point in their academic career as an English language learner. The process of identification begins at the school district's Parent Information Center (PIC) where all parents are required to complete a home language survey. If a language other than English is indicated anywhere on the form, the student is then referred for Language Assessment Battery (LAB) testing. Depending on the student's score on the LAB, he/she may be placed into Program for English Language Learners (PELL) classes.
2. All of the students participating in the study attend the same middle school and are identified as a member of either the sixth, seventh, or eighth grade.
3. All student participants are from low-income families as determined by the federal free lunch program data.
4. All of the students (or their parents) self-identify as either Latino or Hispanic according to the paperwork completed at the PIC (Parent Information Center) office.
5. 31 of the students are male and 44 of the students are female.
6. The teacher/researcher has taught for seven years at both the middle and high school levels. She has taught at this school for the last three years.
7. All parents/guardians of the students participating in this study gave written consent for their minor children to participate in this study. The research project and consent form were explained in person during parent conferences.
8. All students gave their written assent to participate in this study.

9. All students gave permission for self-selected pseudonyms to be used in this study.

As minors were utilized as research participants in this study, the research methodology and all pertinent consent/assent forms were reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Georgia Southern University. The researcher also completed the mandatory human subjects research training offered by the National Institute of Health. The school district in which the research was conducted also required an internal review of all research methodology as well as consent/assent forms.

The research study was described to the students by the researcher during their Extended Learning Time (ELT). Students were able to ask for clarification about the research study in order to make an informed decision about their participation. Parent consent forms were sent home as well as a letter indicating that the forms would be discussed at parent-teacher conferences. As the research site is a Title I school, 100% of parents were required to attend parent conferences. If parents failed to attend, teachers completed a mandatory home visit in order to conduct the parent conference. Through parent conferences held at the school and home visits conducted by teams of teachers, school resource officers, and family engagement specialists, all parents of ELL-monitored and direct students were given the opportunity to participate in this research study. However, it was stressed that participation in the research study was entirely voluntary and at no time should anyone feel pressured to participate in the study.

All ELL (both direct and monitored) students at the school agreed to participate in the initial survey as well as the additional interviews if so chosen. I have developed a rapport with these students because, as mentioned previously, I have been one of the few

academic constants in their lives. Teacher turnover at the school has reached an alarming rate, so much so, that when I recently attended the Georgia Council for the Social Studies conference and was gone for three days, the students asked the other PELL teacher if I had quit my job. Since this academic year has begun, we have had several teachers resign, further strengthening the relationship between the ELL students and their PELL teachers.

The ELL students also empathize with the fact that I myself am an additional language learner. While I have achieved a great deal of fluency in Spanish, it is not my native language. Students understand when I make mistakes as they try to gently correct me. This enables me to gently correct their English mistakes as well in a supportive, safe environment. The students and I constantly debate vocabulary choice as they will indicate that a particular word is “book Spanish” not “real Spanish.” They will also have debates among themselves as to what is the correct word choice depending on which country they are from or even which state.

Together my students and I have constructed a safe space for learning to occur. Learning about language, about each other, about historical events—all of these lessons can occur on any given day in my classroom. It is important to note that while I do feel that I am responsible for much of my students’ learning, they are just as responsible for mine. Together we navigate the middle school educational experience. Together we have had both disappointments and celebrations. Together we have completed this research study and have learned even more about each other. Together we will continue to construct a safe school—a school where students are not afraid to be themselves, are

not afraid to speak in a language other than English, and a school that provides an academically supportive environment for all students.

### Participant Selection

All students selected to participate in this research study are classified as English Language Learners at the research site. All students with a signed parental informed consent form, a photography/videography consent form, and a minor assent form were given a survey. After all students completed the survey, I tallied the results based on the scoring guidelines and criteria that accompany Weber's (1990) Dropout Prediction Scale. Based upon their results, students were then divided into three groups: *cholo* or low-performing, *medio* or average-performing, or *cabezón* or high-performing. The top scores from each of those groups (e.g. the two students who had the highest potential to drop out based on the Dropout Prediction Scale results) were then selected for interviews.

### Participant Surveys

The survey chosen for use in this research study is the Dropout Prediction Scale developed by J.M. Weber (1990) at the Center on Education and Training for Employment at The Ohio State University. Through his initial review of 43 variables linked to the identification of high school dropouts, Weber based his scale on 13 dropout identification procedures that are used throughout several states. These 13 identification procedures were determined after an intensive analysis of 100 dropout prevention programs utilized across the nation. Once Weber determined the 13 identification procedures, he then searched the High School and Beyond database, a survey of approximately 27,200 students (Jones, 1982). In searching the aforementioned database, Weber looked for elements that could be used to define each of the variables listed in the

13 selected dropout identification procedures. He designed the Dropout Prediction Scale around the “most commonly found characteristics among potential dropouts” (Weber, 1990, p. 2). These characteristics are: age relative to classmates, study habits, sexual preoccupation, unexcused absences and low GPA, family mobility/number of schools attended, discipline problems, attendance, school grades, graduation plans, college plans, attitude toward school, introverted/extroverted behavior, and age when expected to finish education (Weber, 1990, p. 2). He then used these variables to predict which students in the High School and Beyond database would be dropouts. The predicted results were then compared to the known dropout data from the High School and Beyond database. Based on these findings, Weber (1988) concluded that the most effective and accurate instruments for predicting dropout were the Dropout Prediction Instrument, the Potential Dropout Profile, the Dropout Prediction Equation, and the Identifying Potential Dropouts Scale. In examining the dropout identification procedures, Weber (1989) was then able to identify three general factors that can be helpful in identifying potential dropout: school-related factors (attendance, grades, academic achievement, reading skills, and interest in school and schoolwork), personal factors (age relative to classmates, disciplinary problems, and extenuating circumstances, such as pregnancy), and home-family factors (economically disadvantaged, broken home/single-parent family). He used information from each of the previously mentioned dropout prediction instrument along with the aforementioned three general factors in order to create his Dropout Prediction Scale (Weber, 1990). While no dropout prediction instrument is 100% accurate (Weber, 1989), the Dropout Prediction Scale has proven to be approximately 85% accurate in identifying dropouts (Friedenberg, 1999). Weber (1989) attributes this accuracy to his

utilization of multidimensional prediction rules. While acknowledging that even a multidimensional prediction instrument can yield inaccurate results, Weber (1989) asserts that this degree of inaccuracy is preferable to the higher degree of inaccuracy in prediction instruments that utilize too few variables. This survey has been found valid and reliable through follow-up studies (Weber, 1988; Friedenberg, 1999; Friedenberg, personal communication, September 20, 2006; Gleason & Dynarski, 2002).

Friedenberg's (1999) only concern with the accuracy of the instrument is that in her research, the issue of pregnancy was a strong enough factor to negate every other factor in determining dropout for Mexican adolescent women. When taken as a singular indicator of dropout, the accuracy rate in dropout prediction for Mexican adolescent women would have increased 20%. Additionally, whereas the subjects of Friedenberg's (1999) study had difficulty answering questions about their future while in the third-grade, the middle school students in this study encountered no such difficulty.

Friedenberg (1999) suggests further longitudinal studies of Hispanic youth utilizing the Dropout Prediction Scale in order to provide further validation of its use with this ethnic group. Nonetheless, the use of this survey is important because it has been designed to take into account both middle and high school students. According to Friedenberg (1999), this survey is one of the few that attempts to address both populations. She also used a bilingual version of the survey in order to address both Spanish and English-speaking students.

One modification that has been made to Weber's (1990) Dropout Prediction Scale must be noted. In Weber's scale, he utilizes the letter grade of D in the calculation of dropout prediction. However, as the Clarke County School District does not recognize

the grade of D, I substituted F in its place. This would not change the overall validity and reliability of this question on the student questionnaire as Weber (1990) also included numerical scale scores to accompany the letter grades on the questionnaire. The numerical grade equivalent for D in Weber's (1990) Dropout Prediction Scale correlates to the numerical grade equivalent for F in the Clarke County School District.

The survey provided to the students was written in both English and Spanish. The technology integration specialist assigned to my school assisted me in creating a Microsoft Access database to which we were able to add sound files. As my students logged onto their computer, they were instructed to open their assignments folder on the desktop. Each student had both an English version and a Spanish version saved in their assignments folder. Then students were then able to self-select which version of the survey they want to complete. When students opened the Access document, there were embedded sound files attached to each of the questions so that the students could proceed at their own pace. Therefore, if a student self-selected the survey in Spanish, when he/she retrieved the Access document, each question had a sound file attached (similar to attaching sound files in Microsoft PowerPoint) so that the student was able to hear the question repeated in Spanish as many times as the student felt necessary to achieve clarification and understand the question. Students then typed their answers into the Access document and then saved the document in their assignments folder before sending it to my dropbox. This allowed the students to be identified only by their student identification number assigned by the district rather than by their name. After I tallied the scores, I then took the two surveys representing the highest score in each category and matched the student identification number to the student. While seventy-five students

completed the Dropout Prediction Scale survey, this was used only as a tool to identify those students selected to participate in the in-depth interviews. I have not included generalized results of the seventy-five surveys as this information was not particularly salient to the study. The surveys were utilized as a tool to minimize bias on my part in selecting the students to participate in the in-depth interviews. There was a fear on my part that I would allow my prior knowledge of the students' academic and social behaviors to affect the selection of students for interviews. By utilizing the Dropout Prediction Scale, I was able to use Weber's (1990) guidelines for scoring to group students into the three aforementioned self-identity groups.

#### Participant Interviews

Students were selected for interviews based on their responses to Weber's (1990) Dropout Prediction Scale. Following the guidelines set forth by Weber (1990), the students with the highest potential for dropping out of school were placed in the *cholo* category, while the students with the lowest potential for dropping out were placed in the *cabezón* category. After these students were selected, I arranged all of the students' scores from highest potential for dropping out to lowest potential in order to find the median scores. Upon finding the median scores, I then selected the two students who represented the median. After all six students were selected based on their survey responses, I began the interview process with them. After much debate, I chose to interview the students individually rather than as a group. I believe that this interview format allowed the students to be much more honest and candid in their responses. I was extremely fortunate as the six students first selected to complete the interview process were all present throughout the research study. Some of the other students who initially



completed the Dropout Prediction Scale moved from the research site before and during the interview process. As recommended by Van Maanen (1988), each interview was audio-taped and then transcribed. iPods were used (along with a tabletop digital recorder and a lapel recorder) to record the interviews as the students were already familiar with the devices as they are a part of the daily routine in the PELL classroom. Some students also choose to turn in their daily journaling via their iPod. Once they completed their journal entry via iPod, they simply uploaded it to our shared iTunes folder and I was able to either download the entries into my iPod or burned them to a compact disc. By audio-taping the conversation, I was also better able to take field notes about the interview as it was happening. The audio-tape also offered another insight into the interviews as “replaying the conversation after the session is often like listening to it for the first time: it is amazing how much the human ear and brain can miss and how the memory can distort” (Cole & Knowles, cited in Meloy, 2002, p. 91). The tapes were listened to several times in order to achieve an accurate transcription record as well as to better understand the interview as a whole.

Most interview questions were constructed in an open-ended manner in order to encourage participant discussion. Individual interviews were conducted before and after school as well as during the student’s ELT class in order to afford a great deal of privacy to the participant so that he/she would be able to freely answer the questions posed. All students were interviewed in my classroom so that they would feel safe and secure in an already familiar environment.

## Participant Profiles

Based on their answers to the questionnaire given to all ELL (both monitored and direct) students at the school, six students were chosen to participate in in-depth interviews in order to discover more about their schooling experiences both in the United States and their home country as well as their perceptions of those experiences. The students chosen to be a part of the interview portion of the research study are Angie, Estela, Roberto, Jesús, Alexandra, and Itzel. Each of the students is from Mexico, with 3 of the students being from the state of Michoacán, 1 from Puebla, 1 from Monterrey and 1 from Durango. Prior to interviewing each of the students, the researcher had obtained approval to conduct human subject research from Georgia Southern University's Institutional Review Board. Parents were mailed the consent forms in both English and Spanish prior to mandatory fall parent conferences. At said conferences, the researcher spoke with each parent in order to explain the research study in detail as well as to answer any questions or address any concerns that the parents had. Parents signed the consent forms in my presence. Students, if present at the parent conferences, signed assent forms at this time as well. Their assent forms had already been covered in their social studies or extended learning time classes. If students were not present at the conferences, they signed the assent forms over the course of the next week in my presence.

## Organizing Field Texts

All materials related to this research study were stored at a secure location away from the school. These materials include field notes, survey responses, and interview responses. Once the survey results were tabulated, the Access documents were

transferred to both a flash drive and CD-ROM before being erased from the hard drives of the students' laptops. These results were transferred to my home computer and were not stored at school. Once student interviews were completed, the WAV files were then downloaded into iTunes and Audacity, both housed on my personal computer. The WAV files were then deleted from the iPods as well as the digital recorders.

### My Role as a Researcher

My interests in this area of research lie in my own experiences as both an L1 and L2 teacher and learner. From my experiences, I understand the difficulty of native English speakers attempting to acquire proficiency in Spanish as well as the difficulty of ELLs in acquiring English proficiency. I also know my own experiences in learning both languages. The three years I have spent with some of these students have been the most challenging and rewarding of my teaching career. I have shared the successes and disappointments of these students, both academically and personally. I have been there to celebrate their *quinceañeras* (Sweet 15 parties) as well as their *primeras comuniones* (first communions). I have been to the *posadas* (Christmas re-enactments of Joseph and Mary's search for shelter before Jesus' birth) in their neighborhood. Family barbecues, fishing trips, immunizations—I have been there for them all. They have been there for my wedding and birthdays, family deaths, and celebrations. These students are a part of me and they have changed who I am as a person and a professional.

As teacher turnover rate at my school is extremely high, many of my students are searching for a constant in their academic lives. It is not uncommon to have half of a grade level's teachers leave at the end of any school year. Due to the extreme turnover, the level of trust between the students and me has intensified. Each year as more and

more teachers leave, the closeness increases. I become more a part of their world, and they of mine.

I witness firsthand the discrimination they face at the hands of other students and more embarrassingly, other teachers and administrators. In many ways, I live their struggle with them, not as a victim, but as a collaborator with them, attempting to achieve some level of social justice and educational equality together. I see their struggles as they attempt to become communicatively competent (Omaggio Hadley, 2000) in another language, while their heritage language becomes further devalued by their time in American (read U.S.) schools. I see their parents struggle to make a new life in a foreign land, working many times two and three jobs to make ends meet, just to hear the same refrain at every parent-teacher conference I translate: “I work at the *pollería* (poultry plant) so that my kids won’t have to. I work with my hands so that my children can work with their minds.”

It is impossible for me to be an objective researcher in this study and as such, I prefer to label myself a researcher-participant, as I am unable to divorce myself from their existence, as they are so much a part of mine. As time has passed, there has become an unwritten understanding that together we are trying to do what is best for them. They have accepted me as a part of their academic community. While being observed this year, both the principal and instructional lead teacher chose to participate in the process. They chose to come on a day that the topic being covered was the Middle Passage and the Underground Railroad. After reading the heart-wrenching journal entries of Olaudah Equiano, my students and I began our own SmartBoard adventure regarding the Underground Railroad. In the activity, students were given background information on

the Underground Railroad (e.g., Harriet Tubman, the routes taken, Canada's stance on slavery, the *Dred Scott* decision) and were asked to make decisions based on the background information they had acquired up to that point. The observation seemed to be going well, the students were participating, when we arrived upon a decision concerning the involvement of Whites in the Underground Railroad. The students were told that some Whites did help slaves escape to freedom. The indication that a White person was willing to aid the slave in escaping was a lit lantern hanging on a post. At this point in the activity, the students were forced to make a choice: to trust the White person at the house or try to make it on their own. Overwhelmingly, the students chose to go it on their own. When the principal asked them why they had made this choice, the students responded in unison: "Because we don't trust White people." After what seemed like an eternity of silence, the principal asked the students, "Well, what about Ms. Bush?" Without hesitation, several students replied, "She's not White!" Upon further pressing about the seemingly obvious appearance of my racial identity, more students responded, "She's one of us!" While my students certainly do not believe that I am from México, they do understand that I am fighting their fight with them, attempting to afford them every educational opportunity available. While I do not presume to be the "White savior" of my students, I am also abundantly aware of the racially dichotomous history of the South until recent memory. My position as a White, Southern, middle-class woman affords me a certain position of power, which I will not hesitate to use to help my students. While I do not presume to speak for my students, I am aware that in this community, my voice does carry more weight so I do not mind lifting it in unison with those of my students and their families. As someone who strongly believes in social

justice, I certainly do not believe that I can sit idly by and watch my students be devoured by a racist, unequal system of schooling.

For all of these reasons, I am proud to write this dissertation to highlight my students' struggles and successes, their dreams and disappointments. For those who have lacked a voice, I am pleased to provide an outlet for their words. Perhaps the most egalitarian portent for our capitalistic society and its schools can be found in the words of Cuba's Communist leader Fidel Castro:

But now...this anonymous mass, this America of color, somber, taciturn America, which all over the continent sings with the same sadness and disillusionment, now this mass is beginning to enter conclusively into its own history, is beginning to write with its own blood, is beginning to suffer and die from it...Yes, now history will have to take the poor of America into account, the exploited and spurned of Latin America, who have decided to begin writing history for themselves for all time. (cited in Young, 2001, p. 216)

This dissertation is only the first step for many of my students. It will be interesting to hear what they have to say.

## CHAPTER 4

### STUDENT EXPERIENCES

“Human relationships are at the heart of schooling”  
(Cummins, 1996, p. 1).

“Research can be carried out by ‘insiders’ or ‘outsiders’. Teachers, as inside participants in educational relationships, have the potential to ‘see inside’ these relationships, their ‘insights’ cannot be duplicated by those who gaze at these relationships from the outside”  
(Cummins, 2000a, p. 1).

This chapter presents the students’ schooling experiences in their own words. Bound up in these discussions are the students’ perceptions of schooling, their status at their school, their future educational plans, and the negotiation of identity development that plagues every middle-school learner. Each student’s unique perspective allows for a greater understanding of his/her reality of middle school as well as his/her hopes and aspirations for the future. Each student also self-selected a pseudonym in order to remain anonymous throughout the research study. Each of the six students chosen represents one of the groups mentioned previously in the research study: *cholos*, *medios*, or *cabezones*. Their inclusion in a particular group was determined by their answers to a dropout prediction survey as well as their own self-identification through a specific survey. When I first submitted my dissertation proposal, I had hoped to pick both a male and a female student representative for each of the aforementioned groups. However, after looking at their survey responses, group members with more distinctive features emerged for each group and it no longer seemed reasonable to limit the participants to one of each gender per group.

**Angie** is a 14-year old female from Michoacán, Mexico. She is currently in the eighth grade and is taking lower-level/remedial classes as well as ELL classes. Angie

moved to the United States in the middle of first grade and has attended schools within the same school district for the majority of her academic career. Initially, her father came to Georgia to live with his brother and look for work to support his family. After two years in the Athens area, he was able to secure enough money to rent a mobile home and buy a car. Soon thereafter, Angie, her mother, and her older sister moved to Athens. Currently, she lives with her father, two sisters, and her brother. Her mother recently returned to Mexico after allegations of spousal abuse surfaced. Angie has many household responsibilities, many of which have increased in her mother's absence. She is the primary caregiver to her younger brother and sister during non-school hours. Her younger sister is enrolled in pre-kindergarten and a neighbor takes care of her younger brother while Angie attends school. This is a relatively new development and is a condition of Angie's probation. She has been declared a truant student and the school is able to send uniformed police officers to her home to bring her to school if she fails to report. If she does not attend school, her probation can be revoked and she can be sent to serve the remainder of her sentence at the regional youth detention center in Gainesville.

Angie attended a parochial pre-kindergarten in Mexico before attending a full year of kindergarten and a partial year of first grade. Upon entering U.S. schools, Angie was placed into English language learner (ELL) classes. She continues to be enrolled in these classes to this day. The only exception is her fourth grade year when she was not enrolled in English language learner classes. She was enrolled in another Georgia public school district that did not offer ELL services at that time. When she returned to her former elementary school within the district, she resumed ELL services. Due to her low standardized test scores, Angie is served by a connections ELL course, ELL/sheltered



social studies course, ELL/sheltered mathematics course, remediation mathematics extended learning time, and supplemental reading and mathematics courses. The only academic class in which she receives neither remedial nor ELL support is science.

Angie has expressed her desire to no longer be in any ELL class but social studies. In her voice recordings on her iPod, Angie says that she believes that she can be successful in every class without support except for social studies because “it’s [social studies class] just too hard. They don’t get that I don’t get it because I’m not from here. Like, I’m from here, but not really. I don’t know all that stuff about the slaves and all, like I can tell you stuff about Mexico, but not like all this junk about Georgia that I gotta know for the CRCT.” This might seem surprising given Angie’s enrollment in Georgia schools since first grade, but Angie has never had a social studies class until middle school. It is the school district’s policy that elementary ELL students receive ELL services in lieu of social studies. As a result, the majority of my students are severely lacking in their social studies skills because they were never given an opportunity to develop them in elementary school.

Angie’s middle school experience has been one of success and disappointment. While she has made progress in the areas of social studies and science, Angie continues to struggle with language arts, reading, and math. She failed two sections of the CRCT during her sixth and seventh grade years. She is scoring at third-grade proficiency on her Measures of Academic Progress assessments in language arts, reading, and math. Her ACCESS scores range from beginning abilities to almost native-like. She is on the targeted list for retention based on her current report card grades and her past performance on the CRCT. Angie is also a member of *Sur 13*, a local Latino gang. Her

level of gang activity has diminished due to her cousin's removal as a gang leader, but she still socializes with gang members outside of school.

Angie's interviews took place in my classroom during the academic day. I offered to go to her home to interview her or to meet her at the neighborhood community center where her cousin lives, but she chose to conduct the interviews during the school day. In her voice recordings, she indicated that she preferred "to get it over with while I'm here anywhere. If you come to my house, I gotta watch my sister and brother. You don't know what all they can do if you ain't watchin' real close. Then I get in trouble 'cause they never do. 'They're babies'—that's all I ever hear. We could meet at the center but I'd still have to bring 'em with me. I don't know if *las monjas* [the nuns who run the center] would like that. They get mad easy" (Angie, personal communication, October 23, 2006). The interviews took place over three different days. The times were selected so that Angie would miss as little class time as possible. Also included are her voice recordings. Each day when she got to my class, Angie would get an iPod and logon to her computer. In her desktop assignment folder, I would place either a predetermined topic (e.g., Are you trying out for the soccer team? Why or why not?) or have a "free" day where she could talk about whatever she chose. These voice recordings have been used to shed further light onto some of the topics Angie discussed during her interviews or brought up in the questionnaire.

**Estela** is a 13-year old female from Acapulco, Mexico. She is currently classified as an eighth-grade student enrolled in lower-level/remedial courses as well as a recipient of ELL services. Estela moved to the United States in fourth grade and has lived continuously in Athens since that time. Estela is the oldest of three children and lives

with her mother. Her father remains in Mexico and is largely absent from her life. Her mother moved to the area because her sister had found employment in the local poultry plant. Estela's mother sought and gained employment at the same plant and sent for her children to come live with her in Athens. Estela, too, has many household responsibilities. She is the primary caregiver to her younger siblings as her mother works at night so she can take care of her children during the day while Estela is at school. According to Estela's mother, this is more of a matter of convenience than of desire. She simply has no one else to count on and does not believe that she can afford childcare. Estela's relationship with her mother has been a turbulent one. Last year, her mother filed unruly child charges against Estela, but for many reasons, Estela remains in the house. Estela is currently serving probation due to truancy and unruly child charges and is monitored bi-weekly by both her probation officer and a volunteer from the University of Georgia. The volunteer checks on her grades, absences, and discipline reports and meets with Estela to discuss how things are going. The probation officer mainly checks her attendance as well as discipline incidents. Disciplinary infractions are of high interest because in Estela's sixth grade year alone, she received over 160 discipline reports. A discipline report can be something as minor as coming unprepared to class or as major as fighting. Of those 160+ discipline reports, 112 of them were of a more serious nature (fighting, bullying, cursing at teachers/students, stealing, etc.). Her seventh grade year was much of the same: 127 discipline reports with 87 of them being serious. She has been threatened many times with alternative school, but according to her iPod voice recordings, "they are not going to send *me* [her emphasis] to alternative school. They been tellin' me that since 6<sup>th</sup> grade." Indeed, the threat rings hollow after three years.

Estela started off her eighth grade year with one week of in-school suspension for fighting the second day back to school.

Estela has attended four different schools since enrolling in fourth grade. They have moved several times to find more affordable housing. At each of those schools, Estela has had significant behavior problems. Upon reviewing her ELL cumulative folder, most of her former teachers indicated that Estela's discipline problems adversely affected her learning. This trend has continued throughout middle school. Frequently, Estela has been involved in several physical altercations. The counselors at school have met with her repeatedly concerning her behavior as a bully to both her peers and younger students. Estela continues to bully other students, particularly newly arrived immigrants. While the bullying does not occur to a great extent in the ELL classroom setting, many of my students are tracked throughout their school day. Therefore, many of them spend the majority of their school day together, and it is in the regular classroom setting that Estela is best able to bully. None of her other teachers speak Spanish, so Estela is frequently able to use their lack of Spanish proficiency to bully and intimidate other Latino students.

In this research study, Estela was also interviewed entirely at school. She, too, cited childcare responsibilities after school as interfering in our potential interview time. We sat down and worked out an interview schedule. Estela decided that she would like to come down and eat breakfast with me on her interview days. As soon as she got off the bus, she would head to the cafeteria to get her breakfast and bring it to my room. This worked well and set a relaxed atmosphere for the interview. She was also pleased that she was allowed to come down a hallway that was restricted to other students during that time. As I do not have a homeroom class nor do the other teachers on my hallway,

students are forbidden from entering this hallway before being dismissed to their extended learning time classes. She would proudly show the note to any teacher who tried to stop her from coming down the hallway. She would have to tell me about this before each and every interview. Her interviews would usually take longer than the other students simply because it took time for her to finish her breakfast and juice while simultaneously answering interview questions.

**Roberto** is a 14-year old male from Monterrey, Mexico. He has lived in the United States since 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. After attending both kindergarten and first grade in Mexico, he enrolled in second grade classes in Oconee County. He attended school for one year in Oconee County before transferring to Clarke County Schools where he has been continuously enrolled with one exception. When Roberto was in sixth grade, he was sent to the regional youth detention center (RYDC) for having a knife at school. By all accounts (police, administration, teachers, and students), Roberto was holding the knife for another student and never believed that he would get in trouble for helping out a friend. Unfortunately for him, Clarke County has a zero-tolerance policy regarding weapons on campus. Charges were filed and Roberto was sent to the RYDC. After leaving the RYDC, Roberto spent one semester at the alternative school. Interestingly, if one pulls up his attendance record from the school district's attendance software, there is no mention of his time at the RYDC, but they refer to his period at the alternative school as "incarceration." Currently, Roberto has very few serious discipline problems. He has served silent lunch and after-school detention many times this year, mainly due to talking back to teachers.

Roberto lives with his mother, father, and younger brother in a lower middle-class neighborhood near the school. His father owns his own landscaping business of which he is justifiably proud. Roberto works with his father in the summers and on weekends cutting grass. In his iPod recordings, he complains that his father will not allow him to work on school days “because I could be gettin’ paid!” Roberto is quite popular at the school and is the first Latino male in the history of the school to be voted “Class Favorite” by his eighth-grade peers. Roberto works hard in school and is trying desperately to make all As and Bs. However, he has experienced a great deal of difficulty in his math class this year and is beginning to question the importance of trying in school. He hangs out with members of a local street gang both inside and outside of school. He has taken to wearing gang clothing and growing out his pinkie nail which is typical of middle school students at this particular school who are either members of the gang or who are “trying on” that identity.

**Jesús** is a 13 year-old male from Michoacán, Mexico. He is currently a seventh-grade student enrolled in lower-level classes with both remediation and ELL services. He has lived in the United States since the second grade. Jesús is a highly talented student who is an avid gamer and who loves Yu-Gi-Oh!® trading cards. He is particularly popular among his male peers. He is frequently asked to draw pictures for them to use in adorning their notebooks. During his free time, Jesús will almost always be found sketching some sort of science fiction figure.

Jesús does not tend to socialize with other gang members at school. He has, however, been asked to join several times. He has turned down their repeated invitations and has faced no obvious retribution for his refusal. This is in part due to the fact that he

is extremely close with his older brother with whom he is almost constantly around.

Jesús helps his family on the weekend by working at the local flea market. Both of his parents work long hours in a local poultry processing plant.

Jesús has had some discipline problems this year, having served both silent lunch and after-school detention. These punishments are the result of talking back to teachers and not following teachers' directives. A recent note left by a substitute teacher labeled Jesús "an obsessive talker" (J. Haygood, personal communication, February 6, 2007).

One of his teachers describes him as "a highly capable student when he wants to be" (A. Matheny, personal communication, February 6, 2007). His grades have fallen on his most recent report card, and Jesús seems increasingly distracted during class.

**Alexandra** is a 12 year-old girl from Querétaro, Mexico. She is currently a seventh-grade student who is enrolled in neither accelerated nor remedial classes. She receives ELL services in the form of ELL language arts/connections and ELL/sheltered social studies. She will most likely exit ELL classes at the conclusion of this academic year. Her spoken English proficiency has progressed to the point that she is one of the anchors of our school's video announcements.

Alexandra is a confident young woman who very much wants to attend college. She had her first taste of college life last year when her mother began working at a sorority house at the University. She frequently goes to work with her mother, hanging out with some of the sorority sisters while her mom is working. One particular woman works with Alexandra two or three times a week as an informal tutor/mentor, assisting Alexandra with school projects and other assignments. She also has support from her older brother who is an eleventh-grade student at the local high school.

Alexandra is rarely a disciplinary problem and enjoys a large measure of academic success. The only exception to this is mathematics. She has struggled this entire year in math and is attending after-school tutoring. She is eager to help other students in subjects in which she is experiencing academic success. She frequently volunteers to help newcomer students at the school to adjust both academically and socially.

**Itzel** is a 13 year-old girl from Durango, Mexico. She is currently an eighth-grade student who is enrolled in advanced classes. She was evaluated for participation in the Clarke County School District's gifted and talented program (Spectrum) during her seventh-grade year. She did not qualify and no attempts are currently being made to proceed with the possibility of a portfolio evaluation. It is the policy of the Clarke County School District to only test students for the gifted program in English. They are not allowed any testing materials in their native language, though the justification is presented that there are non-verbal tests (e.g. InView, Naglieri) that may be given in lieu of traditional quantitative/verbal batteries (OLSAT, CogAT). Fortunately, Itzel had an advocate last year that ensured that Itzel was placed in advanced classes this year. Therefore, she is enrolled in many classes that are mainly comprised of students who have already been identified as gifted/talented via the school district's definition. As an accelerated student, Itzel has the opportunity to take algebra, advanced language arts, and Spanish, options that are only available to accelerated students. While being placed in accelerated classes, Itzel has opted to remain in ELL classes (connections and sheltered social studies). She achieved an exiting score on last year's ACCESS for ELLs test, but both she and her parents requested that she remain in ELL classes for another year as a



means of additional support. Itzel's ACCESS for ELL scores will not be available until May of this year, but her parents do not want her to remain in ELL classes at the high school level should she achieve an exiting score again.

Itzel has participated in several events at the University of Georgia, most notably the Steps to College program. The University's Steps to College program targets students whose first language is not English and provides many opportunities for those students to participate in activities at UGA (i.e., after-school programs, writing contests, college recruitment opportunities, summer programs). Itzel was selected to participate in one of the summer programs that allowed middle-school ELL students to attend special classes at the University for two weeks during the summer break. During this time, not only was Itzel introduced to the college setting, but also met with Latina students from the University who functioned as mentors. Since her summer activities, Itzel is extremely focused on attending college and becoming a veterinarian. Her parents are highly supportive of her education and take great pains to be involved in school activities. Itzel's only sibling did graduate from a high school in the district and is currently employed. His girlfriend, who is a native English speaker, meets with Itzel two or three times a week to practice conversational skills. She is also able to help Itzel with her homework when her parents are unable to do so due to the language barrier.

Itzel has no discipline record at the school and maintains a positive relationship with each of her teachers. She is quiet and withdrawn, attributes that many teachers mistake for lack of intelligence until Itzel begins to turn in her work. One teacher at the school was so impressed by Itzel's poem, "Soy México," that she presented it at the National Council for Teachers of English national conference this year. Itzel does not

have a great deal of self-confidence and has a difficult time making friends. However, while her circle of friends is small, it is an invariably tight-knit group.

Table 3: Descriptive Summary of All 6 Focal Participants in the Research Study

<b>Name</b>	<b>Self-Identity Label</b>	<b>Basic Demographic Information</b>	<b>Dropout Prediction Information</b>	<b>Dropout Prediction Scale Score</b>
<b>Angie</b>	Cholo	8 <sup>th</sup> grade student at the research site; 14 year old female from Michoacán, Mexico; currently ranked 178 <sup>th</sup> out of 206 students; currently taking lower-level/remedial classes in addition to ELL classes	Same age as her classmates; frequently absent; most grades are C's and F's; low mobility; multiple discipline problems; does not plan to marry or have children; does not expect to graduate from high school; socially withdrawn	9
<b>Estela</b>	Cholo	8 <sup>th</sup> grade student at the research site; 13 year old female from Acapulco, Mexico; currently ranked 198 <sup>th</sup> out of 206 students; currently taking lower-level/remedial classes in addition to ELL classes	Same age as her classmates; frequently absent; most grades are C's and F's; low mobility; multiple discipline problems; does not plan to marry but does plan to have a child; does not expect to graduate from high school; socially engaged	10

<b>Roberto</b>	Medio	8 <sup>th</sup> grade student at the research site; 14 year old male from Monterrey, Mexico; currently ranked 94 <sup>th</sup> out of 206 students; currently taking on-level classes in addition to ELL classes	Same age as his classmates; most grades are A's and B's; low mobility; discipline problems; plans to marry and have children; expects to graduate from high school; socially engaged	4
<b>Jesús</b>	Medio	7 <sup>th</sup> grade student at the research site; 13 year old male from Michoacán, Mexico; currently ranked 120 <sup>th</sup> out of 198 students; currently taking lower-level/remedial classes in addition to ELL classes	Same age as his classmates; most grades are A's and B's; low mobility; discipline problems; plans to marry and have children; expects to graduate from high school and attend college	4
<b>Alexandra</b>	Cabezón	7 <sup>th</sup> grade student at the research site; 12 year old female from Querétaro, Mexico; currently ranked 20 <sup>th</sup> out of 196 students; currently taking on-level classes in addition to ELL classes	Same age as her classmates; most grades are A's and B's; no discipline problems; low mobility; expects to graduate from high school and attend college; highly introverted	3
<b>Itzel</b>	Cabezón	8 <sup>th</sup> grade student at the research site; 13 year old female from Durango, Mexico; currently ranked 7 <sup>th</sup> out of 198 students; currently taking advanced classes in addition to ELL classes	Same age as her classmates; most grades are A's and B's; no discipline problems; low mobility; expects to graduate from high school and attend college; introverted	2

## Angie

Angie is an eighth-grade student at the research site and is currently ranked 178<sup>th</sup> out of 206 students. According to her most recent standardized test, the Measures of Academic Progress assessment, Angie is currently in the twenty-sixth percentile in language usage, the seventh percentile in mathematics, and the first percentile in reading. Her ACCESS for ELLs scores are slightly higher as she has achieved in the 3.0-4.0 range which indicates that she has moved beyond beginning or emerging English proficiency and is currently in the developing/expanding phase. On her most recent CRCT, Angie failed to meet standards in all five assessment areas: language arts, science, social studies, reading, and mathematics. To date she has only passed one section of the CRCT during her entire middle school career.

Angie's score on Weber's (1990) Dropout Prediction Scale was the second-highest of all of the students' surveys. She chose to complete the student questionnaire in English. In assessing the student questionnaire, each question is rated according to its ability to predict potential dropout (please see Appendix C). Angie is not older than her classmates so her age relative to classmates should have no bearing on her dropout potential. She also indicated that while homework is assigned in her classes, she chooses not to complete it. This is an indicator of a potential dropout as Weber (1989) posits that this reflects a lack of engagement in one's academic career. Angie also indicated on the student questionnaire that she had been absent for approximately eleven to fifteen days, and that she had been late more than 21 days this year. Her absences combined with her large number of tardy arrivals to school are also an indicator of a potential dropout as Weber (1989) discovered through his search of academic indicators relating to potential

dropouts that every dropout scale focused significantly on a student's absences as reflective of their engagement in school. Angie also self-reported that her grades were about half Cs and half Fs. This is slightly different from Weber's (1990) original Dropout Prediction Scale in that his scale included D's rather than F's. This modification has been accounted for and addressed in the methodology section. Regardless of the grade letter equivalency used, Angie's response is yet another predictor for potential dropout.

Angie has only changed schools one time due to a family move since she began school in the United States. This lack of mobility is not a predictor of a potential dropout, rather her stability in her academic environment normally indicates higher academic achievement (Weber, 1990). Angie indicated on her questionnaire that she has had disciplinary problems in school during the last year; that she has been suspended or put on probation at school; that she is not interested in school; and that she does not like to work hard in school. These answers also indicate that Angie has a greater probability of dropping out than do her peers who do not report the same level of discipline problems. Angie also responded that she does not plan to get married or to have children. These answers reflect a lack of sexual preoccupation and do not indicate a proclivity toward dropping out. However, the same question asks the student to indicate the age at which she expects to finish her full-time education, to which Angie responded that she would expect to be sixteen years old when she finishes her full-time education. This answer again reflects a higher probability of dropping out of school before graduation. Angie also responded that she probably did not expect to graduate from high school. Her answer also reflects a higher potential for dropping out of school. When asked if she

planned to go to college at some time in the future, Angie indicated that she did not plan to do so. She further indicated that several of her close friends or siblings had dropped out of high school. According to Weber (1989), if a student sees those around them dropping out of school, the student herself is more likely to dropout as well. As Angie indicated that several people in her life had dropped out of school, the likelihood of her dropping out of school increases as well. Angie also self-reported that she never went out with friends or went out on dates. She also mentioned that she rarely spoke with friends on the telephone. Each of these responses indicates a level of social withdrawal that can also indicate a higher probability of dropping out (Weber, 1989). When all of Angie's responses to the student questionnaire were totaled, she scored a nine. Any student scoring a four or greater on the Dropout Prediction Scale is classified as a potential dropout. Higher scores indicate a greater dropout probability. With a score of nine, Angie's potential for dropping out is significant.

I had the opportunity to interview Angie on three different occasions in order to discuss more in-depth questions that related to the Dropout Prediction Scale and others that were related to identity development and negotiation. Angie seemed to like being interviewed, even wanting to sit in my chair and "pretend" to be the teacher. She was hesitant to answer some questions as she was afraid that her answers would reveal her family's residency status. She was also concerned with the audience of this research. She wanted to be assured that no teachers at the research site would read her responses either to the questionnaire or the interview. After reassurances as to the confidentiality of this information, Angie proceeded through the interviews with relative ease.

Angie came to the United States at the age of six. She has lived in Georgia for the entire time except for last summer when she was sent to Florida to live with her grandmother as a form of punishment. Her grandmother is a migrant worker who harvests watermelons in Florida throughout the summer months. Angie did complete kindergarten and first grade in Mexico before moving to the United States. She has spent the majority of her academic career in the Clarke County School District. She moved briefly to another neighboring school district during fourth grade, but moved back to Clarke County shortly afterward.

When asked to select words that accurately describe who she feels she is, Angie self-selected the words “Mexican” and “dumb” from the list. When probed further about her rationale for choosing those words, Angie said, “Cause I know I’m Mexican, like I’m from Mexico. And I know I’m dumb cause my teachers be tellin’ me that all the time” (Appendix F, lines 1873, 1877-1878). When asked to elaborate, Angie indicated that not all of her teachers had told her that she was dumb, but that “enough of ‘em” had (Appendix F, line 1882). She appeared agitated regarding this focus of the discussion and asked that we move on to the next interview topic. She also indicated that she was ready to move on to the high school because it would be better “cause you get more education. Like it ain’t gonna be like how we play here” (Appendix F, lines 1906).

Angie has limited memories of her educational experience in Mexico: “I really don’ remember like too much but I have like pictures when they were tellin’ you in Spanish like A B Cs and the numbers and the colors” (Appendix F, line s 1988-1990). She also indicates that she feels as though she learns more here in the United States, though in her journals she followed up this point by further discussing that she might not

feel that way had she remained in Mexico: “Like I wonder what school is like there. Like when I talk to my cousins they’re like studying social studies and stuff there too. It’s just like about Mexico instead of Georgia. Like maybe it would be just as hard there if I had stayed” (Angie, journal entry, December 12, 2006).

Angie also indicates that she dislikes classes in which there are few or no other Mexicans in the class: “Yeah. I just hate language arts. There ain’t no Mexicans at all” (Appendix F, lines 2025-2026). This class is also particularly difficult for Angie as she has had several disciplinary infractions in her language arts class. She has a great deal of difficulty in getting along with her teacher: “She just hate me. I can’t do nothin’ right for her. She got attitude when I walk in the door” (Appendix F, lines 2026-2027). In one of her journal entries, I asked Angie to further reflect upon her inability to establish a positive relationship with this teacher as Angie’s disciplinary infractions in this class were hurting her grade. I believed that by further exploring the reasons for the difficult relationships in the class, perhaps Angie could modify her behavior so that she would not constantly be removed from that particular education setting. Angie responded in her iPod journal,

You don’ know what it’s like. Like she hates all the Mexicans. She be tellin’ us not to be speakin’ in Spanish in there, that if we don’t wanna be Americans and speak in English, that we just need to go back to wherever it is we came from. She *know* that we from Mexico. She know it! She lets the black kids do whatever they want, but if I do the same thing, she says, ‘Angie, you get out of the classroom! You go to ISS! I’ll bring the paperwork up there in a little bit. You just go sit in ISS until I figure out what to do with you. I don’t know why you



come to school if you don' wanna work, if you don' wanna be here. I ain't your babysitter so I'm not sure why you come to this class. This is an *English* class, we speak *English* in here. If you wanna speak Spanish, you don' need to be here. (Angie, journal entry, January 5, 2007)

When asked about classes that she does like, she indicated that she prefers her social studies and science classes as there are many kinesthetic and project-based opportunities for learning in both classes:

Those are the two best. Like we do projects in here. It's not borin'...I ain't bored in science and social studies. I don't have to stare. I can just do stuff. Like I know what I'm doin' in here. Like I know the Civil War. Like I know it. And I know those rocks we been doin' in Ms. Foster's class. Like I get it, you know? (Appendix F, lines 2037-2043)

She also indicated that she had struggled with these subjects in the past, but felt as though she had improved her academic performance in both of these classes during the current academic year. Angie further indicated that if she could be a teacher at the research site, she would focus the curriculum around project-based learning and that no other changes would be necessary: "If you change that, it makes everything better. You wouldn' have to change nothin' else. Everybody'd be getting' it then" (Appendix F, lines 2077-2078).

When asked to provide the rationale for obtaining an education, Angie responded that she went to school in order to get a job one day, one that was better than working in the local *pollería* (poultry processing plant). She mentioned the possibility of attending the local technical college in order to get her cosmetologist's license, and hoped that her class would continue the eighth-grade tradition of participating in a field trip to Athens

Technical College where the students participate in career interest surveys and simulations. Angie does not participate in any after school activities such as clubs or sports, saying that she must go home immediately after school to take care of her younger brother.

Our last interview session highlighted some of the difficulties that Angie faces with her temper. At the beginning of the session, she was so upset by the actions of another student that we could not even begin to address the interview questions until she was able to explain how angry she was and the reason for her anger. While Angie understands that the possibility of being removed from the regular education setting and being placed at the alternative school is highly likely, she refused to walk away from a fight (Appendix F, lines 2264-2281). She even discussed the fact that the principal has already signed the papers for admitting her at the alternative school. She does not seem fazed by this, but rather focuses on her incredulity at the reason for sending her there: her use of foul language rather than other discipline infractions she has experienced during her middle school career (Appendix F, lines 2296-2300). When we were finally able to discuss the interview questions, Angie noted that she does not feel that the teachers at the research site believe it is important to be Mexican. In fact, she rather lists the social hierarchy of the school as she sees it, with African-American students receiving special treatment (Appendix F, lines 2330-2338). There are so few White students in her classes that they do not even register on Angie's social hierarchy (Appendix F, lines 2331-2332). She believes that Mexican students at the school receive fewer privileges than the African-American students at school, while also expressing the belief that African-American teachers show favoritism to African-American students (Appendix F, lines

2336-2339). While she does admit that some teachers at the school do care about her and her education, she focuses on her hatred of one specific teacher and the racism she feels that she experiences in that teacher's class. Her negative experiences in that class appear to overshadow the positive experiences she has in others. In fact, this particular teacher has repeatedly told Angie that she should drop out (Appendix F, lines 2360-2362). She referred to one particular experience in her iPod journal:

Man, I hate that lady! She always be tellin' me that I need to drop out. Just go on and drop out. I'm tired of her tellin' me I ain' gonna be nothin'. She says that all the time. Just 'cause I don' do my work in her class. Does she ever think it's 'cause of her? I don' wanna do my work for her. If I fail the CRCT, it looks bad for her, not me. Everybody knows what goes on in that class, how she be treatin' the Mexicans, like we can't even learn. Like we're stupid. Like we don' even know how to read 'cause we just gonna end up at the *pollería* anyway. Maybe I don' like to read what she have us readin' in that class. I'm tired of readin' poetry. We never read no Spanish poetry and I *know* there's books in the library with Spanish poems in 'em. I'm tired of her tellin' me I ain' nothin' when she ain' nothin' neither. I hate goin' to that class! I don' know why they make me go. I don' do nothin' and it just makes me mad. It ain' just me neither. It's how she treats all the Mexicans in there. The black kids...they do whatever they want. They cuss, and eat, and chew gum, and she don' say nothin'. If I do, I get wrote up. I don' even know why let they her be a teacher at this school man. It just makes me mad! Y'all are supposed to care 'bout us, to want us to be somethin',

to want us to do good. That's y'all's job and she don' do it and nothin' happens and nobody cares. (Angie, journal entry, November 29, 2006)

While Angie does not respect the teacher in question, the teacher's words have clearly had an effect. When asked if she believes what the teacher says about her being dumb, Angie replies "Sometimes. Like you hear it enough and sometimes you wonder if it's true" (Appendix F, lines 2366-2367). The racial distinctions at the school also affect her perception of grading. She believes that the White students at school are making A's because they behave in the way that their teachers want them to behave (Appendix F, lines 2388-2389). She believes that she would do better academically if she had Mexican teachers because she believes that they would have different expectations than White teachers:

Like I think they class [a Mexican teacher's] would be different from a White teacher's class. Like...like maybe they class would be like half Mexican stuff, like we'd study our stuff and she could um talk Spanish to us all the time (Appendix F, lines 2398-2400).

With a racially different composition of both faculty and students, Angie believes that she would have a greater possibility of experiencing academic success. She does not currently believe that she is a good student. This is so ingrained in her psyche that she is unable to provide advice on being a good student for the hypothetical student in one of the interview questions. She finally relays that a good student "don't talk back, don't use foul language, don't fight, [and] don't not do your work" (Appendix F, lines 2422-2423). She admits that at times, she purposely gets in trouble so that she will be removed from

certain teachers' classes as the prospect of in-school suspension is more enjoyable than enduring certain classes (Appendix F, lines 2475-2494).

Angie is also experiencing difficulty in her home life. Her mother has recently returned to Mexico, leaving Angie and her siblings here to stay with their father. Her mother's absence has greatly affected Angie's emotional stability. She has mentioned on several occasions that she does not believe that her father is able to adequately care for her and her siblings on an emotional level. In one of her journal entries soon after her mother left, Angie noted:

He tries and all. Like he makes sure that we have a house and food. But like he don' even talk to us. I come home and fix supper. He don' say nothin'. He just gets his food and goes to his room. He don' ask how my day was or nothin'. It ain' just me either. He don' talk to nobody once he gets home. Like my mom did that and now that she gone back to Mexico, he don' do it in her place. Like he don' never talk at all. (Angie, journal entry, November 30, 2006)

Angie is also having emotional difficulties because her older sister has just become pregnant. The possibility of her sister moving out of the house both excites and concerns Angie. She believes that her sister should go live with the father of the baby

My dad told her before if she got pregnant, she couldn't stay with us no more. But I don' know. I don' think that guy's gonna take care of her. My dad says she's not gonna be livin' with us because he don' like that guy. He told her that guy was bad and she didn' listen. You know? She didn' listen to nobody. She needs to go with him. That's the daddy, not my daddy, he needs to take care of them, not my daddy. (Appendix F, lines 2565-2571)

Her lack of family involvement may be a potential reason that Angie has joined a gang. While she was a member of the gang before her mother left and her sister became pregnant, her gang activity has intensified since the occurrence of these two events. In her interview, she states that she dropped out of the gang two months ago, but her iPod journal contradicts that:

Okay, I lied about *la pandilla*. I still do stuff with 'em. I just don' want you to be like all mad and disappointed. My cousins are in it and it's not as bad as you think. You're white, you don' know what it's like to be in a gang, like they're my family. Like it's fun to be with them. I don' have to think 'bout anything at all when I'm with them 'cause I just have a good time. I can be me with them. None of them think I'm bad. Like I can be a leader of them if I want. The only thing that's keepin' me from it is the whole V thing. It ain' worth all that. But I just don' want you to be mad at me. You just don' understand (Angie, journal entry, February 3, 2007).

She also alludes to the fact that many of the students at school who pretend to be in a gang when they really are not. She says that it is not obvious who is in a gang and that part of being in a gang is not flaunting your membership at school, but rather flaunting it in your community (Angie, journal entry, February 3, 2007). She has recently gotten gang tattoos on both her hands and neck and appears to be escalating in her gang activity. This coupled with a recent increase in disciplinary infractions could result in Angie being sent to the alternative school before spring break.

## Estela

Estela is an eighth-grade student at the research site and is currently ranked 198<sup>th</sup> out of 206 students. According to her most recent standardized test, the Measures of Academic Progress assessment, Estela is in the first percentile for language usage, the second percentile in mathematics, and the first percentile in reading. Her ACCESS for ELLs scores range from 3.0-4.0 showing that she has entered the emerging/developing phase of academic proficiency in English. She did not pass any section of her most recent CRCT, nor has she passed any section of the CRCT during her middle school career.

Estela's score on Weber's (1990) Dropout Prediction Scale was the highest of all students participating. She chose to complete the student questionnaire in Spanish. As Estela is only thirteen years old, her age relative to classmates does not reflect a potential to drop out. The average age of most of her on-level classmates is between thirteen and fourteen years of age. However, Estela did indicate that when she was assigned homework in her classes, she chose not to complete it. This lack of homework completion can indicate a lack of academic engagement which is a potential indicator of dropping out (Weber, 1989). Estela is not frequently absent, though she is frequently tardy which can also indicate a higher probability of dropping out (Weber, 1989). Estela indicates that when she is late it is usually because she has hidden away from the bus stop and then misses the bus on purpose. Lately, however, the police have been going to her house to bring her to school so this has lessened her tardies lately. Estela also self-reported that she has mostly C's and F's on her eighth grade report cards. This also can reflect a lack of academic engagement which can lead to an increased possibility of dropping out.

Estela has never changed schools due to her family moving to a different location, so this degree of stability normally indicates higher academic achievement (Weber, 1989). Estela also self-reported that she has had discipline problems in the school in the past year; that she has been suspended or put on probation at school; that she is not satisfied with the way her education is going; and that she does not like to work hard in school. Each of these is an indicator of a greater probability of dropping out according to Weber's (1990) Dropout Prediction Scale. Estela also indicates that she never plans to marry, but does plan to have a child by the time she is seventeen years old. This suggests a level of sexual preoccupation which can in turn be interpreted as a greater potential to drop out (Weber, 1989). She also believes that she will complete her full-time education at the age of fifteen, also suggesting a high probability of dropping out (Weber, 1989). When asked if she believes she will graduate from high school, Estela indicated that she would probably not do so, nor does she believe that she will attend college. Estela also reported that several close friends have dropped out of high school. She does not report that any of her siblings have dropped out of school, but Estela is also the oldest child in her family. She reported going out with friends on occasion and talking on the phone with friends daily, but noted that she does not have a boyfriend. Her closeness with her friends indicates a degree of social engagement which does not lend itself to potentially dropping out. Estela scored a ten on the Dropout Prediction Scale with any score greater than or equal to four indicating that the respondent does have the potential to drop out. Again, this score was the highest of any student completing the questionnaire at the research site.



I was able to interview Estela on three different occasions in order to follow-up her completion of the student questionnaire with more in-depth questions related to her academic experiences as well as questions relating to identity development and negotiation. She did not seem to mind the interviewing experience at all, always inquiring as to when our next session would be. She was not as preoccupied as some of the other students were with questions regarding residency status or the audience of this dissertation. She was highly engaged in the interview process and answered all questions.

Estela came to the United States in fourth grade. She has attended Clarke County schools for her entire U.S. academic career and has only lived in Athens since she moved from Mexico. When she was asked to choose descriptors that accurately reflected how she would describe herself, Estela selected “Mexican,” “dumb,” “*cholo*,” and “poor.” Additionally when marking her selections, she wrote “100% *puro*” to the side of “Mexican,” and commented that other people had described her as a “*cholo*” (Appendix F, lines 2829-2831) Throughout the interview as well as in her journal entries, Estela frequently discusses what others think of her rather than what she thinks of herself: “All my teachers think I’m dumb. Lots of people do. Like my probation officer always told me that I was makin’ dumb decisions. I guess my grades say I’m dumb too” (Estela, journal entry, December 11, 2006). This negative perception of her academic abilities has affected her future academic plans as Estela indicates that she has no desire to either complete high school or attend college (Appendix F, lines 2843-2844). She believes that she will not pass the CRCT this April and will be retained. According to her report cards for her academic year, she could currently be retained on her course grades alone without

consideration of the CRCT. Naturally, she does not want to remain in the eighth grade for another year and says that she will drop out if she is retained (Appendix F, lines 2848-2850). In a journal entry after the school's mandatory promotion/retention meeting, Estela noted:

Who cares about this stuff? They just pick who they wanna stay back anyway. Like those black kids last year, a lot of them failed the CRCT and they didn't have to stay back. They didn't send all those kids to the [transition academy]. They just picked who they like and who they wanna stay back. I ain' stayin' back. I don' care. I'll get my mom to send me back to Mexico. I ain' stayin' the eighth grade again. I ain' passed the CRCT yet, but now it counts when I can' go to high school. I won' finish, it don' even matter. I don' even think they can send Mexicans over there [to the transition academy] anyway, like there's a rule or somethin' 'bout retainin' people in ESOL. Like they can' do that. (Estela, journal entry, February 12, 2007)

Estela has had a great deal of difficulty, both academic and disciplinary, during her tenure in U.S. schools. She has failed the majority of classes taken and has had many disciplinary infractions both at the elementary and middle school levels. Not surprisingly, when asked if she preferred U.S. or Mexican schools, Estela unequivocally chose Mexican schools. She describes Mexican schools as "fun...that the teachers were better, the classes were better" (Appendix F, lines 2982-2985). She also talks about the language barrier she has experienced in the United States. She reports that she had a much higher level of comprehension of academic subjects while she was in Mexican schools. While preferring that academic discussions be conducted in Spanish, Estela also

noted that her teachers in Mexico were better than her teachers in Athens. She feels that “they [her teachers in Athens] don’t like me. They make me feel dumb even if I do try” (Appendix F, lines 3021-3022). However, Estela has been experiencing some level of academic success in her math class as she notes that she is no longer failing the class and has improved her grade to a C (Appendix F, lines 3054-3060). The classes that Estela likes the least are the classes where she does not have friends, namely other Mexican students. She notes that she does not like to complete group projects if her friends are not in her group, simply refusing to complete assignments and taking a zero rather than working with people she either does not know or does not like. In an iPod entry, Estela noted that she is “never doin’ another group project again. I ain’ workin’ with people that don’ respect me and my language” (Estela, journal entry, January 18, 2007). Again, like Angie, Estela believes that the reason for an education is to obtain a good job (Appendix F, lines 3112-3122). Also like Angie, Estela does not participate in any after-school activities, though she used to participate in migrant education programming after-school during her sixth grade year.

Estela also believes that the teachers at the research site do not believe that being Mexican is important because “they don’ treat us like everybody else” (Appendix F, line 3239). When asked to further explain how teachers treat Mexican students in a different manner, Estela says that teachers do not stop African-American students from picking on the Mexican students and that teachers have a tendency to yell at Mexican students more than other students. She also reports that teachers at the research site do not care about her as a person or a student. When asked how she knows this, she replies:

I don’ know their feelins’, but I know how they act, and they don’ care if I learn

or not. They don't care if I come to school or not. I think they wish I didn't never come to school. (Appendix F, lines 3274-3276)

Estela believes that being a Mexican student at the research site is more difficult than being a student of another ethnicity. When asked why she believes this, Estela replies,

Like the black kids at school, they can do whatever they want with the black teachers. They don't yell at them like they yell at the Mexicans. The black kids get to be in the good classes and we're in the ones for dumb kids. (Appendix F, lines 3374-3314)

When asked to expound upon what she considers the classes for the "dumb kids," she responds that she has to take ELT and ELL classes. Extended learning time at the research site is divided into two components: extension and remediation. Extension classes are for those students who have passed the CRCT and have passing grades in their current classes. The majority of ELL students at the research site are enrolled in remediation classes which provide extra learning opportunities in both language arts and mathematics. Naturally, ELL classes provide extra language support for students learning English as an additional language. These additional support classes are provided for "dumb kids" in Estela's mind. She is a member of an ELT math remediation course as well as ELL courses in language arts, social studies, and mathematics. In her journal, she discussed how frustrating it is for her to be in these classes:

I don't like bein' in these classes. ELT is a waste of time. All it is is more math. I don't get math during the regular class so how am I gonna get math during this extra time? It's the same teacher I have during the regular time and I don't understand her then so how am I supposed to understand her during ELT? I wish

I didn' have to take the dumb classes. I wish my mom would let me out of ESOL. I been in it since I got here and I still ain' smart. I can't read good or write good, so why am I in there? It don' help me and I wanna be in regular classes. Like I'm always in the dumb classes, even in ESOL. Y'all have us in a good class or a bad class and I'm always in the bad class. We don' even get to do what the good ESOL class does. We're always practicing verbs and practicing how to write sentences, and practicing, practicing, practicing. I'm tired of practicing. And we're about to sign up for high school and I'm gonna be in those dumb classes there too. I'm not even gonna pass the eighth grade, and then I'll be here another year in these dumb classes another year. I don' think all this extra practice is gonna help so why do teachers keep me in these dumb classes? I don wanna take ELT math, I wanna be in a good class like other students get to be in like that one where they read the newspaper every morning and talk about what's happening here and everywhere. Or that art class. I'd rather do that than math. I didn't get a choice this whole year. When they pass out those papers to pick your classes, they always go past my desk, they always go past me. They just know I'm gonna be in the dumb classes. They don' even have to look to see if my name is on the list, they just know. (Estela, journal entry, February 14, 2007)

This also affects Estela's perception of herself as a student. She repeatedly remarks throughout her interviews and journal entries that she is not a good student, that she is dumb, and that she is not capable.

One area that Estela does feel capable in is that of her gang. She joined the gang in the sixth grade and has attempted to "jump in" girls at school as well as at the bus stop.

When she was truant last year, the reason she gave to the police was that she was hanging out with other gang members at someone's house. She would hide in the mornings and miss the bus intentionally. Later in the morning, older gang members would drive to her house and pick her up to spend the day together. She views the gang as a form of protection, mentioning that gang members frequently attempt to attack new students. Many times, according to Estela, new students join the gang because they are afraid of what would happen if they do not (Estela, journal entry, November 16, 2006). She and Angie were at one time members of the same gang, but they have since split into differing factions. Estela indicates that she is no longer a member of the group that "smokes weed and does drugs" (Appendix F, line 3452), but is in a different part of the gang. She frequently associates with other alleged gang members at the school and socializes with them outside of school as well.

#### Roberto

Roberto is an eighth grade student at the research site and is currently ranked 94 out of 206 students. According to his most recent standardized test, the Measures of Academic Progress assessment, Roberto scored in the eleventh percentile in language usage, the eleventh percentile in mathematics, and the tenth percentile in reading. His ACCESS for ELLs scores fall into the 3.0-4.0 range, indicating that Roberto's academic English proficiency is emerging/developing. Roberto's latest CRCT scores reveal that he passed language arts, reading, and social studies, while failing mathematics and science. Roberto has had a great deal of academic success during his middle school career, earning mostly A's and B's on his report cards and passing most sections of the CRCT.

Roberto's score on Weber's (1990) Dropout Prediction Scale was the median score of all of the students participating. Roberto chose to respond to the questionnaire written in English. Roberto is the same age as the majority of his peers, thereby reducing the possibility of dropping out, at least in regard to this indicator (Weber, 1989). When asked to describe the amount of time spent on homework per week, Roberto indicated that he actually spent less than one hour per week on homework. This, however, is not an indicator of a potential dropout. Weber (1989) suggests that even this minimal level of effort on work outside of school indicates some degree of academic engagement, thereby reducing the potential for dropping out. Roberto also reported that he had been absent for school only one or two days during the first semester of the current academic year. During that same time, he also reported that he had been late to school one or two days as well. Roberto's low absenteeism rate reduces his risk for dropping out (Weber, 1989). He also reported that his grades are half A's and half B's. This high level of academic achievement also reduces Roberto's potential for dropping out. Roberto has changed schools three times since starting school in the United States. This high level of family mobility and number of schools attended has been shown to increase the risk for dropping out (Weber, 1989).

Roberto also reported having had a number of discipline problems during the last year. He also noted that he has been suspended or put on probation at the school. Roberto also indicated that he had been in serious trouble with the law. This refers to an incident that occurred during his sixth grade year at the research site in which he was caught with a knife. The Clarke County School District has a zero-tolerance toward weapons, so Roberto had to go to the Regional Youth Detention Center in Gainesville in

addition to spending a semester at the alternative school. Each of these discipline infraction responses leads to a greater possibility of dropping out (Weber, 1989). Roberto also responded that while he is not satisfied with the way his education is going, he is interested in school and likes to work hard in school. This level of attention and personal investment in academics suggests the potential for high academic achievement rather than the potential for dropping out (Weber, 1989). Roberto also noted that he would expect to be nineteen years old when finishing his full-time education which again suggests academic achievement rather than the potential for dropping out. He also said that he would be twenty-one years of age or older before marrying and having his first child. Both of these answers imply a lack of sexual preoccupation, which in turn, lessens Roberto's potential for dropping out.

Roberto noted that he probably expected to graduate from high school. Weber (1989) found through his research of effective dropout indicators that any hesitation (i.e., probably, probably not, etc.) on the part of the student when discussing expectations of high school graduation suggested an increase in the possibility of dropping out. Roberto is also unsure of his plans about whether or not to attend college. This level of uncertainty does not indicate a higher potential for dropping out. In Roberto's case, his level of uncertainty regarding college is related to his desire to join his father's landscaping company immediately after high school. Roberto's older brother has dropped out of high school and this does increase his chances of doing the same. Roberto's responses regarding his social life suggest that he is highly extroverted which again decreases his chances of dropping out. Roberto's overall score of four on the Dropout Prediction Scale suggests that he has the potential to drop out, but this is the



lowest possible score that a student can receive on the Dropout Prediction Scale and still be considered at-risk for dropping out.

Roberto was interviewed on three different occasions and seemed to enjoy the attention he received by participating in the interviews. While not expressing concern about issues of anonymity or confidentiality regarding residency issues, Roberto did appear preoccupied with the audience of this dissertation, inquiring as to whom the audience would be and the exact location of Georgia Southern University. He has always lived in Georgia since moving to the United States from Mexico, residing in Oconee and Clarke counties. When asked to choose words that most accurately described him, Roberto chose the words “Mexican,” “popular,” and “*cholo*.” When asked the rationale for his choices, Roberto responded, “‘Cause like I’m Mexican, okay? I think I’m popular ‘cause they voted for me like for the awards, and I’m *cholo* ‘cause I’m a G” (Appendix F, lines 117-118). Roberto is quite popular with his classmates and teachers alike. He is chosen by both to represent the school at various events throughout the year such as the emcee for the anti-gun assembly and a leader at the football pep rally. He further explained that he’s a “G” or gangster because he’s “cool like that” (Roberto, journal entry, December 14).

When asked about his future plans, Roberto said that there was uncertainty about his future, mainly related to the school district’s new promotion/retention policy. Prior to this academic year, the school district did not have a promotion/retention policy. This meant that students could fail every class during any of their middle school years and still be automatically promoted to the next grade level. However, with the advent of the accountability factors surrounding the eighth grade administration of the CRCT and the

school's abysmal pass rate on said test, the school district decided that a promotion/retention policy was necessary. Roberto has no need to be concerned from an academic grade standpoint as he currently has all A's and B's, grades that are more than sufficient for promotion. However, he is rightfully concerned about the CRCT. Students must pass language arts, reading, and mathematics in order to be promoted to the ninth grade. However, if they fail any section of the CRCT (including science and social studies), the school district has mandated that students attend summer school in order to acquire enough "seat-time" that they can be promoted to the ninth grade. However, if they fail one of the accountability sections of the CRCT as mandated by No Child Left Behind (language arts, reading, and mathematics), the students must attend summer school for remediation classes as well as complete a second administration of the CRCT before they can be promoted to high school. Roberto is quite concerned about math in particular:

Man, what if I don't pass math? I don' wanna be at this school no more. I hate that class. I'm glad I finally got switched outta that ESOL math class. I think I've gotta better shot at passin' now that I'm in the regular class. I just don' wanna stay here another year man. I think I got the other sections, but math is gonna be killer on that CRCT. (Roberto, journal entry, February 14, 2007)

He also feels that the subject matter presented in eighth grade is much more difficult than the material presented in seventh grade where he was a highly successful student. He expresses even greater concern about the difficulty of high school: "Like it ain't like middle school at all. It's hard. They don make you come to school over there. You come or you don't. It ain't like middle school" (Appendix F, lines 162-164). He

continues to talk about the classes being more difficult and the teachers being less understanding at the high school level (Appendix F, lines 169-175). When asked if these fears are related to a fear of not graduating from high school, Roberto answers in the affirmative:

I guess what like scares me the most 'bout high school 'man is that I ain' gonna make it. Like I ain' gonna finish. Maybe I can't do it. Like my friends that are over at Cedar, that's all they talk 'bout, like how hard it is. How they don' even care 'bout you at the high school. You get it or you don'. It's bigger at the high school too. You go all 'round that school, not like here with just a hall. Like you gotta get places. It ain't all right there. I don' even know if I'm gonna make it there, so I don' know why I get all worried about crazy stuff like this. (Roberto, journal entry, November 29, 2007)

While Roberto indicated in his questionnaire that he probably wanted to go to college, his interview answer was different. Roberto emphatically responded that he did not want to attend college, rather joining his father's landscaping business either after high school graduation or earlier if he did not complete high school.

With all of his concerns about promotion/retention, Roberto admitted that he is considered to be a good student at Spring Middle School and that the work takes little effort on his part. Again, however, he voiced his concern regarding his abilities in mathematics: "I'm just not good in math" (Appendix F, line 265). When pressed for additional information regarding this belief that is seemingly contradictory to his math grades, Roberto replied: "Man, that junk easy. That's a baby class ((sheltered ELL math))" (Appendix F, line 269). He also noted in his journal that he did not like the

sheltered ELL mathematics class because he did not have many friends in the class:

Man, I don' know those chickens in there. They new. They ain' been here. Like José is the only one that's in my other classes. That class for slow people. They need help with they English more than they need help with math. That ain't me.

(journal entry, February 6, 2007)

Roberto also has distinct ideas about what makes a class enjoyable in addition to having one's friends in the class. He stated that "nice" teachers are essential to a good class:

"Like don' argue...well, well like some don' scream at you for no reason. Like she know how to teach right and everything and everything like that. You know?" (Appendix F, lines 296-298). He further explained that a teacher "teaches right" by being patient:

"She goes over stuff 'til you get it. She don't get mad" (Appendix F, lines 302-303).

When given the hypothetical power to be a teacher at the school and change any aspect of the school that he so chose, Roberto earnestly responded that he wanted "teachers that wanna be here" (Appendix F, line 332).

Roberto also participates in many after-school activities. He has been a member of a local all-star baseball team and has played junior varsity baseball at the local high school. However, he has recently quit both teams in order to play soccer at the research site. When asked why he made the decision to quit baseball in order to play soccer, Roberto replied:

Man, I'm good, *good* at baseball. I ain' even gotta try no more. I wanna play somethin' that I gotta try at. Like I like baseball and all, but like we gone all the time, travelin' to play all these different teams everywhere. For soccer, we ain' gotta travel, we just stay here. I wanna play soccer here 'cause I ain' never played

nothin' for this school. I think I can make it. Tryouts are comin' up in like two weeks. Sometime in February. I think I can do it. I think I can make the team. It's gonna be good for me. I can do good at it. (Roberto, journal entry, January 26, 2007)

Roberto's optimism is not limited to sports, but rather he believes that Spring Middle School values him as a student. He also believes that the school believes that being a Mexican is important. He mentioned that teachers and students frequently talk to him and that many students want to be his friend. In one of his journal entries, Roberto stated,

Of course, this school thinks bein' a Mexican is important. They all voted for me right? ((Roberto received the honor of being named Mr. Spring Middle School by his peers' votes)). If they be hatin' Mexicans, they ain' gonna vote for me. Like I won by a lot I think. Like it wasn' even close. And people don' be startin' junk with me. They respect me. If they racist, they ain' gonna respect me. I think it's how you treat people. I'm nice to people so they nice to me. Try to get along with your teachers and they be nice to you too. (Roberto, journal entry, November 14, 2006)

This is not meant to imply that Roberto never experiences difficulties in school. At times, he notes that he feels "invisible" in class and that teachers do not always acknowledge his contributions to the class (Appendix F, line 467). However, he believes that the majority of his teachers do care about him and that they show this care through the frequent reminders of their expectations of him: "They always tell me to stay out of trouble and all that. Do my work. Be a good student" (Appendix F, lines 483-484).

Like many of the other students interviewed for this dissertation, Roberto reported that having friends is a vital component of school success: “They get you through everything. They’re always there” (Appendix F, line 522). He also encouraged the hypothetical new student in the interview questions to make new friends immediately upon arriving at Spring Middle School. Roberto acknowledged that having Mexican friends is important, especially to newcomers, but said that students should not limit their friends to a single race (Appendix F, lines 527-531). He also asserts that being a successful student makes one’s entire schooling experience much easier. To be a “good” student in Roberto’s eyes, one must put forth effort in their classes, attempt to stay out of trouble, and try to make good grades (Appendix F, lines 562-573). He also posited that decision-making is an important part of being successful in school:

It’s all about choices, man. Like you gotta make the right one. Like you can end up dead if you make the wrong one. You can’t be listenin’ to your friends all the time ‘cause sometime they be tellin’ you bad things to do ‘cause they wanna do bad things. Like the gang. Like people wanna be in it, but they can die. That’s stupid to lose you life for that. But people wanna do it. It’s their choice. You can tell people what you think is good, but they ain’ gotta listen. It ain’ your choice, it’s they choice. If they wanna do it, you gotta let ‘em. But at the same time, you ain’ gotta listen to them either (Roberto, journal entry, February 12, 2007).

Roberto’s insights into various academic experiences shed light on what it is to be a student in flux. While Roberto is currently doing well academically, he has experienced legal problems in the past and has many factors against him (i.e., sibling dropping out, discipline problems at school) in terms of high school completion. His experiences of

being a student in the middle allows us to better understand the factors that influence the decision-making process as it relates to remaining in school.

### Jesús

Jesús is a seventh-grade student at the research site and is currently ranked 120<sup>th</sup> out of 198 students. According to his most recent standardized test, the Measures of Academic Progress assessment, Jesús scored in the sixty-third percentile in language usage, in the thirty-sixth percentile in mathematics, and in the thirteenth percentile in reading. Jesús' scores on his ACCESS for ELLs assessment are wide-ranging with scores from 2.8-6.0. The scores of 2.8 and comprehension, literacy and reading reflect a student who is in the beginning stages of acquiring these elements of academic proficiency in English. However, Jesús also scored a 6.0 in regard to his English academic proficiency in speaking. This score represents a student whose abilities are on par with that of a native English speaker. On his most recent CRCT assessment, Jesús passed all sections with the exception of science. Jesús' most recent report card contained mostly A's and B's with one C in language arts.

Jesús' score on Weber's (1990) Dropout Prediction Scale is also reflective of a student who has a proclivity toward dropping out, but is also at the lower end of the scale of doing so. Jesús is a thirteen-year-old seventh grader who is the same age as most of his on-level peers. This does not suggest a potential for dropping out as he is the same age relative to most of his classmates. Jesús also self-reported that he had only been absent for one or two days of the first semester of the current academic year. He also indicated the same amount of tardies. By exhibiting a low degree of absenteeism, Jesús

also shows a high level of academic engagement, thereby lessening his chances for dropping out.

Jesús indicated that his grades are most accurately described as being mostly C's. While this is not low enough to function as an indicator of an increased potential to drop out, these scores are just on the threshold. He has never changed schools so his lack of familial mobility also suggested an increased inclination toward high school completion. However, Jesús does report that he has had disciplinary problems during the past year as well as having been suspended or put on probation. These discipline infractions function as indicators of increased potential to drop out (Weber, 1989). While he is not satisfied with the way his education is going nor does he like to work hard in school, he did report that he is interested in school. While he said that he does not like to work hard in school, he also self-reported that he spends more than three hours a week on his school work. His lack of satisfaction and hard work again indicate that Jesús is at an increased risk for dropping out. However, by spending a great deal of time on schoolwork outside of school, Jesús' actions suggest that he is indeed somewhat invested in his education (Weber, 1989).

Jesús also said that he expects to get married at the age of 20 and to have his first child at the age of twenty-one or older. These answers suggest a lack of sexual preoccupation (Weber, 1989). This increases Jesús' likelihood of remaining in high school. Jesús expects to probably graduate from high school, but admits that "my friends may keep me from graduatin'"(Jesús, journal entry, January 4, 2007). He also indicated that he plans to attend college immediately after high school. By viewing his education as a continuum, Jesús has a decreased chance of dropping out (Weber, 1989).



Sadly, Jesús indicated that many of his close friends and/or siblings have dropped out of school. With a familiarity with a large number of dropouts, Jesús' chances for dropping out increase exponentially (Weber, 1989). Also, Jesús' lack of social interaction with friends outside of school suggests a high level of introversion which can translate into potential for dropping out (Weber, 1989). Overall, Jesús' score of 4 on the Dropout Prediction Scale suggests that he is potentially a high school dropout.

Jesús was interviewed on three separate occasions and was at times, a difficult interview participant. Jesús did not understand why anyone would want to interview him or record his responses. He responded: "I'm not important enough to record...No one ever listens to me" (Appendix F, lines 837-841). Once we were able to move beyond the issue of him being important enough to record, we also had to address his concerns about confidentiality with regard to this information being shared with other teachers in the school. Once both of these issues were settled, Jesús became more comfortable with the interviews. By the last interview, he appeared to be completely at ease with his participation in and recording of his interview.

Jesús moved to Georgia at the age of seven and has always lived in Athens since arriving from Mexico. He is a highly inquisitive student who loves to research myriad topics on the internet. He always has an unanswered question when he comes to class and will search diligently until he finds the answer. However, despite his inquisitiveness, Jesús has low self-esteem and does believe that he is neither intelligent nor a good student. When provided with a list of descriptive words from which to self-select appropriate self-descriptors, Jesús laughed upon seeing the word *cabezón*. When asked why this word provoked laughter, he replied, "'Cause that ain't me!... 'Cause I ain't

smart!” (Appendix F, lines 990-994). When asked again to self-select the words that did accurately describe him, Jesús selected “Mexican,” “dumb,” and “poor.” When asked to elaborate, he did not further explicate why he self-selected Mexican and poor, but he did explain why he chose “dumb” as an accurate description of his abilities:

I: Dumb, why do you think that?

JESÚS: ‘Cause, I don’ know. Like what teachers be sayin’.

I: Your teachers tell you you’re dumb?

JESÚS: Some of ‘em. They tell me I act dumb sometimes.

I: And what does actin’ dumb mean?

JESÚS: I don’ know. Acting stupid?

I: And what does that mean?

JESÚS: I don’ know. I just be doin’ a lot of dumb stuff. Like here and at my house. Like my teachers tell me I do dumb stuff here and my dad like he tells me I do dumb stuff at the house. Like just stupid stuff. (Appendix F, lines 1025-1041)

In spite of his low self-confidence, Jesús noted that he does want to go to high school and plans to graduate. He hopes to become a doctor one day and remain in the United States to practice some type of medicine. During his interview, he said that he wants to attend college. This is a sentiment that he has repeatedly expressed during his journaling experiences in his social studies class. This journal entry was completed after a mandatory career interest survey:

Why are those jobs like not many that you have to go to college for? Like most of the jobs on there, you just need to graduate high school to get a job like that. Like there’s not a doctor or lawyer or anything like that on that list. Like some people here want to go to college. Like it was in the news that like we can go to UGA

even if we don't have papers but we have to pay like more money or something. Like we can go to college if we want. Like those jobs, like that one, to drive a truck. Do you have to graduate to do that? (Jesús, journal entry, January 18, 2007)

Jesús did attend Mexican schools for both kindergarten and first grade. Unlike some of the other students who have participated in this research study, Jesús believes that his experiences in U.S. schools have been much more positive than those in Mexico. In describing his experiences in Mexican schools, Jesús said,

Um, it was like, it was like horrible, the bathrooms were nasty, um, um, they had to get some people from the town to to go sell food for you could eat. Buy, you have to buy your own food, eat breakfast at your house, and you had to walk 'cause there was like no bus, and um, and then if you act bad, they hit you and there was, there was, the kids, if the kids were gonna fight, they'd fight behind the school, and they'd the doctors, I mean the teachers wouldn't do nothin', they'd just let you fight, and that's all they did (Appendix F, lines 1198-1205)

He also said that his classes were more fun and that there were a greater number of students at the research site in comparison to the school he attended in Michoacán. He also likes the majority of his classes here, explaining that he was able to draw for many assignments and that they were dissecting a frog in his life science class. He was able to give specific details about biomes that they had been studying and reported being highly engaged in his connections classes (physical education and art) as well as his science class.

While Jesús does have a positive outlook regarding school, I asked him to pretend to be his teacher and change the school in a manner that would make it more pleasing to him. The mere mention of him being a teacher drew laughter from Jesús. When asked the reasoning behind the laughter, Jesús replied, “Teachers are supposed to be smart, so I wouldn’t be a teacher” (Appendix F, lines 1325-1326). When he was finally able to imagine himself as a teacher, he said that he would “let ‘em draw all the time, use computers, paint, talk, play, like I’d let ‘em talk to their friends. Like I’m lucky, I got friends in all my classes (Appendix F, lines 1340-1342). He does not see school as a choice, but rather something “you gotta do” (Appendix F, line 1368). Schooling for Jesús represents the possibility of a better life (Appendix F, line 1368).

While Jesús does not participate in any after-school activities at the research site, he and his older brother spend every afternoon together playing video games. He has always looked up to his older brother and cites him as the reason that he has not joined a gang and has stayed in school (Jesús, journal entry, February 15, 2007). He is competitive with his brother and maintains a close relationship with him (Appendix F, lines 1380-1407). He and his brother frequently work side-by-side at the local flea market on weekends to financially assist their parents. His brother attends most of Jesús’ parent-teacher conferences and takes an interest in Jesús’ academic life.

While Jesús experiences a great degree of academic success at the research site, he does not feel that members of the school believe that being a Mexican is important. In fact, he feels that teachers at the school make him feel ashamed to be a Mexican when they tell him to stop speaking in Spanish (Jesús, journal entry, February 15, 2007). He views his language as being an integral part of who he is (Appendix F, line 1494).

However, these negative linguistic encounters with teachers have not poisoned him against all of the teachers at the research site. In fact, he believes that some teachers care about him “‘cause um like some of them treat me good... ‘Cause like they respect me. Like they respect who I am” (Appendix F, lines 1502-1506). When asked to describe how teachers show respect, Jesús replied, “By not screaming” (Appendix F, line 1506). As this response caught me somewhat off-guard, I asked Jesús to further explain what he meant by teachers screaming at students. He then began to imitate one of his teachers and provided the following example: “You better sit down now and shut that mouth. I don’t get paid to babysit you. I don’ even know why some of you bother to come to school” (Appendix F, lines 1514-1516). Jesús reports that he has heard similar sentiments voiced by several teachers at the research site.

While he reports that several teachers at school make him feel ashamed to be a Mexican, he says that being a Mexican is “fun” (Appendix F, line 1530) because being a Mexican is “my life. My whole life. Everything ‘bout my life says I’m a Mexican” (Appendix F, line 1534). He is proud of his brown skin and his Spanish language (Appendix F, line 1538) even though he has been teased for both: “Like people call you wetback and make fun of you. Like they think you can’t speak English just ‘cause you’re from Mexico. Like they’re mean” (Appendix F, lines 1547-1549).

Like many of the other participants in this research study, Jesús says that he cannot give advice on how to be a good student simply because he is not a good student himself. When asked why he believes that he is not a good student, Jesús responds,

“Cause. I always act bad. That’s what my teachers say” (Appendix F, line 1559).

When further prompted about his belief that he is not a good student, he changes his position slightly:

I:                   Okay. Do you think you’re a successful student?

JESÚS:            No. Well, a little bit (Appendix F, lines 1586-1588).

Even though his latest progress report shows mainly A’s and B’s, Jesús still doubts that he can pass the CRCT and is worried about being retained in the seventh grade for another year. No amount of proof can convince him otherwise (Appendix F, lines 1601-1602). He attributes this partly to the fact that his sister dropped out of high school and that his brother is currently contemplating dropping out as well. If his brother drops out, this could devastate Jesús’ own chances for high school completion for a multitude of reasons. First, Jesús greatly admires his older brother and tries to mimic many of the things his brother does. Second, by having two siblings drop out of high school, Jesús’ chances for dropping out increase exponentially. Last, Jesús’ older brother has been instrumental in preventing Jesús from joining a gang. Should his older brother decide to drop out of school, he would be forced to find employment, thereby decreasing the amount of interaction he would have with Jesús, and would not necessarily be able to fend off gang members as he currently does.

#### Alexandra

Alexandra is a seventh-grade student at the research site and currently is ranked 20<sup>th</sup> out of 196 students. On her most recent standardized test, the Measures of Academic Progress assessment, Alexandra scored in the fifty-ninth percentile for language usage, the forty-fifth percentile for mathematics, and the twenty-seventh percentile for reading.

Her most recent ACCESS for ELLs scores range from 3.8-6.0. While she is still in the developing stages of academic English proficiency in writing and literacy, she has achieved native-like academic proficiency in speaking. She passed all five sections of her 2006 CRCT. Her most recent grade reports consists of mainly A's and B's.

Alexandra score on Weber's (1990) Dropout Prediction Scale indicates that she is not at risk for dropping out of high school. While she is a twelve-year-old seventh grader, she is able to maintain good grades and age-appropriate relationships so her age relative to classmates does not affect her potential for dropping out (Weber, 1989). Alexandra self-reported that she spends more than three hours a week on her homework. By spending this amount of time on outside schoolwork, Alexandra exhibits a commitment to her academic career. This also lessens her potential to drop out as she exhibits a personal investment in her education (Weber, 1989).

Alexandra also indicated that she had missed only one or two days during the first semester of the current academic year. She reported the same number of tardies. Her low degree of absenteeism also suggests a degree of buy-in on her part with regard to her education. Again, her potential for dropping out decreases by using absenteeism as a factor. She indicated that her grades were mostly A's and B's, suggesting that she is achieving academic success in her classes, thereby lessening her chances for dropping out. She has never changed schools as a result of her family moving. This lack of familial mobility suggests a stability that in turn increases Alexandra's chances for high school completion (Weber, 1989).

Alexandra said that she "probably" expected to graduate from high school. A lack of certainty that one will complete high school is an indication of a potential

dropout. However, she also reported that she planned to go to college right after high school and in her interview mentioned specific colleges she hoped to attend. By having specific plans regarding college, Alexandra exhibits a commitment to completing her high school education (Weber, 1989). However, she did respond that several of her close friends or siblings had dropped out of school. Her familiarity with several close friends or siblings that have dropped out of school increases her chances of dropping out as well (Weber, 1989).

Alexandra also exhibited a high level of introversion when it came to describing her relationship with friends outside of school. She reported rarely or never talking with friends on the phone, going out on dates, or visiting with friends. This introversion can suggest a lack of social attachment which can lead to dropping out. Overall, her score on the Dropout Prediction Scale was a three, indicating that she is not at risk for dropping out.

Alexandra was interviewed on three separate occasions and was eager to participate each time. She is an extremely outgoing student and the interview process was one more chance of her to shine. Like many of the other students interviewed for this research study, Alexandra's father came first to the United States, seeking employment and shelter for his family. Once he had established himself in the area, he sent for Alexandra, her mother, and her brother.

Alexandra is a self-confident young woman who describes herself as "Mexican" and "intelligent." When asked to look at the list of possible descriptors, she also drew a small smiley face next to the word "*cabezón*." When asked to explain the rationale for her choices, Alexandra replied, "Cause I'm from Mexico and I make good grades, most



of the time. I put a little happy face ‘cause the other kids call me *cabezón*” (Appendix F, line 3601-3602).

Unlike some of the other students interviewed for this research study, Alexandra had no difficulty in describing her future:

Well, like, I’ll finish high school. I’ll go to like...I was thinkin’ I wanna go to like to Oxford [Oxford at Emory]. Like two of my mom’s sisters went over there to work and they said it’s like really nice. One of the girls I know from UGA she went there for like a little while. Like there you can like study really cool stuff. Like if you wanna be a lawyer, you can like go there and you take the classes that get you ready for law school, you know? Or like kind of all that stuff, you know? (Appendix F, lines 3610-3617)

Alexandra is close with her mother and father and their well-being influences her choices for the future. She mentioned her family as a consideration in whether or not to get married:

I think about my family too. Like I don’ know if I wanna get married, that’s too far away, but I think about bein’ far away from my mom and dad. I want them to stay with me. They always help me. (Appendix F, lines 3621-3623)

Alexandra credits this level of parental support in describing her own academic success:

Like they always try to help. Like my mom will call you when I’m havin’ trouble in math so you can get me extra help. I go to work with my mom at night and some of those girls from UGA help me with my homework. (Appendix F, lines 3627-3630)

Her mother has been instrumental in ensuring that Alexandra receives extra help in mathematics. She requested that Alexandra receive additional tutoring and also requested a weekly grade sheet until Alexandra was able to improve her grades.

Alexandra began her academic career in the United States at the end of her third-grade year. She has lived in Georgia continuously since moving from Mexico, and has attended Clarke County schools with the exception of those two third-grade months spend in another Georgia school district. She had completed kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and the majority of third grade in Mexico before arriving in the United States. She provided a rich description of her schooling experiences in Mexico:

It was kinda fun ‘cause like, like, like over there you used to wear uniforms and I got used to wearing uniforms so like I started liking uniforms and like, I uh had a lot of friends there and like, like the teachers you understood like what they were speaking about because like they speak the language that you speak and like they explained the stuff better because of like the language and like here it’s like they say stuff that you don’t understand. Like you and Ms. Mathis are like my only teachers that speak Spanish, you know? Probably for other people [other students in her regular education classes], they probably understand it, ‘cause she explains it to them but like for for me like I don’t understand it ‘cause like some words I just don’ know...Oh, like over there we finished earlier. I didn’t go to school for the whole like day. Like I finished about one o’clock. The lunch was like, like it was no cafeteria, it was like there was like you know a small little yard, like two yards for different grades, and like there were some moms from like students there who would take food and you would just like buy food yourself at like one

dollar, two dollars...I liked it better. You didn' have to plug in numbers and everything ((referring to the code that students must type in when receiving their lunch))...Over there, you used to take your bookbags. Like you can take your bookbags anywhere. Um the boards they're chalkboards, not whiteboards like here. And the desks were like you know like this kind of desks but lower and instead of chairs, we had like lower, like wood, like how you say that, like you know like the ones that are like on this side, like the desk is on the back of the chair of the person in front of you, like that. Like a bench. (Appendix F, lines 3662-3704)

Alexandra also has equally vivid descriptions of her classes here in the United States. At the research site, Alexandra is one of the few ELL students that are allowed to register for extension rather than remediation classes during extended learning time. In her extension class, she is a part of the team that broadcasts the morning announcements via closed-circuit television daily. She is a part of the anchor team as well as being responsible for the audio-visual mixing of the broadcast. She is the only ELL student that is a part of the morning announcements, and she takes great pride in doing so.

Alexandra enjoys all of her classes at Spring Middle School, even ones like mathematics where she has struggled. In one of her journal entries, she spoke about how difficult math has been for her:

I guess if I'm supposed to talk about like a class I'm havin' trouble with, it's gotta be math class. I don' get it. I don' understand it. Like my mom thinks that I should like get it 'cause like it's math. She like thinks it's like the one class I should get. But like she doesn't understand that most of like the math we're doin'

is like word problems and I just like don' get it. I don' think that the teacher has time to help me. I raise my hand, but I'm like super-quiet so she never comes to me. She has to help the loud kids. I got some extra tutoring so maybe I'll be good 'cause like I don't wanna do math again (Alexandra, journal entry, October 31, 2006).

However, Alexandra continues to struggle to improve her grades not only for her own sense of satisfaction, but also because her mom has promised her a laptop if she can raise her math grade to a ninety. Alexandra absolutely loves working with computers and dreams of owning her own. This has been a tremendous source of motivation for her.

Currently, Alexandra does not participate in any after-school activities. Last year, she was active in the Pathways to Success Program (PSP), but this year as funding was reduced, the number of students who could participate was reduced as well. One of the determining factors for participation in PSP was a need for remediation in order to pass the CRCT. As Alexandra passed all sections of the CRCT last year, she is ineligible to participate this year. However, Alexandra did make the girls' soccer team, which involves an after-school commitment of two days of practice per week plus games. She is extremely excited about making the team and thoroughly enjoyed her first week of practice. This is the first time she has played organized sports of any kind.

Alexandra believes that some of the teachers and students at the research site believe that being a Mexican is important:

ALEX: Yeah, I think like Athens does because like if there weren't any Mexicans or Hispanics around here there would be a lot of things that wouldn't get done. Like I'm proud to be from Mexico. I think it's important. I think our school, well parts of our school thinks it's important.

I: How do they show that?

ALEX: Like we have lots of books in the library that are in Spanish and English. And we have a lot better ESOL classes here than we had at the elementary school. I think that shows that we're important. Like, I think, like I think our ESOL teachers know it's hard to be Mexican here and they try to make us feel proud that we're from Mexico. (Appendix F, lines 3919-3931)

In a later journal entry, Alexandra reflected back to the sixth grade Latin American festival from the previous year:

You remember how like you asked me if I thought the school thought it was like important to be a Mexican. Well, yeah, like I think they do. Like we talked about it in like the thing you did with me, like where you asked me questions. Um, but like I thought about it some more, like after we were like done with the questions. Like I thought about that thing we had last year to celebrate like everything that came from like with the Hispanics. Like the dancing, the arts and crafts, like that stuff. Like our whole grade did that and nobody said anything mean about us that day. Like they wanted to know like about *us*, like where we're from, like our food and our music, and stuff. Like I think it was cool that like we got to like show our stuff to people that like aren't like that are from here. Like lots of the black kids thought that our dancing was like super-cool! So yeah, I just wanted to let you think about what I like thought about after like our questions were over. Like that thing in the sixth grade made me like proud to be from Mexico.

(Alexandra, journal entry, January 10, 2007)

Alexandra also believes that her teachers care about her. They show their care and concern through the assigning of work because "like they don't want you to be

dumb” (Appendix F, line). While she believes that her teachers care about her, she does not hold the same belief about many of her fellow students. When I asked Alexandra to describe to me what it is like to be a Mexican student at Spring Middle School, she replied:

Well, sometimes good, sometimes bad. It’s good like when you’re like with your friends. Like you have everything in common, like they know you. They know what you’ve been through like they know what it’s like to leave your country and come here. And then sometimes it’s like bad because other kids teases you and call you wetback and act like you shouldn’t be here, like they’re the only ones who should be here, not you. Just because you speak Spanish, doesn’t mean you don’t have papers. Even if you don’t have papers, why can’t you be here? If you want to work or go to school, you should be allowed to come here. Like I don’t know, sometimes it’s hard to be a Mexican here. Like the other day, some boy told me that like I was lucky I didn’t look like a Mexican, but I didn’t know what it meant. He told me I was pretty ‘cause I didn’t look like a Mexican. He said that Mexicans are dirty. I told him I was a Mexican and he told me no I wasn’t because I wasn’t dirty. (Appendix F, lines 3946-3960)

Alexandra is proud to be Mexican and to be a native Spanish speaker. However, she believes that it is more difficult to be a Mexican student at the research site than it would be to be a White student:

Well, like I think it’s easier to not be Mexican. Like people don’t pick on you so much. Like people, like the kids in our class think it’s cool that you speak Spanish ‘cause like you’re white and you speak Spanish, but like nobody thinks

it's cool that I'm a Mexican and I speak English, you know? Like it's just a lot easier if you're from here, like nothing's as hard. (Appendix F, lines 4034-4039)

While Alexandra admits that there are difficulties associated with being a Mexican student at the research site, she also views herself as a successful student mainly because she has passing grades and continued to try in her math class even when she was failing (Appendix F, lines 4055-4059). She believes that friends are also an integral part of school success:

And I think the most important thing is to make a lot of friends so that those friends can help you a lot like when you need help. Like when you first get here you need like A LOT of help, so if you like make a lot of friends, they can help you. (Appendix F, lines 4048-4051)

Alexandra has one older sibling that is currently in the twelfth grade. She reports that she does not know anyone who has dropped out of school. This exponentially increases her chances of remaining in school until graduation (Weber, 1989). She also says that she knows girls at school who are members of the gang, but not well enough to know their names. Alexandra's familial support in conjunction with her lack of gang activity increases her likelihood of graduating from high school (Weber, 1989).

#### Itzel

Itzel is currently an eighth grade student at the research site and is currently ranked 7<sup>th</sup> out of 206 students. On her most recent standardized test, the Measures of Academic Progress assessment, Itzel scored in the ninety-third percentile in language usage, the eighty-seventh percentile in mathematics, and the seventy-fifth percentile in reading. Her ACCESS for ELLs scores range from 3.6-6.0. Scores in the 3.0-4.0 range

indicate that she is continuing to develop her academic English proficiency. However, she did score native-like proficiency in speaking. On her 2006 CRCT, Itzel exceeded standards on four of five subject area assessments, while meeting standards in reading. Itzel's middle school report card features all A's and one B in a sixth grade math class. When her parents questioned the grade, the teacher responded that no child that was enrolled in ESOL classes at the school would ever earn an A in her class. Her parents chose not to challenge the grade further at Itzel's request.

Itzel's score on Weber's (1990) Dropout Prediction Scale was the lowest of all students who participated in the research study. She chose to complete her student questionnaire in Spanish. Itzel is a thirteen-year-old eighth grade student. As she is not older than most of her on-level peers, her age is not a viable predictor of dropout potential (Weber,1989). She also self-reported that she spends between five and ten hours per week on homework. As she is spending more time that the average American middle school student, again this indicates high academic achievement potential rather than the proclivity to drop out (Weber, 1989).

Itzel has only missed two days of school this year and is extremely proud of this fact. She was highly distressed over missing two days, but she was simply too sick to remain in classes. Her infrequent absenteeism is also an indicator of high academic achievement potential (Weber, 1989). Itzel self-reported that most of her grades are A's. Her academic success in middle school suggests that she will experience continued academic success in high school, again an indicator that suggests she will not drop out of school.



Itzel also has the advantage of low mobility in terms of changing schools. Since she has been in the United States, she has never changed schools due to her family moving to another location. She also self-reported that she has never had disciplinary problems in school during the past year; that she has not been suspended or put on probation at school; and that she has not been in serious trouble with the law. Conversely, she indicated that she is satisfied with way her education is going; that she is interested in school; and that she likes to work hard in school. Her lack of discipline infractions coupled with an interest in school and a satisfaction with the way her education is going suggests that Itzel is already enjoying a great deal of personal success at the research site, thereby lessening her potential for dropping out.

Itzel also indicated that she plans to be twenty-one or older when she gets married, has her first child, and finishes her full-time education. By responding that she plans to wait beyond the age of twenty to either get married or have a child, her chances of dropping out decrease significantly as this shows a lack of sexual preoccupation (Weber, 1989). Also, by responding that she plans to complete her full-time education at the age of twenty-one or older, Itzel shows that she has seriously considered attending a four-year institution of higher learning (Weber, 1989). It is interesting that she indicated that she would “probably” graduate from high school. When asked to further explicate her answer during her journaling experience, Itzel responded:

Well, like when I said probably on the survey, it was like I hope we stay here long enough for me to graduate from high school. Like I don't know what will like happen if we go back to Mexico, like I don't know like what classes from here would count if I like went back to Mexico. Like I think most of them, but I don't

know. My mom said that we're going to try to stay here until I graduate from high school. I really want to graduate from an American high school. (Itzel, journal entry, January 4, 2007)

She did indicate that she planned to attend college immediately after high school. By responding that she did not anticipate a wait-time between her high school graduation and her college matriculation, this suggests a high level of commitment toward pursuing a college education. Again, this greatly lessens Itzel's chances for dropping out.

Itzel also stated that she does not know anyone who has dropped out of high school. By not being familiar with those who have dropped out, Itzel lessens her own chances of dropping out. This combined with her own sibling's graduation from high school greatly increases Itzel's chances of high school completion (Weber, 1989). Itzel's responses concerning going out with friends and talking on the phone suggests that she is highly introverted. This degree of introversion can signal a predilection toward dropping out. However, Itzel's overall score on the Dropout Prediction Scale is a 2, suggesting that she is not a potential dropout.

Itzel was interviewed on four separate occasions and was slightly nervous each time. One interview session had to be cut short as Itzel was not feeling well. During the first interview session, she asked that I hide the recorder behind a stack of books so that she would not see it while she was talking. However, once she became more comfortable, Itzel was able to provide detailed answers.

Unlike the other students interviewed for this research study, Itzel's father did not come to the United States before the rest of his family. Instead, they came together. The family stayed in Texas for a brief period before relocating to Georgia when Itzel was in

the fifth grade. Like Alexandra, Itzel had no difficulty in explaining exactly what she hoped that her future holds. She dreams of becoming a veterinarian. She has always been fascinated by animals and was able to visit the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Georgia last summer. This visit further intensified her desire to become a vet:

Yeah, to get to be around animals all day. I think I would like that job. I think I would be good at it. I love animals and I want them to not be sick. I want them to live for a long time. (Appendix F, lines 4285-4287)

She is currently attempting to re-apply for the same university program that she attended last summer in order to further explore a career as a veterinarian.

Itzel attended kindergarten through fourth grade in Mexico. She began her fifth grade year in Mexico, but did not complete it as she moved to Georgia in the middle of the academic year. She has fond memories of her education in Mexico (Appendix F, lines 4489-4549) and wishes that she could change some aspects of American schooling to match those of Mexican schools, particularly going outside each day for a learning opportunity (Appendix F, line 4539). She enjoys most of her classes at Spring Middle School, but confesses that science is her favorite because of its focus on animals. She also enjoys the students that are in her science class as well as the lab experiments and groupwork. While her grades demonstrate that Itzel is a highly successful student at the school, this does not mean that there are things that she would not change were she able to do so:

I: Okay, if um you could be a teacher at this school, and you were able to make things better or more fun for the students, what would you do?

ITZEL: Anything?

I: Anything.

ITZEL: I will do like the same thing. We will have computers and we'll do research and we'll go outside and we'll be in groups that we'll like to be like not the ones the teachers put us in. Like be with your friends but like with limits like don't talk a lot. Um, I don't know what else.

I: So you like don't think there's enough limits here?

ITZEL: Yeah, yeah like there are lots of limits here. Yeah but like I wanna be able to talk to my friends but not so much like we can't learn. Not like now, like we never talk. Can I change students too?

I: If you want to change students you can. What do you wanna change?

ITZEL: I don't want them to be racist. No, not at all.

I: How do you know if someone is a racist? How do they show that?

ITZEL: Like they treat people different just because of like their skin or their language. Like they treat people bad, like they talk about them, they don't like to be with them. (Appendix F, lines 4670-4696)

She refers to racism multiple times throughout her journals. In one warm-up activity for our Georgia Studies class, the students were supposed to reflect on the life of a slave during an antebellum period. Itzel wrote the following piece:

I think it would be very sad to be a slave. People can treat you bad if they want. You are not better to them than a dog. They can hit you and make you work forever. You can be taken away from your family. Slavery was a very bad thing. I don't know how they were able to keep living and working and hoping that things would get better. I don't think I could think that things would be better if I was a slave. Like the white people were so racist to the black people. I know this isn't about slavery, but I don't understand why the black kids at school pick on us.

They don't think it was OK that the white people were mean to them, so why do they think it is OK to be mean to us? (Itzel, journal entry, January 4, 2007).

In one of her interviews, Itzel described some of the racist interactions between African-American and Latino students at the school:

Well, they talk about us, the Mexicans. Well, the Hispanics. Anybody that talks in Spanish, they make fun of. Like they say that we are dumb, that we are wetbacks, that we don't need to be here, like go back. (Appendix F, lines 4704-4707)

Like many of the other interview participants in this research study, Itzel believes that the reason for an education is to have a better future. She cannot imagine that future without animals and without her being able to help them:

To get a better future. I have to go to school if I want to be a vet. Like you have to do it to be a good person. Like to support your family, you have to go to school. Like you have to. Like my parents talk about my love of animals, like they say everyday, *Ay, tú, tú con tus perros* [Oh, you, you with your dogs] because every day I find some way to talk about animals, like dogs. Like I draw dogs all the time, like my notebook is a dog. Like I like dogs a lot. (Appendix F, lines 4712-4718)

This love of animals is evident in all that Itzel does.

Itzel does not participate in any after-school activities. However, this is not due to a lack of academic or social involvement. Rather, she feels that after-school activities detract from her ability to complete the rest of her assignments to the best of her ability

(Appendix F, lines 4779-4781). She was in the school band during her sixth-grade year, but quit because she felt that it was interfering with her studies.

Itzel is unsure as to whether the people at the research site believe that being a Mexican is important:

ITZEL: I don't know. Like I don't know how they express like that. Like I don't know.

I: Okay.

ITZEL: Well, um, sometimes they would say like "Do this" because you're a Mexican. Like go to after-school because you're a Mexican. Like apply for this because you're a Mexican.

I: Okay.

ITZEL: Like Hispanic. Like they tell you to join something, like, um, like, um, I don't know. Like it's hard for me to explain it.

I: *¿Prefieres hablar en español?* ((Do you prefer to speak in Spanish?))

ITZEL: *Sí, pero, era difícil porque lo que dije sobre la tarea y las maestras que están y que ellas me dan más [tarea]. A veces, creo que...he recibido más trabajo de algunas maestras porque soy mexicana. Ellas quieren que...es que...a mí no me gusta eso. No quiero hacer cosas simplemente porque soy mexicana. Por ejemplo, el programa de la universidad? Del año pasado? Fue solamente para los hispanos. A mí no me gusta. ((Yes, but, it's difficult because of what I said about homework and the teachers and that they give me more [homework]. Sometimes, I think that...I've received more work from some teachers because I'm Mexican. They want that, it's that, I don't like this. I don't want to do things simply because I'm Mexican. For example, the program at the university? From last year? It was just for Hispanics. I don't like that.))* (Appendix F, lines 4849-4877)

Even though she is unsure if the school values her being Mexican, she does believe that about half of her teachers care about her:

Like the teachers that care they make you understand stuff. Like others don't, they don't care if you learn or not. Like they want you to leave them alone. I think

those teachers don't care about me. Or any students. (Appendix F, lines 4910-4913)

She also believes that being a successful student is not only important on an individual level, but as a reflection on her race. She expressed the same sentiments when asked whether someone should join a gang. In answering an interview question pertaining to giving advice to a hypothetical Mexican girl on how to be a successful student, Itzel responded:

Well, I want her to be a good student like don't do bad things because she represents her country. She can't forget that. She can't ever forget that. *Si la gente le ve haciendo algo malo, va a decir que la gente de allá es mala*, ((If people see her doing something bad, they're going to say that the people from there are bad)), so she can't be bad. It makes all Mexicans look bad if she's bad... Yeah, teachers and students say that about Mexicans. I want to say to them that I'm not bad. I don't want to be bad. I want to learn and be better. I want to be good. But I know that when somebody sees one Mexican do something bad, they think we're all bad. And sometimes, like the students here don't think anybody's different, like everybody's a Mexican, even if they're from Guatemala or El Salvador. You know, like everybody's a Mexican. (Appendix F, lines 5056-5061)

Even though her response reflects her absolute ability to describe what is entailed in being a good student, she still has her doubts about her own successes as a student and believes she is successful only because her teachers tell her so (Appendix F, lines 5088-5096). She does have her older brother to look to as a role model as he graduated from a

high school in the school district where Itzel attends middle school. Her brother's successful completion of high school lessens her chances of dropping out (Weber, 1990).

Each student's experiences have shaped the manner in which he/she has negotiated and developed his/her academic identity. Upon further examination of said experiences, several themes related to academic success and failure become apparent. These themes will be discussed in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 5

### EMERGENT THEMES

“What has become increasingly clear to me is that, in coming to this country and in adjusting to American schools, immigrant students and their families travel very long distances. These distances are physical, emotional, and psychological. And for many of these individuals, the journey from where they came from to becoming ‘American’ will take a very long time indeed.”

(Valdés, 2001, p. 9)

While Wainer (2004) identified various themes that “have been problematic for educators and immigrant families,” four of those themes, “parental involvement, teacher training, immigration status, and discrimination” are particularly salient to this research study (p. 1). Interestingly, many of the same issues became apparent upon analysis of the students’ journal entries and their interview transcripts. While there were a multiplicity of responses to various stimuli throughout their school day and academic careers, four emergent themes were woven throughout each of the research participants’ experiences: (1) student perceptions of teacher support, (2) student efficacy and parent/family role models and involvement, (3) student perceptions of school culture, and (4) involvement options.

#### Theme 1: Student Perceptions of Teacher Support

Student perceptions of teacher support were prevalent throughout their interviews and iPod journals. Each of the students spoke at great length concerning their interactions with teachers and the effect that said interactions had on the students’ academic lives. Some students experienced positive and supportive interactions with their teachers, while others experienced negative and detrimental interactions. **Roberto**, an eighth grade student identified as *medio* in this research study, believes that having a

“nice teacher” makes a class more enjoyable. For him, a “nice teacher” is one that “like don’ argue...well, well like some don’ scream at you for no reason. Like she know how to teach right and everything and everything like that. You know?” (Appendix F, lines 297-298). When asked for further information as to what “teaching right” meant, Roberto responded that “like she patient. She goes over stuff ‘til you get it. She don’t get mad” (Appendix F, lines 302-303). While Roberto definitely has his own ideas about what constitutes a “nice teacher,” it becomes apparent through his interview that not all of his teachers fit his description of being nice. When asked how he could change the school to make it a wonderful place for students to be, Roberto responded that he would want “like good teachers. Teachers that wanna be here” (Appendix F, line 332). When asked to further explain this in his iPod journal, Roberto responded:

Man, like I don’ know why teachers be here if they don’ wanna be here. Like teachers tell me don’t bother them. I ain’ botherin’ them, I got questions. Like they come in and they all mad, screamin’ at us, tellin’ us what to do, get out your notebook, copy this off the board, do this, do that. Then they just sit at they desk. They don’ wanna be with us at all man. They just here to get paid. Like when I was at elementary, those teachers liked us. Like they did stuff with us man. Like we worked together at school. They didn’ just give us a worksheet and sit at they desk. I wish we had more teachers like that here. Like not all my teachers bad like that, but some of ‘em. (Roberto, journal entry, January 14, 2007)

Roberto believes that some of his teachers care about him, but that at times, he feels disrespected by his teachers’ actions in the class. He speaks of feeling “invisible” in some of his classes (Appendix F, line 467). He feels that some teachers “like pretend I’m

not there in class...Like I'm invisible...Like I don't have nothin' to say" (Appendix F, lines 463-467). However, this feeling of invisibility does not transfer into all of his classes nor all of his interactions with teachers. He believes that some of his teachers do genuinely care about him: "Uh, 'cuz they always tell me to stay out of trouble and all that. Do my work. Be a good student. I got like, what's that word? Uh...uh...like capaz [capable]" (Appendix F, lines 483-488). In one of his journal entries, Roberto mentioned that some of his teachers "look out for me like they were my mom" (Roberto, journal entry, December 12, 2006). While he has had both positive and negative interactions with his teachers at Spring Middle School, Roberto maintains a positive outlook regarding his educational career and continues to be academically successful at the research site.

**Jesús**, a seventh grade student identified as *medio* in this research study, also frequently discusses his interactions with teachers throughout his interviews and journals. Many of his interactions with his teachers have led to a self-imposed silence. When beginning the interview recordings, Jesús insisted, "I'm not important enough to record....Nobody ever listens to me" (Appendix F, lines 837, 841). He asserted that teachers do not listen to him except when they have to do so (Appendix F, lines 845-846).

He also believes that teachers do not find him intelligent. When self-selecting descriptors, Jesús chose "dumb" and said that he chose that particular descriptor because "like what teachers be sayin'....They tell me I act dumb sometimes" (Appendix F, lines 1927, 1031). He reiterates this belief that he is unintelligent throughout his interviews and journals. When I asked him to pretend to be a teacher at the school, he simply laughed at the thought of him being a teacher because "teachers are supposed to be smart, so I

wouldn't be a teacher" (Appendix F, lines 1325-1326). Like Roberto, Jesús has many of the same wishes for a "good" teacher: one that does not scream and one that respects him (Appendix F, lines 1506-1510). Jesús feels that many of his teachers disrespect him by screaming at him and the other students and says that many of his teachers scream in his classes. He goes so far as to mock them in one portion of the interview: "You better sit down now and shut that mouth. I don't get paid to babysit you. I don't even know why some of you bother to come to school" (Appendix F, lines 1514-1516). He expressed great concern about being retained in the seventh grade and does not believe that he can pass the CRCT (Appendix F, lines 1601-1602).

Through their screaming and assurances that he is dumb, Jesús' teachers have effectively silenced him in the majority of his classes. He has taken their words to heart and no longer believes that he is a capable student. He frequently disparages his intellectual abilities in class and withdraws from class discussions. While in his journal he admits to having a "few good teachers," they have in no way negated the destructive influences that the "bad" teachers have had on his self-perception and self-confidence as a student (Jesús, journal entry, February 14, 2007).

**Estela**, an eighth grade student identified as *cholo* in this research study, has strong feelings about her interactions with teachers at Spring Middle School. She believes that she is not capable of being promoted to the ninth grade. When asked why she believes that she will be retained, Estela answered: "Cause I ain't gonna pass. I ain't gonna pass the CRCT. I'm gonna stay here (in the eighth grade) another year. I'll quit before I stay here another year" (Appendix F, lines 2848-2850). Estela preferred her educational experiences in Mexico to those in the United States primarily due to her

teachers (Appendix F, lines 2980-2994). She believes that her teachers in the United States make schooling as difficult as possible: “I don’t know man like they don’t like me. They make me feel dumb even if I do try....[When describing one particular teacher] She never even gives me a chance. I’m in trouble when I walk in and sit down. She just yells at me all the time and puts me out....She says, “Get out! I don’ care where you go, just get out!” (Appendix F, lines 3026-3032). She believes that teachers at the school do not like the Mexican students at the school, particularly since their numbers are growing (Appendix F, lines 3234-3235). For Estela, she does not believe that any of her teachers care about her: “I don’ know their feelins’, but I know how they act, and they don’t care if I learn or not. They don care if I come to school or not. I think they wish I didn’ never come to school” (Appendix F, lines 3274-3276).

Estela’s perception that teachers at the school do not care about her greatly influences her behavior and academic participation at the school. She refuses to try in many of her classes “‘cause I’m just gonna get put out anyway” (Estela, journal entry, February 14, 2007). Estela has had a large number of discipline infractions at the research site and says that she prefers to go to the alternative school instead because she’s heard that “teachers over there want you to be smart. They want you to learn” (Estela, journal entry, February 14, 2007). She has had multiple negative encounters with her teachers at Spring Middle School during each year of attendance. These negative encounters have affected her perception of her own academic abilities and have contributed to her lack of participation in her academic career.

**Angie**, an eighth grade student identified as *cholo* in this research study, frequently mentioned her interactions with teachers throughout her interviews and

journals. Her perceptions of her teachers greatly influence her perception of their classes. Angie likes going to her ELL classes because both of her teachers speak Spanish. She feels that this makes these classes much easier for her as well as encouraging her to retain both languages. However, she “hates” her language arts class. She describes it as “lame” because

I don’ talk to nobody and other people are talkin’ to each other. And I just um keep starin’. Yeah. I just hate language arts. There ain’t no Mexicans at all. She just hate me. I can’t do nothin’ right for her. She got attitude when I walk in the door. (Appendix F, lines 2024-2027).

She also believes that other students receive preferential treatment from teachers based on their race (Appendix F, lines 2336-2339). However, Angie does believe that some of her teachers care about her. She believes that throughout her elementary and middle school career in the United States, there have only been five teachers who have cared about her (Appendix F, line 2352). These teachers remind her to behave so that she can continue to participate in the regular educational setting rather than being confined to in-school suspension or the alternative school. Angie is much more vocal though about the teachers that she believes do not care about her. When I asked her to describe how this lack of care was demonstrated, she noted:

‘Cause like they don’t care what I do, like Ms. Jones [pseudonym] like she don’t care at all what I do. ‘Cause like today they were screaming in the lunchroom and and so like she told them to settle down but she didn’t tell me nothin’. I can do whatever, she don’ care. She tells me all the time, I’m never gonna be nothin’ no way. That I’m gonna drop out and be nothin’.’” (Appendix F, lines 2357-2362).

When asked if she believes Ms. Jones' predictions, Angie replied, "Sometimes. Like you hear it enough and sometimes you wonder if it's true" (Appendix F, lines 2366-2367). Angie also indicated that when she does try to actively and positively participate in class, her teachers assume that she is going to participate in a negative manner (Appendix F, line 2456). It is through these teachers' actions and Angie's perceptions of those actions that she has become effectively silenced from participating in her own education. In one of her journal entries, Angie discussed her unwillingness to participate in class discussions anymore: "I ain't even gonna try. Those teachers don't care what I gotta say anyway" (Angie, journal entry, February 14, 2007). Angie also discussed her attempts to get in trouble during class so that she can be sent to in-school suspension. When I asked her why her behavior differed among her classes, she indicated that certain teachers did not allow her to behave badly and that she followed their expectations (Appendix F, lines 2496-2498). Through a thorough analysis of Angie's interviews and journals, it becomes apparent that Angie's interactions with her teachers as well as her perceptions of her teachers' intentions have greatly influenced many of her academic decisions.

**Alexandra**, a seventh grade student at the school identified as *cabezón* in this research study, spoke at great length about her interactions with her teachers and those interactions' influence on her academic success. She enjoys all of her classes, even those in which she struggles at times. She believes that Spring Middle School is supportive of Mexican students:

Like we have lots of books in the library that are in Spanish and English. And we have a lot better ESOL classes here than we had at the elementary school. I think that shows that we're important. Like, I think that, like I think that our ESOL

teachers know it's hard to be Mexican here and they try to make us feel proud that we're from Mexico. (Appendix F, lines 3927-3923)

Alexandra also reports that she feels that all of her teachers care about her:

'Cause they like like 'cause like they give you work for you to learn stuff so you'll be smart. Like they don't want you to be dumb. And even though like you don' do it, like they still be like they still care like you really pass the work or not, like they want you to understand it. Like even if you get a bad grade, some teachers make sure that you still learn it that you don't give up because you have a bad grade. (Appendix F, lines 3935-3941)

Throughout her journal entries, Alexandra details instances where her teachers have assisted her or indicated that she was performing well. In her voice, one can hear Alexandra's happiness at the teachers' approval. She speaks of wanting to do well in school to make both her parents and her teachers happy (Alexandra, journal entry, December 12, 2006). She also indicated that when her teachers expressed the belief that she was capable of completing an assignment, she felt that it was much easier to do so and that she enjoyed working diligently on those assignments (Alexandra, journal entry, February 14, 2007). For Alexandra, her teachers' positive perceptions and high degree of caring have positively influenced her educational decisions.

**Itzel**, an eighth grade student identified as a *cabezón* at the research site, feels a closeness with her teachers that encourages her to perform academically (Itzel, journal entry, February 14, 2007). Her parents' and teachers expectations of her are given as reasons for completing all of her assignments to the best of her ability (Appendix F, line 4785). She also notes that a teacher's level of care and concern for her influence how



diligently she works in that teacher's class (Itzel, journal entry, February, 14, 2007).

When asked how a teacher demonstrates care in the classroom, Itzel responded:

Well, like she asks you like, 'Are you okay? Can I help you?' Like not all of the teachers do that. Like yesterday when I felt bad after lunch, Ms. Mathis asked me if I was okay, if I wanted to lie down on the couch. Like she noticed I wasn't feeling well and she asked about it. Like the teachers that care they make you understand stuff. Like others don't, they don't care if you learn or not. Like they want you to leave them alone. I think those teachers don't care about me. Or any student. (Appendix F, lines 4906-4913).

Itzel also indicated that she believed that approximately half of her teachers cared about her (Appendix F, line 4917). In a journal entry, she also described how diligently she wanted to work for those teachers that do demonstrate care for her:

Like in some teachers' classes, like I want to do so good. Like I want them to be proud of me, like how my parents are proud of me. Like when I know that a teacher likes me and wants me to do well and cares about how I feel, I will stay up all night working on their stuff. Like I want to show them how much I care about them too. But like if a teacher doesn't really like me, I'll do my work, it's just not my best. Like you can look at my work and see whether I like a teacher or not and if that teacher likes me (Itzel, journal entry, December 12, 2006).

Through Itzel's words, the tremendous influence of her perception of teacher support becomes apparent. While she is academically successful in each of her classes, the quality of her work fluctuates depending on whether she feels that a particular teacher cares whether or not she learns. While she performs academically in response to her

parents' expectations, teacher support also plays a large role in the quality of Itzel's academic work and efforts.

Each of the students in this research study indicated that their perceptions of teacher support greatly influenced their level of participation in classes at Spring Middle School. When students perceived that teachers were supportive of their academic endeavors as well as of their heritage, the students tended to have higher grades and perform at a higher academic level while being more academically engaged as well. For those students who perceived that their teachers did not truly care about them or their academic performance, their actions and level of academic performance mirrored those levels of engagement that they believed their teachers exhibited. Regardless of the level of academic performance or the grade earned in a class, these students demonstrate that teachers' actions in a classroom have a great deal of influence on the actions of students in the classroom as well as their overall academic performance.

#### Theme 2: Student Efficacy and Parent/Family Role Models and Involvement

Students frequently discussed the impact that their families had on their own academic achievement, including parental support of academic endeavors, parents/siblings completion of high school, and the degree of control they felt they had over their own educational decisions and careers. Those students that reported a low level of parental involvement and support tended to struggle academically and did not attain the same grades of those of their peers with parental support. Also, those students who had family members drop out of high school before the completion of the twelfth grade reported greater academic difficulties than those students who did not know anyone in their immediate lives who had dropped out of high school. Students who reported

feeling a lack of control in their educational decisions also had lower grades and more discipline infractions than those students who felt that they had a certain degree of control regarding their educational decisions and academic careers.

**Roberto** exhibits some degree of doubt regarding his academic abilities. In his journals and interviews, Roberto frequently mentions the new promotion/retention policy for the school district with great trepidation. This fear is not uncommon as this is the first year the district has had a promotion/retention policy for middle school students. In the past, students have not had to pass their classes in order to advance to the next grade. This year students must pass three of four academic subjects as well as pass the language arts, reading, and mathematics portions of the CRCT. Roberto also discusses being afraid to take the CRCT ““cause it’s all y’all talk about” (Roberto, journal entry, February 14, 2007). He believes that the eighth grade curriculum has been much more difficult than that of the seventh grade and is not sure that he is prepared for the test (Appendix F, lines 135-148).

He also doubts his ability to perform well academically should he be promoted to high school. He believes that the classes and the homework will be much more difficult at the high school level and is unsure about his academic abilities at this level (Appendix F, lines 157-189). While he wants to graduate from high school, he expresses doubts about his ability to do so, citing his friends and his grades as potential barriers to graduation (Appendix F, line 185). He does not want to attend college, but rather wants to go into business with his father. While he expresses doubts about his academic abilities, Roberto also mentions that some classes are easy for him because “I get the work easy...I just get it” (Appendix F, lines 245, 247). He later mentions that most of the

classes at Spring are easy for him with the exception of math because he is “just not good at it” (Appendix F, line 261).

Roberto’s parents are highly involved in both his academic and extracurricular activities. They participate in the Parent Teacher Student Organization at the research site as well as attending all of Roberto’s athletic events. I had the privilege of sitting with Roberto’s parents at the recent honors night and they beamed with pride as Roberto received several awards. In his journals, Roberto mentions that his parents are unable to help with much of his schoolwork, but that they always make sure that he has a quiet place to work in addition to having all of the materials he needs to complete his assignments (Roberto, journal entry, December 12, 2006). While his brother dropped out of high school, Roberto does not hold his brother to be a role model. In fact, he comments that he “wouldn’t want that life” (Roberto, journal entry, December 12, 2006). His brother dropped out when he was sixteen and is married with a child. Roberto’s brother, wife, and child live with Roberto and his family. Roberto notes that his brother “delivers brick. It’s a hard job. Like it’s tough” (Appendix F, lines 639-640). In his journal, Roberto commented, “I hope I don’t never have to work like my brother works. He works all the time. I know he said he just didn’t like school, but there ain’t no way he can like workin’ that hard” (Roberto, journal entry, December 12, 2006).

Roberto’s level of parental support suggests improved academic performance according to Weber (1990). While he does have a sibling who has previously dropped out of school, Roberto does not seem to hold his brother up as a role model nor does he want to follow in his brother’s footsteps, commenting about the difficulty of his brother’s life. While Roberto has a lower self-efficacy regarding his academic performance, his

grades do not reflect this. He is performing well academically in relation to his on-level peers and is active in various extra-curricular activities. The combination of parental support and positive extracurricular activities suggests that Roberto is unlikely to drop out of high school and should continue to improve his academic performance (Weber, 1989).

**Jesús** exhibits extremely low levels of self-efficacy and self-worth. Repeatedly throughout his interviews and journals, he doubts his importance as a student as well as a human being. He also frequently refers to his belief that he is not intelligent and that he is incapable of performing certain tasks due to his lack of intellectual ability. As his teacher, I can say that Jesús' beliefs about his intellectual abilities do not mesh with the quality of work he produces in many of his classes. However, he is steadfast in his belief that he is unintelligent. He not only believes that he is unintelligent but believes other students, teachers, and his parents share in this belief. He mentions that he hears that he is dumb both at the research site as well as at his house:

I just be doin' a lot of dumb stuff. Like here and at my house. Like my teachers tell me I do dumb stuff here and my dad like he tells me I do dumb stuff at the house. Like just stupid stuff. (Appendix F, lines 1039-1041).

Like Roberto, Jesús expresses trepidation about the upcoming CRCT (Appendix F, lines 1597, 1601-1602). He mentions that he has mostly A's and B's on his most recent report card, but believes that he is not ready for the CRCT “‘cause I'm gonna fail and they're gonna keep me in seventh grade again” (Appendix F, lines 1601-1602). Simultaneously while declaring that he is unintelligent, he also believes that he can graduate from high school and mentions that he would like to be a doctor one day.

Jesús does not have a great deal of parental support as his parents work extremely long hours and are not usually home when Jesús is. However, this is not to say that he is lacking in familial support. In fact, Jesús holds his older brother in high regard, constantly spending time with him after school. Jesús mentions that once he completes his chores upon arriving home in the afternoons, “sometimes I just watch my brother” (Appendix F, line 1380). He likes to spend his free time watching his brother play video games because “like he’s really good, and so I just wanna watch him ‘cause like I can’ get very far and it like holds him up so I’d, I just watch him” (Appendix F, lines 1398-1399). Jesús notes that he has had several friends drop out of high school. His oldest sister has dropped out of high school as well to be with her boyfriend. She works in the area and visits with Jesús on a weekly basis. Jesús mentions that his brother is thinking of dropping out of school because he wants to get a job so he can earn money (Appendix F, lines 1636-1638). However, his mother is discouraging him from dropping out (Appendix F, lines 1637-1638). Jesús mentions in one of his journals that if his brother drops out, he will do the same (Jesús, journal entry, December 12, 2006).

Jesús’ low self-efficacy combined with his lack of parental support greatly increases his chances for dropping out as well as for lowered academic performance. While his brother does provide a great deal of familial support, he is thinking of dropping out of school as well. As Jesús spends a great deal of time with his brother, this could negatively impact his chances of completing high school. So far, he has maintained his grades and hopefully he will continue to do so.

**Angie** also exhibits a low level of self-efficacy and does not experience a great deal of academic success at Spring Middle School. While she states that she would like to

attend high school (Appendix F, line 1920), she believes that it will be difficult to do so due to her sister's experiences at the high school. Her sister was also a student at Spring Middle School, earning excellent grades and the respect of students and faculty alike. However, when her sister reached the ninth grade, she began dating an older man and became pregnant. The burden of being pregnant and going to high school was simply too much for Ariela to bear and she dropped out of high school last year. This has given Angie pause about her chances for successfully completing high school since she believes that Ariela had "a headstart. She was already smart and makin' good grades and she couldn't do it" (Angie, journal entry, December 12, 2006).

While she expresses some doubts about her academic abilities, Angie also frequently discusses her fear of being retained in the eighth grade (Appendix F, line 2445; Angie, journal entries, December 12, 2006; February 14, 2007). She is haunted by her academic experiences from the previous year when she attended supplemental tutoring and still failed the CRCT. Neither the state nor the district retained seventh grade students during the 2005-2006 academic year due to failure of any portion of the CRCT. She mentioned continually that she is not a good student (Appendix F, line 2451; Angie, journal entries, December 12, 2006; February 14, 2007) "'cause every time I say somethin', teachers got to be just getting' on me" (Appendix F, lines 2456-2457). During the self-selection of appropriate descriptors, Angie chose the word "dumb" to describe herself: "And I know I'm dumb 'cause my teachers be tellin' me that all the time" (Appendix F, lines 1877-1878). When asked if all of her teachers told her that she was unintelligent, Angie responded, "Enough of 'em" (Appendix F, line 1882). She has internalized this label to such an extent that she has difficulty in seeing many of her

academic successes. Occasionally, she is able to recognize success particularly in the form of her participation in project-based learning.

Angie's parental and familial support system has been failing throughout this school year, beginning as early as last June. Angie incurred many disciplinary infractions during the course of the previous academic year. As a form of punishment for these infractions, Angie's father sent her to Florida for the summer to work as a migrant worker with her grandmother. Angie spent the majority of the summer harvesting watermelons. While she appeared to have learned her lesson based on conversations with both her father and Angie, this time away from her immediate family was difficult for Angie.

When Angie returned, there were issues of domestic violence that her family had to deal with immediately. The resolution for the situation was for Angie's mother to return to Mexico, leaving Angie with her older sister, younger brother, and father. Angie's mother was her touchstone for many of the decisions she was faced with as an adolescent. She mentions frequently that she feels as though teachers at the research site are like "second mothers" now that hers is gone. She does not have a strong relationship with her father and speaks of the silence that exists in their home:

Since my mom went back to Mexico, my dad eats in his room, my sister eats in the living room, I eat in my room. I stay in the room, I take the food to the room, like she (her sister) don' even say hey when I get home. (Appendix F, lines 2519-2522)

When I asked Angie to elaborate on the cause of the distress in her home, she indicated that it began with a fight with her sister shortly after her mother left for Mexico:



‘Cause she started sayin’ that I was supposed to go with this boy and lose my [holds up two fingers in ‘v’ shape, signifying virginity]. You know. And then that I uh I supposed to do the same thing she do and so I told my daddy what she told me and so she got a whippin’. And so that’s why she don’ wanna talk to me no more. (Appendix F, lines 2526-2530)

Angie also indicated that the silence in her household has been going on for two or three months.

There is also great resentment on Angie’s part that her sister has become pregnant. Angie complains that Ariela has not gotten a job and stays at home all day, leaving the chores for Angie to do when she arrives home in the afternoons (Angie, journal entry, February 14, 2007). The issue of her sister’s pregnancy has further complicated what was already a tense situation. While Ariela continues to live with the family, Angie commented:

My dad told her before if she got pregnant, she couldn’t stay with us no more. But I don’ know. I don’ think that guy’s gonna take care of her. My dad says she’s not gonna be livin’ with us because he don’ like that guy. He told her that guy was bad and she didn’ listen. You know? She didn’ listen to nobody. She needs to go with him. That’s the daddy, not my daddy, he needs to take care of them, not my daddy. (Appendix F, lines 2565-2571).

Angie’s low level of self-efficacy combined with the familial turmoil and resultant lack of support greatly increase Angie’s chances for lowered academic achievement (Weber, 1989). The fact that Angie’s older sibling has already dropped out of high school after only one semester does not bode well for Angie’s prospects at high school completion.

Teachers at the research site are attempting to enroll Angie in counseling sessions so that she can better cope with some of the anger she currently feels toward her family. Perhaps when this, along with other issues, is resolved, Angie's mother can return from Mexico and provide a greater level of familial stability.

**Estela** also exhibits a low-level of self-efficacy. She mentions repeatedly that she is dumb, she does not want to go to either high school or college, and that she will be retained in the eighth grade (Appendix F, lines 2843, 2848-2850). Like many of the students at Spring Middle School, Estela is concerned about the new promotion/retention policy in effect for this academic year: "I ain't gonna pass the CRCT. I'm gonna stay here (in the eighth grade) another year. I'll quit before I stay here another year" (Appendix F, lines 2848-2850). She also mentions that she is currently failing three of five classes and that she does not believe that she can pass by attending summer school (Appendix F, line 2862).

Estela has been invited to participate in free CRCT preparation classes after school, but she has chosen not to stay. When completing online practice CRCTs in class, Estela does not earn passing scores and usually remarks that the practice is a waste of time because she expects to fail the test anyway. She chose the self-descriptor "dumb" when completing one of her interviews and refers to herself as dumb in many of her classes. She does not view dropping out of school as being detrimental because the people she knows that have dropped out "some of them went back to Mexico, some of them went to the *pollería* (poultry processing plant)" (Appendix F, lines 3374-3375). Neither of those options is unappealing to Estela (Estela, journal entry, December 12, 2006).

Estela's familial support is virtually non-existence. Her mother filed unruly child charges against her last year when Estela received probation for another offense. Estela continues to live at her mother's house, but there are mandatory visits by a social worker to monitor the family's progress. Estela is also the oldest child in her family and is expected to care for her younger siblings after school. Estela's father is not a part of her life, so her mother has to work long hours to provide for the family as she is their sole source of income. Therefore, many of the childrearing responsibilities fall to Estela, leaving her little time to work on academics outside of school. Estela expressed great resentment regarding her role in her family:

I ain't got no babies 'cause I don't want no babies. I already have to raise my mom's. She don' even love me, she just got me there to watch her kids. She took out that [unruly child charges] on me last year 'cause she said I was bad. If I'm that bad, why can't I leave? She don't want me, so why can't I leave? 'Cause she needs to me to cook, clean, and wash those babies. That's all she thinks I'm good for anyway. (Estela, journal entry, December 12, 2006).

Estela's role in her family angers her and she frequently seeks counseling at the research site in order to deal with her anger. She feels that she is an island in this world, with no one supporting her academically or emotionally (Estela, journal entry, December 12, 2006). This sense of isolation can be destructive to one's self-concept and self-esteem (Weber, 1989). A low self-efficacy combined with a lack of familial support can be destructive to one's academic potential. While there are interventions currently in place to ensure that Estela does not slip further (i.e., social worker, mandatory counseling,

counseling services at the research site), her current situation and emotional state suggest that she is at an extremely heightened risk for academic failure (Weber, 1989).

**Alexandra** exhibits a higher-level of self-efficacy than do many of the other students. While her grades are not as high as Itzel's, Alexandra has much more confidence in her academic abilities and is constantly searching for ways to improve. Alexandra also has a high degree of parental involvement and support with regard to her educational career. When asked about her future plans, Alexandra showed no hesitation in answering that she would complete high school and would attend college:

Well, like, I'll finish high school. I'll go to like...I was thinkin' I wanna go to like to Oxford [Oxford at Emory]. Like two of my mom's sisters went over there to work and they said it's like really nice. One of the girls I know from UGA she went there for like a little while. Like there you can like study really cool stuff. Like if you wanna be a lawyer, you can like go there and you take the classes that get you ready for law school, you know? Or like kind of all that stuff, you know?

(Appendix F, lines 3610-3617)

She also credits her family with her academic success and mentions that she would have to take them into consideration when deciding where to go to college or whether to marry:

I think about my family too. Like I don' know if I wanna get married, that's too far away, but I think about bein' far away from my mom and dad. I want them to stay with me. They always help me. (Appendix F, lines 3621-3623)

Upon prompting for further details about how her parents help her, Alexandra confined her response to the academic assistance they provide:

Like with school stuff. Like they always try to help. Like my mom will call you when I'm havin' trouble in math so you can get me extra help. I go to work with my mom at night and some of those girls from UGA help me with my homework. (Appendix F, lines 3627-3630)

Alexandra has an extremely close relationship with both her mother and her father as the youngest child in the family. Her belief that she can always be successful in school if only she tries (Appendix F, lines 4055-4059) demonstrates an increased potential for academic achievement. By having not only familial support but also the extrafamilial support of college students, Alexandra has an extended support system that can provide both academic and emotional encouragement. Each of these factors can greatly increase Alexandra's academic performance (Weber, 1989).

**Itzel** is a highly talented student whose self-efficacy does not correlate with her academic performance. She is highly thought of by all of her teachers and is ranked toward the top of the eighth grade class at Spring Middle School. She attributes her advanced academic performance to "working hard" rather than being intelligent (Itzel, journal entry, February 14, 2007). She self-identifies as a "*cabezón*," though admits that this label is applied to her by the other students as well.

Itzel also experiences a high level of familial and extrafamilial support. Both of her parents are involved in the Parent Teacher Student Organization and attended Itzel's performances when she participated in the school band in sixth and seventh grades. Itzel said that she had to quit being involved with the school band because it was taking away from her studies (Itzel, personal communication, October 24, 2006). Her father indicated

that this was indeed Itzel's choice and that he had encouraged her to remain a member of the band (Itzel's father, personal communication, October 24, 2006).

Itzel is proud of the fact that her brother graduated from an American high school in spite of many difficulties. In one of her journal entries, she discussed how complicated it was for her brother to enter American schools in the eleventh grade, not be able to speak English at all, and graduate with a diploma. She mentions in a journal entry that he is her model and inspiration for graduating from an American high school, "because he did it with not much practice, and I'll have a lot of time to practice before twelfth grade" (Itzel, journal entry, February 14, 2006). Her brother's successful navigation of the American high school combined with a tremendous amount of parental support greatly increase Itzel's own prospects for academic success (Weber, 1989).

### Theme 3: Student Perceptions of School Culture

One of the most powerful themes that emerged from this research study was the students' perceptions of the school culture, particularly as it related to racism. There were two differing responses that the students had to the racism they experienced at school: either to ignore it or to accept it. For those students able to ignore the racism, school was a nice place to be and they tended to believe the best about the students around them. For those students who accepted the racism, school was an unpleasant place to be and they were constantly on the lookout for their next racist encounter.

**Roberto** believes that the culture of the school respects his *mexicanidad*. He notes that both "the other Mexican students and some of the black kids" respect him at Spring Middle School (Appendix F, line 441). They demonstrate this respect by showing Roberto that "they don't wanna start nothin'" with him (Appendix F, line 449). He

believes that some teachers do disrespect him by not allowing him to speak in Spanish and by pretending that he is invisible in their classes, but he does not distinguish teachers racially nor does he mention that teachers treat other races differently. For Roberto, Spring Middle School is a place that respects the diversity that is present.

**Jesús** asserts that Spring Middle School is a place teeming with racism. He mentions that “sometimes you’re treated bad for being a Mexican” (Appendix F, line 1543). When asked what signifies being “treated bad,” Jesús explains that “like people call you wetback and make fun of you. Like they think you can’t speak English just ‘cause you’re from Mexico. Like they’re mean” (Appendix F, lines 1547-1549). In his journals, Jesús continually mentions his belief of differing standards for Latino and African-American students at the research site:

Like if you’re black at this school, you can do whatever you want. Like black teachers let the black kids do anything. Like the black teachers hate us, they hate us like bein’ here. Like they don’ let us speak Spanish and that’s *our* language. Like they can’t tell us not to do that. Like when I speak Spanish they think I be cussin’ them out or talkin’ bout them, but I’m just usin’ my language. I ain’t talkin’ ‘bout them. Like they don’t say nothin’ to the black kids and they’re talkin’ ‘bout us! Like they say wetback in class and the teachers don’ say nothin’. I think they’re glad the kids say it ‘cause they think it. (Jesús, journal entry, December 12, 2006).

Jesús does not believe that the school in this research study respects his culture. He also believes that the school perpetuates racism by allowing African-American students to act in one way while having differing expectations of its Latino students. By internalizing

much of the racist dialogue and actions he experiences at Spring Middle School, his academic performance can be negatively impacted (Weber, 1989).

**Angie** does not believe that the research site respects her heritage as a Mexican. She holds this belief based on her interactions with teachers and students of other races at Spring Middle School. She notes that “there’s different races in here and they treat us all different” (Appendix F, lines 2325-2326). When asked to elaborate on the differential treatment, Angie responded,

Like the blacks. They get treated the best. Like the black teachers let the black kids do whatever. They’re not any whites in my classes so I’m not even gonna talk about them. They just treat us bad....They just treat us different. Like we don’t get as many privileges as black kids. Like if they act bad in class with a black teacher, they don’ even get in trouble. But if we act bad, we get wrote up real quick. (Appendix F, lines 2330-2338)

In several of Angie’s journal responses (November 1, 2006; December 12, 2006; February 14, 2007), Angie refers to racism that she has experienced at the school. Unlike many of the other research participants, Angie experiences racism from her teachers to a much greater degree than from other students at the research site. She attributes much of the behavior problems she experiences in class as reactions to her teachers’ racist attitudes (Angie, journal entry, November 2, 2006).

Angie internalizes a tremendous amount of the racism she experiences at the research site, and this racism has made her extremely resentful of some of her teachers, to the point where she believes she can no longer perform academically in those teachers’ classes. In her defense, the same two teachers continually write her up for discipline



infractions, while she does not seem to be experiencing behavioral difficulties in her other classes. Regardless, her internalization of the racism she experiences has had a detrimental effect on both her behavior and her academic performance in at least two of her academic classes at the research site.

**Estela** has experienced racism in a variety of ways at Spring Middle School. These experiences have left her distrustful of other races (Estela, journal entry, December 12, 2006). She refuses to participate in the Pathways to Success afterschool program simply because she would be grouped with African-American students (Appendix F, lines 3140-3141). Estela also believes that the teachers at Spring Middle School are angry at the increased Latino enrollment because “they don’ treat us like everybody else” (Appendix F, line 3239). When asked to further explain the differential treatment, Estela responded,

They just don’. They yell at us a lot...Like they don’ stop the black kids from pickin’ on us. Like this one black boy in Ms. Jones’ class, he keep messin’ with me. And she don’ say nothin’. She don’ say nothin’ to him. (Appendix F, lines 3243, 3247-3249).

When asked her rationale for why Ms. Jones does not stop the harassment, Estela replied, “Cause he’s black and she’s black” (Appendix F, line 2353). This is not a unique experience for Estela at the research site. She mentions that other students harass her as well, calling her epithets such as “wetback” (Appendix F, line 3257).

Estela believes that it is more difficult to be a Mexican at the research site. When asked to explain, Estela replied:

Like the black kids at school, they can do whatever they want with the black teachers. They don't yell at them like they yell at the Mexicans. The black kids get to be in the good classes and we're in the ones for dumb kids. (Appendix F, lines 3311-3314).

Estela's experiences at Spring Middle School have led her to an intense resentment of African-American students at the school (Estela, journal entry, January 4, 2007). While she despises being in what she calls "dumb classes" such as extended learning time remediation classes and ELL classes (Appendix F, line 3318), she said "at least there ain't black kids in here" (Estela, journal entry, January 4, 2007). That she would choose to remain in self-described "dumb" classes rather than interact with African-American students demonstrates the incredible racial strife and discrimination that Estela has experienced at the research site. By not believing that Spring Middle School respects her ethnic heritage, Estela is at an increased chance of academic failure (Friedenberg, 1990; Nieto, 2004).

**Alexandra** believes that in spite of a few racist students, the research site overall respects her Mexican heritage. She believes that the Athens community understands the level of labor that is performed by Latinos and is appreciative of this labor (Appendix F, lines 3919-3921). She also cites the large collection of bilingual books and Spanish-language books in the school's media center (Appendix F, lines 3927-3928). She also discusses that her ELL classes at the middle school are "better" than they were at elementary" (Appendix F, lines 3928-3929). She is particularly grateful to have a sheltered ELL social studies class because she "never got to go to social studies when I was at the elementary. They always took us out of social studies to go to ESOL"

(Alexandra, journal entry, November 2, 2006). She never mentions that she has had racist encounters or experiences with any of the faculty at the research site. She has, however, had racist encounters with students at this school but has not attributed their racism to the research site as a whole:

Sometimes it's hard to be a Mexican here. Like the other day, some boy told me that I was lucky I didn't look like a Mexican, but I didn't know what it meant. He told me I was pretty 'cause I didn't look like a Mexican. He said that Mexicans are dirty. I told him I was a Mexican and he told me no I wasn't because I wasn't dirty....[My friend Victoria] told him to shut up and leave us alone. We went to the teacher and asked to move. She said okay. We never cause trouble so she like said okay as soon as we asked her. He hasn't picked on me again since that.

(Appendix F, lines 3955-3967).

When I asked her how that encounter made her feel, she admitted that it made her angry:

Like mad. Like who does he think he is just because he is born here? I don't tell him he's ugly because he's from Georgia. I don't say anything to him at all.

Everybody thinks that they can say whatever they want to us, like we don't have feelings or something. I like don't get people sometimes. (Appendix F, lines

3971-3975).

While Alexandra's feelings were obviously hurt by this student's cruel remarks, she has not allowed it to influence her belief that the research site respects who she is as a person. This ability to not internalize racism has allowed Alexandra to maintain her focus on her academic activities rather than be drawn into racist bickering with her classmates.

**Itzel** has experienced racism at the research site as have many of the other participants in this research study. When I asked Itzel about how she would change the school to make it a better place, she began by describing a place filled with computers and project-based learning and groupwork (Appendix F, lines 4677-4680; Itzel, journal entry, December 12, 2006). Interestingly, the conversation took an unexpected turn as Itzel asked if she was allowed to “change the students too” (Appendix F, line 4686). When given permission, she responded, “I don’t want them to be racist. No, not at all” (Appendix F, line 4690). In describing her own experiences with racism at Spring Middle School, Itzel said,

Well, they talk about us, the Mexicans. Well, the Hispanics. Anybody that talks in Spanish, they make fun of. Like they say that we are dumb, that we are wetbacks, that we don’t need to be here, like go back. (Appendix F, lines 4704-4707)

In response to a follow-up journal entry, Itzel continued,

I don’t let it bother me. They can think I’m a wetback, I’m not one. They can think I’m dumb, I’m not. I don’t need to go back home ‘cause this is like home to me now. I work hard, my mom works hard, my dad works hard, we want to be here. We work hard to be here. I don’t hurt anybody here. (Itzel, journal entry, February 14, 2007)

By not internalizing the racist attitudes she encounters at school, instead using those attitudes as motivation to work even harder, Itzel has taken what could be a destructive force in her academic and emotional lives and has transformed it into a catalyst to propel her even further in her search for academic excellence.

#### Theme 4: Involvement Options

Another prevalent theme throughout the students' interviews and journals were their perception of involvement options. Through the use of the term "involvement options," I am referring to the students' perceptions of opportunities to be involved in activities outside of the traditional school day, for example, sports, college, after-school programming, tutoring, and gangs. The students' perceptions of these types of activities as well as the availability of these activities affect the students' academic performance during the traditional school day. Weber (1990) suggests that being involved in positive extracurricular activities such as clubs or sports can increase students' academic performance.

**Roberto** is involved in extracurricular activities at Spring Middle School. Last year, he played junior varsity baseball for the local high school team and advanced to the state tournament. However, he quit the baseball team at the end of the season so that he could try out for the Spring soccer team. He did make the team and currently practices three days a week after school for the upcoming season. Roberto also assists his father with his landscaping business. He mows lawns on the weekends as well as working on small landscaping jobs. Each of these extracurricular activities provides Roberto with a touchstone outside of school to balance his academic life. According to Weber (1990), these extracurricular activities should enhance Roberto's academic performance as long as he does not devote an inordinate amount of time to them. Soccer should provide such a support to Roberto's academic performance because now his grades are checked weekly in order to maintain eligibility for the team. There is also a mandatory study hall one day a week for all soccer players so this should enhance his academic performance as

well. His parents have also stressed to him that Roberto must maintain his current grades in order to remain on the team. If his grades drop, his parents will force him to quit the team and begin attending after-school tutoring instead.

**Jesús** does not participate in any extra-curricular activities either at the research site or at any community center in the Athens area. While he has been asked to participate in the Pathways to Success after-school program, he has chosen not to do so. This program provides free transportation home after the day's activities so his lack of participation is not due to necessity of transportation after-school. Jesús does mention that he does not participate in after-school activities because he needs to be at home with his brother. The brother also provides much of Jesús' support outside of school. By limiting his extra-curricular support to essentially one person, Jesús' lack of social involvement can increase his chances for dropping out as well (Weber, 1989).

**Angie** does not participate in traditional after-school activities such as Pathways to Success, clubs, or sports. She does not go to the Boys and Girls Club after school to participate in their activities. Angie does, however, participate in a local street gang known as *Sur 13*. Angie is extremely honest about her participation in the gang with those she trusts. She asks in response to being in a gang, "What's wrong with it?" (Appendix F, line 2621). Once she was reassured that no one at the research site would have access to her interview transcripts, Angie spoke freely about her involvement with the gang:

Well, I used to be in it, 'til like two months ago. Helpin' like with my cousin, well, like sometimes when, like when this girl starts talkin' 'bout somethin' 'bout like parents, like we care 'bout our parents, it's just that person that we hate,

everybody from the gang like goes and beat that person. So that's how we were doin' it. (Appendix F, line 2641-2645).

Later, in one of Angie's journals, she admitted that she had lied to me about the extent of her gang involvement and that she was still currently a member of the gang and that she still thought it was a cool thing to do. When I asked Angie what made it cool to be in a gang, she responded that "'cause you with your friends all day, um you can hangin' around, and some people go to school, but they still be hangin' around after, just do whatever" (Appendix F, lines 2658-2660).

Angie further described the gang she was in as the female section of the street gang *Sur 13*. When I asked her if she or the other female gang members joined the boys from *Sur 13*, she stated:

The other girls like they did like for them to be in like the leader tells them they have to do like you know have sex with all they boys that are like *Sur 13*. They had to do it with them. But it wasn't me 'cause my cousin was the leaders and like she didn' wanna have that for me, like she cares for me, that I wasn't gonna lose mine for like somethin' like that, like she did. (Appendix F, lines 2686-2691).

Angie also described in great detail those students at school who are truly in the gang compared to those who are pretending to be (Appendix F, lines 2703-2704).

Interestingly, when I asked her how someone shows they are a member of the gang, Angie stated, "They don't show it" (Appendix F, line 2699). Later, she was able to provide some physical characteristics (tattoos, etc.) that might show someone was in a

gang. Overall, she expressed no remorse about her participation in the gang, but was concerned about my opinion of her gang membership.

In her journals, she frequently responds to other gang members as “sisters” and “*mi familia* (my family)” (Angie, journal entries, December 16, 2006; February 14, 2007). In one of her journals, Angie notes that her gang activities have increased since her mother returned to Mexico and her sister stopped speaking to her (Angie, journal entry, February 14, 2007). Her increased involvement in the gang appears to correlate with her declining grades at the research site.

**Estela** participated in the Pathways to Success after-school program when she was in the sixth grade as a part of their migrant education program. However, when the funding was cut during Estela’s seventh grade year, the program was forced to eliminate separate programming for migrant students. Estela quit attending after-school because there was no longer a separate and distinct group comprised of only Latino students: “I stay with black kids if I stay after school. I don’ wanna stay afterschool” (Appendix F, lines 3140-3141). When asked why the presence of African-American students would stop her from staying after school, Estela responded, “Cause they always wanna start stuff. Like they wanna talk about wetbacks and stuff. I ain’t even goin’” (Appendix F, lines 3145-3146). Estela has also recently moved into a new neighborhood where few of her friends live. She cites this as another reason she choose not to attend after school programming: “I just rather be by myself and not go do all that stuff. Like since I moved, I’m not close to any of my friends anymore so I just stay by myself after school” (Appendix F, lines 3152-3154).



Estela does spend a portion of her day involved in gang activity. While she was reluctant to discuss this activity during the one-on-one interview portion of this research study, she was more open during her journaling:

Like I don't know why everybody thinks it's bad to like join *Sur 13*. It's not bad. They're my friends. It's my choice if I wanna be with them or not. I'm not doin' bad stuff, I'm just hangin' out with my friends. Some people in the gang do bad stuff, like they fight people and stuff. I used to do rounds like that, but I don't know, I stopped. I just hang out with them (Estela, journal entry, December 12, 2006).

When asked in a follow-up journal to describe how much time she spends with gang members, Estela responded that she was with the gang two or three days a week after school, but also that she would hang out with them more but "I gotta get home and watch my brother" (Estela, journal entry, January 4, 2007).

Estela's choice to associate with gang members is not a positive choice and could be not only detrimental to her academic success, but to her overall emotional stability as well. By choosing to participate in gang activity, Estela has increased her potential for participation in illegal activities. By already having had a previous brush with the law, any future illegal activities increase the length of her probation and the possibility for incarceration at the local youth detention center. Also, by spending a great deal of time caring for her brother, Estela limits her interaction with same-age peers as well as older people who could serve as a role model for Estela. This combination of gang activity and isolation can potentially lead to academic self-destruction for Estela (Weber, 1989).

**Alexandra** does participate in a variety of both before-school and after-school activities. As mentioned previously, Alexandra is one of the anchors of the morning announcement broadcast and is a member of the girls' soccer team. Both of these activities have provided Alexandra with opportunities to establish relationships she would not typically have the chance to do so. As all of the students in this research study, Alexandra is enrolled in ELL classes for most of her day. As ELL social studies and ELL language arts are only offered one particular period per day, many times the ELL students are tracked simply due to the manner in which their schedule must be constructed in order to enroll in those ELL classes. The morning announcement crew and the soccer team are filled with students who are not ELLs and who are not of the same track as Alexandra. Both of these experiences have boosted her self-confidence (Alexandra, journal entry, February 14, 2007). She thoroughly enjoys being a member of the morning announcement team due to the incredible amount of responsibility she is given during the production phase (Appendix F, lines 3717-3721, 3726-3730, 3734-3739).

Before she was a member of the soccer team and morning announcement crew, Alexandra participated in the Pathways to Success after-school program. She applied to continue the program this year, but due to budget cuts and her previous scores on the CRCT, she was denied acceptance into the program for her seventh grade year. Alexandra is also different from many of the other participants in this research study in that she does not have any younger siblings and is therefore not responsible for babysitting after-school, freeing up her time to participate in activities such as soccer.

Alexandra's participation in both before-school and after-school activities with students signals the potential for increased academic potential. These activities provide

her with an additional support system as well as a supplementary outlet in which to express her emotions and frustrations. With the presence of an additional support system, Alexandra's potential for academic achievement increases and her chances for dropping out decrease.

**Itzel** does not participate in any traditional after-school activities such as Pathways to Success, clubs, or sports. However, she is involved in many extra-curricular activities that support her academically and emotionally. Last year, Itzel was chosen to participate in Steps to College, a program for middle and high school students at the University of Georgia. As a component of her participation, Itzel attended mini-classes at UGA and was connected with a Latina mentor who attends classes at the university as well. Interestingly, she is now concerned that she was chosen only because she is Latina (Appendix F, lines 4869-4871; Itzel, journal entry, December 12, 2006). She inquired as to whether there were similar programs at the University of Georgia that were open to all races (Itzel, journal entry, December 12, 2006).

Outside of the traditional school day, Itzel spends her time studying. She expresses fear about falling behind in her classes (Appendix F, line 4881) and frequently comes to school even if she is sick. When talking about a typical day, Itzel noted,

I start my homework when I get home and work on it until 9 o'clock at night when we eat supper. The other night, though, I had a language arts test and a social studies test, so I stayed up and studied until twelve. I'm serious. I can't help it. Even my parents came in and said *¡Duerméte!*(Go to sleep!). (Appendix F, lines 5022-5030)

Itzel works diligently on her homework and also meets with her brother's girlfriend during the week to practice her spoken English proficiency (Appendix F, lines 5132-5133).

While Itzel does not participate in traditional after-school activities, her involvement in university activities as well as opportunities for English practice greatly increase her potential for academic achievement (Weber, 1989). Weber (1989), however, does speak to the inordinate amount of pressure that some students place on themselves, resulting in unattainable goals. Itzel's activities will have to be monitored to ensure that she does not place too much pressure on herself academically.

#### Summary

Throughout this process of interviewing and journaling, the students became more comfortable with the sound of their own voice. For some, they began this process by feeling that they were not important enough to contribute anything to this research study. For others, they relished the opportunity for a conversation that focused solely on them. Through the journals and interviews, I learned more about these students' academic experiences than I had ever known before. For my eighth grade students whom I have known for three years, I was not expecting many new revelations. However, I see them, and all of my students, in a new light. I better understand the experiences that our immigrant students encounter in their daily lives. At times, I was ashamed to be a part of an institution that has inflicted so much pain in their lives, while at others, I was beyond proud to be a part of their accomplishments. I am committed to ensuring that the academic experiences of all students at Spring Middle School take place in an environment that is safe, caring, and supportive. While I superficially understood the

struggles of immigrant students at the research site, these students opened my eyes in a profound way that I never imagined to be possible. They allowed me, for a brief time, to be a part of their world and I will never be the same.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

“Power is, after all, what it is all about.”  
(Cummins & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988, p. 390)

The purpose of this study was to examine the educational experiences of Latino immigrants at one Georgia middle school in order to better understand the identity negotiation each of the student’s experiences. By better understanding the identity negotiation of each student in relation to his/her educational experiences, we can better understand the educational experiences that ultimately lead to either academic success or failure. In isolating and categorizing these experiences, teachers have a greater opportunity to limit those experiences which negatively impact a student’s academic performance.

By listening to the students’ experiences in their own words, the power of these educational experiences becomes more real. You can hear the joy, the excitement, the shame, and the anger through *their* words. Four major findings emerged from my study: (1) Student perception of teacher support is vital to their academic performance. If a student believes that her teacher genuinely cares, her academic performance for that teacher increases exponentially. (2) Student efficacy and parental/familial involvement play a large role in determining the academic performance of a student. If a student believes that she is incapable of successfully completing on-level work, she will fail to do so. Without parental or familial support, her chances of academic success lessen. (3) Student perceptions of the school culture affect their academic performance, particularly with regard to racism. If the student views the school as being a site of racism and feels powerless to combat said racism, the student’s academic performance will suffer.

However, if a student views the school as being generally supportive of them and their ethnic heritage, their academic performance improves. (4) Involvement options for the students affect their academic performance. Students who have positive extra-curricular involvement options (sports, clubs, etc.) have increased academic performance. Those who have negative extra-curricular involvement options (i.e., gang, caring for siblings) have decreased academic performance.

I used an ethnographic case study as described by Nieto (2004) in order to examine these students' educational experiences in U.S. schools. While each of the case study participants was originally from Mexico, each participant's length of time in U.S. schools varied. Through interviews and journaling, these students were able to describe their educational experiences in ways that I had never heard them described before. As their teacher, I arrogantly believed that I understood their experiences in U.S. schools, but through this case study approach, I learned more about each of these students than I ever dreamed possible. I also utilized Cummins' (1996) theory of empowerment in order to provide a lens through which to view these students' experiences. His notion of collaborative and coercive relations provided an excellent tool for analyzing the outcomes of the students' educational experiences.

As I mentioned previously, all six of the case study participants were originally from Mexico. Each of them took a different path to arrive in the United States, in Athens, and at Spring Middle School. Some of them have greatly enjoyed their time in U.S. schools and have thrived both academically and emotionally. For others, the transition has been much more difficult. Regardless of where they now are on the path to

academic success, each student's story enlightens us to the joys and pains of being an immigrant student in one Georgia middle school.

When I first began this research study, I found little previous research regarding the negotiation of students' academic identities, particularly at the middle school level. The majority of information I found relating to academic identities and academic success centered on students at the high school level. Almost none of the research I found told the students' stories in their own words. Even after teaching some of these students for three years, their words and their telling of their experience were powerful to me. It was certainly not the polished academic language I was accustomed to reading in my doctoral classes, but their words made this program real to me. Their struggle was the struggle I had myopically read about in my classes, but hearing about this struggle through the words of adolescents made it real to me in a way that I was not ready for. This has been an emotionally draining experience for both my students and me, but it was an emotional release that we, and our school, desperately needed.

Upon hearing their words, it became painfully obvious that student perception of teacher support heavily influenced students' academic performance in the classroom (**Finding 1**). Those students who felt as though their teachers cared about them put forth their best effort in those teachers' classrooms, even if they were not enjoying academic success at that particular time. Itzel speaks at great length about the effect that teachers' care has on her own academic outlook for her classes (Itzel, journal entry, December 12, 2006). She mentions that when a teacher demonstrates care for her, "I want to do good for her. I want to give her my best work" (Itzel, journal entry, December 12, 2006). Roberto and Alexandra mirror Itzel's responses. Both speak about the importance of



having a relationship based on care with your teacher. Alexandra notes, “It just makes it like so much better when you feel like your teachers like you and like they want the best for you” (Alexandra, journal entry, December 12, 2006). Alexandra also responded that she wants to continue to work diligently in those teachers’ classes that demonstrate care, even if she is not performing well academically in those classes: “Like even if you get a bad grade, some teachers make sure that you still learn it that you don’t just give up because you have a bad grade” (Appendix F, lines 3939-3941). Through her teachers’ care and encouragement, Alexandra has demonstrated her own desire for academic excellence and continually seeks extra help in those classes where she feels encouragement. These demonstrations of care between teachers and students can best be described as collaborative relations of power by Cummins (1996). In this collaborative power relation, power is generated through the interpersonal relations between teacher and student. This is important because it is through this generation of power that an individual has the potential to become empowered and change not only his/her social standing, but the societal standing of his/her group. This power generation also comes with a sense of personal responsibility as well as a responsibility for the entire group. Itzel discusses the ever-present awareness that she not only represents herself, but also her ethnic heritage. When asked how to be a successful student, she responded:

Well, I want her to be a good student like don’t do bad things because she represents her country. She can’t forget that. She can’t ever forget that. *Si la gente le ve haciendo algo malo, va a decir que la gente de allá es mala*, ((If people see her doing something bad, they’re going to say that all people from

there are bad)) so she can't be bad. It makes all Mexicans look bad if she's bad.  
(Appendix F, lines 5056-5061).

Through the development of collaborative power relations in the classroom, the sense of both personal and group responsibility takes root, allowing for even greater power generation among its members (Cummins, 1996). These collaborative experiences are “*additive* rather than *subtractive*. Power is *created with* others rather than being *imposed on* or *exercised over* others” (Cummins, 1996, p. 15). Once teachers and students have established an environment of empowerment in their educational setting, students are better able to nurture the necessary abilities to experience educational success. They then see themselves as true stakeholders in the purpose of education and are then better able to understand the potential benefit of education for themselves. By establishing a collaborative environment of caring, the students are able to move beyond insecurities about their identity as their identities have already been validated through the students' participation in the creation and sharing of power. Through this research study, it has become apparent that collaborative relations of power cannot exist without first establishing a community of care or “community of learners” as described by Hall (2001). Only when students feel safe and loved can they move to the power generation phase of collaborative power relations. Once they feel loved and supported, they can progress to true learning (Nieto, 2004). They have become stakeholders in their education and are better able to see the potential rewards related to their own academic success.

However, collaborative power relations are not always the norm in educational environments. At the research site for this study, many students experienced a lack of

care and support by their teachers and were therefore never able to progress to the generation of power needed to foster academic development. Rather these students experienced what Cummins (1996) describes as “coercive relations of power.” Coercive power relations assume that there is a finite amount of power in the world and the more that one group has that power, the less power is left for other groups. At the research site, Angie and Estela felt that these coercive relations of power developed along racial lines. As mentioned previously, the research site has undergone tremendous demographic change in the last five years. What once was a predominantly White school, now reports a population that is less than ten percent White. African-Americans comprise the largest demographic group at the research site, with Latinos being the second-largest. However, in the past three years, the research site’s Latino enrollment has grown exponentially with even greater growth predicted for the 2007-2008 academic year. This has led to some degree of racial tension among the faculty and the students feel this tension as well. Estela mentions that she only has problems with her African-American teachers ““cause they hate us bein’ here. They think we need to go back and let them run it” (Estela, journal entry, December 12, 2006). She also notes differential treatment in her classes with different expectations of African-American and Latino students (Estela, journal entry, December 12, 2006). Angie reports similar experiences. Both of these students indicated that they did not believe that any of their teachers cared about them, though Estela eventually noted in her journals that she truly only experienced difficulty with her African-American teachers. Regardless of the reason, these students believe that their teachers do not care about them nor do they care about Latino students’ academic performance. They indeed feel subjugated and powerless at the research site. Estela

continually refers to teachers saying that she “does not belong” at the research site, with one teacher indicating that she should return to Mexico (Estela, journal entry, February 14, 2007). Angie feels the same disconnect described by Estela. It is through this emotional disconnect that the students become academically disconnected as well. Angie believes that she is harming her teachers by failing their classes (Angie, journal entry, February 14, 2007). She feels anger toward her teachers and reacts by refusing to participate in class activities, assignments, or discussions. She does not realize that she has power regarding her academic outcomes because she has never been given the opportunity to generate power with her teachers at Spring Middle School. By feeling powerless, these students are effectively removed from participation in their own educational careers. When teachers relegate these students to positions of inferiority, truly they lower the positions of us all. Teachers must realize that our interaction with students is perhaps the most crucial role that we have as educators. These interactions have tremendous potential and impact regarding our students’ educational success. It is through these interactions that we negotiate our own identities as educators and struggle with what our purpose truly is. Cummins (1996) calls these struggles for identity negotiation “role definitions” and views them as vital to our interactions with our students, and ultimately our perception of their potential for academic success.

It was heartbreaking to read Estela’s, Angie’s and Jesús’ interviews. To realize how much destructive power thoughtless teachers had exerted over these adolescents’ lives was difficult to bear. By labeling these students as unintelligent, those teachers left a lasting mark on each of these students that continue to this day. Each of these students had a teacher at some point in their academic careers say that they were unintelligent and

these students took it to heart. It has become somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy for some of the students as they now believe that they are unintelligent and unimportant (Jesús, journal entry, December 12, 2006; Angie, journal entry, January 4, 2007; Estela, journal entry, February 14, 2007).

In a more positive vein, the positive impact that teachers can have on students' academic performance can be seen through the lives of Itzel, Alexandra, and Roberto. Each of these students cites a teacher who they believe truly cares for them (Itzel, journal entry, December 12, 2006; Alexandra, journal entry, January 4, 2007; Roberto, journal entry, February 14, 2007). They are willing to put forth their best academic effort even in classes that are self-described as being difficult for them. These students perceive the research site as being a positive educational environment and are experiencing some degree of educational success. This is a typical educational response when students feel supported and cared for by their teachers (Franquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004; Jimenez & Gersten, 1999). Rumberger and Larson (1998) echo the importance of teacher support, particularly for English language learners: "Schools must do more than simply teach students English. They must also attend to and strengthen cultural awareness and identity" (p. 88). It is through teacher support that students' identities are validated in the educational environment. Stanton-Salazar (2001) reports that the most successful students have caring teachers in their lives that affirm their identities. Riojas, Clark, and Gonzalez (1988) found that teachers must not only care for their students, but also provide opportunities for language minority students to act as role models for their classmates. Each teacher should be able to find an academic area in which each student

excels in and allows students to serve as role models in these areas of expertise. This further validates the identity, thereby increasing their academic success.

Teachers cannot underestimate the power of their words and actions. These students were able to vividly describe interactions with their teachers as distant as three years ago (Alexandra, journal entry, February 14, 2007). By providing an atmosphere of care and support, teachers can greatly improve their students' academic performance (Collier, 2006; Lin, 2001; Noddings, 1992). As the students begin to feel safe and comfortable in their educational environment, collaborative power relations can more easily be established, thereby leading to the generation of power rather than its subtraction (Cummins, 1996). It is in this power generation that students are better able to positively negotiate their own identities, leading to greater academic success.

These students also voiced the importance of both self-efficacy and the role of parental/familial support in their academic lives. Students who had high levels of self-efficacy and experienced parental/familial support for their academic endeavors experienced greater academic success than those students with low self-efficacy and little parental/familial support (**Finding 2**). The description of self-efficacy as is related to this research study is provided by Bandura (1986); for him, self-efficacy is

people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances. It is concerned not with the skills one has but with the judgments of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses. (p. 391)

It is Bandura's (1986) belief that people develop certain beliefs about their abilities to successfully complete an assigned task based on their previous experiences. Angie,

Estela, and Jesús offer further evidence for Bandura's claim. Each of them expressed that they had little belief in their academic abilities, partially because of the academic reinforcements they had received at the research site (i.e., grades) and partially due to the negative interactions they have experienced with their teachers wherein they have internalized their teachers' negative opinions of their academic abilities. This lack of confidence in one's abilities is common at both the middle and high school levels among students who are not achieving academically (Legault, Green-Demers, & Pelletier, 2006; Usher & Pajares, 2006; Margolis & McCabe, 2006; Jinks & Morgan, 1999). They have been conditioned to believe their academic efforts result in failure and humiliation (Pajares, 2003). It is not surprising therefore that many of these students experience motivational difficulties with regard to their academic assignments. If students believe that they will ultimately fail at their academic tasks, they eventually no longer attempt to complete those tasks.

Bandura (1989) also suggests that individuals that demonstrate more efficacious beliefs "make things happen" (p. 731). This is supported by the experiences of Itzel, Alexandra, and Roberto. Each of these students believes that they are academically capable of successfully completing class-level assignments, though Roberto expresses doubts regarding his ability to successfully pass the CRCT and be promoted to the ninth grade. According to Bandura (1986, 1989), these students have been reinforced in their academic abilities and therefore exhibit a greater degree of efficacious behavior. Margolis and McCabe (2006) suggest that these students believe that they have the ability to succeed because they do not give up easily when difficulties arise (p. 218). These

students were encouraged during their times of academic difficulties, resulting in more efficacious behaviors on their part.

The students who were academically successful at the research site also reported higher levels of parental/familial support. Parental and familial support is key to academic achievement (Gonzalez & Wolters, 2006; Ceballo, 2004; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993). While the support of this research study's participants did not necessarily include assistance with homework or class projects, it did entail academic encouragement by parental or familial members as well as attendance at school events. This is a fairly typical response to school engagement by immigrant families (Bolarin, 1992). Spera (2006) found that increased parental involvement produced increased levels of motivation and academic achievement among students. This concurs with Boveja's (1998) finding that students who do not feel that their parents appropriately express love and support demonstrate lower levels of academic achievement as well as a greater propensity to drop out of high school.

Teachers can combat low self-efficacy in their classrooms by creating environments in which students feel comfortable in taking risks and getting them to believe they can succeed (Pressley, Dolezal, Raphael, Mohan, Roehrig, & Bogner, 2003). Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) found that "students are motivated to engage in tasks and achieve when they believe they can accomplish the task" (p. 134). Margolis and McCabe (2006) also suggest that teachers "plan moderately challenging tasks, capitalize on student choice and interest, reinforce effort and correct strategy use, encourage students to try, stress recent successes, and give frequent, focused, task-specific feedback (p. 227). Each of these components is designed to further bolster the students' belief that



they can achieve academically, even if it is only in small increments. This is vitally important as increasing their efficacious behavior can help them erase “maladaptive academic behaviors, avoidance of courses and careers, and diminishing school interest and achievement” (Pajares, 2003, p. 153). This increasing of efficacious behavior extends beyond the classroom walls as “beliefs of personal competence ultimately become habits of thinking that serve them throughout their lives” (Pajares, 2003, p. 153).

Teachers and administrators can also work to create more inviting environments for their immigrant students’ parents. As all of the research participants are Latino in this study, the ways to create such an environment are directed at Latino parents. First, we must acknowledge that we have not always treated Latino parents as equals in the quest for their students’ education (Sosa, 1997). We must also take steps to eliminate the language barrier that exists between many Latino parents and school staff (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Teachers must also be willing to understand the cultural background from which many Latino parents understand their relationship with teachers. For many Latino parents, there is a high level of respect for educators as professionals and they see advocacy for their children as interference in the professional’s best judgment (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, 2004). We must also understand that Latino parents have not always had the best prior experiences with U.S. schools (Quezada, Diaz, and Sanchez, 2003). We must be willing to overcome this hesitancy by providing a positive atmosphere for both the parents and their students. Only then can our Latino parents and students become true stakeholders in the American educational process.

Students' perceptions of their school's culture also played an overwhelming role in their identity negotiation as well as their academic achievement. Those students who believed that the research site was supportive of their ethnic identity and heritage language appeared to have higher levels of academic achievement (**Finding 3**). Their perception of the educational environment is important because this is where the majority of their identity work took place. Through their interactions with teachers and fellow students, the participants in this research study were negotiating their identities, reconciling their identities prior to U.S. schooling with the identities they were currently cultivating in a Georgia middle school. As Valenzuela (1999) found, "language is one of the most powerful resources needed to maintain self-identity" (p. 169). The students who experienced academic success at the research site believed that the institution and its inhabitants valued their ethnic heritage as well as their language. These students felt free to become who they were going to be without forgetting who they were. For these students, Spring Middle School provided an encouraging environment, in which they could experiment with and try on new identities. These students also viewed racist encounters with other students and teachers as singular events, rather than evidence of systemic hatred. Their overall positive experience at the research site allowed them to negotiate their identities in a loving, caring, and supportive environment which led to academic success. Oyserman, Harrison, and Bybee (2001) found that positive experiences with one's racial identity at educational sites can increase students' self-efficacy and overall academic achievement.

This, of course, was not the case for all of the participants in this research study. Some of the students, such as Angie and Estela, saw systemic hatred and devaluation of

their ethnic heritage and language. It is no surprise then that these students' identity development and negotiation was stifled as language is a central component of one's identity (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cummins, 1996; Antrop-González, Vélez, & Garnett, 2005). These students believed that their culture, the essence of who they are, was continually devalued by the actions of staff members and students at Spring Middle School. They remained on the sidelines of their own educational endeavors, relegated to that position due to subjugation by the dominant group at the research site. It was with great pain that I listened to them recall multiple instances of racial discrimination and hatred, simply due to the color of their skin and the language they speak. I have never felt that kind of discrimination and it was heartbreaking to me that these students had been forced to endure this type of discrimination in order to obtain an education. This was much more than simple racially-motivated dislike of another group, and to dismiss it as such is dangerous. It is easy to dismiss name-calling as

White authority figures often view name-calling—even that of a racialized nature—as common adolescent behavior, the visible minority participants equate such name-calling with a serious form of harassment and violence... White authority figures also tend to see name-calling as isolated incidents rather than part of a continual pattern of harassment encountered by visible minority students. (Varma-Joshi, Baker, & Tanaka, 2004, p. 175).

The students in this research study perceived many of these racialized incidents as true racial discrimination. Discrimination by teachers can be even more dangerous as “students named teachers’ discrimination against them as Latinos as the primary cause of

their disengagement from school, refusing to invest in learning from these teachers” (Katz, 1999, p. 809).

Listening to the experiences of each of these students reminds us that school must be a safe, supportive environment if we truly want children to succeed academically and emotionally. The school demographics of Georgia are rapidly shifting and we must be willing to embrace all of the diversity we have been gifted with if all students are to succeed. A school’s climate influences the academic performance of its students. After listening to some of these students’ experiences, I am no longer surprised that the research site has been labeled a needs improvement school, nor am I surprised that the same students continue to experience academic failure year after year. These students’ stories are invaluable as they teach us what we must do to ensure that our schools are places where we truly believe all students can learn and that we will pay the emotional price to create a safe, supportive haven for these students. We must constantly search for ways that validate all of our students’ identities and cultural backgrounds (Rollins & Valdez, 2006; Conchas, 2001; Sanders, 1997). For my students and me, this research study has been one such way to validate our experiences. As mentioned previously, there has been great resistance at the research site to both my position and my students’ enrollment. This study gave us all an opportunity to have a voice, to share what we have been creating together for three years. While this has been a wonderfully exhaustive experience, I have learned to validate my students’ voices and their identities on a smaller scale. Again, it is heart-wrenching to hear Jesús say that he is not important enough to record or that he does not have anything important to contribute to the discussion (Appendix F, line). Before this study, I would have never believed that a twelve-year-old

student could even harbor such ideas. However, this calls further attention to the fact that Jesús, along with many other students at the research site, has been silenced through the actions of uncaring, unsympathetic, and perhaps unknowing teachers. He has not actively participated in collaborative relations of power at Spring Middle School, resulting in the development of a subjugated identity and feelings of worthlessness. This is typical for students who live on the margins of their education (Nieto, 2002; Cummins, 1996).

Involvement options for the students also affected their levels of academic achievement. Some students (Roberto, Alexandra, and Itzel) were involved in positive extracurricular activities such as clubs, sports, and social functions (e.g., practicing English with a native speaker). Students who self-reported their involvement in extracurricular activities exhibited higher levels of academic achievement (**Finding 4**). Extracurricular activities have been shown to increase academic achievement as well as promote emotional well-being (Gerber, 1996; Mahoney, 2003). Cooper, Valentine, Nye, and Lindsay (1999) found that structured after-school activities such as sports or homework assistance programs significantly increased students' levels of academic achievement. Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, and Brown (2004) examined the effectiveness of homework programs similar to the Pathways to Success after-school program at the research site and found that participation in these programs increased student self-efficacy, increased academic achievement, and contributed to higher graduation rates. Marsh (1988) also found that structured extracurricular activities could serve as an extension of the traditional curriculum, thereby increasing student self-efficacy and academic achievement. Darling (2005) found that participation in

extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs positively impacted student self-concept and self-esteem, resulting in increased academic achievement. Students who participate in positive extracurricular activities tend to stay in school longer and have a higher graduation rate than those students not involved in extracurricular activities (Randolph, Rose, Fraser, & Orthner, 2004)

Not surprisingly, the students who reported few or negative extracurricular activities (Jesús, Angie, and Estela) demonstrated lower levels of academic achievement. While Jesús did report spending time with his brother playing video games, Cooper et al (1999) found this type of activity to have a negative effect on one's academic performance, particularly as Jesús is an inactive participant in the gaming, choosing instead to function as a silent observer to his brother's game playing. This activity does not affirm Jesús' identity, nor does it provide an opportunity for him to experience success beyond the school walls. Angie and Estela, however, participate in a much more dangerous pastime: gangs. For Angie and Estela, gang participation can provide a sense of family belonging and support. This is a common reason for gang participation (Holleran & Waller, 2003). Gang affiliation serves as an avenue for peer group socialization which Harris (1995) posits is the most powerful environmental effect on young adolescent social and emotional development. As the gang most often participates in deviant societal behavior, Angie's and Estela's tendency to spend time with others who participate in this type of behavior increases their own tendency toward delinquent behaviors and lower academic achievement (Biglan, Brennan, Foster, & Holder, 2004). As students increase the amount of time they spend with deviant peers and begin to identify with the group's deviance, the group begins to exert almost total influence on the

individuals' behavior (Cairns, Cadwallader, Estell, & Neckerman, 1997). As these students report low levels of parental/familial involvement, it is natural that they would begin to seek out extra-familial support systems such as gangs (Poulin & Boivin, 2000). As students become more entrenched in the deviant behavior of the gang, their level of academic engagement and achievement suffers. The longer students remain in the gang, the less likely are their chances for high school completion (Dishion, Nelson, & Yasui, 2005). Youth involved in gang activity also engage in higher rates of illegal activity and substance abuse (Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001). Participation in illegal activity and substance abuse further decreases one's level of academic achievement while increasing the probability of dropping out (Weber, 1989).

Each of these students reminds us of the power we wield in the classroom. We can choose to develop collaborative or coercive relations of power with our students. In doing so, we must be willing to take the responsibility for our students' educational outcomes. We must realize that the educational environment we create in the classroom can either positively or negatively influence our students' lives. We should remember Luke's admonition that "to whom much is given, much is expected" (Luke 12:48). Society entrusts children's lives to us each day. While this is a tremendous responsibility, it is ripe with reward if only we are willing to create classrooms that cultivate positive academic experiences, provide teacher and student support, and encourage family participation.

#### Avenues for Future Research

I believe that this research study has helped my students and me to better understand the power differential that exists at Spring Middle School. Through the

navigation of said differential, the students negotiated and developed their own academic identities and worldviews of academic success. I believe that this dissertation continues the vein of research previously conducted by Carger (1996) and Valenzuela (1999), while uniquely focusing on the experiences of immigrant *middle school* students. It would be most interesting to continue this research longitudinally, focusing on either this group of students as they negotiate the new world of high school or beginning with a new group of students and following their academic successes and struggles throughout middle and high school.

Regardless of the avenue taken, I implore that all teachers, administrators, and support staff take these students' words to heart. Through their struggles and successes may you discover the power you possess in influencing your own students' lives both inside and outside of the classroom. Perhaps you will be a little more empathetic the next time an immigrant student becomes a member of your classroom family. Maybe you will stand there to greet them as they cross the stage at their high school graduation. Hopefully, you will feel a sense of responsibility to these students as they navigate the difficult journey of identity negotiation. Perhaps you will be the shining example of a supportive teacher in their academic journey.

### Epilogue

I wanted to reiterate how meaningful and life-changing this experience has been for my students and myself. We have all grown over the course of the past three years together and our lives will never be the same. By interviewing and journaling with my students, I saw facets of their lives that previously had remained hidden from view. I also saw the ways in which our lives were inextricably woven together. I thought about my



own experiences with schooling, both positive and negative, and how those teachers are forever a part of my psyche. I take them with me each day into my classroom, still learning from them long after I left their classrooms. So it is with my own students. Some of them will be leaving in May to move to the local high school. I pray that I have armed them with knowledge and self-love and an abiding sense of self-worth as each of these components will be desperately needed as they move to their next phase of their educational careers. Our experiences together have changed us. I am certainly not the teacher I was three years ago precisely due to these students' presence in my life. They have made my education come alive for me. They have put their faces to educational theories, their tears to heart-breaking events in my life and theirs, and their smiles to our joyful celebrations of our successes. Their words have both affirmed as well as convicted me. Their words are forever etched on my heart and in my mind, and like those teachers from the past, these students will go forth with me for the rest of educational career and truly the rest of my life.

This study reminded me of the power I have as a classroom teacher. While accountability measures such as No Child Left Behind threaten the individuality of teachers across the nation, these students remind me that *I* was important to them, that *I* made a difference in their lives, either positively or negatively. No legislation can take away the power that I have with these children. Fortunately, this study also reminded me that the power I have discussed is not my own, for it has been generated collaboratively with the students in this study. We have all drawn from each other's experiences, joys, and despairs. We have been there for each other through the highest peaks and the lowest valleys and I dread not continuing my daily journey with them. That is perhaps the

hardest part of being a teacher: letting go. Like a mother, I pray that I have prepared them for the next phase of their lives, that they will be happy and successful, that they will fulfill their dreams. For long after they are gone, I will take comfort in the time that we shared together and I will never forget it.

As enjoyable as this study was, it had to end. While this formal documented interaction between myself and my students is over, our lives are still evolving. My three years at Spring Middle School have been intense. I have experienced the gamut of emotions while growing and developing with these students. I have loved them, been frustrated with them, and watched them grow into young adults. It pains me that there will no longer be an ELL/sheltered social studies class at Spring Middle School next year. I see all that we have achieved and it is heart-breaking to know that this will not continue, at least not down the same path. This tragedy has been somewhat ameliorated through the writing of this dissertation, which has been extremely cathartic for me. For my students, this dissertation also provided a much-needed release. For some students, this was the first time they felt important enough to be heard by an adult. For others, this study provided an outlet to discuss their frustrations and fears about our school in an open, honest environment. For all, this research study provided a forum in which we learned from each other and made our school a better place. Our school will never be the same because of this study. More importantly, my students and I will never be the same either.

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## APPENDIX A

### PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT

#### COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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#### DEPARTMENT Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading

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### PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Lucy Bush and I am currently the ESOL/Sheltered Social Studies Teacher at XXXXX Middle School. I am working on my Doctorate of Education in Curriculum Studies at Georgia Southern University. I am interested in finding out about what factors influence academic identity development among Latino students. Much of the current research focuses on academic identity development at the high school level with very little research concerning middle school students. The present study is an attempt to investigate the experiences that influence academic identities among Latino middle school students at XXXXX so that the educational experiences of all Latino students may be improved, thereby improving levels of academic success.

This letter is to request your permission to allow your son or daughter to voluntarily participate in a research study. Participation in this survey and possible in-depth interview is voluntary and participants may withdraw their participation at any time. Your child may choose to not answer any question(s) he/she does not wish to answer for any reason. Your child may refuse to participate even if you agree to his/her participation. Your child will be asked to answer a 13-item survey designed to measure students' general perceptions of middle school. Based on the responses to the surveys, six students will be selected to participate in three in-depth interviews that will further discuss factors surrounding the development of academic identities. I am requesting your permission to use your child's responses to survey and in-depth interview questions in order to assist in completion of my study. None of the teachers or other people at XXXXX Middle School will see the answers to either the survey or the interview. All of the answers will be confidential and will be kept in a locked cabinet at my home. In order to protect the confidentiality of your child, a number and not the child's name will appear on all of the information recorded during the study.

Your child's participation and name in this study will be kept strictly confidential. There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. The Clarke County School District's Office of Research and Grants has approved this study. This study will be beneficial to all involved and provide much needed research in this area. If you would like a copy of the results of this study, you may indicate your intent below.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research project, please call me at XXXXXXXX or email me at [bushl@clarke.k12.ga.us](mailto:bushl@clarke.k12.ga.us). You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Grigory Dmitriyev at (912) 681-5545 or [gregodmi@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:gregodmi@georgiasouthern.edu). If you have any questions about your child's rights as a research participant in this study, they should be directed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored

Programs at (912) 681-5465. The results from this study should allow further opportunities for academic success regarding your children.

**Attached you will find two copies, one copy for your records and the other copy should be returned to me via your child.**

**Parental Permission**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Parent's name) give permission for my child to participate in this study.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Parent's name) do not give permission for my child to participate in this study.

Parent signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The informed consent procedure has been followed.

Investigator's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Project: *Bienvenidos a los Estados Unidos, you're no longer yourself: An investigation of academic identity formation among Latino middle school students*

Parents,

If you wish to receive a copy of the results, please indicate by sending me your address, and I will mail you a copy when the project is complete.

Sincerely,

Lucy Bush  
ESOL/Sheltered Social Studies Teacher  
XXXXX Middle School  
Doctoral Candidate  
Georgia Southern University

## **COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

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### **DEPARTMENT Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading**

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#### **PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT**

Estimado padre o guardián legal:

Me llamo Lucy Bush y soy la profesora de ESOL/Sheltered Social Studies en XXXXX Middle School. Estoy trabajando en mi Doctorado de Educación en Estudios Curriculares en la Universidad de Georgia Southern. Estoy interesada en averiguar información acerca de los factores que influyen el desarrollo de la identidad académica de los estudiantes latinos. La mayoría de las investigaciones actuales tiene que ver con el desarrollo de la identidad académica al nivel secundario, y no hay mucha información sobre los estudiantes de middle school. En esta investigación yo estoy buscando información sobre las experiencias que hayan influido la identidad académica de los estudiantes latinos en XXXXX para que las experiencias educacionales para todos los estudiantes latinos mejoren, también mejorando su éxito académico.

He escrito esta carta para pedir su permiso para que su hijo/a participe voluntariamente en esta investigación. La participación en este cuestionario y posible entrevista no es obligatoria y los participantes pueden dejar de participar en cualquier momento durante la investigación. Su hijo/a puede decidir no contestar las preguntas por cualquier razón. Su hijo/a puede decidir no participar después, aunque usted diga que sí puede participar. Pediré que su hijo/a conteste un cuestionario de 13 preguntas. El cuestionario va a medir las percepciones generales de su hijo/a sobre middle school. Después de leer las respuestas a los cuestionarios, pediré que seis de los estudiantes participen en tres entrevistas más profundas para hablar de los factores que hayan formado su identidad académica. Estoy pidiendo su permiso para utilizar las respuestas de su hijo/a para completar mi proyecto. Ningún profesor o cualquier otra persona en XXXXX Middle School va a ver las respuestas al cuestionario o la entrevista. Todas las respuestas son confidenciales y las guardaré en un cajón cerrado con llave en mi hogar. Para proteger la confidencialidad de su hijo/a, pondré un número en vez del nombre de su hijo/a en toda la información que reciba durante la investigación.

El nombre y la participación de su hijo/a serán estrictamente confidencial. No hay riesgos en participar en esta investigación además de las que se experimentan durante la vida diaria. La Oficina de Investigaciones del Distrito Escolar de Clarke County ha aprobado esta investigación. Esta investigación va a ser beneficiosa para todos los participantes y va a proveer información necesaria. Si usted quiere una copia de los resultados de esta investigación, déme el favor de indicarlo abajo.

Si usted tiene cualquier pregunta acerca de este proyecto, llámeme al XXXXXXXXXX o envíeme un correo electrónico a [bushl@clarke.k12.ga.us](mailto:bushl@clarke.k12.ga.us). También, puede ponerse en contacto con mi consejero, Dr. Grigory Dmitriyev al (912) 681-5545 o [gregodmi@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:gregodmi@georgiasouthern.edu). Si tiene una pregunta acerca de los derechos de su hijo/a como participante en este proyecto de investigación, debe de hablar con el Institutional Review Board (IRB) Coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs al (912) 681-5465. Los resultados de esta investigación deben de ayudar a crear más oportunidades para el éxito académico para su hijo/a.

**Hay dos copias sujetadas, una copia para usted y otra copia que su hijo/a debe llevarme a mí.**

**Permiso del padre/guardián legal**

Yo, \_\_\_\_\_ (nombre del padre) permito que mi hijo/a participe en esta investigación.

Yo, \_\_\_\_\_ (nombre del padre) no permito que mi hijo/a participe en esta investigación.

Firma del padre: \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

Se ha seguido el procedimiento para el permiso informado.

Firma de la Investigadora: \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

Título del Proyecto: *Bienvenidos a los Estados Unidos*, ya no eres tú: Una investigación acerca de la formación de la identidad académica de los estudiantes latinos de middle school.

Padres,

Si quieren recibir una copia de los resultados de esta investigación, denme el favor de enviarme su dirección, y yo les enviaré una copia cuando yo complete el proyecto.

Sinceramente,

Lucy Bush  
ESOL/Sheltered Social Studies Teacher  
XXXXXX Middle School  
Doctoral Candidate  
Georgia Southern University



**APPENDIX B**

**MINOR'S ASSENT**

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

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**DEPARTMENT Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading**

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**MINOR'S ASSENT**

Hello,

I am Lucy Bush, a graduate student at Georgia Southern University and I am conducting a study on the academic identity formation of middle school students.

You are being asked to participate in a project that will help me learn about the experiences that influence the formation of academic identities of Latino students at XXXXX Middle School. You will be asked to answer a 13-question survey regarding your feelings about school. You may also be selected to participate in an in-depth interview. You will not be asked to put your name on the survey. I am requesting your permission to use your responses to survey questions and possible follow-up interview questions to assist in the completion of my project. The survey will take less than 5 minutes and each of the three interviews will take between 30-45 minutes.

You do not have to participate in this survey or interview. It will not affect your grade in any way. You can stop the survey or the interview whenever you want. You can refuse to help me even if your parents have said you are allowed to participate.

None of the teachers or other people at our school will see the answers to the questions I ask you. All of the answers that you give me will be kept in a locked cabinet at my home and only I or people helping me at Georgia Southern will see your answers. I will not put your name on the answers you give me, so no one will be able to know which answers were yours.

If you or your parents/guardians have any questions about this form or the project, please call me at XXXXXXXX or my advisor, Dr. Grigory Dmitriyev, at (912) 681-5545. Thank you!

If you understand the information above and want to help in the project, please sign your name on the line below:

**Yes, I want to help in the project:** \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

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**DEPARTMENT Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading**

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**MINOR'S ASSENT**

Hola,

Yo soy Lucy Bush, estudiante graduada de la Universidad de Georgia Southern y estoy en el proceso de hacer una investigación acerca de la formación la identidad académica de los estudiantes de middle school.

Yo pido que tú participes en un proyecto que me ayudará a aprender acerca de las experiencias que influyan la formación de la identidad académica de los estudiantes latinos en XXXXX Middle School. Pediré que contestes un cuestionario de 13 preguntas acerca de tus sentimientos sobre tu escuela. Y después, pediré que algunos de los estudiantes participen en una entrevista más profunda. No pediré que pongas tu nombre en el cuestionario. Este formulario es para que tú me des permiso para utilizar tus respuestas a las preguntas del cuestionario y las respuestas a las preguntas de las entrevistas para ayudarme a completar mi proyecto. Sólo tardarás unos 5 minutos en completar el cuestionario y 30-45 minutos en completar cada entrevista.

No es obligatorio que participes en este cuestionario o la entrevista. No tendrá ningún efecto en tu nota. Puedes dejar de tomar el cuestionario o parar tu participación en la entrevista en cualquier momento. No tienes que participar aunque tus padres te hayan dado permiso para participar.

Ningún profesor ni cualquier otra persona en tu escuela va a ver tus respuestas. Todas las respuestas que me des estarán en un cajón cerrado con llave en mi hogar, y solo yo y las personas de la Universidad de Georgia Southern van a ver tus respuestas. No incluiré tu nombre con tus respuestas para que nadie sepa qué respuestas son tuyas.

Si tus padres/guardianes legales tienen preguntas acerca de este formulario o este proyecto, díles que me llamen al (706) XXX-XXXX o que llamen a mi consejero, Dr. Grigory Dmitriyev, al (912) 681-5545. ¡Gracias!

Si entiendes la información en este formulario y quieres participar en este proyecto, dame el favor de firmar tu nombre abajo:

**Si, quiero participar en este proyecto:** \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre del estudiante:

\_\_\_\_\_

Firma de la investigadora: \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

**Directions:**

**Read the 13 items carefully. Answer each item by placing a check ( ) in the blank next to the best answer for you. (Only mark one answer for each question.)**

1. What grade are you in?  
 6<sup>th</sup>       7<sup>th</sup>       8<sup>th</sup>
  
2. How old are you?  
 11 or less       12       13       14       15 or more
  
3. How much time do you spend on homework a week?  
 No homework is ever assigned.  
 I have homework, but I don't do it.  
 Less than 1 hour a week.  
 Between 1 and 3 hours a week.  
 More than 3 hours, but less than 5 hours a week.  
 Between 5 and 10 hours a week.  
 More than 10 hours a week.
  
4. Between the beginning of school last fall (August 2005) and Christmas vacation (December 2005), how many days were you ABSENT from school? (*Don't count illness.*)  
 None  
 1 or 2 days  
 3 or 4 days  
 5 to 10 days  
 11 to 15 days  
 16 to 20 days  
 21 or more days
  
5. Between the beginning of school last fall (August 2005) and Christmas vacation (December 2005), about how many days were you LATE to school?  
 None  
 1 or 2 days  
 3 or 4 days  
 5 to 10 days  
 11 to 15 days  
 16 to 20 days  
 21 or more days

6. Which of the following describes your grades? (mark one)

- Mostly As
- About half As and half Bs
- Mostly Bs
- About half Bs and half Cs
- Mostly Cs
- About half Cs and half Fs
- Mostly Fs

7. Since you started school in the United States, how many times have you changed schools because you or your family moved?

- Never
- Once
- Twice
- Three times
- More than three times

8. Are the following statements about you true (T) or false (F)?

- |   | <b>T</b>                 | <b>F</b>                 |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. I have had disciplinary problems in school during the last year. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. I have been suspended or put on probation in school.             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. I have been in serious trouble with the law.                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. I am satisfied with the way my education is going                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. I am interested in school.                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. I like to work hard in school.                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

9. At what age do you expect to .....get married?.....have first child?.....finish your full-time education?

Have already done this	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18 or less	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20 or more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't expect to do this	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Do you expect to graduate from high school?

- Yes
- Probably
- Probably not
- No

11. Do you plan to go to college at some time in the future?

- Yes, right after high school.
- Yes, after staying out 1 year.
- Yes, after a longer period out of school.
- Don't know.
- No.

12. Have any of your close friends or brothers/sisters dropped out of high school?

- No
- Yes, 1 of them
- Yes, several of them
- Yes, many of them

13. How often do you spend time on the following activities outside of school?

	<i>Rarely or Never</i>	<i>Less than once a week</i>	<i>Once or twice a week</i>	<i>Every day or almost every day</i>
a. Visiting with friends at a local gathering place	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Going out on dates	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Talking with friends on the telephone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Cuestionario Estudiantil

### Instrucciones:

Lee las 12 preguntas siguientes con cuidado. Contesta cada pregunta escribiendo un “cheque” ( ) en el espacio al lado de la mejor respuesta en tu opinión. (Sólo marca una respuesta para cada pregunta.)

1. ¿En qué grado estás?  
 6       7       8
2. ¿Cuántos años tienes?  
 11 menos       12       13       14       15 o más
3. ¿Cuánto tiempo pasas trabajando en tu tarea cada semana?  
 Mis profesores no me dan tarea.  
 Mis profesores me mandan tarea, pero no la hago.  
 Menos de una hora cada semana.  
 Entre 1 y 3 horas cada semana.  
 Entre 3 y 5 horas cada semana.  
 Entre 5 y 10 horas cada semana.  
 Más de 10 horas cada semana.
4. Entre el primer día de clases el año pasado (agosto del 2005) y las vacaciones de Navidad (diciembre del 2005), ¿Cuántos días escolares estuviste ausente? (*No incluyas días cuando estuviste enfermo/a.*)  
 Ninguno  
 1 o 2 días  
 3 o 4 días  
 5 a 10 días  
 11 a 15 días  
 16 to 20 días  
 21 días o más
5. Entre el primer día de clases el año pasado (agosto del 2005) y las vacaciones de Navidad (diciembre del 2005), ¿Cuántos días llegaste tarde a la escuela?  
 Ninguno  
 1 o 2 días  
 3 o 4 días  
 5 a 10 días  
 11 a 15 días  
 16 to 20 días  
 21 días o más

6. ¿Cuál de lo siguiente describe tus notas? (marca uno)

- Casi todas As
- La mitad As la mitad Bs
- Casi todas Bs
- La mitad Bs y la mitad Cs
- Casi todas Cs
- La mitad Cs y la mitad Fs
- Casi todas Fs

7. Desde que empezaste a asistir a la escuela en los Estados Unidos, ¿cuántas veces has cambiado de escuelas porque tu familia se había mudado?

- Nunca
- Una vez
- Dos veces
- Tres veces

8. Para ti, ¿son las frases siguientes ciertas (C) o falsas (F)?

- |   | <b>C</b>                 | <b>F</b>                 |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. He tenido problemas disciplinarios en la escuela en el ultimo año. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Me han expulsado o me han dado probación en la escuela.            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. He tenido problemas serios con la policía.                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Me satisface cómo va mi educación                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. La escuela me interesa.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. Me gusta trabajar duro en la escuela.                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Más de tres veces                            |                          |                          |

9. ¿A qué edad esperas .....casarte?.....

(a)	(b)	(c)
	tener tu?.....	terminar tu
	primer hijo/a	educación
		de tiempo
		completo?

- |                      |                          |                          |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| No pienso hacer esto | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ya he hecho esto     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18 o antes           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21 o después         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

10. ¿Piensas ir a la universidad en el futuro?

- Sí, inmediatamente después de graduarme del colegio (la secundaria).
- Sí, un año después de haberme graduado del colegio.
- Sí, más de un año después de graduarme del colegio.
- No lo sé.
- No.



11. ¿Piensas que vas a graduarte del colegio (la secundaria)?

- Sí
- Posiblemente
- Creo que no
- No

12. ¿Han dejado el colegio (la secundario) algunos amigos o familiares íntimos tuyos?

- No
- Sí, uno de ellos
- Sí, varios
- Sí, muchos

13. ¿Cuánto tiempo pasas haciendo estas actividades fuera de la escuela?

	<i>Nunca o casi nunca</i>	<i>Menos de una vez por semana</i>	<i>Una o dos veces cada semana</i>	<i>Todos los días o casi todos los días</i>
a. Estar con amigos en un lugar común	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Salir con un/a novio/a	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Hablar con amigos por teléfono	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## APPENDIX D

### SCORING OF STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

(Taken from Weber's Dropout Prediction Scale)

Assign each variable that matches the indicator requirements a 1; otherwise assign the variable a 0.

<b>Age relative to classmates:</b>	If in items 1 and 2, student is older than classmates
<b>Study habits:</b>	If the item 3a, student marked no homework assigned or done
<b>Sexual preoccupation:</b>	If in items 9a or 9b, student marked have already done this or 18 or under
<b>Unexcused absences/ Low GPA:</b>	If in item 4, student marked over 5 days and in item 6 mostly Cs or less
<b>Family mobility/number of schools attended:</b>	If in item 7, student moved 3 or more times
<b>Discipline problems:</b>	If the answer average across item 8a, b, and c is $\geq .5$ (true=1, false=0)
<b>Attendance:</b>	If item 4 = 3 to more than 21 days and item 9 = 5 to more than 21 days
<b>School grades:</b>	If in item 6, student marked half Cs and half Fs or less
<b>Graduation plans:</b>	If in item 10, student marked a response other than yes
<b>College plans:</b>	If in item 11, student marked no
<b>Attitude toward school:</b>	If the sum of responses to 8d, e, and f is 0 (true = 1; false = 0)
<b>Introverted/Extroverted:</b>	If the sum of responses to 13a, b, and c is $\geq$ (rarely or never = 1....everyday or almost everyday = 4)
<b>Age when expected to finish education:</b>	If in item 9c, the student marked don't expect to do this, have done this, or 18 or under

After you have assigned a 1 or 0 to each of these items, add up the points. If the total is four or more, the student is classified as a potential dropout.

## APPENDIX E

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Interview Questions/Prompts for Students Selected for In-Depth Interview

##### Background Information

1. When did your parents come to the United States?
2. When did you come to the United States?
3. When did you come to Georgia?
4. How do you describe yourself? Look at the following list (to be provided on a separate sheet of paper) and choose the words you think best describe you. Pick as many as you think best describe you.
  - Russian
  - Canadian
  - Mexican
  - Guatemalan
  - American
  - Salvadoran
  - Indian
  - Black
  - White
  - Rich
  - Poor
  - Intelligent
  - Dumb
  - Popular
  - Cabezón
  - Cholo
5. Tell me about your future. What do you think it will be like?

##### School

1. Did you go to school in your home country? What grades did you complete there?
2. Can you tell me what school was like in your home country?
3. How have your school experiences in Georgia been different from those in your home country?
4. Tell me a little about your classes here. What's your favorite? Why?
5. If you could be your teacher, what kinds of things would you do to make you like school?
6. What do you think is the reason for going to school?
7. What kinds of activities do you participate in at school (clubs, sports, etc.)? Why or why not?

### **Perceptions of school environment**

1. Do you think that this school thinks that being Latino/Mexican/Guatemalan/Salvadoran is important? How do you know?
2. Do you think your teachers care about you? Why or why not?
3. Tell me what it's like to be Latino/Mexican/Guatemalan/Salvadoran. How would you describe it?
4. How is it different from being a young person who's not Latino/Mexican/Guatemalan/Salvadoran?
5. Let's say a new Latino/Mexican/Guatemalan/Salvadoran student came to your school. What advice would you give him or her about being a successful student at this school?
6. Do you think of yourself as a successful student? Why or why not?
7. Have any of your friends or siblings dropped out of school? Why? What's happened to them?
8. What do you think about speaking in English? Are there times you think you should not speak in English? If so, when? Have you ever been told not to speak Spanish at school?
9. Let's say a new Latino/Mexican/Guatemalan/Salvadoran student asked your advice about whether or not s/he should join a gang. What advice would you give about being in a gang? What do you know about gangs? Is being in a gang a cool thing to do? Do you know anyone who is in a gang? (Make clear that I'm not asking for specific names of gang members, but rather a generalized question about their knowledge of gang presence). How does someone show they're in a gang?

**APPENDIX F**  
**TRANSCRIPTS OF INTERVIEWS**

1 **Roberto: Interview #1**

2

3 I: Alright, I'm just going to ask you some questions. If you don't want  
4 to answer any of 'em, you don't have to. Ok, I'm um not going to use  
5 your real name so you need to um pick a name you want me to use for  
6 my research.

7

8 ROBERTO: What? Pick a name?

9

10 I: Remember when you um had the chance to pick out a pseudonym, you  
11 know, like another name? Remember when I asked for that on your  
12 survey that we did in class?

13

14 ROBERTO: Ohhh...yeah. I din't do it.

15

16 I: So you've got to think of one. Like not right now, but in a couple a  
17 weeks or so.

18

19 ROBERTO: Can you like give me uh example?

20

21 I: Like any name you want to be. It's just so that like nobody knows  
22 who you are when they read this.

23

24 ROBERTO: Who's gonna read it? Not here right?

25

26 I: No, not here. Just some people at Georgia Southern.

27

28 ROBERTO: Is that like a college?

29

30 I: Yeah.

31

32 ROBERTO: Aiight. But I ain't pickin' now. [2 second pause]. I'll think about it.  
33 How 'bout Monday?

34

35 I: Monday?

36

37 ROBERTO: Yeah. Monday. Can I tell you the name Monday?

38

39 I: Yeah, that's fine. Whenever. Just try to remember that I need in like  
40 the next coupla weeks.

41

42 ROBERTO: Aiight. No, why don chu just pick a name? I don care man

43 I: You've got a while. Don't even think about it right now. It's just a  
44 name (3 second pause) it'll wait.  
45  
46 ROBERTO: 'Kay.  
47  
48 I: Ready to get started?  
49  
50 ROBERTO: Yeah. Is it going to take a while so I can stay here?  
51  
52 I: Not that long. *Both laugh.* Alright, when did your parents come to  
53 the United States?  
54  
55 ROBERTO: I don know. I don know that.  
56  
57 I: You don't know how long your parents have been here? How long do  
58 you think they've been here?  
59  
60 ROBERTO: Well, I think thirteen or twelve.  
61  
62 I: Thirteen or twelve?  
63  
64 ROBERTO: 'cause when I came here I was one. Well, my dad be here a long time  
65 but my mom been here when I left. Well I was like one.  
66  
67 I: Oh uh so your dad came first?  
68  
69 ROBERTO: Yeah.  
70  
71 I: And like he got everything set up for y'all?  
72  
73 ROBERTO: Yeah.  
74  
75 I: Okay. Uh...and so you came when you were one?  
76  
77 ROBERTO: Yeah.  
78  
79 I: So, you've always gone to school here?  
80  
81 ROBERTO: Yeah.  
82  
83 I: Have you always lived in Georgia?  
84  
85 ROBERTO: Well yeah.  
86  
87 I: So you've never lived anywhere else in the United States but Georgia?  
88

89 ROBERTO: Yeah. Here [Clarke County] and Oconee.  
90  
91 I: Okay. I want you to look at this paper I have. It just has like one  
92 question on it. It's a list. Here's a pen. I'm just wantin' you to look at  
93 this list so I can know how you would like um describe yourself.  
94 Okay?  
95  
96 ROBERTO: Okay. Can I write something if it's not on there?  
97  
98 I: Sure. You can pick as many of these words as you think describe you  
99 or you don't have to pick any at all. If none of these words describes  
100 you, that's fine. You don't have to write anything. I'm not lookin' for  
101 a right answer. Okay?  
102  
103 ROBERTO: 'Kay.  
104  
105 I: You can write your own word. Okay? So circle um as many as you  
106 want or pick whatever you want. Understand?  
107  
108 ROBERTO: Yeah.  
109 *(Pause while Roberto completes his question. Chooses Mexican, popular and cholo).*  
110  
111 I: All finished?  
112  
113 ROBERTO: Yeah. That's all, I think.  
114  
115 I: Can you um tell me why you picked those?  
116  
117 ROBERTO: 'Cause like I'm Mexican, okay? I think I'm popular 'cause they voted  
118 for me like for the awards, and I'm *cholo* 'cause I'm a G.  
119  
120 I: Okay. Thanks. Um...tell me about your future.  
121  
122 ROBERTO: Um, I don' know.  
123  
124 I: You don' know? You don' know anything about it?  
125  
126 ROBERTO: Can you like explain it a different way?  
127  
128 I: Let's think about your future next year 'cause that's pretty close.  
129 What do you think high school's gonna be like?  
130  
131 ROBERTO: I don know. I might not make it.  
132  
133 I: Why do you say that?  
134



135 ROBERTO: Man, you know that promotion/retention junk all y'all talkin' about. I  
136 might not pass the CRCT.  
137  
138 I: How did you do like last year on it?  
139  
140 ROBERTO: Aiight.  
141  
142 I: So why wouldn't you do well this year?  
143  
144 ROBERTO: Harder.  
145  
146 I: What?  
147  
148 ROBERTO: Like the classes. They a lot harder this year than seventh grade man.  
149  
150 I: Well, if you do go to high school, what do you think it's going to be  
151 like?  
152  
153 ROBERTO: Hard.  
154  
155 I: Hard. Why do you say that?  
156  
157 ROBERTO: Like the classes man. They ain't like middle school. Uh...I just think  
158 they gonna be *real* hard.  
159  
160 I: Have you heard that from your friends?  
161  
162 ROBERTO: Yeah. Like it ain't like middle school at all. It's hard. They don  
163 make you come to school over there. You come or you don't. It ain't  
164 like middle school.  
165  
166 I: But what do you think will be hard about it? Makin' new friends? Or  
167 your teachers or your classes are gonna be hard or what?  
168  
169 ROBERTO: The classes and the homework.  
170  
171 I: Classes and homework. Why do you think it's gonna be so much  
172 harder than middle school?  
173  
174 ROBERTO: 'Cause they talkin' 'bout larger than middle school and um, I don'  
175 know. ((seems agitated))  
176  
177 I: Okay, that's fine. Just wanted to make sure that you said all you  
178 wanted to say 'bout it. (pause) Um, do you think you're gonna  
179 graduate from high school?  
180

181 ROBERTO: Um, I want to.  
182  
183 I: Um, what do you think'll stop you from it?  
184  
185 ROBERTO: Probally my grades or my friends.  
186  
187 I: Grades or friends? But you want to right?  
188  
189 ROBERTO: Yeah.  
190  
191 I: Do you wanna go to college?  
192  
193 ROBERTO: No.  
194  
195 I: No. Are you wantin' to work with your dad?  
196  
197 ROBERTO: Yeah. ((Roberto's father owns a landscaping business.))  
198  
199 I: Anything else you wanna say that we haven't talked 'bout today?  
200 'Cause that was the last question for today. If there's nothin' else...  
201  
202 ROBERTO: When will the next questions happen?  
203  
204 I: I'll come get you one day next week.  
205  
206 ROBERTO: Aiight.  
207  
208 I: That's it. You ready to go to ELT?  
209  
210 ROBERTO: Yeah.  
211  
212 I: Alright, I'll see ya fourth block.

213 **Roberto: Interview #2**

214

215 I: You ready to get started? It'll be like last time, okay?

216

217 ROBERTO: Yeah, I'm ready.

218

219 I: Yeah. Okay. Um, so did you go to school at all in Mexico ever?

220

221 ROBERTO: Mm-mm.

222

223 I: So you've always been in Georgia?

224

225 ROBERTO: Yeah.

226

227 I: In Clarke County?

228

229 ROBERTO: No.

230

231 I: No? Where else did you go to school in Georgia?

232

233 ROBERTO: Oconee.

234

235 I: Oconee County? Okay. Um, tell me a little bit about your classes here.

236

237 ROBERTO: At Spring?

238

239 I: That's fine. What can you tell me about 'em?

240

241 ROBERTO: Some of 'em easy.

242

243 I: Okay, what makes 'em easy?

244

245 ROBERTO: I get the work easy.

246

247 I: Yeah...like the work doesn't take much effort on your part?

248

249 ROBERTO: Right. I just get it.

250

251 I: Okay. What classes are like that for you?

252

253 ROBERTO: Ssssscience, social studies, and uh reading/language arts.

254

255 I: Yeah? So what're you havin' trouble with?

256

257 ROBERTO: Math.

258

259 I: Math. Why do you think you're havin' trouble with math?  
260  
261 ROBERTO: 'Cause I'm not good at it.  
262  
263 I: What do you mean you're not good at it?  
264  
265 ROBERTO: I'm just not good in math.  
266  
267 I: You seemed to be knowin' what you were doin' when I went in there.  
268  
269 ROBERTO: Man, that junk easy. That's a baby class ((sheltered ELL math)).  
270 I: That's easy. Do you wanna stay in that class or do you wanna be in a  
271 regular class?  
272  
273 ROBERTO: Man, a regular class. Like Ms. Mott (pseudonym) or Ms. Curtis  
274 (pseudonym) or somebody like that.  
275  
276 I: Okay. Um, what's your favorite class?  
277  
278 ROBERTO: I don' know.  
279  
280 I: You don' have one that just sticks out?  
281  
282 ROBERTO: Mm-mm.  
283  
284 I: Well, if you had to think about the classes you like, what makes you  
285 like them? Except besides like that it's easy to you. What makes you  
286 like a class?  
287  
288 ROBERTO: Um...um have the friends I like, the friends I been with a long time.  
289  
290 I: Yeah?  
291  
292 ROBERTO: Uh have good friends. Have nice teachers.  
293  
294 I: And uh what makes a teacher nice?  
295  
296 ROBERTO: Like don' argue...well, well like some don' scream at you for no  
297 reason. Like she know how to teach right and everything and  
298 everything like that. You know?  
299  
300 I: What do you mean "teach right"?  
301  
302 ROBERTO: Like she patient. She goes over stuff 'til you get it. She don't get  
303 mad.  
304

305 I: Okay. Um, okay, if you could be your teacher, so like if Mr. Jennings  
306 said, okay Roberto, you can be the teacher. What do you want to do to  
307 make school better? This is your job. How would you do it?  
308  
309 ROBERTO: Like me in charge?  
310  
311 I: Yeah, like you. How would you make Coile a fabulous place for the  
312 students here? What would you do?  
313  
314 ROBERTO: I don know.  
315  
316 I: You don't know how you'd make this school good?  
317  
318 ROBERTO: Lot of stuff.  
319  
320 I: Which is what? Tell me.. I wanna know.  
321  
322 ROBERTO: I don' know.  
323  
324 I: Just think of one thing.  
325  
326  
327 ROBERTO: Uh...((clicks tongue against teeth))...I don know. Like no homework?  
328  
329 I: If that's what you want. ((Both laugh.))  
330  
331 ROBERTO: Pizza everyday. ((Laughs)). I don' know..like good teachers.  
332 Teachers that wanna be here.  
333  
334 I: That's all?  
335  
336 ROBERTO: Yeah.  
337  
338 I: Okay. Um, why do you think you should go to school? What do you  
339 think is the reason for going to school?  
340  
341 ROBERTO: So you can learn everything, learn everything before you start ya life.  
342  
343 I: Okay and um, what kinds of activities do you participate in here at  
344 school? Like are you in sports or clubs or PSP or anything like that?  
345  
346 ROBERTO: I'm tryin' out for soccer.  
347  
348 I: You're about to try out for soccer?  
349  
350 ROBERTO: Yeah.

351 I: Why do you wanna play soccer? Did you play last year?  
352  
353 ROBERTO: Yeah. I wanna play 'cause I'm good at it. I played a lot this summer.  
354  
355 I: You still play baseball too right?  
356  
357 ROBERTO: I quit baseball.  
358  
359 I: You quit? When?  
360  
361 ROBERTO: I quit 'cause I started playin' soccer.  
362  
363 I: You couldn't do both?  
364  
365 ROBERTO: Naw, with baseball, we travel too much. Now they in the same  
366 season, so I had to pick.  
367  
368 I: Do you think you'll ever go back to baseball?  
369  
370 ROBERTO: Uh-uh.  
371  
372 I: Even at high school when they play at different times of the year?  
373  
374 ROBERTO: Mm-mm.  
375  
376 I: Okay. Alright. Is there anything else you want to say?  
377  
378 ROBERTO: No.  
379  
380 I: Alright. We're done.  
381  
382 ROBERTO: We gonna do it again?  
383  
384 I: Yeah one more time. I'll let you know when.  
385  
386 ROBERTO: Aiiight.  
387  
388 I: You ready to go back?  
389  
390 ROBERTO: Can't I stay here? That was short man, I want it to be long.  
391  
392 I: No, get your stuff. I'll walk ya back.

393 **Roberto/Interview #3**

394

395 I: So what're y'all doin' in there?

396

397 ROBERTO: Like Nazi stuff.

398

399 I: Like Anne Frank?

400

401 ROBERTO: Yeah...we just read that. Yeah, we just finished that.

402

403 I: Yeah, Ms. Smith [pseudonym] said that you were the first one done  
404 with your project. She said it was really good.

405

406 ROBERTO: Well, I guess so. I worked hard on it.

407

408 I: She said she was very proud of you.

409

410 ROBERTO: She told me she was impressed.

411

412 I: That's great! When are you gettin' your projects back?

413

414 ROBERTO: I dunno. Next week maybe?

415

416 I: Will you bring it up here so I can see it?

417

418 ROBERTO: Yeah, whenever she gives it back.

419

420 I: Okay, so are you ready to get started?

421

422 ROBERTO: Yeah.

423

424 I: Do you think that this school thinks that being Mexican is important?

425

426 ROBERTO: Can you say that again?

427

428 I: Do you think that this school thinks that being Mexican is important?

429

430 ROBERTO: Like is it a good thing to be a Mexican?

431

432 I: You could look at it that way.

433

434 ROBERTO: Like do you mean do people respect me? Like being a Mexican?

435

436 I: Yeah.

437

438 ROBERTO: Yeah, they do.

439 I: Like the teachers? Or the students?  
440  
441 ROBERTO: Like the other Mexican students and some of the black kids.  
442  
443 I: How do you know that?  
444  
445 ROBERTO: 'Cause like how they be talkin' to me.  
446  
447 I: And how's that?  
448  
449 ROBERTO: In a good, polite way. Like they don't wanna start nothin' with me.  
450  
451 I: And what about the teachers?  
452  
453 ROBERTO: I dunno. The teachers, not so much. Like some of 'em, but not all.  
454  
455 I: Why do you say that?  
456  
457 ROBERTO: Like some of 'em get on to me when I be talking in Spanish. But  
458 that's like who I am.  
459  
460 I: Is there any other way that you think that teachers show you  
461 disrespect?  
462  
463 ROBERTO: Like pretendin' I'm not there in class. Ya know?  
464  
465 I: Like how?  
466  
467 ROBERTO: Like I'm invisible. Like I don't have nothin' to say.  
468  
469 I: Any other ways?  
470  
471 ROBERTO: No, not really.  
472  
473 I: Do you think your teachers care about you?  
474  
475 ROBERTO: Yeah.  
476  
477 I: All of them?  
478  
479 ROBERTO: Not all of 'em, but some of 'em.  
480  
481 I: And why do you think that?  
482  
483 ROBERTO: Uh, 'cuz they always tell me to stay out of trouble and all that. Do my  
484 work. Be a good student. I got like, what's that word? Uh...uh..



485  
486 I: What word are you thinking of?  
487  
488 ROBERTO: Like *capaz* [capable].  
489  
490 I: Like you've got potential?  
491  
492 ROBERTO: Yeah, that's the word they say.  
493  
494 I: Ok. Well, um, tell me what it's like to be a Mexican student at this  
495 school?  
496  
497 ROBERTO: Good! 'Cuz like you can speak two languages, uh, I'm from a  
498 different place. I live over here, I live over there. I live in two places,  
499 Mexico and the United States. I think that's a good thing.  
500  
501 I: Okay. So how do you think that's different from being somebody  
502 who's not Mexican?  
503  
504 ROBERTO: Uh, they only speak one language...so they like only think one way.  
505 Like it's different. Like Mexicans, Hispanics, they speak two  
506 languages, English and Spanish. Like if they know Spanish. Not  
507 everybody does. Some people forget it. But like it's different when  
508 you think in two languages. It's just different.  
509  
510 I: Let's say a new Mexican student came to our school, what advice  
511 would you give him or her about being a successful student?  
512  
513 ROBERTO: Do hard work. Be polite to the teachers. They like that. And make  
514 some friends.  
515  
516 I: You think friends is a really important part?  
517  
518 ROBERTO: The most important.  
519  
520 I: Why do you say that?  
521  
522 ROBERTO: 'Cuz like they get you through everything. They're always there.  
523  
524 I: What kind of friends would you tell the new student to make? Like,  
525 what makes a good friend?  
526  
527 ROBERTO: I dunno. Like I'd tell them to hang out with other Mexican kids. 'Cuz  
528 like then they'd at least have somebody to talk to you, you know?  
529 Like someone like them. But he doesn't have to hang out with all  
530 Mexicans all the time. I've got some friends that are black. They

531 could hang out with us. You know how we roll, Ms. Bush!  
532 ((Laughs))  
533  
534 I: Are y'all gonna be a good influence or a bad one? ((laughs))  
535  
536 ROBERTO: All good, all good. ((Both laugh.))  
537  
538 I: Of course. ((Laughs.))  
539  
540 ROBERTO: Nah, really, he's gonna have to figure out who he wants to be with,  
541 like where he fits in. It just depends. Like maybe he's really quiet and  
542 don't wanna hang out. That's okay, too.  
543  
544 I: Okay. I get it.  
545  
546 ROBERTO: He can hang out wherever he wants to.  
547  
548 I: Okay. You ready to keep goin'?  
549  
550 ROBERTO: Yeah.  
551  
552 I: Um, do you think you're a successful student?  
553  
554 ROBERTO: Yeah.  
555  
556 I: Why?  
557  
558 ROBERTO: Uh, I dunno.  
559  
560 I: You don't know?  
561  
562 ROBERTO: Well, like I do all my work now. Like I try in my classes. I'm doin'  
563 good now. I got good grades in everything 'cept math. I'm trying to  
564 stay out of trouble sometimes now.  
565  
566 I: And what causes you to get in trouble when you get in trouble?  
567  
568 ROBERTO: Uh, I be talkin' to folks...teacher get mad.  
569  
570 I: Yeah, but you haven't had anything serious happen lately.  
571  
572 ROBERTO: No, like I told you, I been tryin' to stay out of trouble. Like I've  
573 stayed out of trouble pretty good lately.  
574  
575 I: Is there a reason?  
576

577 ROBERTO: I wanna make the soccer time. Like if you get suspended, you can't  
578 play soccer. Like you can't even try out. Like I gotta be good and get  
579 good grades.  
580  
581 I: So when are soccer tryouts? Next month?  
582  
583 ROBERTO: Yeah, they're like the first week in February, I think.  
584  
585 I: Well, good luck! I'm sure you'll make the team.  
586  
587 ROBERTO: Yeah, the coaches gonna be comin' 'round talkin' to y'all about us.  
588 Like I been trying. Like I been tryin' to be good and get good grades.  
589 I really wanna be on the team. Like a whole bunch of us is tryin' out.  
590 Like it's gonna be tight. You and Ms. Mathis [pseudonym] gonna  
591 have to come watch.  
592  
593 I: We came last year.  
594  
595 ROBERTO: Yeah, but I wasn't on the team last year. This year's gonna be tight!  
596  
597 I: I'm sure we'll come. We always do. Don't you remember Ms. Mathis  
598 bringin' her daughter to the games last year?  
599  
600 ROBERTO: Oh yeah. Y'all sat on the top row of the bleachers? Yeah, I  
601 remember.  
602  
603 I: You'll have to get us a schedule. Have you done everything else you  
604 have to do: teacher recommendations, physical?  
605  
606 ROBERTO: I'm getting' my physical Friday.  
607  
608 I: Ok. Just make sure you get everything taken care of.  
609  
610 ROBERTO: I will.  
611  
612 I: Okay. You ready to keep goin'?  
613  
614 ROBERTO: Yeah.  
615  
616 I: Have you got any brothers or sisters or friends that have dropped out  
617 of high school?  
618  
619 ROBERTO: My brother.  
620  
621 I: Like why did he drop out?  
622

623 ROBERTO: 'Cause he didn't like school.  
624  
625 I: Do you know why? Did he ever tell you why he didn't like school?  
626  
627 ROBERTO: He just didn't like it. He wasn't good at it. He got bad grades.  
628  
629 I: So what's he doin' now?  
630  
631 ROBERTO: Workin'.  
632  
633 I: Does he work with your dad?  
634  
635 ROBERTO: Uh-uh.  
636  
637 I: Where does he work?  
638  
639 ROBERTO: Some company. Like he ((coughs)) like he delivers brick. It's a hard  
640 job. Like it's tough.  
641  
642 I: Does he still live with y'all?  
643  
644 ROBERTO: Yeah, he's just eighteen.  
645  
646 I: How old was he when he dropped out?  
647  
648 ROBERTO: Almost sixteen. My dad still lets him live with us. But he works all  
649 the time.  
650  
651 I: Oh...  
652  
653 ROBERTO: ...he got married. He's gotta kid and everything.  
654  
655 I: Do they all live with y'all?  
656  
657 ROBERTO: Yep. My dad don't like it, but he lets him stay. He just lets him stay.  
658 Like he has to pay some money to my dad like for rent, but he lets him  
659 stay.  
660  
661 I: Okay. Can we talk a little about speaking in Spanish and English?  
662  
663 ROBERTO: Yeah.  
664  
665 I: What do you think about talkin' in English?  
666  
667 ROBERTO: Good.  
668

669 I: Good?  
670  
671 ROBERTO: Like you gotta know English to do good at school and to get a good  
672 job.  
673  
674 I: Do you ever think there's a time you shouldn't talk in English?  
675  
676 ROBERTO: Yeah.  
677  
678 I: And what's that?  
679  
680 ROBERTO: Like when I be around folks that don't be talkin' in English?  
681  
682 I: Like they don't know English?  
683  
684 ROBERTO: Yeah, like some Mexicans don't know English. They don't know how  
685 to speak it. So I don't talk in English 'round them.  
686  
687 I: What about at school?  
688  
689 ROBERTO: Like when I'm not in yours and Ms. Mathis' class, I speak it in class  
690 'cause they teachers don't know what I be sayin'. Not like I'm tryin'  
691 to be bad, but just so they don't know what I'm tryin' to tell my  
692 friends.  
693  
694 I: Has any, um, teacher at school ever told you not to speak in Spanish at  
695 school?  
696  
697 ROBERTO: ((coughs)) Yeah.  
698  
699 I: When was this?  
700  
701 ROBERTO: Last year.  
702  
703 I: Why did they tell you that?  
704  
705 ROBERTO: Uh, I dunno. They just told me, "Don't speak Spanish."  
706  
707 I: Could they speak Spanish?  
708  
709 ROBERTO: No. Like it was a bunch of teachers.  
710  
711 I: Okay, um, let's say that a new Mexican kid came to school and asked  
712 you whether or not he should join a gang. Okay, um, what advice  
713 would you give him about being in a gang?  
714

715 ROBERTO: It's a hard choice. Like he could get in a gang, and like lose his life, or  
716 like go to jail. You know? But like some people wanna be in one.  
717 Like for protection. Like you're safe.  
718  
719 I: Do you know people this has happened to?  
720  
721 ROBERTO: Yeah. Like friends. Like that drive-by at Garnett Ridge. Like people  
722 that got shot and people that like did the shootin'. They like they're  
723 gonna be in jail like forever.  
724  
725 I: So what else would you say about gangs?  
726  
727 ROBERTO: ((clicks teeth)). Like at this school, they do drugs, they wanna hurt  
728 people. They don't care about they life. They throw they life away.  
729  
730 I: Do you, um, do you think there's a lot of gangs in Athens.  
731  
732 ROBERTO: Yeah. Like DX, 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Sur 13, Latin Kings, like they  
733 everywhere.  
734  
735 I: So is like bein' in a gang a cool thing to do?  
736  
737 ROBERTO: Uh, well, to some folks yeah. To some folks no.  
738  
739 I: What makes a cool thing to the folks that wanna do that?  
740  
741 ROBERTO: 'Cause they hard and everything. They think they hard and  
742 everything. Like they don' care about they work. Like they wanna  
743 shoot somebody, hurt somebody. Like they wanna do that.  
744  
745 I: And if they don't think it's cool, why?  
746  
747 ROBERTO: 'Cause they afraid. They afraid to lose they life. They afraid of goin'  
748 to jail.  
749  
750 I: Okay, now this next question I'm askin' you, I'm not askin' you. I'm  
751 not askin' you for anybody's name, okay? You got that? Don't tell  
752 me anybody's name. Okay? I don't want you to say, "Well, so-and-  
753 so, he's..."  
754  
755 ROBERTO: Aight.  
756  
757 I: Do you know anybody who's in a gang?  
758  
759 ROBERTO: Yeah. They at this school.  
760

761 I: And how does somebody show you they're in a gang?  
762  
763 ROBERTO: How they dress, how they act.  
764  
765 I: Like how?  
766  
767 ROBERTO: Like how they dress—like they wear baggy pants, like Dickies. Like  
768 all one color. All that. Have tattoos all over them. Uh....[clicks  
769 teeth]...like they throw gang signs at each other in the hall.  
770 [coughs]..Like they act bad at school. Like they don' even care what  
771 the teacher be doin' or teachin' like they don' care. Like why they  
772 come to school? Like they just hang out. Like they don' do they work  
773 and stuff.  
774  
775 I: Is there anything else you want to say to add on to what we've talked  
776 about or somethin' I didn't talk about that you want to?  
777  
778 ROBERTO: Nah, I think that's it.  
779  
780 I: Okay, well, you're all done. Thanks for doin' that.  
781  
782 ROBERTO: No problem. Will you write me a pass?  
783  
784 I: Yeah. Go get that paper off my desk please.  
785 ((Roberto goes to get the paper.))  
786  
787 ROBERTO: You're not tellin' anybody what we talked about?  
788  
789 I: No. The only people who are gonna see this are the people at Georgia  
790 Southern.  
791  
792 ROBERTO: Like your teachers? And they can't tell?  
793  
794 I: No, my teachers won't tell  
795  
796 ROBERTO: Aight. Just don' tell nobody. I'll see you fourth block.  
797  
798 I: Thanks again. I'll see you down there.  
799  
800 ROBERTO: Aight.  
801 (([Door closes.]))  
802  
803  
804  
805  
806

807 **Jesús: Interview #1**

808

809 I: What's wrong? You seem shy all the sudden.

810

811 JESÚS: I don't know why we're doin' this.

812

813 I: Don't you remember that survey we did?

814

815 JESÚS: Oh, 'bout school and like what we thought about it?

816

817 I: Yeah. Remember when you um signed that paper that said you  
818 wanted to fill out the survey? Remember the second part said that you  
819 might be picked to answer some more questions?

820

821 JESÚS: Yeah, I said it was fine.

822

823 I: Well, um this is like the question part. ((Both laugh.))

824

825 JESÚS: Oh. But why is that recorder there?

826

827 I: I know you think I'm super-smart, but I can't remember everything  
828 you say word for word. We're gonna be talkin' for a while so this is  
829 just so I can go back later and listen to our um conversation again. I'm  
830 gonna type this whole thing up and I'll let you look at it to make sure  
831 that it's exactly what you said. Okay?

832

833 JESÚS: Whatever.

834

835 I: What do you mean whatever?

836

837 JESÚS: I'm not important enough to record.

838

839 I: Now come on. Why would you say somethin' like that?

840

841 JESÚS: 'Cause it's true. Nobody ever listens to me.

842

843 I: Now that's not true. We all listened to you yesterday talk about the  
844 the book you wanted to talk about.

844

845 JESÚS: Yeah, but you had to listen to me. It went along with what you were  
846 talkin' about.

847

848 I: But the other students like listened to you too. We always listen to  
849 you.

850

851 JESÚS: I just don't have anything to say.

852



853 I: Do you wanna do this another day? That's okay.  
854  
855 JESÚS: Do you think I'll have somethin' important to say then?  
856  
857 I: I think you have somethin' important to say now. Did you bring that  
858 book?  
859  
860 JESÚS: What book?  
861  
862 I: The one that you said that you were gonna bring. We could start with  
863 that. Like do you wanna talk about that first?  
864  
865 JESÚS: Oh, I forgot it. I'll bring it tomorrow.  
866  
867 I: That's fine. Do you think you feel like talkin' today?  
868  
869 JESÚS: Yeah, I guess.  
870  
871 I: Well, how 'bout this? What if we try the first question, see if you  
872 wanna answer it, and if you don't, we'll stop? Okay? If you ever  
873 wanna stop, that's completely fine, I promise.  
874  
875 JESÚS: Okay. We'll do the first one. Is it easy?  
876  
877 I: I think so. Let's see. You ready?  
878  
879 JESÚS: Yeah.  
880  
881 I: Are you sure? Why are you pointin' at the iPod?  
882  
883 JESÚS: Nobody's gonna hear it right?  
884  
885 I: No, just me. I'm gonna go home tonight and listen to you and me talk  
886 all over again and type out what we're sayin'.  
887  
888 JESÚS: But people aren't gonna look at it? Just you?  
889  
890 I: Um, nobody here. Just my teachers that live far away from here. Do  
891 you remember um how we talked about like you pickin' a fake name?  
892  
893 JESÚS: Yeah.  
894  
895 I: Well, that's so we can talk about you without everybody knowin' it's  
896 you.  
897

898 JESÚS: Nobody's gonna know? Not even Ms. Mathis?  
899  
900 I: No, not even Ms. Mathis. Nobody's here's gonna read this, but even  
901 the people that read it won't know who you are, you know?  
902  
903 JESÚS: If you say so.  
904  
905 I: I promise so. I had to sign papers sayin' that I wouldn't talk 'bout who  
906 you really are, you know? Like you're gonna pick your fake name and  
907 I'm the only one that's ever gonna know who you really are. I  
908 promise, it's gonna be okay.  
909  
910 JESÚS: Alright. Let's go.  
911  
912 I: You sure you're ready?  
913  
914 JESÚS: Yeah, I think so.  
915  
916 I: Alright, remember, let's just try the first question to see how it goes,  
917 okay? If you don' wanna do it, you don' have to?  
918  
919 JESÚS: Okay.  
920  
921 I: Okay, here we go. When um did your parents first come to the United  
922 States?  
923  
924 JESÚS: I don't know.  
925  
926 I: Okay. You don't know how long it's been? Did y'all come at the  
927 same time or different times?  
928  
929 JESÚS: No, my dad came first.  
930  
931 I: Okay, your dad came first. And then who came?  
932  
933 JESÚS: My mom.  
934  
935 I: And then did you come when your mom came or did y'all come later?  
936  
937 JESÚS: We came later.  
938  
939 I: Okay, so y'all came later.  
940  
941 JESÚS: Yeah.  
942

943 I: Okay, so like how long have you been here?  
944  
945 JESÚS: Like, when I was like seven years old.  
946  
947 I: Okay, so when you were like seven years old. And how old are you  
948 now? Thirteen?  
949  
950 JESÚS: Yeah.  
951  
952 I: So that's about six years, right?  
953  
954 JESÚS: Yeah. No, it's been longer. My dad's been here like seven or eight  
955 years.  
956  
957 I: Okay. And um when did you come to Georgia? Have you always  
958 lived in Georgia?  
959  
960 JESÚS: Yeah.  
961  
962 I: Have y'all always lived in Athens?  
963  
964 JESÚS: Yeah.  
965  
966 I: Okay. I'm gonna give you a sheet of paper okay? It has a list of  
967 words on it. Again, nobody's gonna see it but me, okay?  
968  
969 JESÚS: Just your teachers?  
970  
971 I: Just my teachers. Okay? Look at this list and I want you to see if  
972 there are any words on this list that describe you, okay? I just want  
973 you to look at this list and I'll read it to you if you want...  
974  
975 JESÚS: No, I got it.  
976  
977 I: Okay. All it is is just a list of words and you're just pickin' the ones  
978 that you think describe you. It may be none of them. Alright? If  
979 there's not a word there that you think describes you, you can put that  
980 down too. Okay?  
981  
982 JESÚS: Okay. ((Looks down the list. Starts to laugh)).  
983  
984 I: Why are you laughin'?  
985  
986 JESÚS: That word. ((points to *cabezón*)).  
987

988 I: Why do you laugh at that word?  
989  
990 JESÚS: ‘Cause that ain’t me!  
991  
992 I: Why not?  
993  
994 JESÚS: ‘Cause I ain’t smart.  
995  
996 I: Are there any other words on the list that you think are funny?  
997  
998 JESÚS: No, not really.  
999  
1000 I: Are there some words on the list that you think describes you?  
1001  
1002 JESÚS: Maybe.  
1003  
1004 I: You wanna take a couple of minutes to mark the ones you think  
1005 describe you?  
1006  
1007 JESÚS: Okay. You want me to circle it?  
1008  
1009 I: You can circle it, check it, whatever you want. Just so I can tell what  
1010 you marked. Okay?  
1011 (Takes a few minutes to mark “Mexican”, “dumb”, and “poor.”)  
1012  
1013 I: You all done?  
1014  
1015 JESÚS: Yeah.  
1016  
1017 I: Anything you wanna say ‘bout what you chose?  
1018  
1019 JESÚS: Nah.  
1020  
1021 I: Do you think other people would describe you that way?  
1022  
1023 JESÚS: Dumb, yeah.  
1024  
1025 I: Dumb, why do you think that?  
1026  
1027 JESÚS: ‘Cause, I don’ know. Like what teachers be sayin’.  
1028  
1029 I: Your teachers tell you you’re dumb?  
1030  
1031 JESÚS: Some of ‘em. They tell me I act dumb sometimes.  
1032

1033 I: And what does actin' dumb mean?  
1034  
1035 JESÚS: I don' know. Acting stupid?  
1036  
1037 I: And what does that mean?  
1038  
1039 JESÚS: I don' know. I just be doin' a lot of dumb stuff. Like here and at my  
1040 house. Like my teachers tell me I do dumb stuff here and my dad like  
1041 he tells me I do dumb stuff at the house. Like just stupid stuff.  
1042  
1043 I: Can you tell me an example?  
1044  
1045 JESÚS: I don' wanna talk about it.  
1046  
1047 I: Okay. You wanna keep goin'?'  
1048  
1049 JESÚS: Yeah.  
1050  
1051 I: Okay, can you tell me what your future will be like?  
1052  
1053 JESÚS: My future?  
1054  
1055 I: Yeah. Like what's gonna happen beyond today.  
1056  
1057 JESÚS: I don' know. I don' know what might happen.  
1058  
1059 I: Well, then, let's talk about high school.  
1060  
1061 JESÚS: Okay.  
1062  
1063 I: Do you think you'll go to high school?  
1064  
1065 JESÚS: I hope so.  
1066  
1067 I: Do you think you'll graduate from high school?  
1068  
1069 JESÚS: I think so. I wanna be a doctor.  
1070  
1071 I: A doctor? I didn't know that. What kind of doctor?  
1072  
1073 JESÚS: Any kind.  
1074  
1075 I: Do you want be a doctor here or go back to Mexico and be a doctor?  
1076  
1077 JESÚS: Right here.  
1078

1079 I: Okay. What do you think you have to do to um be able to be a doctor?  
1080  
1081 JESÚS: Um graduate. Like graduate high school. And like I then I gotta go to  
1082 college for four years.  
1083  
1084 I: Okay. Where do you wanna go to college? Have you thought that far?  
1085  
1086 JESÚS: I don' know. I just wanna go to college.  
1087  
1088 I: Okay, can we keep talkin' 'about school a little more the next time we  
1089 get together to talk?  
1090  
1091 JESÚS: Yeah.  
1092  
1093 I: Okay, that's it for today. See, that wasn't too bad, was it?  
1094  
1095 JESÚS: No, I just think...I just don't like that recorder.  
1096  
1097 I: Would you rather be the one to wear um one like this ((points to lapel  
1098 recorder)) next time?  
1099  
1100 JESÚS: I don' know. Lemme think 'about it.  
1101  
1102 I: That's fine. You did a great job. There's nothin' to be nervous about.  
1103 I promise.  
1104  
1105 JESÚS: You're not gonna show this to anybody, right?  
1106  
1107 I: Just those people I told you 'bout at Georgia Southern.  
1108  
1109 JESÚS: But like they don' know nothin' 'bout papers, right?  
1110  
1111 I: Honey, all they're gonna know is how fabulous you are, okay? They  
1112 don' care 'bout that at all. They don't, I promise. That's not even  
1113 anywhere, I mean anywhere, in the paper I'm writin'. Nobody's  
1114 gonna know anything 'about you 'cept how terrific you are, okay.  
1115  
1116 JESÚS: You sure?  
1117  
1118 I: I promise. No one's askin' anything 'about that. Okay?  
1119  
1120 JESÚS: Okay.  
1121  
1122 I: You ready to go back? Get your stuff and let me sign your agenda?  
1123 Can you grab that pen for me?  
1124

1125 JESÚS: When am I comin' back?  
1126  
1127 I: Next week if you wanna?  
1128  
1129 JESÚS: Okay. Are we gonna talk about school some more?  
1130  
1131 I: Yeah.  
1132  
1133 JESÚS: Okay.  
1134  
1135 I: Alright, I'll see you in class this afternoon, but I'll see you next week  
1136 to talk some more, okay?  
1137  
1138 JESÚS: Okay.  
1139  
1140 I: Bye honey. I'll see you after lunch, okay?  
1141  
1142  
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1170

1171 **Jesús: Interview #2**

1172

1173 I: Alright, you ready to um do this again?

1174

1175 JESÚS: Yeah.

1176

1177 I: Okay, I'm just gonna ask you some more questions like last time,  
1178 okay?

1179

1180 JESÚS: Okay.

1181

1182 I: You ready?

1183

1184 JESÚS: Yeah.

1185

1186 I: Okay, so did you go to school in Mexico at all?

1187

1188 JESÚS: Yeah.

1189

1190 I: Okay. What grades did you go to there?

1191

1192 JESÚS: Kindergarten and first grade.

1193

1194 I: Okay. Kindergarten and first grade? And um how was it different  
1195 there? Like describe it to me, 'cause like I've never been to  
1196 elementary school in Mexico.

1197

1198 JESÚS: Um, it was like, it was like horrible, the bathrooms were nasty, um,  
1199 um, they had to get some people from the town to to go sell food for  
1200 you could eat. Buy, you have to buy your own food, eat breakfast at  
1201 your house, and you had to walk 'cause there was like no bus, and um,  
1202 and then if you act bad, they hit you and there was, there was, the kids,  
1203 if the kids were gonna fight, they'd fight behind the school, and they'd  
1204 the doctors, I mean the teachers wouldn't do nothin', they'd just let  
1205 you fight, and that's all they did.

1206

1207 I: Anything else?

1208

1209 JESÚS: Well, that's like how it was at my school in Michoacán.

1210

1211 I: Is that the only state you ever went to school in in Mexico?

1212

1213 JESÚS: Yeah.

1214

1215 I: Um, how has school here been different from school there?

1216



1217 JESÚS: Um, it's better.  
1218  
1219 I: Okay. How is it better?  
1220  
1221 JESÚS: Um. I don' know.  
1222  
1223 I: Okay, well pretend I'm an alien from another planet who doesn't know  
1224 anything 'bout schools here or in Michoacán. How would you  
1225 describe it to me then?  
1226  
1227 JESÚS: Well, like the bus, it comes to pick you up. That's the first thing. It's  
1228 fun at school here.  
1229  
1230 I: Yeah? What makes it fun?  
1231  
1232 JESÚS: There's a lot of kids at this school. That's fun. I get to draw a lot  
1233 here. Like for my classes, I can draw some of my stuff like to turn in.  
1234  
1235 I: Oh, like assignments? Like you can turn in drawings?  
1236  
1237 JESÚS: Yeah.  
1238  
1239 I: Okay. Tell me a little 'bout your classes now that you have now.  
1240  
1241 JESÚS: They're tight.  
1242  
1243 I: They're tight? Tell me a little bit 'bout 'em, okay?  
1244  
1245 JESÚS: Um, I don' know. They're tight. Like I just like 'em.  
1246  
1247 I: Okay. What's your favorite?  
1248  
1249 JESÚS: P.E.  
1250  
1251 I: Okay, why P.E.?  
1252  
1253 JESÚS: 'Cause you get to exercise and learn and play. And you get to go  
1254 outside.  
1255  
1256 I: Okay, any other classes you really like?  
1257  
1258 JESÚS: Art.  
1259  
1260 I: Okay, why?  
1261  
1262 JESÚS: 'Cause I love to draw.

1263  
1264 I: Okay, and if you couldn't pick a connections class, what would you  
1265 pick?  
1266  
1267 JESÚS: That's not fair.  
1268  
1269 I: What's not fair?  
1270  
1271 JESÚS: I don't like my regular classes, just my connections, that's why it's not  
1272 fair.  
1273  
1274 I: Okay, that's fine.  
1275  
1276 JESÚS: But if you want me to pick a regular class...  
1277  
1278 I: You don't have to, it's okay.  
1279  
1280 JESÚS: I pick science.  
1281  
1282 I: Okay, do you wanna say anything 'bout science?  
1283  
1284 JESÚS: I like it 'cause we draw posters and do projects. Ms. Abbott  
1285 [pseudonym] shows us like these experiments and stuff. You know  
1286 we're gonna cut up a frog in March.  
1287  
1288 I: Really?  
1289  
1290 JESÚS: Yeah, and maybe somethin' else too.  
1291  
1292 I: Well, that's cool.  
1293  
1294 JESÚS: And like we read in groups a lot.  
1295  
1296 I: You like that?  
1297  
1298 JESÚS: Yeah, and we learn a lot.  
1299  
1300 I: So what're y'all learnin' right now?  
1301  
1302 JESÚS: Right now? Um, right now, we're learnin' like places like rainforest,  
1303 desert, and wetslands, and grasslands, and that.  
1304  
1305 I: Cool. It's sounds like you're havin' a good time.  
1306  
1307 JESÚS: Yeah.  
1308

1309 I: Great! You ready to keep goin'?

1310

1311 JESÚS: Yeah.

1312

1313 I: Okay, if you could be your teacher, okay so if they said Jesús, you're

1314 gonna be a teacher now at this school and you need to make make kids

1315 like school. What're you gonna do to make kids like school?

1316

1317 JESÚS: I don' know. (Starts laughing.)

1318

1319 I: Why are you laughin'?

1320

1321 JESÚS: Just thinkin' 'bout me teachin'.

1322

1323 I: Why is that so funny? I'm a teacher (both laugh).

1324

1325 JESÚS: But you're smart. I'm not. Teachers are supposed to be smart, so I

1326 wouldn' be a teacher.

1327

1328 I: Oh yes you could be a teacher. What 'bout when you taught us 'bout

1329 Islam the other day?

1330

1331 JESÚS: That was different. You'd already taught it.

1332

1333 I: But they got it when you did it. Let's pretend you're the teacher,

1334 okay?

1335

1336 JESÚS: Okay, whatever I want?

1337

1338 I: Yeah.

1339

1340 JESÚS: I'd let 'em draw all the time, use computers, paint, talk, play, like I'd

1341 let 'em talk to their friends. Like I'm lucky, I got friends in all my

1342 classes.

1343

1344 I: Does that make it better?

1345

1346 JESÚS: Yeah, last year I hated my classes.

1347

1348 I: Why?

1349

1350 JESÚS: 'Cause I only had friends in ESOL and social studies. I wasn't with

1351 my friends the rest of the day.

1352

1353 I: Well, that sounds like you would be a great teacher. I wanna go to

1354 your school (Both laugh).

1355  
1356 JESÚS: That would be cool. I'd be the teacher and you'd be the student.  
1357  
1358 I: Would you like that?  
1359  
1360 JESÚS: Yeah.  
1361  
1362 I: Okay. What do you think is the reason for goin' to school?  
1363  
1364 JESÚS: To learn.  
1365  
1366 I: Okay.  
1367  
1368 JESÚS: Like to have a better life. Like you gotta go to school.  
1369  
1370 I: Okay. Are you in any clubs or sports or afterschool?  
1371  
1372 JESÚS: No.  
1373  
1374 I: Why not?  
1375  
1376 JESÚS: 'Cause I don't like 'em.  
1377  
1378 I: What do you do when you go home?  
1379  
1380 JESÚS: I, uh, I go throw the trash and then sometimes I just watch my brother.  
1381 He likes to play Playstation 2.  
1382  
1383 I: That's cool. I used to love to watch my brother play Nintendo. I was  
1384 horrible at it so I'd just watch him beat all the levels.  
1385  
1386 JESÚS: Yeah, me too.  
1387  
1388 I: That makes me happy to hear you say that. Like when my brother  
1389 used to want me to play Mario with him, I'd fall in the holes, and you  
1390 know how the trees go up and down? Like I could never jump and my  
1391 brother'd get so mad 'cause like I couldn' make it past world one.  
1392  
1393 JESÚS: That's funny.  
1394  
1395 I: Yeah?  
1396  
1397 JESÚS: Yeah, my brother has like this game, I can't remember the name of it,  
1398 but like he's really good, and so I just wanna watch him 'cause like I  
1399 can' get very far and it like holds him up so I'd, I just watch him.  
1400

1401 I: That's cool. Do you play any games with him?  
1402  
1403 JESÚS: Yeah.  
1404  
1405 I: What's your favorite game to play with him?  
1406  
1407 JESÚS: Dragonball Z.  
1408  
1409 I: Whadda you do in that?  
1410  
1411 JESÚS: Fight.  
1412  
1413 I: People or animals?  
1414  
1415 JESÚS: Monsters.  
1416  
1417 I: Anything else you wanna say 'bout what we've talked 'bout here  
1418 today?  
1419  
1420 JESÚS: No.  
1421  
1422 I: Alright, get your stuff.  
1423  
1424 JESÚS: Okay.  
1425  
1426  
1427  
1428  
1429  
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1446

1447 **Jesús: Interview #3**

1448 I: Well, this is the last time we're gonna do this, okay?  
1449  
1450 JESÚS: Okay.  
1451  
1452 I: You ready to go?  
1453  
1454 JESÚS: Yeah. Hey—I beat my brother at Dragonball Z.  
1455  
1456 I: Really?  
1457  
1458 JESÚS: Yeah.  
1459  
1460 I: That's great, Jesús.  
1461  
1462 JESÚS: Okay, you can start askin' me questions now, I just wanted to tell you  
1463 that.  
1464  
1465 I: That's great! Maybe there's hope for me (Laughs).  
1466  
1467 JESÚS: Nah, I could beat you.  
1468  
1469 I: I might have to challenge you (both laugh).  
1470  
1471 JESÚS: Whenever, I'm ready (laughs).  
1472  
1473 I: You ready to get started?  
1474  
1475 JESÚS: Yeah.  
1476  
1477 I: Okay, here we go. Do you think that Spring Middle School thinks it's  
1478 important to be a Mexican?  
1479  
1480 JESÚS: I don't know.  
1481  
1482 I: Do they ever do anything that makes you feel special because you're  
1483 Mexican?  
1484  
1485 JESÚS: No.  
1486  
1487 I: Do they ever do anything that makes you feel bad that you're  
1488 Mexican?  
1489  
1490 JESÚS: Like when they tell me to not talk Spanish.  
1491  
1492 I: Okay, why does that make you feel bad?

1493  
1494 JESÚS: 'Cause that's like my language, that's me.  
1495  
1496 I: Okay. Um, do you think your teachers care 'bout you?  
1497  
1498 JESÚS: Yeah, a little bit.  
1499  
1500 I: Okay, why?  
1501  
1502 JESÚS: 'Cause um like some of them treat me good.  
1503  
1504 I: And how do you know somebody's treatin' you good?  
1505  
1506 JESÚS: 'Cause like they respect me. Like they respect who I am.  
1507  
1508 I: How?  
1509  
1510 JESÚS: By not screaming.  
1511  
1512 I: Do you have a lot of teachers that scream?  
1513  
1514 JESÚS Yeah. (*In a mocking voice*). You better sit down now and shut that  
1515 mouth. I don't get paid to babysit you. I don' even know why some  
1516 of you bother to come to school.  
1517  
1518 I: You have teachers that say that?  
1519  
1520 JESÚS: Yeah.  
1521  
1522 I: A lot?  
1523  
1524 JESÚS: Yeah.  
1525  
1526 I: Okay, if you had to describe to me what it's like to be a Mexican, how  
1527 would you describe it to me?  
1528  
1529 JESÚS: Um I don' know, probably that I'm proud to be Mexican 'cause you  
1530 can know two languages and it's fun to be Mexican.  
1531  
1532 I: What makes it fun to be a Mexican?  
1533  
1534 JESÚS: My life. My whole life. Everything 'bout my life says I'm a Mexican.  
1535  
1536 I: How do you show people you're a Mexican?  
1537  
1538 JESÚS: My skin. And my language. That's who I am.

1539  
1540 I: Okay, how do you think it's different from someone who's not a  
1541 Mexican?  
1542  
1543 JESÚS: It's just different. Sometimes you're treated bad for being Mexican.  
1544  
1545 I: How?  
1546  
1547 JESÚS: Like people call you wetback and make fun of you. Like they think  
1548 you can't speak English just 'cause you're from Mexico. Like they're  
1549 mean.  
1550  
1551 I: Okay. Let's pretend that a new Mexican student has just arrived and  
1552 he's gonna be in your classes. What advice would you give him on  
1553 how to be a successful student?  
1554  
1555 JESÚS: Um, I don' know. I don' know how to be a good student.  
1556  
1557 I: Why do you say that?  
1558  
1559 JESÚS: 'Cause. I always act bad. That's what my teachers say.  
1560  
1561 I: Okay, if you think that, then let's tell the new student to do the  
1562 opposite of what you do. Why don' you tell me?  
1563  
1564 JESÚS: Talk.  
1565  
1566 I: He should talk or he shouldn't talk?  
1567  
1568 JESÚS: Shouldn't talk.  
1569  
1570 I: What else?  
1571  
1572 JESÚS: Interrupt class.  
1573  
1574 I: He shouldn't interrupt class?  
1575  
1576 JESÚS: No.  
1577  
1578 I: What else?  
1579  
1580 JESÚS: He shouldn't bother the girls.  
1581  
1582 I: Anything else?  
1583  
1584 JESÚS: No, that's all.



1585  
1586 I: Okay. Do you think you're a successful student?  
1587  
1588 JESÚS: No. Well, a little bit.  
1589  
1590 I: Okay, how a little bit?  
1591  
1592 JESÚS: Well, sometimes, sometimes, 'cause I'm passin' like with mostly As  
1593 and one B.  
1594  
1595 I: That's more than passin'. You've got good grades.  
1596  
1597 JESÚS: But I'm not ready for the CRCT?  
1598  
1599 I: Why?  
1600  
1601 JESÚS: 'Cause I'm gonna fail and they're gonna keep me in seventh grade  
1602 again.  
1603  
1604 I: I don't think so. We just looked at your MAP scores last week and  
1605 you've gotten a lot better since August. You're gonna pass.  
1606  
1607 JESÚS: I don't think so.  
1608  
1609 I: Is there anything else that you think makes you a good student?  
1610  
1611 JESÚS: No, that's all.  
1612  
1613 I: Okay, have any of your brothers or sisters or friends dropped out of  
1614 school?  
1615  
1616 JESÚS: Yeah, but the one closest to me is my sister.  
1617  
1618 I: Okay. How old was she when she dropped out?  
1619  
1620 JESÚS: Seventeen.  
1621  
1622 I: Did she go to Cedar Shoals?  
1623  
1624 JESÚS: Yeah.  
1625  
1626 I: Why did she drop out?  
1627  
1628 JESÚS: She left with her boyfriend. They still stay here but she dropped out.  
1629  
1630 I: Okay.

1631  
1632 JESÚS: She's gotta job. I don' know what she does, but she's gotta job.  
1633  
1634 I: Okay. What about your brother? How's he doin'?  
1635  
1636 JESÚS: He says he hopes not to um drop out. But he wants to work 'cause he  
1637 wants money, but my mom's talkin' to him so he don't drop out. She  
1638 don' want him to drop out.  
1639  
1640 I: Okay, anything else?  
1641  
1642 JESÚS: Nope.  
1643  
1644 I: Okay, so what do you think 'bout talkin' in English?  
1645  
1646 JESÚS: It's good.  
1647  
1648 I: Um, are there times you think you shouldn' talk in English?  
1649  
1650 JESÚS: Yeah, when I'm around my family 'cause they can't talk English 'cept  
1651 my brothers. They talk English so I talk English with them.  
1652  
1653 I: Okay, any other time you think you shouldn't talk in English?  
1654  
1655 JESÚS: No, that's all.  
1656  
1657 I: Okay, um, has anyone ever told you not to speak Spanish at school?  
1658  
1659 JESÚS: Yeah, teachers, 'cause they thought I was cussin' 'em out.  
1660  
1661 I: Okay.  
1662  
1663 JESÚS: And they think I'm talkin' 'bout them.  
1664  
1665 I: Yeah? Does it happen a lot?  
1666  
1667 JESÚS: Yeah, a whole bunch of times.  
1668  
1669 I: Okay, now let's pretend about this new Mexican student we've been  
1670 talkin' 'bout today, he comes up to you and asks for advice. He wants  
1671 to know if he should join a gang. What would you tell him?  
1672  
1673 JESÚS: It's up to him but he could end up gettin' killed. Well, there's like lots  
1674 of kids in gangs at school, like they write like 18<sup>th</sup> Street or whatever  
1675 on stuff and like they try to get other kids to be in the gang. Like they  
1676 keep askin' me to join up and stuff. They tryin' to get me in one too.

1677  
1678 I: And how are they tryin' to get you in a gang?  
1679  
1680 JESÚS: They like tell you, like they in the gang and they wanna have you be a  
1681 part of it too. Like a family. Like they bother me 'bout bein' in a  
1682 gang. Well, they did bother me but my brother told 'em to stop.  
1683  
1684 I: Anything else?  
1685  
1686 JESÚS: Nope.  
1687  
1688 I: Anything else we didn' talk 'bout that you wanna talk 'bout now?  
1689  
1690 JESÚS: Nope, that's it.  
1691  
1692 I: Okay, thanks Jesús for all of your help. I really appreciate it.  
1693  
1694 JESÚS: No problem.  
1695  
1696 I: Alright. I'll see you in a little bit.  
1697  
1698 JESÚS: Okay. Bye.

1699 **Angie/Interview #1**

1700

1701 ANGIE: Can I sit in your chair?

1702

1703 I: Sure. I don't care.

1704

1705 ANGIE: Okay.

1706

1707 I: You ready to get started? Today we're just going to talk about stuff  
1708 like when your parents came to the United States, stuff like that. Then  
1709 when I get you next week, we'll talk about stuff like what you think  
1710 about school in general, classes and stuff, and then the week after that  
1711 when I get you we'll talk about school and choices and stuff. Okay?

1712

1713 ANGIE: Okay.

1714

1715 I: But nobody's gonna hear this except me and maybe my professors.  
1716 Okay?

1717

1718 ANGIE: What chu mean about my parents like?

1719

1720 I: Like when they came to the United States and stuff like that.

1721

1722 ANGIE: Not like if they got papers?

1723

1724 I: No, nothin' like that. When have I ever asked you anything like that?

1725

1726 ANGIE: Never.

1727

1728 I: Okay, so I'm not startin' now. ((Both laugh)). I'm gonna ask you  
1729 questions about how long you've been here, but I'm not askin'  
1730 anybody about any papers. Okay?

1731

1732 ANGIE: Alright, but I need some paper if we gonna do this. It helps me  
1733 concentrate.

1734

1735 I: Just go get some over there. See it? On the cart?

1736

1737 ANGIE: Yeah. I just need a couple.

1738

1739 I: That's fine. Get whatever you need. Do you need somethin' to write  
1740 with?

1741

1742 ANGIE: Yeah.

1743

1744 I: Go to my desk. There's a bunch of pens and pencils in that holder.  
1745 Just get whatever you want.  
1746  
1747 ANGIE: Okay.  
1748 ((Angie goes to get paper and pencil.))  
1749  
1750 I: Ready?  
1751  
1752 ANGIE: Yeah. I want paper so I won't forget.  
1753  
1754 I: Well, I'll ask you as many times as you want.  
1755  
1756 ANGIE: But I can write it too, right?  
1757  
1758 I: Sure, if that's what you want.  
1759  
1760 ANGIE: It helps me concentrate.  
1761  
1762 I: Okay, you ready to get started? You ready for the first one?  
1763  
1764 ANGIE: Yeah.  
1765  
1766 I: Okay, um, you just tell me. You just say and it's fine. Nobody here is  
1767 gonna hear it but me. Okay?  
1768  
1769 ANGIE: You sure? Not no teachers?  
1770  
1771 I: No, I promise. Just me.  
1772  
1773 ANGIE: Okay.  
1774  
1775 I: Um, when did your parents come to the United States? How long ago  
1776 did they come here?  
1777  
1778 ANGIE: What chu mean?  
1779  
1780 I: Like when did they move to the United States?  
1781  
1782 ANGIE: When?  
1783  
1784 I: Like how old were you?  
1785  
1786 ANGIE: Six.  
1787  
1788 I: Okay, so you were six. Did you come at the same time they did?  
1789

1790 ANGIE: Yep.  
1791  
1792 I: Okay, so y'all all came together.  
1793  
1794 ANGIE: Just my mom.  
1795  
1796 I: Just your mom?  
1797  
1798 ANGIE: Yeah.  
1799  
1800 I: Did Ariela ((Angie's sister)) come too?  
1801  
1802 ANGIE: Yeah, me, mom, Ariela, and Reina ((Angie's oldest sister)).  
1803 ((Laughs)). It took us a long time to answer that one. I hope they ain't  
1804 all like that ((Laughs)).  
1805  
1806 I: But not your dad?  
1807  
1808 ANGIE: No, he came first.  
1809  
1810 I: Did y'all come to Athens?  
1811  
1812 ANGIE: Yeah.  
1813  
1814 I: So you been in Georgia this whole time?  
1815  
1816 ANGIE: Yeah, but ((2 second pause)) remember I got sent to Florida last year.  
1817  
1818 I: Okay, so except for when you went and stayed with your grandmother,  
1819 you've been in Georgia the whole time.  
1820  
1821 ANGIE: Yeah.  
1822  
1823 I: Have you ever lived anywhere else in the United States besides  
1824 Georgia?  
1825  
1826 ANGIE: Mmmm, no. Just here and then last summer in Florida.  
1827  
1828 I: So you've been here since you were six. Did you start school here?  
1829  
1830 ANGIE: Ummm, no.  
1831  
1832 I: No? Okay.  
1833

1834 ANGIE: Like I went to school in Mexico. I went to this church school, and  
1835 then kindergarten. I went to part of first grade there before we came  
1836 here.  
1837  
1838 I: So you started first grade here?  
1839  
1840 ANGIE: Like not at the beginning. I went to first grade in Mexico first.  
1841 I: Okay. Now look at these list of words. If you need any help with what  
1842 it says, let me know.  
1843  
1844 ANGIE: Okay.  
1845 ((Angie looks over the list.))  
1846  
1847 I: Okay, so all it says is, How do you describe yourself? Look at this list  
1848 and choose the words that best describe you. You can choose as many  
1849 words as you think best describes you. Okay so you can pick as many  
1850 as you want to. If there's a word you don't see, feel free to write it  
1851 down. Got it? Do you want me to read the list?  
1852  
1853 ANGIE: What's this word? (*points to "dumb"*).  
1854  
1855 I: Dumb.  
1856  
1857 ANGIE: Dumb? I didn' know it had a "b" at the end.  
1858  
1859 I: Yeah.  
1860  
1861 ANGIE: So I can start?  
1862  
1863 I: Go ahead. Just circle whichever ones you think apply to you.  
1864  
1865 ANGIE: Finished.  
1866  
1867 I: Okay. Thanks. Can we talk 'bout what you picked?  
1868  
1869 ANGIE: Yeah.  
1870  
1871 I: Okay, you circled Mexican and dumb. Why did you circle those?  
1872  
1873 ANGIE: 'Cause I'm Mexican and dumb.  
1874  
1875 I: Why do you think that?  
1876  
1877 ANGIE: 'Cause I know I'm Mexican, like I'm from Mexico. And I know I'm  
1878 dumb cause my teachers be tellin' me that all the time.  
1879

1880 I: All your teachers?  
1881  
1882 ANGIE: Enough of 'em. I don' really wanna talk 'bout this. Can we keep  
1883 goin'?'  
1884  
1885 I: You ready to keep goin'?'  
1886  
1887 ANGIE: Yeah.  
1888  
1889 I: Um, okay. This is the last question for today. Tell me about your  
1890 future. What do you think it'll be like?  
1891  
1892 ANGIE: I don know.  
1893  
1894 I: I don know like you don't understand the question or you just don'  
1895 know.  
1896  
1897 ANGIE: Like I don know. Everything's crazy.  
1898  
1899 I: Well let's narrow it down. Let's just talk about next year. What do  
1900 you think next year will be like?  
1901  
1902 ANGIE: Better.  
1903  
1904 I: Better? How will it be better?  
1905  
1906 ANGIE: 'Cause you get more education. Like it ain't gonna be like how we  
1907 play here.  
1908  
1909 I: Like how we play here?  
1910  
1911 ANGIE: Yeah, like y'all laugh with us or crack jokes sometimes and the other  
1912 teachers don' do that. I think that's what high school's gonna be like.  
1913  
1914 I: You don't think high school's gonna be fun?  
1915  
1916 ANGIE: Uh-uh.  
1917  
1918 I: Do you want to go to high school?  
1919  
1920 ANGIE: Yeah, but it's gonna be hard. Look at Ariela.  
1921  
1922 I: Do you wanna graduate?  
1923  
1924 ANGIE: I want to.  
1925



1926 I: Is there anything else you wanna say before we finish up today?  
1927  
1928 ANGIE: When we gonna do this again?  
1929  
1930 I: I'll come get you next week.  
1931  
1932 ANGIE: So it'll be like this? Just questions.  
1933  
1934 I: Yeah, just like this. Just different questions.  
1935  
1936 ANGIE. Okay.  
1937  
1938 I: You ready to go back?  
1939  
1940 ANGIE: No. ((laughs)).  
1941  
1942 I: Get your stuff girl. Let's go. ((both laugh)).

1943 **Angie: Interview #2**

1944 I: Alright, so we're gonna pick up where we left off. Is that cool?  
1945  
1946 ANGIE: Yeah. Thanks for getting' me outta that class. It's so lame.  
1947  
1948 I: Why?  
1949  
1950 ANGIE: There ain't no Mexicans in that class and that lady hates me. She been  
1951 hatin' me since 7<sup>th</sup> grade.  
1952  
1953 I: Okay, don't even think about that. You'll be with me for a little while  
1954 now. Let's go get some water and walk it off. Okay?  
1955  
1956 ANGIE: Okay. Can I wash my face?  
1957  
1958 I: Sure.  
1959 ((Angie goes to water fountain and sink. Returns to classroom.))  
1960  
1961 I: Ready? You feel better?  
1962  
1963 ANGIE: Yeah. I just get mad like that.  
1964  
1965 I: I know. You forget I've been with you for three years now.  
1966  
1967 ANGIE: Yeah I know. My mom says you're my second mom ((laughs)) but  
1968 you can't whip me ((laughs loudly)).  
1969  
1970 I: Alright, *mi hija*, you ready to get started?  
1971  
1972 ANGIE: ((Laughs.)) Yeah.  
1973  
1974 I: Okay, here we go. Did you go to school at all in Mexico?  
1975  
1976 ANGIE: Just kindergarten and pre-K.  
1977  
1978 I: Okay.  
1979  
1980 ANGIE: And like a month of first grade.  
1981  
1982 I: Okay. And then y'all moved here?  
1983  
1984 ANGIE: Yep.  
1985  
1986 I: And um what was school like in Mexico?  
1987  
1988 ANGIE: Um, ((sighs)), um I really don' remember like too much but I have like

1989 pictures when they were tellin' you in Spanish like A B Cs and the  
1990 numbers and the colors.  
1991  
1992 I: And you were cute right?  
1993  
1994 ANGIE: You know it. ((Laughs.))  
1995  
1996 I: So that's what you remember the most.  
1997  
1998 ANGIE: Yeah....and uh they could hit you there. Not like here.  
1999  
2000 I: Did that happen to you?  
2001  
2002 ANGIE: No, but to people in my class.  
2003  
2004 I: How have your school uh experiences in Georgia been different from  
2005 your experiences in Mexico? Like how is school different here than  
2006 there?  
2007  
2008 ANGIE: I think I learn more in here.  
2009  
2010 I: And why do you think that?  
2011  
2012 ANGIE: Because that's how I can know the two languages of Spanish and  
2013 English, the ABCs, the numbers and colors, science, social studies.  
2014 My teachers there only knew Spanish. Like you and Ms. Matheny  
2015 know both. It makes it easier. It like makes me keep both.  
2016  
2017 I: Okay, um, just tell me a little bit about your classes here. Um, how  
2018 would you describe your classes for eighth grade?  
2019  
2020 ANGIE: Some are okay just that one class is so lame.  
2021  
2022 I: Why is it lame? What makes it lame?  
2023  
2024 ANGIE: 'Cause I don' talk to nobody and other people are talkin' to each other.  
2025 And I just um keep starin'. Yeah. I just hate language arts. There  
2026 ain't no Mexicans at all. She just hate me. I can't do nothin' right for  
2027 her. She got attitude when I walk in the door.  
2028  
2029 I: Okay, well let's think about somethin' better. What's your favorite  
2030 class?  
2031  
2032 ANGIE: Your class.  
2033

2034 I: Now you don't have to say that. You know this doesn't affect your  
2035 grade at all.  
2036

2037 ANGIE: I know. But like your class and Ms. Foster's. Those are the two best.  
2038 Like we do projects in here. It's not boring. And I got some friends in  
2039 here and in there. That makes it a lot better. I ain't bored in science  
2040 and social studies. I don't have to stare. I can just do stuff. Like I  
2041 know what I'm doin' in here. Like I know the Civil War. Like I know  
2042 it. And I know those rocks we been doin' in Ms. Foster's class. Like I  
2043 get it, you know?  
2044

2045 I: You've been doin' great in here. I'm really glad that you've been  
2046 helpin' out the new girls. That's sweet of you.  
2047

2048 ANGIE: Well, it's 'cause I get it. I know what we doin' in here.  
2049

2050 I: I'm glad. Did you ever think you'd been sayin' this stuff after sixth  
2051 grade social studies?  
2052

2053 ANGIE: No way. ((Both laugh.))  
2054

2055 I: Okay, um next question. If you could be a teacher, what kinds of  
2056 things would you do to make students like school?  
2057

2058 ANGIE: Anything?  
2059

2060 I: Anything. Like if you could tell me anything I could do to make you  
2061 like school, what would it be?  
2062

2063 ANGIE: Projects.  
2064

2065 I: Projects? Why?  
2066

2067 ANGIE: 'Cause like I feel smart when I do 'em. I just get it. Like my  
2068 Sequoyah project in here. I get it. I couldn't been readin' bout that  
2069 man in the book, but in the project, I get it. Mine was good.  
2070

2071 I: It was. It was one of the best.  
2072

2073 ANGIE: But like if you gave us a quiz, I'd probably fail. I just get projects.  
2074

2075 I: Can you think of anything else you'd like to change?  
2076

2077 ANGIE: No, just projects. If you change that, it makes everything better. You  
2078 wouldn't have to change nothin' else. Everybody'd be getting' it then.  
2079

2080 I: So nothin' else?  
2081  
2082 ANGIE: Just projects. Oh, and some good food in the cafeteria. ((Laughs.))  
2083  
2084 I: So that's it. Projects and good food.  
2085  
2086 ANGIE: Yep.  
2087  
2088 I: Okay, so um what do you think is the reason for goin' to school?  
2089  
2090 ANGIE: Where you can um get an education.  
2091  
2092 I: And what does that mean to you?  
2093  
2094 ANGIE: It means like I can get a job. I don't want to be at the *pollería*. I want  
2095 somethin' else.  
2096  
2097 I: Like how?  
2098  
2099 ANGIE: Like my mom be workin' all the time before she went back to Mexico.  
2100 I don't wanna do that. I wanna make money, but not work like that.  
2101  
2102 I: So how's an education gonna help you?  
2103  
2104 ANGIE: Like how they have that work thing at the high school. Like they train  
2105 you at Athens Tech. Like I'm good with hair and like makeup and  
2106 stuff. Did you see Cookie today? I did that.  
2107  
2108 I: I haven't been on the eighth grade hallway today. I'll see her 4<sup>th</sup>  
2109 block. I'll have to pay attention.  
2110  
2111 ANGIE: Like that would be a fun job. Like my aunt be cuttin' hair and she  
2112 makes good money and she don't work all the time like my mom and  
2113 dad.  
2114  
2115 I: Remind me when we do your registration for Cedar. I'll try to make  
2116 sure you get in those classes first semester. Ms. Mathis and I know the  
2117 teachers over there, so we'll talk to them. You're serious right?  
2118  
2119 ANGIE: Yeah. Like I don' wanna get in trouble like here.  
2120  
2121 I: I know. But you've been doin' *a lot* better lately. I'm really proud of  
2122 you.  
2123  
2124 ANGIE: I gotta do better. I want good grades but it's more than that. With  
2125 Ariela you know, good grades didn' stop that.

2126  
2127 I: I know. But I think you're on the right track. We'll sit down in  
2128 February and plan out your 9<sup>th</sup> grade year over at Cedar. I want you to  
2129 help me decide what classes you need to be in. Some of 'em we don't  
2130 have a choice, like you have to take 9<sup>th</sup> grade lit/comp, but there's  
2131 some others we can mess around with. Okay?  
2132  
2133 ANGIE: February?  
2134  
2135 I: Yeah, it's not set up in the computer 'til then.  
2136  
2137 ANGIE: Okay. Are we still goin' on the Athens Tech field trip?  
2138  
2139 I: I don't know. Let me find out.  
2140  
2141 ANGIE: Okay.  
2142  
2143 I: Okay, you ready to move on?  
2144  
2145 ANGIE: Yeah.  
2146  
2147 I: Okay, um, what activities do you participate in here at school? Like  
2148 clubs, or sports, or PSP?  
2149  
2150 ANGIE: Nope, nothin'. I go home and take care of my little brother.  
2151  
2152 I: Okay.  
2153  
2154 ANGIE: And I just don't like the kind of sports and clubs we have here. Like I  
2155 like soccer, I like to look when people play them, but I don't like to  
2156 play them. I like to look. I'm too fat to play.  
2157  
2158 I: Oh, no, you're not. I thought you played soccer last year.  
2159  
2160 ANGIE: No, I didn't play. I went to some of the games, but I didn't play.  
2161  
2162 I: Oh, okay. Well, that's the end of the questions for today. Is there  
2163 anything else you want to say?  
2164  
2165 ANGIE: Um, yeah, like can you get me that permission slip in Spanish? I  
2166 didn't get one in homeroom.  
2167  
2168 I: Yeah, when you come this afternoon, I'll have some. Let everybody  
2169 else know that I'll have extras.  
2170  
2171 ANGIE: Okay.

2172  
2173 I: Okay, we just have one more interview to do. You ready?  
2174  
2175 ANGIE: Yeah, like in a week.  
2176  
2177 I: Yeah, I'll let you know.  
2178  
2179 ANGIE: Okay.  
2180  
2181 I: Alright, let's get your stuff together and go back to class.

2182 **Angie: Interview #3**

2183

2184 I: Are you okay? You ready to do this?

2185

2186 ANGIE: No.

2187

2188 I: No?

2189

2190 ANGIE: No. I'm sleepy. That's why I had my hood up. I'm sleepy.

2191

2192 I: Do you wanna do it another day?

2193

2194 ANGIE: No. Can I go get some water though before we start?

2195

2196 I: Sure. Here's the pass.

2197

2198 ANGIE: Okay, I'll be back.

2199 ((Approximately a minute and a half passes before M returns.))

2200

2201 I: Feel better?

2202

2203 ANGIE: Yeah. Let's get started.

2204

2205 I: Okay. It's gonna be like before. I'm just gonna ask you some  
2206 questions. If you don't wanna answer them, you don't have to, okay?

2207

2208 ANGIE: Okay.

2209

2210 I: Alright, are you feelin' better?

2211

2212 ANGIE: My head hurts 'cause I'm mad.

2213

2214 I: Why are you mad?

2215

2216 ANGIE: 'Cause Estela makes me mad!

2217

2218 I: What happened?

2219

2220 ANGIE: It's 'cause, it's this boy, right? He's so cute? You seen him? That  
2221 new boy? Oh, oh. Like his name is Jorge, but everybody calls him  
2222 L.A. because he's from Los Angeles, you know? And then she's  
2223 gonna start tellin' him that um that he um that he um that I'm too short  
2224 for him, that I'm too fat, that I'm this and that, and so he um, he he  
2225 didn't care, so he came and asked me and he said, "What's your phone  
2226 number?" and and I was just laughin' and then Estela said, she's gonna  
2227 get in the conversation and start cussin' and stuff and cuss me out over



2228 some boy just 'cause he don't want her skinny self. I don't care. She  
2229 want to fight over a boy, let's fight. She's mad because he said in  
2230 front of everybody when she came up to talk to him, "I don't want  
2231 you." So she's mad. I don't care. I don't wanna fight over a boy, but  
2232 if she comes to fight me, she better be ready, you know? Then she  
2233 started cryin' and she said she's gonna fight me after school.  
2234  
2235 I: So are y'all gonna fight?  
2236  
2237 ANGIE: I don't want to, but if she starts with me, I'll finish it.  
2238  
2239 I: Maybe things will cool off by this afternoon.  
2240  
2241 ANGIE: No, I think she wants to fight.  
2242  
2243 I: And...  
2244  
2245 ANGIE: Well.  
2246  
2247 I: You know you can't get into another fight. If you do, they're gonna  
2248 put you at the alternative school. You know you don't want that.  
2249 You've been doin' great lately and you don' wanna mess that up over  
2250 a boy.  
2251  
2252 ANGIE: No, but if she wants to fight, I'm gonna fight back.  
2253  
2254 I: Well, you know you're gonna get the same suspension she gets.  
2255  
2256 ANGIE: I know, but I'm just getting' tired of her mouth. You know she's  
2257 tryin' to fight those sixth graders again? Like why can't she leave  
2258 them alone? They're like babies. Don' nobody wanna fight them  
2259 'cept Estela.  
2260  
2261 I: Why are they gonna fight? I thought that she and Angela were friends  
2262 again. I thought we took care of all of that before Christmas.  
2263  
2264 ANGIE: Man, Ms. Bush, you know Estela. She be bein' friends with  
2265 everybody just to find out stuff about them, you know? She gets them  
2266 to talk about other people and then she goes and tells that person, she's  
2267 just always startin' stuff. I'm tired of it.  
2268  
2269 I: Well, I'm just tellin' you. Don't fight...you'll get the same  
2270 suspension. You know they're gonna send you to the alternative  
2271 school, right? You don't get stuff over there like you do here? Like  
2272 no ESOL over there, you know?  
2273

2274 ANGIE: I know, but I can't stand her mouth no more.  
2275  
2276 I: Well, try not to think about it right now. You don't have any more  
2277 classes with her today so just try not to think about her, you know?  
2278 Like just don't even think about her. Avoid her when you're goin' to  
2279 the bus. Just stay out of her way.  
2280  
2281 ANGIE: I'm not backin' down from her.  
2282  
2283 I: I'm just askin' you not to fight. Not today. Let's not think about it,  
2284 okay? Let's get goin' okay? Let's not even think about her and just  
2285 move on to the questions. Okay?  
2286  
2287 ANGIE: Alright. Let's go.  
2288  
2289 I: Okay.  
2290  
2291 ANGIE: You know they already signed the papers for alternative school, right?  
2292 They sittin' on his [the principal's] desk.  
2293  
2294 I: What papers for alternative school?  
2295  
2296 ANGIE: Like when you get in a fight or somethin' you know? Like they put me  
2297 foul language like four times and fighting like three times. And so  
2298 they called my mom when she was here and they said that the next  
2299 time I get suspension or they would give me a write-up 'bout foul  
2300 language that I fixin' to go to alternative school.  
2301  
2302 I: Then you don't need to give him a reason to send you on. Do you  
2303 want to be over there?  
2304  
2305 ANGIE: No, but I don' want her to be runnin' her mouth 'bout me. I'm tired of  
2306 it!  
2307  
2308 I: I understand that. Do you wanna finish this another day when you're  
2309 not so mad?  
2310  
2311 ANGIE: No, I just wanted you to listen to me. I just needed to say it to  
2312 somebody that'd understand. Like I don' wanna go to alternative  
2313 school, but I ain't gonna let her say stuff 'bout me neither.  
2314  
2315 I: I understand. But I'm like perfectly happy to do this another day.  
2316  
2317 ANGIE: No, let's get goin'.  
2318

2319 I: Okay, do you think this school thinks that bein' Mexican is important?  
2320  
2321 ANGIE: No.  
2322  
2323 I: Why do you think that? Like how do you know that?  
2324  
2325 ANGIE: No because there's different races in here and they treat us all  
2326 different.  
2327  
2328 I: Like how?  
2329  
2330 ANGIE: Like the blacks. They get treated the best. Like the black teachers let  
2331 the black kids do whatever. There's not any whites in my classes so  
2332 I'm not even gonna talk 'about them. They just treat us bad.  
2333  
2334 I: Can you explain that?  
2335  
2336 ANGIE: They just treat us different. Like we don't get as many privileges as  
2337 black kids. Like if they act bad in class with a black teacher, they don'  
2338 even get in trouble. But if we act bad, we get wrote up real quick.  
2339 You know?  
2340  
2341 I: Well, do you think that your teachers care about you?  
2342  
2343 ANGIE: Some.  
2344  
2345 I: Okay, how do you know your teachers care about you?  
2346  
2347 ANGIE: When like when like I wanna get in trouble and she says like reasons  
2348 why I should be good and behave and stuff.  
2349  
2350 I: Do you have a lot of teachers that care about you?  
2351  
2352 ANGIE: Some, like five since I been here.  
2353  
2354 I: Yeah, and what about teachers that don't care about you? How do  
2355 they show you that?  
2356  
2357 ANGIE: 'Cause like they don't care what I do, like Ms. Jones [pseudonym] like  
2358 she don't care at all what I do. 'Cause like today they were screaming  
2359 in the lunchroom and and so like she told them to settle down but she  
2360 didn't tell me nothin'. I can do whatever, she don' care. She tells me  
2361 all the time, I'm never gonna be nothin' no way. That I'm gonna drop  
2362 out and be nothin'.  
2363

2364 I: Do you believe that?  
2365  
2366 ANGIE: Sometimes. Like you hear it enough and sometimes you wonder if it's  
2367 true.  
2368  
2369 I: Okay. Can you tell me what it's like to be Mexican?  
2370  
2371 ANGIE: Mmmm...like we have different food, we do different stuff that y'all  
2372 don' like *quinceañeras* and stuff. Like...what else...like..you're  
2373 like...like you're like...I'm not tryin' to be bad....but like some white  
2374 folks are quiet and do their work. Like some of them be wildin' but  
2375 mostly they be doin' they work, they quiet, they do what the teacher  
2376 wants.  
2377  
2378 I: So do you think that all the white kids at school are makin' A's?  
2379  
2380 ANGIE: Well, there's only like two of 'em. [*laughs*]  
2381  
2382 I: But do you think that?  
2383  
2384 ANGIE: Yep.  
2385  
2386 I: Why do you think that?  
2387  
2388 ANGIE: Well, 'cause they pay attention, they don't talk, they and what else?  
2389 Like I think that's what the teacher wants.  
2390  
2391 I: Well, do you think that would be the case if you had Mexican  
2392 teachers?  
2393  
2394 ANGIE: Mmm, nope.  
2395  
2396 I: Well, what do you think a Mexican teacher would want?  
2397  
2398 ANGIE: Like I think they class would be different from a white teacher's class.  
2399 Like...like maybe they class would be like half Mexican stuff, like  
2400 we'd study our stuff and she could um talk Spanish to us all the time.  
2401 Well, you don't have to be Mexican to do that, but she'd be able to  
2402 talk and maybe she would.  
2403  
2404 I: So do you think that'd be better for you?  
2405  
2406 ANGIE: Yep.  
2407  
2408 I: Okay. Well, let's say that a new Mexican student came to our school.

2409 What would you tell her to do in order to be a successful student?  
2410 Like what advice would you give her about how to be a good student?  
2411  
2412 ANGIE: I'm not a good student so I couldn't tell her.  
2413  
2414 I: Well let's say you're right. So let's tell her the opposite ((both  
2415 laugh)). What would you tell her to do? ((both laugh))  
2416  
2417 ANGIE: I don't know.  
2418  
2419 I: Well, I don't think you're a bad student so I'm not sure why you can't  
2420 give her advice.  
2421  
2422 ANGIE: Well, don't talk back, don't use foul language, don't fight, don't not do  
2423 your work.  
2424  
2425 I: So do you do the opposite of all of those things?  
2426  
2427 ANGIE: ((laughs)) Yeah. In some classes.  
2428  
2429 I: Why?  
2430  
2431 ANGIE: I don't know. But I'm gettin' better. I'm passin' almost all of my  
2432 classes now.  
2433  
2434 I: That's great! That's really good.  
2435  
2436 ANGIE: I'm tryin'. I don't wanna get retained.  
2437  
2438 I: You've still got time to get even better. You gonna go to that CRCT  
2439 prep thing after school?  
2440  
2441 ANGIE: I don't know. I don't think so.  
2442  
2443 I: Do you not think it'll help?  
2444  
2445 ANGIE: Not really. Um, I went last year and I still failed.  
2446  
2447 I: Yeah, but this year it counts for you. If you don't pass, you have to go  
2448 to summer school. And if you don't pass then, you have to stay in  
2449 eighth grade again. Do you think you're a good student at all?  
2450  
2451 ANGIE: Nope.  
2452  
2453 I: Why not?

2454  
2455  
2456 ANGIE: 'Cause every time I say somethin', teachers got to be just gettin' on  
2457 me.  
2458  
2459 I: Like how do they get on you? Like give me an example.  
2460  
2461 ANGIE: After school detention, or like silent lunch.  
2462  
2463 I: Yeah. When's the last time that happened?  
2464  
2465 ANGIE: Today.  
2466  
2467 I: Today? What'd you get it for?  
2468  
2469 ANGIE: We were screaming. All of us.  
2470  
2471 I: Who is we?  
2472  
2473 ANGIE: Me, Estela, and Maria.  
2474  
2475 I: Why were y'all screamin'?  
2476  
2477 ANGIE: Just to get in trouble.  
2478  
2479 I: You wanted to get trouble?  
2480  
2481 ANGIE: ((*emphatically*)) Yes.  
2482  
2483 I: Why do you wanna get in trouble?  
2484  
2485 ANGIE: 'Cause it's fun.  
2486  
2487 I: Why is it fun to be in trouble?  
2488  
2489 ANGIE: 'Cause you not in the classes. They put you out. You can do what you  
2490 want.  
2491  
2492 I: So you'd rather be in ISS or somethin' instead of class.  
2493  
2494 ANGIE: Yes.  
2495  
2496 I: You don' act like that in here.  
2497  
2498 ANGIE: You don' let me.  
2499

2500 I: How do they let you get in trouble?  
2501  
2502 ANGIE: ‘Cause they don’ care what I do. I just take up space to them. Ms.  
2503 Jones [pseudonym] told me that. She don’ even know why I come to  
2504 school.  
2505  
2506 I: How does that make you feel?  
2507  
2508 ANGIE: I don’ care. I like ISS. I’d rather be in ISS than be in her class. It  
2509 keeps me separate from the other girls.  
2510  
2511 I: Yeah, but like you can’t talk or go to the cafeteria. You have to eat  
2512 your lunch in silence in the room.  
2513  
2514 ANGIE: So, that’s what I do at home too.  
2515  
2516 I: You eat by yourself at home too? You’re never with Ariela (her sister)  
2517 or anybody?  
2518  
2519 ANGIE: No since my mom went back to Mexico, my dad eats in his room, my  
2520 sister eats in the living room, I eat in my room, I stay in the room, I  
2521 take the food to the room, like she (her sister) don’ even say hey when  
2522 I get home.  
2523  
2524 I: She doesn’t? What happened to y’all?  
2525  
2526 ANGIE: ‘Cause she started sayin’ that I was supposed to go with this boy and  
2527 lose my ((holds up two fingers in ‘v’ shape, signifying virginity)).  
2528 You know. And then that I uh I supposed to do the same thing she do  
2529 and so I told my daddy what she told me and so she got a whippin’.  
2530 And so that’s why she don’ wanna talk to me no more.  
2531  
2532 I: So how long’s it been since y’all talked?  
2533  
2534 ANGIE: Mmmm, like two or three months.  
2535  
2536 I: Is she (Ariela) still goin’ to school?  
2537  
2538 ANGIE: She don’ go to school no more.  
2539  
2540 I: When did this happen?  
2541  
2542 ANGIE: Mmmm...it was when...when was it? Like she finished the first half  
2543 of ninth, and then dropped out. Like she made her fifteenth and then  
2544 dropped out. That was March the sixth.  
2545

2546 I: So what's she doin' now?  
2547  
2548 ANGIE: She's at home.  
2549  
2550 I: She workin'?  
2551  
2552 ANGIE: No.  
2553  
2554 I: Got a boyfriend?  
2555  
2556 ANGIE: Yeah. Got a baby daddy.  
2557  
2558 I: I heard she was pregnant.  
2559  
2560 ANGIE: Yeah. She doesn't wanna get married, but she wants to have more  
2561 kids with him. Like he's a lot older and stuff.  
2562  
2563 I: Is she gonna keep livin' with y'all?  
2564  
2565 ANGIE: I don' know. My dad told her before if she got pregnant, she couldn't  
2566 stay with us no more. But I don' know. I don' think that guy's gonna  
2567 take care of her. My dad says she's not gonna be livin' with us  
2568 because he don' like that guy. He told her that guy was bad and she  
2569 didn' listen. You know? She didn' listen to nobody. She needs to go  
2570 with him. That's the daddy, not my daddy, he needs to take care of  
2571 them, not my daddy.  
2572  
2573 I: Anything else you wanna say 'bout that?  
2574  
2575 ANGIE: No. I'm ready for the next question.  
2576  
2577 I: Okay. Um, what do you think about talkin' in English?  
2578  
2579 ANGIE: It's kinda good sometimes and kinda bad sometimes.  
2580  
2581 I: Yeah?  
2582  
2583 ANGIE: Yep.  
2584  
2585 I: What makes it that way?  
2586  
2587 ANGIE: Sometimes like I'm thinkin' in Spanish and then like I don' know, like  
2588 I'm thinkin' in Spanish and I think I'm talkin' in Spanish, but I'm not  
2589 and it's just all confused.  
2590



2591 I: Are there times you think you shouldn't talk in English?  
2592  
2593 ANGIE: Well, like it depends. Like if it's like grownups and I don't want them  
2594 to know what I'm talkin' about, I'll talk in Spanish if they don't know  
2595 Spanish and I'll talk in English if they don't know English. You know?  
2596  
2597 I: Have you ever been told um not to speak in Spanish at school?  
2598  
2599 ANGIE: Only by Ms. Jones.  
2600  
2601 I: Like when does she say it? What are y'all doin' when she says it?  
2602  
2603 ANGIE: She says like other students might think that we're talkin' about them.  
2604  
2605 I: Like does she say it in a nice way? Like she's lookin' out for y'all?  
2606 Like she's tryin' to keep the other kids from getting' mad at y'all?  
2607  
2608 ANGIE: No, it's like she's pretendin' that's the reason, but she just don't want  
2609 us to talk in Spanish, that's all. Like sometimes she screams, "Stop  
2610 talkin' Spanish!" But me and Estela, we like "That's our language!"  
2611 Then she starts yellin' back and I just get out the class.  
2612  
2613 I: Okay, um, let's pretend this new Mexican girl wants to ask you for  
2614 some advice. You're her friend. She trusts you. And she um comes  
2615 to you and she um says, "Should I join a gang?"  
2616  
2617 ANGIE: Like a *pandilla*, no?  
2618  
2619 I: Exactly.  
2620  
2621 ANGIE: Well, she can be in a gang. What's wrong with it?  
2622  
2623 I: You tell me if there's somethin' wrong with it?  
2624  
2625 ANGIE: It's her choice. She's a big girl. She can make her own decisions. It's  
2626 whatever she wants to do. If she wants in, I'll help her get in.  
2627  
2628 I: Okay, so what can you tell me 'bout bein' in a gang?  
2629  
2630 ANGIE: Why? You gonna tell somebody here 'bout it?  
2631  
2632 I: Angie, no one at this school is going to hear these tapes. The only  
2633 people who are going to read this are in Statesboro.  
2634  
2635 ANGIE: Where's that?  
2636

2637 I: Exactly. It's like three and a half hours from here. They don't know  
2638 who you are. ((Angie laughs)). Okay, let's just talk in general. Like  
2639 what do you know about gangs, just in general?  
2640  
2641 ANGIE: Well, I used to be in it, 'til like two months ago. Helpin' like with my  
2642 cousin, well, like sometimes when, like when this girl starts talkin'  
2643 'bout somethin' 'bout like parents, like we care 'bout our parents, it's  
2644 just that the person that we hate, everybody from the gang like goes  
2645 and beat that person. So that's how we were doin' it.  
2646  
2647 I: Anything else you wanna say?  
2648  
2649 ANGIE: Like a lot of the girls, they just be smokin' and drinkin', but I wasn'. I  
2650 didn't ever do that.  
2651  
2652 I: So do you think bein' in a gang is a cool thing to do?  
2653  
2654 ANGIE: Yeah, sometimes it is.  
2655  
2656 I: So what makes it cool?  
2657  
2658 ANGIE: 'Cause you with your friends all day, um you can be hangin' around,  
2659 and some people go to school, but they still be hangin' around after,  
2660 just do whatever.  
2661  
2662 I: So do you know anybody who's in a gang? Like don't say their name.  
2663 Just in general, do you know people who are in a gang?  
2664  
2665 ANGIE: Yeah, I know girls who are still in.  
2666  
2667 I: People at school?  
2668  
2669 ANGIE: Yeah, two people. Everybody else quit.  
2670  
2671 I: The gang?  
2672  
2673 ANGIE: No, school.  
2674  
2675 I: Oh. Do you think there are a lot of gangs at school?  
2676  
2677 ANGIE: No just like one or two.  
2678  
2679 I: The gang you were in? Was it girls and boys?  
2680  
2681 ANGIE: No just girls. Like we were just *Sur 13*. Like we were separate from  
2682 the boys.

2683  
2684 I: Did y'all ever do anything with the boys?  
2685  
2686 ANGIE: The other girls they did like for them to be in like the leader tells them  
2687 they have to do like you know have sex with with all the boys that are  
2688 like *Sur 13*. They had to do it with them. But it wasn't me 'cause my  
2689 cousin was the leader and like she didn' wanna have that for me, that  
2690 she cares for me, that I wasn't gonna lose mine for like somethin' like  
2691 that, like she did. So.  
2692  
2693 I: How does somebody show they're in a gang?  
2694  
2695 ANGIE: What?  
2696  
2697 I: Like how do they show everybody that they're in a gang?  
2698  
2699 ANGIE: Like they don' show it.  
2700  
2701 I: What do you mean?  
2702  
2703 ANGIE: Like the ones that show it, they fakin'. The real ones don' show  
2704 nothin'.  
2705  
2706 I: So like all the ones that are writin' tags on everything, they're fakin'?'  
2707  
2708 ANGIE: Well, it depends. Like some of them like if they have a nickname like  
2709 *flaca*, they be writin' that and it's real, but all these kids writin' *Sur 13*  
2710 in books and stuff, they fakin'. And like the real ones, they get a tattoo,  
2711 like this one. ((Shows me the tattoo on her hand.)) *Mi vida loca*.  
2712 Three dots. Look at the girls' hands. Then you know who be in. And  
2713 then like each of them they have a little cell phone and they and so  
2714 when this person press that button, all they all the gangs get connected  
2715 and then they just start beatin' that person.  
2716  
2717 I: Okay. Anything else?  
2718  
2719 ANGIE: Like some get tattoos like on they neck so they can cover it with they  
2720 hair when they want to and show it when they want to. Like it's  
2721 usually they gang nickname. Then they have like the dots I showed  
2722 you. Like they do the tattoos for you in the gang. Like one of the boys  
2723 do it.  
2724  
2725 I: Anything else you wanna tell me?  
2726  
2727 ANGIE: Mm-mm. I think I told you enough. ((laughs))  
2728

2729 I: Okay.  
2730  
2731 ANGIE: You promise you not gonna let other teachers listen to this?  
2732  
2733 I: I promise. The people that are gonna read this have no idea who you  
2734 really are. That's exactly why you picked out that fake name. Okay?  
2735  
2736 ANGIE: Okay.  
2737  
2738 I: Okay, we're all done.  
2739  
2740 ANGIE: No more?  
2741  
2742 I: Nope. That was it.  
2743  
2744 ANGIE: But I can still come talk to you even though we done, right?  
2745  
2746 I: Haven't you always?  
2747  
2748 ANGIE: Yeah.  
2749  
2750 I: So why would that stop now?  
2751  
2752 ANGIE: I don' know.  
2753  
2754 I: It's not. You know that you can come up here and talk to me or Ms.  
2755 Mathis anytime you want. Okay?  
2756  
2757 ANGIE: Okay.  
2758  
2759 I: Now get your stuff and head back to class.  
2760  
2761 ANGIE: Okay.  
2762  
2763 I: Bye sweetheart. I'll see you next week.

2764 **Estela: Interview #1**

2765

2766 I: Remember that survey you did in my class?

2767

2768 ESTELA: Yeah.

2769

2770 I: Well I'm gonna ask you some more questions like that, okay?

2771

2772 ESTELA: Okay.

2773

2774 I: Do you have any questions 'fore we get started?

2775

2776 ESTELA: No.

2777

2778 I: Okay, nobody at this school is gonna see any of this information at all  
2779 okay? Just teachers where I go to school okay?

2780

2781 ESTELA: Okay.

2782

2783 I: Do you have any questions? Are you ready to get started?

2784

2785 ESTELA: Yeah.

2786

2787 I: Okay. When did your parents come to the United States?

2788

2789 ESTELA: ((laughs)). Um, I don't know.

2790

2791 I: Okay. Did they come before you or at the same time you did?

2792

2793 ESTELA: Before me.

2794

2795 I: Okay so when did you come?

2796

2797 ESTELA: Um, I forgot.

2798

2799 I: Okay, when did you start school here?

2800

2801 ESTELA: Fourth grade.

2802

2803 I: Okay, so were you here a long time before that?

2804

2805 ESTELA: No like when I got here I started school.

2806

2807 I: Okay, so you've been here about five years. So that's when you came  
2808 to Georgia? Georgia was the first place you came in the United  
2809 States?

2810  
2811 ESTELA: Yeah.  
2812  
2813 I: But you don' know how long your parents were here before you came?  
2814  
2815 ESTELA: Uh-uh.  
2816  
2817 I: Okay. Um, okay, I want you to look at this list, and you can mark on  
2818 it, okay? And it says how do you describe yourself? Look at the  
2819 following list and choose the words you think best describe you. Pick  
2820 as many as you think best describe you. Okay so it's got like Russian,  
2821 Canadian, Mexican, Guatemalan, American, Salvadoran, Indian,  
2822 Black, White, Rich, Poor, Intelligent, Dumb, Popular, Cabezón, Cholo.  
2823  
2824 ESTELA: I can check any of 'em?  
2825  
2826 I: As many as you want. If there's a word to describe you that's not on  
2827 the list, you can write that in too.  
2828  
2829 ESTELA: ((talks as she's completing the list)). Well, Mexican for sure ((writes  
2830 "100% puro" next to Mexican)), dumb, cholo, other people call me  
2831 that, and poor. Okay, that's it.  
2832  
2833 I: You're done?  
2834  
2835 ESTELA: Yep.  
2836  
2837 I: Okay, um tell me 'bout your future.  
2838  
2839 ESTELA: I don' have one.  
2840  
2841 I: Why would you say that?  
2842  
2843 ESTELA: I don' know. Like I don wanna go to high school. I don wanna go to  
2844 college.  
2845  
2846 I: Why do you think that?  
2847  
2848 E: 'Cause I ain't gonna pass. I ain't gonna pass the CRCT. I'm gonna  
2849 stay here (in the eighth grade) another year. I'll quit before I stay here  
2850 another year.  
2851  
2852 I: Okay, why do you think you're not gonna pass?  
2853  
2854 ESTELA: 'Cause I got bad grades.  
2855

2856 I: Okay, what do you have bad grades in right now?  
2857  
2858 ESTELA: Language arts, science, math. I think that's it.  
2859  
2860 I: Okay, you don't think you can go to summer school and pass?  
2861  
2862 ESTELA: Maybe, but probably not.  
2863  
2864 I: Are you goin' to those extra help classes in afterschool for the CRCT?  
2865  
2866 ESTELA: What classes?  
2867  
2868 I: Like those classes that you can go to in PSP (the afterschool program).  
2869 They like help you work on language arts and math.  
2870  
2871 ESTELA: Do they cost money?  
2872  
2873 I: No, you just have to take that form home and have um your mom sign  
2874 it. Then you can stay and the bus'll take you home.  
2875  
2876 ESTELA: I don't wanna stay.  
2877  
2878 I: Why not?  
2879  
2880 ESTELA: I just don't want to.  
2881  
2882 I: Well, why don't you ask Ms. Cobb (pseudonym) for a form just in  
2883 case. Just let your mom see it. It's not every day after school, Estela.  
2884 Just a couple of days a week. Just some extra practice.  
2885  
2886 ESTELA: Who has it? Ms. Cobb? Is she the only teacher?  
2887  
2888 I: She's the only teacher with the forms, but she's like not the only  
2889 teacher teachin' afterschool.  
2890  
2891 ESTELA: You sure?  
2892  
2893 I: I'm sure. I saw the list of teachers that're doin' it. Just think 'bout it  
2894 okay?  
2895  
2896 ESTELA: Okay. Can I go back to class now?  
2897  
2898 I: Yeah, that's all for today. I'll come get you next week, probably  
2899 Tuesday or Wednesday, okay?  
2900  
2901 ESTELA: Okay. I need a pass. I don't want her yellin' at me.

2902  
2903 I: Here, I've got your pass right here, okay?  
2904  
2905 ESTELA: Okay. Are you sick?  
2906  
2907 I: A little. I've just got a cold.  
2908  
2909 ESTELA: Do we have a sub today?  
2910  
2911 I: You'd like that wouldn't you? (Both laugh.)  
2912  
2913 ESTELA: Nooooooooo (laughs).  
2914  
2915 I: No, I'll be here all day.  
2916  
2917 ESTELA: Are we gonna work on our projects today? (referring to Native  
2918 American projects)  
2919  
2920 I: Yeah. You'll have at least half the class to work on it.  
2921  
2922 ESTELA: Okay. I'll see ya.  
2923  
2924 I: Okay, see ya fourth block.  
2925  
2926  
2927  
2928  
2929  
2930  
2931  
2932  
2933  
2934  
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2936  
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2943  
2944  
2945  
2946  
2947



2948 **Estela: Interview #2**

2949

2950 I: Okay, you ready to do this again?

2951

2952 ESTELA: I guess.

2953

2954 I: You guess?

2955

2956 ESTELA: Yeah, is it questions like last time?

2957

2958 I: Yeah, we're just gonna keep talkin' 'bout school?

2959

2960 ESTELA: Yeah, that's fine.

2961

2962 I: Okay, you ready to get started?

2963

2964 ESTELA: Yeah.

2965

2966 I: Okay, here we go.

2967

2968 ESTELA: Okay.

2969

2970 I: Did you um go to school in Mexico?

2971

2972 ESTELA: Yeah.

2973

2974 I: Okay, what grades?

2975

2976 ESTELA: Kindergarten, um through third grade.

2977

2978 I: Okay, um, can you tell me what school was like in Mexico?

2979

2980 ESTELA: It was fun.

2981

2982 I: How was it fun?

2983

2984 ESTELA: 'Cause we get out early, and it was just better. Like the teachers were better, the classes were better. I don' know, just better.

2985

2986 I: Okay, how were your teachers better?

2987

2988 ESTELA: They spoke Spanish. That's it.

2989

2990 I: That's the only thing that made 'em better?

2991

2992

2993 ESTELA: Yeah, they were like mean to us, but they spoke Spanish so like I  
2994 understood them.  
2995  
2996 I: Okay, and what about your classes?  
2997  
2998 ESTELA: I don't remember how many I took, but I know I took math, science,  
2999 and social studies.  
3000  
3001 I: Okay. Um how have your school experiences um here in Georgia  
3002 been different than your school experiences in Mexico?  
3003  
3004 ESTELA: Mostly the language. In Mexico, everything was in Spanish.  
3005  
3006 I: Okay the language, is that all that's different?  
3007  
3008 ESTELA: And the questions?  
3009  
3010 I: Okay, what questions?  
3011  
3012 ESTELA: Like the questions they ask you in class? Like they were in Spanish  
3013 over there. I understand them. They were more easy than here.  
3014  
3015 I: Okay, what do you think makes it harder here. Just the language?  
3016  
3017 ESTELA: Like the language and the teachers.  
3018  
3019 I: Okay, how do teachers make it harder?  
3020  
3021 ESTELA: I don't know man like they don't like me. They make me feel dumb  
3022 even if I do try.  
3023  
3024 I: How do they do that?  
3025  
3026 ESTELA: Like Ms. Jones. She never even gives me a chance. I'm in trouble  
3027 when I walk in and sit down. She just yells at me all the time and puts  
3028 me out.  
3029  
3030 I: What do you do when she puts you out?  
3031  
3032 ESTELA: I just walk around. She says, "Get out! I don't care where you go, just  
3033 get out!"  
3034  
3035 I: So you just walk 'round the school?  
3036  
3037 ESTELA: Sometimes. Sometimes I go to ISS 'cause that's where I'm gonna end  
3038 up anyway.

3039  
3040 I: Okay, do you feel like talkin' a little 'bout the classes you have this  
3041 time?  
3042  
3043 ESTELA: Yeah, I have....like for connections or what?  
3044  
3045 I: You can tell me all your classes if you want.  
3046  
3047 ESTELA: Okay, I got first math, then language arts, lunch, then on A day, I got  
3048 soci...no I got science, on B day I got social studies, okay?  
3049  
3050 I: Okay, so what's your best class?  
3051  
3052 ESTELA: Of math or?  
3053  
3054 I: Anything. What class do you think you're doin' the best in?  
3055  
3056 ESTELA: Math, I guess.  
3057  
3058 I: Okay. Why do you say math?  
3059  
3060 ESTELA: 'Cause I had an F and now I think I have a C.  
3061  
3062 I: Well, that's good Estela. What do you think has made you improve?  
3063 What's made you do better?  
3064  
3065 ESTELA: My homework.  
3066  
3067 I: Have you been doin' it lately?  
3068  
3069 ESTELA: Yeah.  
3070  
3071 I: Okay, so what's your least favorite class?  
3072  
3073 ESTELA: Science.  
3074  
3075 I: Okay, science. Why?  
3076  
3077 ESTELA: I don' know.  
3078  
3079 I: Do you like what y'all are studying?  
3080  
3081 ESTELA: Yeah, I like what we're studying but I don' like the people in my class.  
3082 There's no Mexicans in there. Not my friends anywhere. I don' like  
3083 workin' on projects with the other people. I just wanna be by myself  
3084 and she (the teacher) won't let me.

3085  
3086 I: Um, okay, let's pretend here for a minute. If you could um be your  
3087 teacher, okay? If you were a teacher at this school, um,  
3088  
3089 ESTELA: Okay.  
3090  
3091 I: What kinds of things would you do to make kids like school?  
3092  
3093 ESTELA: Don't give that much homework, (laughs)  
3094  
3095 I: Okay, what else?  
3096  
3097 ESTELA: Um, don't do that much classwork, have longer to eat lunch.  
3098  
3099 I: Okay, so what're y'all gonna do during the day?  
3100  
3101 ESTELA: (laughs) Not that much.  
3102  
3103 I: Okay.  
3104  
3105 ESTELA: Like first do our classwork, and then have free time.  
3106  
3107 I: Okay and what're you gonna do durin' free time?  
3108  
3109 ESTELA: Well, they can talk and they can do some...I don' know...like they can  
3110 get on the computers and learn what they wanna learn about.  
3111  
3112 I: Okay. Um what do you think is the reason for going to school?  
3113  
3114 ESTELA: To get an education.  
3115  
3116 I: Okay, and what're you gonna do what that?  
3117  
3118 ESTELA: Uh, get a good work.  
3119  
3120 I: Okay, what do you think is a good job?  
3121  
3122 ESTELA: Like be a teacher. Be a doctor. I don' know what else.  
3123  
3124 I: Okay. Um what kinds of activities do you participate in after school?  
3125 Like are you in any sports or clubs or PSP?  
3126  
3127 ESTELA: None of them.  
3128  
3129 I: Why not?  
3130

3131 ESTELA: I don't like it. I don' like stayin' after school.  
3132  
3133 I: You used to stay after when you were in sixth grade?  
3134  
3135 ESTELA: Yeah, but that's when they had the separate group for the Mexicans  
3136 ((referring to the migrant education group that met)).  
3137  
3138 I: So now that that group's not here anymore, you don' stay?  
3139  
3140 ESTELA: No, I stay with black kids if I stay after school. I don' wanna stay  
3141 afterschool.  
3142  
3143 I: What's wrong with stayin' with black kids after school?  
3144  
3145 ESTELA: 'Cause they wanna start stuff. Like they wanna talk about wetbacks  
3146 and stuff. I ain't even goin'.  
3147  
3148 I: Do you ever tell the teachers when that's happenin'?  
3149  
3150 ESTELA: No. It's borin' after school. I just don' wanna go. I rather be at home  
3151 hangin' out with my friends. Or sometimes I rather just be by myself  
3152 and not go do all that stuff. Like since I moved from (my  
3153 neighborhood), I'm not close to any of my friends anymore so I just  
3154 stay by myself after school.  
3155  
3156 I: So you don't have any friends where you stay now?  
3157  
3158 ESTELA: Cookie, but I don' stay with her that much any more.  
3159  
3160 I: Okay. Do you have anything else you wanna say 'bout what we  
3161 talked about today?  
3162  
3163 ESTELA: No, no.  
3164  
3165 I: Okay, that's it for today. We'll only um do this like one more time,  
3166 okay? Just once more.  
3167  
3168 ESTELA: Okay. Same questions?  
3169  
3170 I: Same type of questions. You're doin' great so far. The last questions  
3171 will be okay too. Okay? Get your stuff and let me write you a pass  
3172 sweetheart. Okay?  
3173  
3174 ESTELA: I don' got my agenda.  
3175

3176 I: That's okay. I'll write it on a piece of paper. Your teacher can call me  
3177 if she needs to, okay.  
3178  
3179 ESTELA: If you say so. Ms. Jones gonna be callin' you 'cause she won't believe  
3180 me man.  
3181  
3182 I: And if she needs to call me, that's fine. Okay?  
3183  
3184 ESTELA: Will you just go 'head and walk me back. I don' even wanna start  
3185 with her today.  
3186  
3187 I: Sure, let me find my keys okay? (looks for keys). Okay, here they  
3188 are. Let's go.  
3189  
3190  
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3221

3222 **Estela: Interview #3**

3223 I: Okay, you ready to get started for the last time?  
3224  
3225 ESTELA: Yeah.  
3226  
3227 I: Okay, here we go. Do you think that this school thinks bein' Mexican  
3228 is important?  
3229  
3230 ESTELA: Nope.  
3231  
3232 I: Why?  
3233  
3234 ESTELA: 'Cause like there's a lot of Mexicans at this school now, and like, the  
3235 teachers don' like us.  
3236  
3237 I: Okay. Why do you say that?  
3238  
3239 ESTELA: They don' treat us like everybody else.  
3240  
3241 I: Okay. How do they not treat y'all like everybody else?  
3242  
3243 ESTELA: They just don'. They yell at us a lot.  
3244  
3245 I: Anything else?  
3246  
3247 ESTELA: Yeah. Like they don' stop the black kids from pickin' on us. Like this  
3248 one black boy in Ms. Jones' class, he keep messin' with me. And she  
3249 don' say nothin'. She don' say nothin' to him.  
3250  
3251 I: Okay, why do you think she never stops him?  
3252  
3253 ESTELA: 'Cause he's black and she's black.  
3254  
3255 I: Okay, do other kids pick on you?  
3256  
3257 ESTELA: One of 'em a lot. Like he calls me a wetback all the time. He makes  
3258 fun of us when we talk in Spanish at lunch.  
3259  
3260 I: Do you ever tell your teachers?  
3261  
3262 ESTELA: They ain' gonna do nothin' so I don' say nothin'.  
3263  
3264 I: Okay, do you think your teachers care 'bout you?  
3265  
3266 ESTELA: No.  
3267

3268 I: None of 'em.  
3269  
3270 ESTELA: Nope.  
3271  
3272 I: And why do you think that?  
3273  
3274 ESTELA: I don' know their feelins', but I know how they act, and they don' care  
3275 if I learn or not. They don' care if I come to school or not. I think  
3276 they wish I didn' never come to school.  
3277  
3278 I: Really?  
3279  
3280 ESTELA: Yeah.  
3281  
3282 I: Okay. Anything else you wanna say 'bout that before we move on?  
3283  
3284 ESTELA: No.  
3285  
3286 I: Okay, can you tell me uh can you describe to me what it's like to be a  
3287 Mexican?  
3288  
3289 ESTELA: Well, for me it's fun to be a Mexican 'cause I can speak two  
3290 languages.  
3291  
3292 I: Okay, anything else?  
3293  
3294 ESTELA: No, that's it.  
3295  
3296 I: Okay...  
3297  
3298 ESTELA: ...well, havin' friends that are Mexican. That's cool.  
3299  
3300 I: Okay. Do you have friends that aren't Mexican?  
3301  
3302 ESTELA: No.  
3303  
3304 I: Okay, how do you think it's different to be a Mexican than somebody  
3305 who's not?  
3306  
3307 ESTELA: Harder.  
3308  
3309 I: Okay, why is it harder to be a Mexican?  
3310  
3311 ESTELA: Like the black kids at school, they can do whatever they want with the



3312 black teachers. They don' yell at them like they yell at the Mexicans.  
3313 The black kids get to be in the good classes and we're in the ones for  
3314 dumb kids.  
3315  
3316 I: What classes are you in that are for dumb kids?  
3317  
3318 ESTELA: ELT, ESOL.  
3319  
3320 I: Why do you think that?  
3321  
3322 ESTELA: For ELT, I didn' get one of those papers where you get to pick your  
3323 class. I have to take math, I don't get a choice. And ESOL, like when  
3324 you're finally smart enough, they let you out.  
3325  
3326 I: Anything else?  
3327  
3328 ESTELA: The black kids don' get picked on like the Mexicans.  
3329  
3330 I: Why do you say that?  
3331  
3332 ESTELA: 'Cause the teachers don' let it happen. Like the black kids always  
3333 sayin' stuff to us, you know? Like they always say wetback or  
3334 somethin' like that to us.  
3335  
3336 I: Okay. Let's say a new Mexican student came to your school. What  
3337 um advice would you give her 'bout bein' a successful student here?  
3338  
3339 ESTELA: I don' know. I'm not good.  
3340  
3341 I: Do you think that?  
3342  
3343 ESTELA: My teachers tell me that.  
3344  
3345 I: But do *you* think that?  
3346  
3347 ESTELA: Sometimes.  
3348  
3349 I: But not all the time?  
3350  
3351 ESTELA: No.  
3352  
3353 I: Okay, so I'm sure you have some advice to give to the new girl.  
3354  
3355 ESTELA: Learn English. And I don' know. I think that's the big thing.  
3356

3357 I: Nothin' else?  
3358  
3359 ESTELA: No, if she does that, she's fine.  
3360  
3361 I: Okay. Do you think of yourself as a successful student?  
3362  
3363 ESTELA: Yeah, lately. Like I do my work, well not all my work, but alotta my  
3364 work, I been doin' it lately. And I been tryin' to speak more in two  
3365 language, not just one.  
3366  
3367 I: Okay. Alright, um have any of your friends or brothers or sisters  
3368 dropped outta school?  
3369  
3370 ESTELA: Yeah, my friends.  
3371  
3372 I: And what's happened to them?  
3373  
3374 ESTELA: Some of them went back to Mexico, some of them went to the *pollería*  
3375 (poultry processing plant).  
3376  
3377 I: Okay. Um, what do you think about speakin' in English?  
3378  
3379 ESTELA: Speakin' in English?  
3380  
3381 I: Like are there ever times you shouldn't be speakin' in English?  
3382  
3383 ESTELA: No. Well, yeah, with my mom?  
3384  
3385 I: Why?  
3386  
3387 ESTELA: 'Cause she don' talk English.  
3388  
3389 I: So you don' speak English 'round her at all?  
3390  
3391 ESTELA: When my friends come over so we can talk and she don' know what  
3392 we're sayin'.  
3393  
3394 I: Okay, um have you ever been told not to speak Spanish at school?  
3395  
3396 ESTELA: Yeah, by teachers. And like kids in class.  
3397  
3398 I: Okay. Why do you think they said that?  
3399  
3400 ESTELA: 'Cause they think we talkin' 'bout them? I guess. I don' know why  
3401 they say that to us.  
3402

3403 I: Okay.  
3404  
3405 ESTELA: Like Ms. Jones. ((in a mocking voice)) Students, we don't speak  
3406 Spanish in here. This is English class. You're supposed to be learning  
3407 English. If you want to speak Spanish, go to a Spanish class. This is  
3408 an English class.  
3409  
3410 I: So you've heard that a lot?  
3411  
3412 ESTELA: Like every day.  
3413  
3414 I: Okay.  
3415  
3416 ESTELA: That's my language. She can't take that away like that. That's what I  
3417 say to her. That's my language. I don't care if you don't like it. That's  
3418 my language.  
3419  
3420 I: And what does she say?  
3421  
3422 ESTELA: She says that's why she don't care 'bout me, 'cause I don't care 'bout  
3423 myself. So I talk Spanish in there now just to make her mad.  
3424  
3425 I: Okay. Anything else you wanna say 'bout that?  
3426  
3427 ESTELA: Nope.  
3428  
3429 I: Okay, let's go on to the next question. Okay? Let's say a new  
3430 Mexican girl came up to you and wanted to ask your advice about  
3431 whether she should join a gang. What would you tell her?  
3432  
3433 ESTELA: ((in a sarcastic voice)). No, no, no, you should never join a gang.  
3434  
3435 I: Okay, is that what you really think?  
3436  
3437 ESTELA: No.  
3438  
3439 I: So what do you really think?  
3440  
3441 ESTELA: I think it's her choice. If she wants to be in one, she'll be in one. If  
3442 not, then no.  
3443  
3444 I: Okay. Anything else.  
3445  
3446 ESTELA: Well, she might join to make friends.  
3447

3448 I: Okay, what else?  
3449  
3450 ESTELA: Well, they would protect her. If she new, then sometime people  
3451 wanna beat her up 'cause she new. *La pandilla* (the gang) don't let  
3452 that happen. Like if she wanna smoke weed and do drugs, she should  
3453 be in it.  
3454  
3455 I: Okay, what else would you say 'bout bein' in a gang?  
3456  
3457 ESTELA: Like there's girls in this school in it.  
3458  
3459 I: Okay. Is bein' in a gang a cool thing to do?  
3460  
3461 ESTELA: Depends.  
3462  
3463 I: On what?  
3464  
3465 ESTELA: If you wanna be with them or not.  
3466  
3467 I: Okay. How does somebody show they're in a gang? Like how do  
3468 they let other people know they're in a gang?  
3469  
3470 ESTELA: Dress like it, have tattoos, and wear, and um, um bring drugs to school.  
3471 Like they wear they hair a certain way and they wear Dickies. Like all  
3472 one color.  
3473  
3474 I: Anything else you wanna say?  
3475  
3476 ESTELA: Nope. Are we done?  
3477  
3478 I: Yeah.  
3479  
3480 ESTELA: When am I comin' back?  
3481  
3482 I: That was it, honey. I won't be askin' you any more questions. But I  
3483 will come back once I get this all typed up, and um, you and I are  
3484 gonna go over to make sure it's exactly what you said. Okay?  
3485  
3486 ESTELA: Okay.  
3487  
3488 I: Lemme write you a pass.  
3489  
3490 ESTELA: I don' need one. I got PE.  
3491  
3492 I: Well, take one just in case. Okay?  
3493

3494 ESTELA: Okay. Bye Ms. Bush.  
3495  
3496 I: Bye honey. See you tomorrow.  
3497  
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3540 **Alexandra: Interview #1**

3541 I: Alright. You ready to get started?

3542

3543 ALEX: Yes.

3544

3545 I: Okay, the first things I'm gonna ask you are just some um  
3546 background things about you, okay? Nobody's gonna see this at  
3547 school, just me and my teachers. Okay? They don't like know who  
3548 your parents are or anything like that, okay?

3549

3550 ALEX: Okay.

3551

3552 I: And then, like I say, you're gonna pick which name you want to be in  
3553 my paper. Okay? I'll let you see everything before I turn it into my  
3554 teachers at Georgia Southern. That way you can see that your name's  
3555 not in it anywhere. If there's something you want taken out, we'll take  
3556 it out. Okay?

3557

3558 ALEX: 'Kay.

3559

3560 I: Alright, so the first question, is when did your parents come to the  
3561 United States?

3562

3563 ALEX: Like my dad came about uh six years ago.

3564

3565 I: Uh-huh.

3566

3567 ALEX: And my mom, my dad, and me came about, well I mean, my mom, my  
3568 brother, and me came like four years ago.

3569

3570 I: Okay. And um so why did your dad come here first?

3571

3572 ALEX: He got an um apartment, he got a car, and he um, um, he called us and  
3573 told us he was ready for us to go, to come here.

3574

3575 I: Okay. Thanks for tellin' me that. You ready to move on?

3576

3577 ALEX: Yeah.

3578

3579 I: Okay, I just want you to look at this little list right here. Grab that pen  
3580 right there. I just want you to look at the list and look at the words.  
3581 Again, nobody's gonna see this but me. It just says, How do you  
3582 describe yourself? Look at this list and choose the words you think  
3583 best describe you. Pick as many as best describe you...

3584

3585 ALEX: So I can pick more than one?

3586  
3587 I: Sure. And if you don't see a word that describes you, you can write  
3588 down your own words on the list.  
3589  
3590 ALEX: Check it?  
3591  
3592 I: It's however you wanna do it. You can check it, circle it, whatever. I  
3593 just need to be able to tell what you chose. But it's however you  
3594 wanna do it.  
3595  
3596 ALEX: Okay. ((pause while K fills out paper)). Okay, done.  
3597  
3598 I: Okay, I see that you marked Mexican and intelligent. You also put a  
3599 smiley face by the word *cabezón*. Why did you choose those?  
3600  
3601 ALEX: 'Cause I'm from Mexico and I make good grades, most of the time. I  
3602 put a little happy face 'cause the other kids call me *cabezón*.  
3603  
3604 I: Thanks. You ready to keep goin'?'  
3605  
3606 ALEX: Yeah.  
3607  
3608 I: 'Kay. Tell me about your future. What's it gonna be like?  
3609  
3610 ALEX: Well, like, I'll finish high school. I'll go to like...I was thinkin' I  
3611 wanna go to like to Oxford [Oxford at Emory]. Like two of my  
3612 mom's sisters went over there to work and they said it's like really  
3613 nice. One of the girls I know from UGA she went there for like a little  
3614 while. Like there you can like study really cool stuff. Like if you  
3615 wanna be a lawyer, you can like go there and you take the classes that  
3616 get you ready for law school, you know? Or like kind of all that stuff,  
3617 you know?  
3618  
3619 I: That sounds cool.  
3620  
3621 ALEX: I think about my family too. Like I don' know if I wanna get married,  
3622 that's too far away, but I think about bein' far away from my mom and  
3623 dad. I want them to stay with me. They always help me.  
3624  
3625 I: How do they help you?  
3626  
3627 ALEX: Like with school stuff. Like they always try to help. Like my mom  
3628 will call you when I'm havin' trouble in math so you can get me extra  
3629 help. I go to work with my mom at night and some of those girls from  
3630 UGA help me with my homework. ((Called for check out))

3631 **Alexandra: Interview #2**

3632

3633 I: Okay, you ready to get started?

3634

3635 ALEX: Yeah.

3636

3637 I: It's gonna be like last time with me just askin' you some questions  
3638 'bout school stuff, okay?

3639

3640 ALEX: Yeah.

3641

3642 I: Okay, here we go.

3643

3644 ALEX: Okay.

3645

3646 I: Did you go to school at all in your home country?

3647

3648 ALEX: Yeah.

3649

3650 I: How long?

3651 ALEX: I went to kindergarten and the one uh what's the other one called?

3652 You know like there's two grades for little kids, right? And that other  
3653 one. And then first grade, second grade, third grade, that's all the  
3654 grades I went to.

3655

3656 I: And then you came here?

3657

3658 ALEX: Yeah.

3659

3660 I: Okay. Um, can you tell me what school was like in Mexico?

3661

3662 ALEX: It was kinda fun 'cause like, like, like over there you used to wear  
3663 uniforms and I got used to wearing uniforms so like I started liking  
3664 uniforms and like, I uh had a lot of friends there and like, like the  
3665 teachers you understood like what they were speaking about because  
3666 like they speak the language that you speak and like they explained the  
3667 stuff better because of like the language and like here it's like they say  
3668 stuff that you don't understand. Like you and Ms. Mathis are like my  
3669 only teachers that speak Spanish, you know? Probably for other  
3670 people [other students in her regular education classes], they probably  
3671 understand it, 'cause she explains it to them but like for for me like I  
3672 don't understand it 'cause like some words I just don' know.

3673

3674 I: Okay. Um, so if you had to say exactly how you think school here is  
3675 different from school there, how would you describe that to me?

3676



3677 ALEX: Like how?  
3678  
3679 I: Like you've sorta already done it, but I'd like to know a little more  
3680 about how your school day here is different than when you were in  
3681 Mexico.  
3682  
3683 ALEX: Oh, like over there we finished earlier. I didn't go to school for the  
3684 whole like day. Like I finished about one o'clock. The lunch was  
3685 like, like it was no cafeteria, it was like there was like you know a  
3686 small little yard, like two yards for different grades, and like there  
3687 were some moms from like students there who would take food and  
3688 you would just like buy food yourself at like one dollar, two dollars.  
3689  
3690 I: Oh.  
3691  
3692 ALEX: I liked it better. You didn' have to plug in numbers and everything  
3693 ((referring to the code that students must type in when receiving their  
3694 lunch)).  
3695  
3696 I: What about your classes? How were they different?  
3697  
3698 ALEX: Over there, you used to take your bookbags. Like you can take your  
3699 bookbags anywhere. Um the boards they're chalkboards, not  
3700 whiteboards like here. And the desks were like you know like this  
3701 kind of desks but lower and instead of chairs, we had like lower, like  
3702 wood, like how you say that, like you know like the ones that are like  
3703 on this side, like the desk is on the back of the chair of the person in  
3704 front of you, like that. Like a bench.  
3705  
3706 I: Okay, well tell me a little bit about your classes here.  
3707  
3708 ALEX: Huh?  
3709  
3710 I: Why don't you just tell me a little bit about your classes here, this  
3711 year, in seventh grade?  
3712  
3713 ALEX: Like anything about them?  
3714  
3715 I: Sure.  
3716  
3717 ALEX: Well, like ELT is like fun 'cause like we say announcements and we  
3718 take turns saying the announcements and like when I'm not on the  
3719 announcements there's still something to do like run the equipment  
3720 you know like when the person goes to the other person? Like  
3721 mixing? That's me.  
3722

3723 I: Really? I didn't know that you was doin' that. I thought it was Mr.  
3724 Davis ((pseudonym)).  
3725

3726 ALEX: Yeah. Well like he teached us all that. Like how to move that stuff,  
3727 and then we learned how, and and you know that now we're doin' it  
3728 live. One time we used to record it like so when we messed up and  
3729 stuff we could go back and fix it before y'all saw it, but now we're  
3730 good enough that we just do it live.  
3731

3732 I: Wow! So you like bein' in that class?  
3733

3734 ALEX: Yeah, it's fun. Like there's only four of us in there. One day though it  
3735 was just me and John ((pseudonym)) in there so I had to do everything,  
3736 like I did the mixing and everything all by myself. Like you know like  
3737 when the character builder comes up and and the word of the day, I  
3738 had to type all that and then mix it and then turn the volumes down  
3739 and up and then and fix the cameras and then it went good though.  
3740

3741 I: So that's ELT? Y'all are busy in there. So what about your other  
3742 classes?  
3743

3744 ALEX: Connections I had P.E., but now I have consumer science and I still  
3745 have ESOL. Consumer science we haven't talked about a lot of like  
3746 anything, but because I wasn't here on Thursday, but but like when we  
3747 went yesterday we read about how food like how it's important about  
3748 cultures and that different people eat different stuff and ESOL is fun  
3749 'cause like I have Ms. Fortson ((language arts teacher-pseudonym))  
3750 and like when I don't understand stuff in her class, I can go to ESOL  
3751 and tell Ms. Mathis and like she can help us 'cause probably she can  
3752 help us better because like she's ESOL.  
3753

3754 I: So what's your favorite class?  
3755

3756 ALEX: Your class ((both laugh)).  
3757

3758 I: No, now you don't have to say that. You know that.  
3759

3760 ALEX: No, I'm for real. It's fun in here.  
3761

3762 I: What makes it fun?  
3763

3764 ALEX: 'Cause like there's some of my friends in here and and like in Mr.  
3765 Bork's ((social studies teacher—pseudonym)) it's harder, like he  
3766 doesn't explain them anything. 'Cause like they just read the book in  
3767 there. Like the Coach Book? ((referring to CRCT test preparation  
3768 materials)) That's all they do in there. He doesn't explain it like clearly

3769 in there. Like kids from his class come up to me for me to explain  
3770 what they're supposed to learn. Like in this class, we stay a long time  
3771 on something so that everybody gets it, like we don't just stay a week  
3772 on one thing and then go to the next thing like if we don't understand  
3773 it.  
3774  
3775 I: Okay, if you could be your teacher, what kinds of things would you do  
3776 to make you like school?  
3777  
3778 ALEX: I would teach like I like a lot of a lot of arts and crafts and I like um I  
3779 like to be on the computer and like do a website and like teach students  
3780 like teach students how to like to learn like how to do like a myspace  
3781 or like do their own website or fix their computers or stuff like that.  
3782 Like I'd want to use computers all of the time.  
3783  
3784 I: Okay, what do you think is the reason for going to school?  
3785  
3786 ALEX: So we can learn and we can have a better future.  
3787  
3788 I: What does a "better future" mean to you?  
3789  
3790 ALEX: Like a good job. Like I can make money.  
3791  
3792 I: Okay, and what types of activities do you participate in at school?  
3793  
3794 ALEX: Um, I used to like um I was in PSP ((federally-funded after-school  
3795 program)) but I couldn't do it anymore 'cause like sometimes I had to  
3796 go early at home in the busses so I talked to Ms. Conley ((after-school  
3797 director—pseudonym)) and she was like okay, take me out and put a  
3798 student in. I wanted to sign up for tutoring ((free supplemental  
3799 tutoring required by needs improvement status and No Child Left  
3800 Behind)) but they didn't accept me 'cause they said that I passed the  
3801 CRCT last year and that I was doin' good so I didn't needed help on  
3802 anything. But now I want to try out for soccer. Um I still have to get  
3803 like like um what's it called? Go to the doctor?  
3804  
3805 I: A physical?  
3806  
3807 ALEX: Yeah, a physical. I got my form but I just gotta go to the doctor and get  
3808 him to fill out that form so I can try out for the soccer team.  
3809  
3810 I: Do you know position you wanna play?  
3811  
3812 ALEX: I don't care. I just wanna play 'cause like I asked my brother what  
3813 would be a good position to play and he said like the ones that play  
3814 better like the ones that cover like the goal and like all that stuff, that's

3815 better. And tryouts are like next month. Like I went and signed up on  
3816 that poster, you know what I'm talking about?  
3817  
3818 I: The one by the cafeteria?  
3819  
3820 ALEX: Yeah, I signed up there to say I want to try out. Like a lot of girls are  
3821 signing up. Can I ask you a question?  
3822  
3823 I: Sure.  
3824  
3825 ALEX: Do they look at your grades for making the team?  
3826  
3827 I: Yeah.  
3828  
3829 ALEX: Good. 'Cause I'm passing everything.  
3830  
3831 I: You seem surprised by that.  
3832  
3833 ALEX: Yeah, 'cause like I missed a day 'cause like they called me to the  
3834 counselors' office and I come back and then like I asked my math  
3835 teacher and she's about to come to me but the problem is that students  
3836 come to her and she has to go over there and like them sometimes at  
3837 the end of class she comes and comes to me and explains it to me,  
3838 she's like okay tomorrow like I'll give you some time to finish that  
3839 finish all that work and like while other people are doin' other stuff but  
3840 yeah I'm like catching up.  
3841  
3842 I: Do you feel better about math then?  
3843  
3844 ALEX: Yeah. Lots better.  
3845  
3846 I: Okay...  
3847  
3848 ALEX: ...well you know I had a 65?  
3849  
3850 I: Yeah.  
3851  
3852 ALEX: Well I had an 81 on my report card. That's good, right?  
3853  
3854 I: Yes, that's good. I know you've been working really hard to pull up  
3855 your grade in there.  
3856  
3857 ALEX: And my mom, she said that if I wanted like um to get a laptop then  
3858 like I have to get like at least a ninety in all of my classes. And I'm  
3859 like I can do that. Don't you think?  
3860

3861 I: You already have a grade higher than ninety in my class right now and  
3862 y'all haven't even finished your projects yet. So yeah, I think you can  
3863 do it.  
3864  
3865 ALEX: Are we done?  
3866  
3867 I: Yep, that's it. I'll come get you soon so we can finish up the last part,  
3868 okay?  
3869  
3870 ALEX: Okay. Can you write me a pass?  
3871  
3872 I: Yeah, I've got one over here. Okay, here you go. I'll see you this  
3873 afternoon.  
3874  
3875 ALEX: Okay. Bye.  
3876  
3877 I: Bye honey.  
3878  
3879  
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3906

3907 **Alexandra: Interview #3**

3908 I: Are you ready to finish up the last part of our interview?  
3909  
3910 ALEX: Yeah. Is it going to take a long time?  
3911  
3912 I: Not too long. Are you ready to get started?  
3913  
3914 ALEX: Yeah.  
3915  
3916 I: Okay, do you think that this school thinks that being Mexican is  
3917 important?  
3918  
3919 ALEX: Yeah, I think like Athens does because like if there weren't any  
3920 Mexicans or Hispanics around here there would be a lot of things that  
3921 wouldn't get done. Like I'm proud to be from Mexico. I think it's  
3922 important. I think our school, well parts of our school thinks it's  
3923 important.  
3924  
3925 I: How do they show that?  
3926  
3927 ALEX: Like we have lots of books in the library that are in Spanish and  
3928 English. And we have a lot better ESOL classes here than we had at  
3929 the elementary school. I think that shows that we're important. Like, I  
3930 think, like I think our ESOL teachers know it's hard to be Mexican  
3931 here and they try to make us feel proud that we're from Mexico.  
3932  
3933 I: Do you think your teachers care about you?  
3934  
3935 ALEX: Yeah, like 'cause they like like 'cause they like give you work for you  
3936 to learn stuff so you'll be smart. Like they don't want you to be dumb.  
3937 And even though like you don't do it, like they still be like they still  
3938 care like you really pass the work or not, like they want you to  
3939 understand it. Like even if you get a bad grade, some teachers make  
3940 sure that you still learn it that you don't just give up because you have  
3941 a bad grade.  
3942  
3943 I: Okay, good. Can you tell me what it's like to be a Mexican student at  
3944 this school?  
3945  
3946 ALEX: Well, sometimes good, sometimes bad. It's good like when you're  
3947 like with your friends. Like you have everything in common, like they  
3948 know you. They know what you've been through like they know what  
3949 it's like to leave your country and come here. And then sometimes it's  
3950 like bad because other kids teases you and call you wetback and act  
3951 like you shouldn't be here, like they're the only ones who should be  
3952 here, not you. Just because you speak Spanish, doesn't mean you

3953 don't have papers. Even if you don't have papers, why can't you be  
3954 here? If you want to work or go to school, you should be allowed to  
3955 come here. Like I don't know, sometimes it's hard to be a Mexican  
3956 here. Like the other day, some boy told me that like I was lucky I  
3957 didn't look like a Mexican, but I didn't know what it meant. He told  
3958 me I was pretty 'cause I didn't look like a Mexican. He said that  
3959 Mexicans are dirty. I told him I was a Mexican and he told me no I  
3960 wasn't because I wasn't dirty.  
3961  
3962 I: Were your friends with you?  
3963  
3964 ALEX: Yeah, Victoria. She told him to shut up and leave us alone. We went  
3965 to the teacher and asked to move. She said okay. We never cause  
3966 trouble so she like said okay like as soon as we asked her. He hasn't  
3967 picked on me again since that.  
3968  
3969 I: Wow! How did that make you feel?  
3970  
3971 ALEX: Like mad. Like who does he think he is just because he is born here. I  
3972 don't tell him he's ugly because he's from Georgia. I don't say  
3973 anything to him at all. Everybody thinks that they can say whatever  
3974 they want to us, like we don't have feelings or something. I like don't  
3975 get people sometimes.  
3976  
3977 I: Sometimes people can be really mean. You did the right thing by  
3978 walking away.  
3979  
3980 ALEX: I hope so. I sorta wish I'd hit him.  
3981  
3982 I: Well, then you would've gotten like suspended and that wouldn't have  
3983 been fabulous now would it?  
3984  
3985 ALEX: No, but I just don't want him to think he can talk to like Mexicans like  
3986 that. Like what makes him think that's okay? I don't um, um I don't  
3987 think it's okay, like you shouldn't be mean to people, it doesn't matter  
3988 where they're from. It's just stupid. Like that stuff we did in social  
3989 studies...who were those people? You know who I'm talkin' about.  
3990 Like we just studied them, the people in the Middle East.....um, um,  
3991 like it starts with a P.  
3992  
3993 I: Palestinians?  
3994  
3995 ALEX: Yeah, like the Palestinians and the Jewish people. Like I know they  
3996 don't like each other, but it's not okay to kill little kids just because  
3997 you don't like each other. Like sometimes I just like um think about  
3998 how we can get along with everybody, like we wouldn't have to fight

3999 Iraq anymore because we could like work like um like do things  
4000 together to fix things without fighting.  
4001  
4002 I: Do you think that's possible?  
4003  
4004 ALEX: I don't know. Like it seems like all we talk about in this class [social  
4005 studies] is like wars and people not getting along and people takin'  
4006 stuff from like other people. Like when we talked about the Europeans  
4007 carvin' up Africa just 'cause they wanted what the Africans had. It's  
4008 not fair. I know that's a lot worse than like that boy pickin' on me, but  
4009 it all goes back to people not being nice to each other. Like it all goes  
4010 to like our character word this week. You know what I'm talkin'  
4011 about? Like the character builder on the announcements? Like two  
4012 weeks ago, the word was "respect." Like if we all had respect for each  
4013 other, I think things would just have to like be a lot like better. Like  
4014 not so much fighting, like at school or anywhere.  
4015  
4016 I: That's a good point. You should bring up stuff like that um like when  
4017 we're havin' discussions in here. It's good for y'all to learn to listen to  
4018 each other's points of view.  
4019  
4020 ALEX: Yeah, I've been doin' better about talkin' in class, like when I'm  
4021 supposed to. ((laughs)).  
4022  
4023 I: Is there any other way you would describe bein' Mexican?  
4024  
4025 ALEX: Well, like your food is different. Like I like American food, but I like  
4026 Mexican food too, you know? And like I think it's cool that we can  
4027 like talk in two different languages, like you can too, even though  
4028 you're not Mexican, but it's just different. Most white people only  
4029 like speak English so that's who I'm talkin' about.  
4030  
4031 I: Well like how do you think it's different from being someone who's  
4032 not Mexican?  
4033  
4034 ALEX: Well, like I think it's easier to not be Mexican. Like people don't pick  
4035 on you so much. Like people, like the kids in our class think it's cool  
4036 that you speak Spanish 'cause like you're white and you speak  
4037 Spanish, but like nobody thinks it's cool that I'm a Mexican and I  
4038 speak English, you know? Like it's just a lot easier if you're from  
4039 here, like nothing's as hard.  
4040  
4041 I: Okay, let's say a new Mexican student came to our school. What  
4042 advice would you give her about being a successful student here?  
4043  
4044 ALEX: To pay attention in class even though she doesn't know the language.



4045 Like it's important for the teachers to know that you care like you care  
4046 about gettin' an education. Like you need to be respectful of teachers  
4047 and other kids at school. Like you should be nice and try to like be  
4048 nice to everybody. And I think the most important thing is to make a  
4049 lot of friends so that those friends can help you a lot like when you  
4050 need help. Like when you first get here you need like A LOT of help,  
4051 so if you like make a lot of friends, they can help you.  
4052  
4053 I: I see. Do you think of yourself as a successful student?  
4054  
4055 ALEX: ((3 second pause)). Probably 'cause my grades are going up and like  
4056 even when I was failing Ms. Williams' [pseudonym] math class, like I  
4057 didn't give up. I went and got extra help, and my mom called you  
4058 about getting tutoring help after school, and like I kept trying, like I  
4059 didn't give up.  
4060  
4061 I: Good. Have any of your friends or brothers or sisters dropped out of  
4062 school?  
4063  
4064 ALEX: Uh, no. I don't know any people that have dropped out.  
4065  
4066 I: Okay, um, what do you think about speaking in English?  
4067  
4068 ALEX: Like um probably I need to know a little bit more than I know now just  
4069 so I can get better grades. 'Cause like I still have trouble saying words  
4070 like long words, like I need more practice.  
4071  
4072 I: Um, are there times you think that you should not speak in English?  
4073  
4074 ALEX: Um, no.  
4075  
4076 I: Have you ever been told not to speak Spanish at school?  
4077  
4078 ALEX: Yeah, sometimes teachers tell us that and sometimes students. Like  
4079 they think it's bad to speak in Spanish like they think we're talkin'  
4080 about them or something.  
4081  
4082 I: Okay, a new Mexican student comes up to you and asks your advice  
4083 about something. She wants to know whether or not she should join a  
4084 gang. What advice would you give her?  
4085  
4086 ALEX: Not to go in it 'cause like once you go in it, like you can't get out of it.  
4087 Like if you wanna drop out of it, they won't let you.  
4088  
4089 I: What else do you know about gangs?  
4090

4091 ALEX: Just like I don't wanna be in one. Like at school, they wanna sell  
4092 drugs and fight people and then when they get to high school, they  
4093 wanna like kill people and like do drive-bys and stuff like that stuff  
4094 over at Garnett Ridge. Like you have to know how to fight if you  
4095 wanna be in the gang.  
4096  
4097 I: Okay, um, is being in a gang a cool thing to do?  
4098  
4099 ALEX: Uh no, not for me, but for some people. Like they wanna be in it.  
4100  
4101 I: Do you know anyone who's in a gang? Not like tell me someone's  
4102 name but just do you know kids who are in a gang at school?  
4103  
4104 ALEX: Yeah. Like here at school. Like girls and boys.  
4105  
4106 I: Okay, so how does someone show they're in a gang?  
4107  
4108 ALEX: Like the way they dress and like how they speak. Like for the girls,  
4109 like they wear the bandannas on their head and like they wear like a lot  
4110 of makeup on, like really dark, dark makeup.  
4111  
4112 I: And you said they speak a certain way. How is that?  
4113  
4114 ALEX: Like they speak like Spanglish, and like they make up words that only  
4115 people in the gang know what they mean.  
4116  
4117 I: Is there anything else?  
4118  
4119 ALEX: No, that's it.  
4120  
4121 I: Okay, that's it. You're all done.  
4122  
4123 ALEX: That's it? That was the last one?  
4124  
4125 I: Yep, that's it. Thanks for answerin' all my questions.  
4126  
4127 ALEX: I liked it.  
4128  
4129 I: I'm glad. Here let me write you a pass back to class, okay?  
4130  
4131 ALEX: Okay.  
4132  
4133 I: Thanks, Alexandra. I really appreciate it.  
4134  
4135 ALEX: Bye.  
4136

4137 **Itzel: Interview #1**

4138

4139 I: Okay, are you ready to get started?

4140

4141 ITZEL: Mm-hmm.

4142

4143 I: I'm gonna set this a little closer to you ((referring to the iPod)) if that's  
4144 okay.

4145

4146 ITZEL: Okay.

4147

4148 I: Alright. Is that alright?

4149

4150 ITZEL: Mm-hmm.

4151

4152 I: Is it too close?

4153

4154 ITZEL: Can I put it behind the book? I don't wanna see it.

4155

4156 I: Sure, that's fine. ((Student moves the iPod behind a stack of atlases  
4157 that are on the table.)) Are you good with that?

4158

4159 ITZEL: Yeah.

4160

4161 I: Now, are you ready to get started?

4162

4163 ITZEL: No. ((laughs))

4164

4165 I: You better be ((both laugh)).

4166

4167 ITZEL: No, I'm ready. [laughs]

4168

4169 I: Ok, here we go. I can ask these questions in either English or Spanish,  
4170 ¿tienes una preferencia? (Do you have a preference?)

4171

4172 ITZEL: *A mí no me importa.* (It doesn't matter to me.)

4173

4174 I: It doesn't matter to me either. It's whatever you want.

4175

4176 ITZEL: We'll start in English? Okay? Then if I want, we can switch?

4177

4178 I: Whatever you want.

4179

4180 ITZEL: Okay, English first.

4181

4182 I: Okay, here we go. Alright, when did your parents come to the United

4183 States?  
4184  
4185 ITZEL: Like two or three years ago.  
4186  
4187 I: And when did you come to the United States?  
4188  
4189 ITZEL: The same time.  
4190  
4191 I: The same time. Your dad didn't come first?  
4192  
4193 ITZEL: No. We all came together.  
4194  
4195 I: Who?  
4196  
4197 ITZEL: Me, my brother, my dad, and my mom.  
4198  
4199 I: Okay. Um, when did you come to Georgia?  
4200  
4201 ITZEL: Um, the same time I told you before. When I came to the United  
4202 States.  
4203  
4204 I: So when you came to the United States, you came to Georgia?  
4205  
4206 ITZEL: Yes.  
4207  
4208 I: Do you remember what grade that was?  
4209  
4210 ITZEL: Fifth grade.  
4211  
4212 I: Did you go anywhere else in the United States before you came to  
4213 Georgia?  
4214  
4215 ITZEL: Texas.  
4216  
4217 I: Texas. And that's it?  
4218  
4219 ITZEL: No.  
4220  
4221 I: Where else did you go?  
4222  
4223 ITZEL: Somewhere else. I don't know. I just passed a little time there. I  
4224 didn't go to school there.  
4225  
4226 I: Did you go to school in um Texas?  
4227  
4228 ITZEL: No, but I was there for a little while.

4229  
4230 I: Okay, anything else you want to say about anything we've talked  
4231 about.  
4232  
4233 ITZEL: No, um, I don't think so.  
4234  
4235 I: You ready to keep goin'?  
4236  
4237 ITZEL: Yeah.  
4238  
4239 I: I just want you to look at this list right here that I have typed out.  
4240 Okay, um, I just want you to look at it and tell me the words that you  
4241 think best describe you.  
4242  
4243 ITZEL: Like, circle it?  
4244  
4245 I: That's fine. Underline it, highlight it, whatever you wanna do.  
4246 ((Pause while Itzel is filling out her paper.)) Okay, I see that you  
4247 chose "Mexican" and "cabezón." Can you tell me why you picked  
4248 like these two words to like describe yourself?  
4249  
4250 ITZEL: Well, like I'm from Mexico so I'm Mexican. *Y los otros* (and the  
4251 others), they call me *cabezón* sometimes. I just laugh 'cause I'd rather  
4252 be smart than dumb.  
4253  
4254 I: So tell me about your future. What's it gonna be like?  
4255  
4256 ITZEL: I wanna be a vet. Because I really like animals.  
4257  
4258 I: What's your favorite kind of animal?  
4259  
4260 ITZEL: Dogs.  
4261  
4262 I: Do you have a dog now?  
4263  
4264 ITZEL: No, but I used to. When I was in Mexico, I had two dogs. I left them  
4265 at my grandmother's house when we came here. My dad says I can  
4266 maybe get a dog next year.  
4267  
4268 I: So what all do you think you have to do to be a vet?  
4269  
4270 ITZEL: I don't know. Study a lot. Go to college. Work for another vet so you  
4271 can learn how to be a vet.  
4272  
4273 I: Did you get to go to the vet school when you were at UGA last  
4274 summer?

4275  
4276 ITZEL: Yeah. They took us to see some horses.  
4277  
4278 I: And how was that?  
4279  
4280 ITZEL: It was good. I don' wanna be a vet to big horses though. Like little  
4281 animals. Like cats and dogs.  
4282  
4283 I: That sounds like fun.  
4284  
4285 ITZEL: Yeah, to get to be around animals all day. I think I would like that job.  
4286 I think I would be good at it. I love animals and I want them to not be  
4287 sick. I want them to live for a long time.  
4288  
4289 I: That sounds like a great job! Are you gonna try to go back to UGA  
4290 this summer and work with some more animals and people at the vet  
4291 school?  
4292  
4293 ITZEL: Yeah. Ms. Foster [pseudonym] was talking to me about some  
4294 application I have to fill out. I don't know. I need to ask her about it  
4295 again. I think she forgot.  
4296  
4297 I: Do you want me to email her once we get finished to find out what all  
4298 you have to do and when you have to turn it in?  
4299  
4300 ITZEL: Yeah.  
4301  
4302 I: Okay, well that was my last question for today, unless there's anything  
4303 else you want to say.  
4304  
4305 ITZEL: How many more times, um, are we gonna do this?  
4306  
4307 I: Just two more. Is that okay?  
4308  
4309 ITZEL: Yeah.  
4310  
4311 I: Anything else?  
4312  
4313 ITZEL: No. Will you email Ms. Foster now?  
4314  
4315 I: Sure. While I'm doin' that, will you go ahead and get out your um,  
4316 um, agenda so I can fill it out?  
4317  
4318 ITZEL: Yeah.  
4319 ((While Itzel is getting her agenda, I quickly emailed Ms. Foster to  
4320 find out the status of Itzel's application.))

4321 ((Itzel walks back to my desk))  
4322 Here.  
4323  
4324 I: Okay, what time is it?  
4325  
4326 ITZEL: It's 1:17.  
4327  
4328 I: Alright, um, here you go. I'll let you um like what I hear from Ms.  
4329 Foster. I'm sure she'll email me back um by the end of the day. I'll  
4330 come to your um fourth block class and let you know what she says.  
4331  
4332 ITZEL: Okay.  
4333  
4334 I: Alright, I'll see you then.  
4335  
4336  
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4366

4367 **Itzel: Interview #2**

4368

4369 I: Okay, here we go for the second part of the um interview. Are you  
4370 ready?

4371

4372 ITZEL: Yeah.

4373

4374 I: Why do you say it like that? It wasn't bad last time was it?

4375

4376 ITZEL: No. I don't feel good today.

4377

4378 I: Your face is um a little red. Do you um have a fever?

4379

4380 ITZEL: No, I..my throat hurts.

4381

4382 I: Do you want to do this another day? I can come get you another day.

4383

4384 ITZEL: No. Can I put my head on the desk while we talk?

4385

4386 I: Are you sure you want to do this?

4387

4388 ITZEL: Can I come back tomorrow?

4389

4390 I: Sure. Why don't you come find me in the um morning. I'm usually  
4391 down here or either I'm in Ms. Lyle's room. If you come to school  
4392 tomorrow, why don't you just um come down here and find me, like  
4393 after you eat your breakfast? Okay?

4394

4395 ITZEL: Okay.

4396

4397 I: Do you want me to write you a note to go to the um office and use the  
4398 phone? They'll let you.

4399

4400 ITZEL: Yeah. I need to call my dad.

4401

4402 I: Okay. Just let me know whenever you feel better and we'll finish up.  
4403 Okay?

4404

4405 ITZEL: Okay.

4406

4407 I: Give me your agenda. If it's not signed sick, they won't let you go  
4408 call home. ((signing agenda)). Okay, you're already. Go to the office.  
4409 Ms. Johnson...do you know her? She's the lady that sits at the front.  
4410 Give this to her and she'll let you call home, okay? I hope you get to  
4411 feelin' better. Here's a note back to your class just in case you can't



4412 get your dad. Okay?  
4413  
4414 ITZEL: Okay. If I'm here tomorrow, I'll come.  
4415  
4416 I: Okay. But if you're still sick, don't worry about it. Even if you come  
4417 to school in the mornin', but like you're not feelin' better, don't worry  
4418 about it. We'll get it done. Okay? Go home and rest, honey. You  
4419 look really tired.  
4420  
4421 ITZEL: Okay. I'll see you tomorrow.  
4422  
4423 I: Okay. I hope you feel better.  
4424  
4425 ITZEL: Bye.  
4426  
4427 I: Bye sweetheart.  
4428

4429 *When Itzel returned a couple of days later, we continued where we left off.*  
4430  
4431 I: You look like you're feelin' better?  
4432  
4433 ITZEL: Yeah. My throat doesn't hurt anymore.  
4434  
4435 I: Good, I'm glad you're feelin' better.  
4436  
4437 ITZEL: ((smiles)). I'm glad too. I don't like missing school. I already have  
4438 so much work to make up from my missed days.  
4439  
4440 I: I'm sure you'll be able to um make it up. Your stuff for Georgia  
4441 Studies..you can turn that in whenever. Worry 'bout your other stuff  
4442 first. Okay?  
4443  
4444 ITZEL: Okay. I need to do all my math stuff 'cause I'll be too far behind if I  
4445 don't.  
4446  
4447 I: Let me know what you need me to do. Like I say, your Georgia  
4448 studies stuff can wait. I can catch you up on like everything you've  
4449 missed. You can just do that Gettysburg address assignment, and um,  
4450 that'll be good. I'll get you caught up. Okay? Don't worry...I can  
4451 tell by that look on your face...don't worry...it'll all get done.  
4452  
4453 ITZEL: I hate missing school. It's too hard to miss school.  
4454  
4455 I: Do what you can. We can go um talk to all of your teachers if you feel  
4456 like you just can't get caught up. Okay? I promise...it's gonna be  
4457 fine.  
4458  
4459 ITZEL: Okay. I'll do math tonight. I can turn in the social studies stuff next  
4460 week?  
4461  
4462 I: Sure, um, no problem. Just whenever. Is everything good now?  
4463  
4464 ITZEL: Yeah.  
4465  
4466 I: Okay, you ready to get started?  
4467  
4468 ITZEL: Yeah.  
4469  
4470 I: Okay, I want you to just take a deep breath. Don't even think about  
4471 the makeup work. We'll like get that done, like no problem. Okay?  
4472 It's all good. Breathe with me.  
4473  
4474 ITZEL: ((Giggles. Takes two deep breaths.))

4475  
4476 I: Alright. Feel better?  
4477 *Itzel nods yes.*  
4478 I: Okay, let's get started.  
4479  
4480 ITZEL: Okay.  
4481  
4482 I: Okay, um, can you tell me a little about when you went to school in  
4483 Mexico? What was it like?  
4484  
4485 ITZEL: It was different.  
4486  
4487 I: Okay. How was it different?  
4488  
4489 ITZEL: Well, we had races, and there wasn't a cafeteria, you had to take your  
4490 own lunch. And there were just like Mexicans. And oh, and one time,  
4491 there was like um one of the Americans went there.  
4492  
4493 I: To your school?  
4494  
4495 ITZEL: Yeah. She came to our school. But yeah, she spoke Spanish.  
4496  
4497 I: Was she a teacher or a student?  
4498  
4499 ITZEL: A teach...no a student. She was in my grade. I think it's her father.  
4500 He was from Mexico. Her mother was American. But they came back  
4501 to Mexico. She used to live in the United States, but she came back to  
4502 Mexico.  
4503  
4504 I: Well, that's cool. Did she stay the whole year with y'all?  
4505  
4506 ITZEL: No, like she stayed the rest of that year, but then she went back to here  
4507 for one year and then she came back to there for one year.  
4508  
4509 I: Oh, that's cool.  
4510  
4511 ITZEL: Yeah, like she went to school with us for a year, then here for a year,  
4512 then back with us for a year.  
4513  
4514 I: I see. What grades did you finish in Mexico?  
4515  
4516 ITZEL: One through four.  
4517  
4518 I: One through four? Did you go to kindergarten too?  
4519  
4520 ITZEL: Yes.

4521

4522 I: Like at school or at church?

4523

4524 ITZEL: At school.

4525

4526 I: Okay. Um how have your experiences here at school in Georgia been  
4527 different from your experiences at school in Mexico?

4528

4529 ITZEL: Like experiences from what?

4530

4531 I: Just like any way that school was different there from here.

4532

4533 ITZEL: Oh, okay. Well, it's different here like the people. They're not all the  
4534 same. Like here we talk a lot but *no vas afuera* [but you don't go  
4535 outside].

4536

4537 I: Oh, did you go outside in Mexico every day?

4538

4539 ITZEL: *Todos los días*. [Everyday]. *Como medio hora o una hora*. [Like a  
4540 half-hour or hour.]

4541

4542 I: That's cool.

4543

4544 ITZEL: Yeah. I like to go outside.

4545

4546 I: What did you do outside?

4547

4548 ITZEL: Like you got to play whatever you want. Walk around. Explore.  
4549 Look at everything. Just be outside the classroom.

4550

4551 I: Okay, tell me about your classes here.

4552

4553 ITZEL: Well, like, they're sometimes easy and sometimes hard. I, I think it's  
4554 hard, like social studies and language arts.

4555

4556 I: And why are those hard?

4557

4558 ITZEL: But you are using English a lot in those classes. And like different  
4559 from Mexico. Different like, the things you study here.

4560

4561 I: Like how are they different?

4562

4563 ITZEL: Like in social studies, you study like different people and you study  
4564 the United States and Georgia and all that stuff. And over there, it's  
4565 like things from over there, so like I had Mexican history when I was

4566 in Mexico and we talked about the geography, like mountains and stuff  
4567 of Mexico.  
4568  
4569 I: In every grade?  
4570  
4571 ITZEL: Yeah. Like the ones I was there for. Like we had Mexican history  
4572 every year.  
4573  
4574 I: ‘Cause like here we don’t have United States history every year.  
4575  
4576 ITZEL: Like in Mexico, like in first, second, third, and fourth grade, we had  
4577 Mexican history every year. And like over there, sixth grade was in  
4578 elementary school.  
4579  
4580 I: It used to be like that here.  
4581  
4582 ITZEL: Really?  
4583  
4584 I: Yeah, like when I was your age, I went to a “junior high.” It had like  
4585 seventh, eighth, and ninth grade in it. You didn’t go to high school  
4586 until like tenth grade and you stayed at the elementary school until you  
4587 finished the um sixth grade.  
4588  
4589 ITZEL: Yeah, like that’s how it was in Mexico. Like in seventh grade, then  
4590 you went to a different school. Not a ...what was that word you said?  
4591  
4592 I: Junior high?  
4593  
4594 ITZEL: Yeah, like it wasn’t called that, but it wasn’t with the elementary  
4595 school.  
4596  
4597 I: Okay. Let’s keep goin’. What’s your favorite class?  
4598  
4599 ITZEL: I don’t have one.  
4600  
4601 I: You don’t have one? At all?  
4602  
4603 ITZEL: I guess if I had to have one it would be science. Science because it’s  
4604 about nature and animals. All of my favorite things. ((laughs))  
4605  
4606 I: Do you like all of the projects y’all get to do in there? I know in Ms.  
4607 Forrest’s [pseudonym] you get to do lots of projects in there.  
4608  
4609 ITZEL: I like it sometimes. Sometimes like I like this project we did last  
4610 week. We did this project about the planets. You had to choose a  
4611 planet and write about it like to someone who didn’t know about your

4612 planet. Like I pretended I was from Jupiter and I had to tell people on  
4613 Earth like what my planet was like. And then we got to make models  
4614 out of all this stuff and like paint them and everything. Mine's in the  
4615 hall. Did you see it on the way to social studies? It's the big one.  
4616  
4617 I: Oh yeah, I didn't know that was yours.  
4618  
4619 ITZEL: Yeah. And I did a poster and a poem and um some other thing I  
4620 forgot.  
4621  
4622 I: Okay.  
4623  
4624 ITZEL: Oh yeah...a fact thingie.  
4625  
4626 I: Okay. So do you like doing all of those hands-on things.  
4627  
4628 ITZEL: No, well sometimes yes. It depends. If I like what we're talking  
4629 about, then yes, I like the projects. But if it's something I don't like,  
4630 like when we talked about rocks, like the different kinds of rocks, I  
4631 didn't like that. I didn't like that at all. It was boring. I was tired of  
4632 talking about rocks.  
4633  
4634 I: Well, we had to talk about rocks in the beginning of Georgia Studies  
4635 too. Remember?  
4636  
4637 ITZEL: Yeah, and it was boring in there too. ((Laughs.))  
4638  
4639 I: Oh, I see ((Laughs)).  
4640  
4641 ITZEL: No, I don't like rocks with anybody.  
4642  
4643 I: That's cool. Do y'all get to do groupwork in there?  
4644  
4645 ITZEL: Yeah.  
4646  
4647 I: Are your friends in there?  
4648  
4649 ITZEL: Yeah.  
4650  
4651 I: So you like havin' your friends in there? Is Cora [pseudonym] in there  
4652 with you?  
4653  
4654 ITZEL: Yeah.  
4655  
4656 I: How's that?  
4657

4658 ITZEL: I like it. She makes me want to do better. I have to show her a lot  
4659 how to do things.  
4660  
4661 I: You help her a lot in Georgia Studies.  
4662  
4663 ITZEL: In science too. I wish I had somebody to help me when I came here. I  
4664 was alone. I don't want her to be alone.  
4665  
4666 I: Well that's sweet. You and Cora seem like good friends.  
4667  
4668 ITZEL: We are.  
4669  
4670 I: Okay, if um you could be a teacher at this school, and you were able to  
4671 make things better or more fun for the students, what would you do?  
4672  
4673 ITZEL: Anything?  
4674  
4675 I: Anything.  
4676  
4677 ITZEL: I will do like the same thing. We will have computers and we'll do  
4678 research and we'll go outside and we'll be in groups that we'll like to  
4679 be like not the ones the teachers put us in. Like be with your friends  
4680 but like with limits like don't talk a lot. Um, I don't know what else.  
4681  
4682 I: So you like don't think there's enough limits here?  
4683  
4684 ITZEL: Yeah, yeah like there are lots of limits here. Yeah but like I wanna be  
4685 able to talk to my friends but not so much like we can't learn. Not like  
4686 now, like we never talk. Can I change students too?  
4687  
4688 I: If you want to change students you can. What do you wanna change?  
4689  
4690 ITZEL: I don't want them to be racist. No, not at all.  
4691  
4692 I: How do you know if someone is a racist? How do they show that?  
4693  
4694 ITZEL: Like they treat people different just because of like their skin or their  
4695 language. Like they treat people bad, like they talk about them, they  
4696 don't like to be with them.  
4697  
4698 I: Has anybody ever been a racist to you at this school?  
4699  
4700 ITZEL: Yes, like in seventh and eighth grade.  
4701  
4702 I: And how were they racist?  
4703

4704 ITZEL: Well, they talk about us, the Mexicans. Well, the Hispanics. Anybody  
4705 that talks in Spanish, they make fun of. Like they say that we are  
4706 dumb, that we are wetbacks, that we don't need to be here, like go  
4707 back.  
4708  
4709 I: Why do you think you go to school? What's the reason for going to  
4710 school?  
4711  
4712 ITZEL: To get a better future. I have to go to school if I want to be a vet. Like  
4713 you have to do it to be a good person. Like to support your family,  
4714 you have to go to school. Like you have to. Like my parents talk  
4715 about my love of animals, like they say everyday, *Ay, tú, tú con tus*  
4716 *perros* [Oh, you, you with your dogs] because every day I find some  
4717 way to talk about animals, like dogs. Like I draw dogs all the time,  
4718 like my notebook is a dog. Like I like dogs a lot.  
4719  
4720 I: I know. I see how you always make a pawprint for the "I" in your  
4721 name instead of a dot.  
4722  
4723 ITZEL: I know. I love to do that. I like to draw dragons a lot too. Like since  
4724 Christmas, I've been drawing lots of dragons. Did you see my new  
4725 dog folder?  
4726  
4727 I: No.  
4728  
4729 ITZEL: I have it here. Hold on. I have it. ((Shows me a folder with a beagle  
4730 on it.)) I used to have a dog like this. Like this kind when I was in  
4731 Mexico.  
4732  
4733 I: Just like that?  
4734  
4735 ITZEL: Yes, and its name was Muffin.  
4736  
4737 I: This was in Mexico.  
4738  
4739 ITZEL: Yeah, no. Azúcar was the dog we had in Mexico. Muffin was the dog  
4740 we had here. We had to give Muffin to someone else because we  
4741 moved and where we live now, we cannot have a dog or a cat.  
4742  
4743 I: Can you have any kind of pet?  
4744  
4745 ITZEL: Yes, I have a parrot. I'm teaching it to talk.  
4746  
4747 I: Really? What can it say?  
4748



4749 ITZEL: Well, like nothing yet. It's still a baby. Like he's too small to talk.  
4750 Like he's a baby.  
4751  
4752 I: But when he gets bigger, you're going to teach him to talk?  
4753  
4754 ITZEL: Yeah.  
4755  
4756 I: What do you want him to say?  
4757  
4758 ITZEL: I don't know. But I want him to talk in English and Spanish, both of  
4759 them.  
4760  
4761 I: Both of them? And what's he gonna say? Good things or bad things?  
4762  
4763 ITZEL: ((Laughs)). Both of them.  
4764  
4765 I: Yeah?  
4766  
4767 ITZEL: Yeah, he's going to be funny.  
4768  
4769 I: Okay, I'll come see him when he learns how to talk. Okay?  
4770  
4771 ITZEL: Okay.  
4772  
4773 I: Okay, let's keep goin'. Are you in any clubs at school? Or sports?  
4774  
4775 ITZEL: No.  
4776  
4777 I: Why not?  
4778  
4779 ITZEL: Because like it leaves me little time to like do my homework, like I  
4780 can't do it if I do that stuff. Like I can't finish everything then. I don't  
4781 want to be in clubs. I want to finish my work.  
4782  
4783 I: Why do you think you do your work?  
4784  
4785 ITZEL: Because my parents make me. Teachers tell me to do it.  
4786  
4787 I: But if I told you to go run out in front of a car, you might not do it.  
4788 [*Both laugh.*]  
4789  
4790 ITZEL: No, but when you tell me to do things that are good for me, I do them.  
4791 Just like when my parents tell me to do things that are good for me, I  
4792 do them. Like I do my work because my parents tell me to.  
4793

4794 I: So why do you think the other kids in your class don't do their work?  
4795  
4796 ITZEL: Because they like have different parents at home maybe? Or maybe  
4797 they're just lazy? Maybe their parents tell them to do their work and  
4798 they're just lazy, they just don't do it.  
4799  
4800 I: Okay, that's all we have for today. I'll come get you in a week or so  
4801 to finish up, okay?  
4802  
4803 ITZEL: Only one more time.  
4804  
4805 I: Only one more time.  
4806  
4807 ITZEL: Okay.  
4808  
4809 I: Anything else?  
4810  
4811 ITZEL: No, that's it.  
4812  
4813 I: Okay, thanks again for talking with me today. Um, I'll write you a  
4814 pass and I'll see you this afternoon.  
4815  
4816 ITZEL: Okay.  
4817  
4818 I: Okay, bye, Itzel.  
4819  
4820 ITZEL: Bye.  
4821  
4822  
4823  
4824  
4825  
4826  
4827  
4828  
4829  
4830  
4831  
4832  
4833  
4834  
4835  
4836  
4837  
4838  
4839

4840 **Itzel Interview #3**

4841 I: Alright, last time. You ready?

4842

4843 ITZEL: Yeah.

4844

4845 I: Okay, here we go. Do you think that this school thinks it's important  
4846 to be a Mexican?

4847

4848

4849 ITZEL: I don't know. Like I don't know how they express like that. Like I  
4850 don't know.

4851

4852 I: Okay.

4853

4854 ITZEL: Well, um, sometimes they would say like "Do this" because you're a  
4855 Mexican. Like go to after-school because you're a Mexican. Like  
4856 apply for this because you're a Mexican.

4857

4858 I: Okay.

4859

4860 ITZEL: Like Hispanic. Like they tell you to join something, like, um, like, um,  
4861 I don't know. Like it's hard for me to explain it.

4862

4863 I: *¿Prefieres hablar en español?* ((Do you prefer to speak in Spanish?))

4864

4865 ITZEL: *Sí, pero, era difícil porque lo que dije sobre la tarea y las maestras*  
4866 *que están y que ellas me dan más [tarea]. A veces, creo que...he*  
4867 *recibido más trabajo de algunas maestras porque soy mexicana. Ellas*  
4868 *quieren que...es que...a mí no me gusta eso. No quiero hacer cosas*  
4869 *simplemente porque soy mexicana. Por ejemplo, el programa de la*  
4870 *universidad? Del año pasado? Fue solamente para los hispanos. A*  
4871 *mí no me gusta. ((Yes, but, it's difficult because of what I said about*  
4872 *homework and the teachers and that they give me more [homework].*  
4873 *Sometimes, I think that...I've received more work from some teachers*  
4874 *because I'm Mexican. They want that, it's that, I don't like this. I*  
4875 *don't want to do things simply because I'm Mexican. For example,*  
4876 *the program at the university? From last year? It was just for*  
4877 *Hispanics. I don't like that.))*

4878

4879 I: *Entiendo.* ((I understand.))

4880

4881 ITZEL: *Por eso no me gusta faltar.* ((That's why I don't like to miss  
4882 [school].))*Like they expect more from me because I'm Mexican.*

4883

4884 I: Why do you say that?

4885

4886 ITZEL: Because like you and Ms. Mathis. You always make me work hard.  
4887 You tell me I can do it. Sometimes I feel like I can't. Like I need to  
4888 be perfect for you, for my parents. Sometimes, I just don't want to.  
4889  
4890 I: And that's okay. If I ever put too much pressure on you, you need to  
4891 let me know. I just want to make sure that you're reaching your full  
4892 potential in my class, okay?  
4893  
4894 ITZEL: Okay.  
4895  
4896 I: Anything else you want to say?  
4897  
4898 ITZEL: No.  
4899  
4900 I: Okay, um, do you think your teachers care about you?  
4901  
4902 ITZEL: Um, yeah, some of them.  
4903  
4904 I: Like how do you know if your teacher cares about you?  
4905  
4906 ITZEL: Well, like she asks you like, "Are you okay? Can I help you?". Like  
4907 not all of the teachers do that. Like yesterday when I felt bad after  
4908 lunch, Ms. Mathis asked me if I was okay, if I wanted to lie down on  
4909 the couch. Like she noticed that I wasn't feeling well and she asked  
4910 about it. Like the teachers that care they make you understand stuff.  
4911 Like others don't, they don't care if you learn or not. Like they want  
4912 you to leave them alone. I think those teachers don't care about me.  
4913 Or any students.  
4914  
4915 I: Okay. Do you think most of your teachers care about you?  
4916  
4917 ITZEL: About half.  
4918  
4919 I: Okay. Why don't you tell me what it's like to be a Mexican teenager?  
4920  
4921 ITZEL: I don't know. It's cool, I guess. It's different, like you come here, and  
4922 everything, EVERYTHING, is in English, television, radio, movies,  
4923 everything's in English. Like that's not my language. Like it's  
4924 different programs on television, like it's different from Mexico. Like  
4925 boys are different here too. Like in Mexico girls don't have  
4926 boyfriends now [in the eighth grade]. That's for later. Like here  
4927 everything is faster. Like I want a boyfriend and my mom says okay,  
4928 but my dad says no. Like he says wait until you grow to be fifteen,  
4929 then we'll talk about having a boyfriend. So I say like why do I have  
4930 to be fifteen when my brother had a girlfriend when he was like six  
4931 [laughs]. It's not fair. I don't like it. I don't know. I just don't like it.

4932  
4933 I: Well if you had to compare to someone who's not from Mexico, like  
4934 students at school who are not from Mexico. How would you describe  
4935 it?  
4936  
4937 ITZEL: Like they were born here. Like you speak English since you were a  
4938 baby. You didn't have to learn it. Like you knew it since you were  
4939 little. You started talking in English, I didn't. I came here and  
4940 learned, but I learned Spanish when I was a baby and you learned  
4941 English. Like of course I learned Spanish first because I'm from  
4942 Mexico and they speak Spanish there. You know? And it's like the  
4943 first thing you learn.  
4944  
4945 I: Do you ever think that your teachers are jealous of you? Like they  
4946 wish they could talk in two languages like you do?  
4947  
4948 ITZEL: No.  
4949  
4950 I: Well, like Ms. Mathis and I talk about it. Like how lucky y'all are to  
4951 speak Spanish since you were little, like you don't even have to think  
4952 about it, it's automatic.  
4953  
4954 ITZEL: Like English is for you.  
4955  
4956 I: Yeah.  
4957  
4958 ITZEL: But I've had to learn it different from you. I have to learn classes at the  
4959 same time I learn English. Like I have to learn social studies at the  
4960 same time I'm learning English.  
4961  
4962 I: Yeah, I'm sure it's hard. Sometimes it's hard when I'm talkin' to y'all  
4963 in Spanish and I say some word like that they don't say in Michoacán,  
4964 like the other day, I said "*anteojos*."  
4965  
4966 ITZEL: Nooooo, *lentes*.  
4967  
4968 I: Okay, so I know that now. But I was taught to say *anteojos*.  
4969  
4970 ITZEL: That's like old.  
4971  
4972 I: Yeah, but that's like automatic for you. Like you don't even have to  
4973 think about it.  
4974  
4975 ITZEL: Yeah, but I have to think a lot when I'm talking in English. Like you  
4976 know lots more words than I do and you don't even have to think  
4977 about it. But it's different for me too. Like people from Guatemala

4978 and El Salvador, like they say things I don't even know, you know.  
4979 Like I don't even know them.  
4980  
4981 I: Yeah, it's different. You have to remember too though, I'm A LOT  
4982 older than you and I've had a lot more practice. Just think how  
4983 fabulous your English will be when you're thirty. Think about how  
4984 fabulous it already is.  
4985  
4986 ITZEL: But like it makes you understand how hard it is for us. Because like  
4987 you speak another language that you weren't born with. Like it makes  
4988 you know that it's hard for us too.  
4989  
4990 I: Yeah, I completely respect how hard all of y'all are working to learn  
4991 English.  
4992  
4993 ITZEL: Yeah, like for you it was different 'cause I'm in Spanish now, and it's  
4994 like *gato*, cat, *perro*, dog.  
4995  
4996 I: Oh yeah, I can remember the first conversation I ever learned in  
4997 Spanish: *¿Cómo estás? Bien, ¿y tú? ¡Excelente! ¿Quieres ir a la*  
4998 *biblioteca para estudiar? ¡Sí, por supuesto!* [Both laughing.]  
4999  
5000 ITZEL: Yeah, like that's how it is now in my Spanish class. I try not to laugh.  
5001  
5002 I: I think Ms. David [pseudonym] understands.  
5003  
5004 ITZEL: Yeah, I think so too.  
5005  
5006 I: You're doing great in there.  
5007  
5008 ITZEL: Yeah, it's easy. I like having an easy class since I have so many hard  
5009 ones.  
5010  
5011 I: What's your hardest class?  
5012  
5013 ITZEL: Mmm, I don't know. I don't know. Probably language arts. Just  
5014 because everything's in English and there's no one to help me in there.  
5015 There aren't any Hispanics in that class at all.  
5016  
5017 I: Okay.  
5018  
5019 ITZEL: Like we read books all the time in there. I hate reading books. I don't  
5020 have time to read. They take too long when I'm reading them in  
5021 English. Like because we're reading a book right now in language  
5022 arts, I start my homework when I get home and work on it until 9  
5023 o'clock at night when we eat supper. The other night, though, I had a

5024 language arts test and a social studies test, so I stayed up and studied  
5025 until twelve [midnight].  
5026  
5027 I: Wow!  
5028  
5029 ITZEL: I'm serious. I can't help it. Even my parents came in and said  
5030 *¡Duerméte!* ((Go to sleep!)) [laughs]  
5031  
5032 I: They just want you to have a balance.  
5033  
5034 ITZEL: Sometimes they help me with my homework, like with math. But they  
5035 can't help me with the other because it's too much in English.  
5036  
5037 I: So who helps you with the rest?  
5038  
5039 ITZEL: My brother's girlfriend. She's American.  
5040  
5041 I: Oh, okay. She's helpin' you with the rest?  
5042  
5043 ITZEL: Yeah.  
5044  
5045 I: That's cool. Do you like her?  
5046  
5047 ITZEL: Yeah, she's nice.  
5048  
5049 I: Okay, you ready to keep going'?  
5050  
5051 ITZEL: Yeah.  
5052  
5053 I: Okay, let's pretend that a new Mexican girl came here to this school.  
5054 What advice would you give her about being a successful student?  
5055  
5056 ITZEL: Well, I want her to be a good student like don't do bad things because  
5057 she represents her country. She can't forget that. She can't ever forget  
5058 that. *Si la gente le ve haciendo algo malo, va a decir que la gente de*  
5059 *allá es mala*, ((If people see her doing something bad, they're going to  
5060 say that the people from there are bad)), so she can't be bad. It makes  
5061 all Mexicans look bad if she's bad.  
5062  
5063 I: Have you ever heard anybody say that before?  
5064  
5065 ITZEL: Yeah. A lot.  
5066  
5067 I: Here at school?  
5068

5069 ITZEL: Yeah, teachers and students say that about Mexicans. I want to say to  
5070 them that I'm not bad. I don't want to be bad. I want to learn and be  
5071 better. I want to be good. But I know that when somebody sees one  
5072 Mexican do something bad, they think we're all bad. And sometimes,  
5073 like the students here don't think anybody's different, like everybody's  
5074 a Mexican, even if they're from Guatemala or El Salvador. You  
5075 know, like everybody's a Mexican.  
5076  
5077 I: Yeah.  
5078  
5079 ITZEL: Yeah like Spanish equals Mexican.  
5080  
5081 I: Okay.  
5082  
5083 ITZEL: Like some students talk about me speaking Mexican. I don't speak  
5084 Mexican. I speak Spanish.  
5085  
5086 I: Um do you think you're a successful student?  
5087  
5088 ITZEL: Um, I don't know.  
5089  
5090 I: Why do you say that?  
5091  
5092 ITZEL: Like, teachers say so.  
5093  
5094 I: Why do you think teachers say that?  
5095  
5096 ITZEL: Um, I don't know. Because I do my work. Because I'm good. I try.  
5097  
5098 I: Um, do you have any brothers or sisters or friends who have dropped  
5099 out of school?  
5100  
5101 ITZEL: No, my brother went all the way through. He graduated. He  
5102 graduated from here in Georgia.  
5103  
5104 I: Great! What does he do now?  
5105  
5106 ITZEL: Nothing. [laughs]  
5107  
5108 I: Nothing?  
5109  
5110 ITZEL: Well, not nothing, like he has a job but like he's not going to college  
5111 or anything.  
5112  
5113 I: Okay.  
5114



5115 ITZEL: He needs to get a better job. Like one that pays more money. He's  
5116 lazy though. He's not going to work hard. He knows English, he  
5117 knows how to use the computer, he could have a better job if he  
5118 wanted one.

5119 I: And how old is he?  
5120  
5121

5122 ITZEL: Twenty.  
5123

5124 I: Does he still live with y'all?  
5125

5126 ITZEL: No he has an apartment with his girlfriend. She's American. She's  
5127 nice.  
5128

5129 I: Can she speak Spanish?  
5130

5131 ITZEL: No, that's why my parents sometime don't like her. They can't  
5132 understand her. But I talk to her, that's why my English is better than  
5133 before. We talk about school, music, my brother [laughs]  
5134

5135 I: Yeah?  
5136

5137 ITZEL: Like I practice every time I see her. Like two or three times a week.  
5138

5139 I: Well, that's cool.  
5140

5141 ITZEL: Yeah. Sometimes I stay with them like at their home on the weekend.  
5142 And I practice all weekend with her.  
5143

5144 I: How nice!  
5145

5146 ITZEL: Yeah. I like her. I like him too. Like I didn't like when he was living  
5147 here with us. I would say like ¡*Vete de aqui!* ¡*No me molestas!* But  
5148 now, like I miss him because he doesn't live with us anymore. Like  
5149 now we get along. Like now it's different. Like now I miss him. I  
5150 don't want to argue with him anymore.  
5151

5152 I: Um, what do you think about speaking in English?  
5153

5154 ITZEL: I think it's good. I think it helps you. It helps you to get a better job,  
5155 to do better in school, like I don't know, there's just a lot of things you  
5156 have to do in English, like applications, like if you want to watch the  
5157 news like *las noticias*, like you need to know English. Like if you  
5158 want to watch the news from Atlanta, you need to know English.  
5159

5160 I: Do you think there's ever a time you shouldn't speak in English?

5161

5162 ITZEL: No, why?

5163

5164 I: Has anybody ever told you not to speak Spanish at school?

5165

5166 ITZEL: Yes, teachers. Every year I've been here I've had teachers tell me to

5167 stop speaking in Spanish. And like students too.

5168

5169 I: A lot of times?

5170

5171 ITZEL: Sometimes, like teachers tell us in class to not talk in Spanish. And

5172 black kids tell us all the time to stop talking in Spanish. I think they

5173 think we're talking about them and we're not. We're just talking in

5174 our language.

5175

5176 I: If the new girl we've been talking about..

5177

5178 ITZEL: ...our imaginary friend [laughs]

5179

5180 I: yes, our imaginary friend, if she came to you for advice about joining a

5181 gang, what would you say? What would you tell her?

5182

5183 ITZEL: No, she can't do it because if she does something bad it affects her and

5184 it affects other people too. Like it makes them think bad of all of this

5185 of us too. Like yesterday when they were talking about guns, like if

5186 you kill somebody, you don't just hurt the person you kill, you hurt

5187 everyone who loves the person you kill. Like your actions can affect

5188 people you don't even know. Like you can make a lot of people sad

5189 without even knowing it.

5190

5191 I: Do you know anyone in a gang? Not anybody's name, but just do you

5192 know anybody in a gang?

5193

5194 ITZEL: No, I know lots of people who pretend to be.

5195

5196 I: Even if they're pretending, how do they show that they're in a gang?

5197

5198 ITZEL: They're like, *Oh, yo soy de aquí, soy de 18<sup>th</sup> Street, soy Sur 13, ellos*

5199 *muestran signos a otros miembros de su pandilla* ((Oh, I'm from here,

5200 I'm from 18th Street, I'm Sur 13, they show signs to other members of

5201 their gang)). Like they want to write signs and stuff on everything.

5202 Like everything, desks, bathroom, lockers, everything.

5203

5204 I: Is there anything else you want to say? Anything we haven't covered?

5205

5206 ITZEL: No, that's it.

5207 I: Okay, thanks, M. Get your stuff and go back to class. Do you need a  
5208 pass?  
5209  
5210 ITZEL: No, I'm just going back to Ms. Mathis' class. It's okay.  
5211  
5212 I: Alright, I hope you have a great weekend. I'll see you Monday!  
5213  
5214 ITZEL: Okay, bye!