

**AN INTERPRETIVE CASE STUDY OF STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS ON
THE ENROLLMENT AND PROGRESSION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
STUDENTS IN HIGH SCHOOL FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSES**

A Dissertation

by

HERBERT JOSEPH SCHOENER III

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2012

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

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ABSTRACT

An Interpretive Case Study of Stakeholders' Perceptions on the Enrollment and Progression of African American Students in High School Foreign Language Courses.

(August 2012)

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The “achievement gap” is a common term in Texas public education, often referring to academic differences in achievement among student ethnic groups within the core curriculum. Seldom is Foreign Language referenced in, nor even considered relevant to such discussions in addressing the achievement gaps that exist in our public schools, although Foreign Language holds significant influence on both students’ high school and post-secondary academic trajectories. Throughout the state of Texas, it has been found that African American students are not progressing in foreign language study at the same rate and length as Hispanic, White, and Asian students; these stark achievement gaps appear to be going unmentioned, unnoticed, and/or unaddressed.

This interpretive case study examined the perceptions of foreign language teachers, counselors, and administrators at a central Texas high school campus through a critical lens, regarding why they felt African American students are not progressing in foreign language courses, as compared to other student ethnic groups. Data collection for this

qualitative study included individual interviews, focus group sessions, field notes, documents, and school records. For data analysis, the study employed the constant comparative method.

Four general themes emerged from interviews and focus group sessions with stakeholders. These themes included *deficit views*, *racial erasure*, *paralogical beliefs and behaviors*, and *organizational constraints*, which described obstacles standing in the way of creating an equitable campus for all students.

This study offers implications for educational policy, practice, and future research. For policy, Texas high school graduation requirements for foreign language should be increased and accountability measures for student learning in foreign languages should be instated. For practice, the high school should commit itself to ongoing, yearlong staff development to address equity traps at the campus. Practice should also include student performance data in foreign languages to help guide discussions about achievement gaps with African Americans and other student ethnic groups. Implications for future research include the need to examine the transferability of this study's findings to public middle school and high school campuses in Texas. Future studies should also investigate the equity trap *avoidance and employment of the gaze* in the context of public high school foreign language courses.

DEDICATION

I am forever thankful for the unconditional love and never-ending support of my family, whom God has blessed upon me. I dedicate this dissertation to you. Without each of you, I could never have come this far.

To my parents, Herb and Martha Schoener, Jr., and my sister, Sheri Schoener. Through thick and thin, you have always loved me, believed in me, encouraged me, and supported me.

And to my grandparents, Herb and Viola Schoener, Sr., and my aunt, Muriel Fitzgerald. Although you were not able to live to see me reach this day, I have felt your warmth and love each step of the way as you have watched over me from above.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“The Achievement Gap.” This is a phrase often heard in education and in our schools (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In my experiences, the majority of times this term is used to describe differences among student groups in core subject areas, such as English/Language Arts, Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies. I have seldom heard “Achievement Gap” applied or discussed in relation to non-core subject courses, such as foreign language.

During my second year teaching at my current high school campus, our principal had begun organizing monthly table discussions, inviting teachers to come for collegial discussions in how we can address and close the achievement gaps among the student groups at our school. As a foreign language teacher, I felt my presence as appropriate and necessary as any other subject area teachers, so I attended during my conference period. However, I recall quite vividly one senior teacher seeing me joining others at the principal’s conference table for the discussion and asking pointedly, “Joey, do you even have any of these kids?” That teacher’s comment had a profound effect and continues to stay with me, for achievement gaps indeed extend throughout the school and the curriculum; achievement gaps are not exclusive to core curriculum courses. In fact, from an earlier analysis of data requested through the Texas Education Agency [APPENDIX B; APPENDIX C], stark differences in achievement were found among African American and White, Hispanic, and Asian students in public high school foreign language courses (TEA Data Request, 2010).

This dissertation follows the style of the *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy*.

Statement of the Problem

Disparities in academic performance among student ethnic groups¹ are continuing and oftentimes widening in our nation's public schools (Cota-Robles & Gordon, 1999; Lee, 2002; Lewis, Hancock, James, & Larke, 2008); ironically, this is occurring at a time when one finds almost ubiquitously in schools and the education literature the notion that all students can succeed (Ingram, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2009a). This achievement gap among student ethnic groups does not stem merely from the contexts of the younger generations, but far more broadly from a deep-seated historical context in the United States of differential learning opportunities and race equity issues in education (Barton, 2004; Feagin, 2006; Oakes, 2005; Orfield & Lee, 2006; Petrovich & Wells, 2005).

While the term achievement gap is commonly referred to in its singular form, there exists an array of achievement gaps among student groups in education, some of which include: standardized test scores (Barton & Coley, 2008, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2006, 2009a; Lewis, Hancock, James, & Larke, 2008; TEA, 2006a, 2006c, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a); high school graduation and dropout rates (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Losen, Orfield, & Balfanz, 2006; Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004; Texas Education Agency, 2006a, 2007b, 2008b, 2009a); overrepresentation of African

¹ When I refer to the terms African American, Hispanic, Asian and White as ethnicities, I am operating out of necessity according to the Texas Education Agency (2006b) definitions, which problematically do not separate ethnicity and race; instead, the Texas Education Agency treats these intersectionalities as one and the same. For overall consistency, however, I use the term ethnicity almost entirely throughout this dissertation, for this study utilizes student data from the 2005-2006, 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 school years, which were collected before implementation by the Texas Education Agency of the updated federal standards beginning with data for the 2009-2010 school year (TEA, 2009b).

American students in Special Education (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Patton, 1998; Russo & Talbert-Johnson, 1997); enrollment and representation in honors, gifted, and Advanced Placement courses (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Oakes, 2005); and admittance into colleges and universities (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Perna, 2000). What is most important and indicative from this research is that gaps in school achievement among African American and other student ethnic groups are wide, diverse, persistent, and well-documented.

According to Lewis, James, Hancock, and Hill-Jackson (2008), “any serious attempt to address the achievement gap between African American and White students must be approached from multiple perspectives and theoretical positions. . . . [for] there is no ‘silver bullet’ that can explain the existence and persistence of the Black-White achievement gap” (p. 136). While this study also considers the achievement gap among African American, Hispanic, and Asian student ethnic groups, there exists a diversity of theories and perspectives in the literature whose aim is to describe and explain a range of disparities that exist in academic achievement, some of which include: the need for culturally responsive teaching and other aspects of Multicultural Education (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000, 2002); the stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995); social and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977); deficit theories and thinking (Ginsburg, 1986; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Solorzano, 1992); systemic racism (Feagin, 2006); equity traps (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004); African American resistance to “acting White” (Ogbu, 2004; Ogbu & Simons, 1998); tracking and ability-grouping practices (Mickelson, 2005; Mickelson & Everett, 2008; Oakes, 1992, 2005; Oakes, Selvin, Karoly, & Guiton, 1992;

Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Petrovich, 2005b); and resegregation of American schools (Orfield, 2001; Orfield & Lee, 2004, 2006, 2007).

Another approach in coming to understand the achievement gap was undertaken by Barton (2004), which involved a synthesis of existing research on school and home conditions closely associated with academic achievement. The researcher's objective was to identify any agreement existing in the literature on factors that help to create and perpetuate these achievement gaps. In the most recent follow-up report, Barton and Coley (2009) identified sixteen correlates, including: curriculum rigor, teacher preparation, teacher experience, teacher absence and turnover, class size, availability of instructional technology, fear and safety at school, parent participation, frequent changing of schools, low birth weight, environmental damage, hunger and nutrition, talking and reading to babies and young children, excessive television watching, parent-pupil ratio, and summer achievement gain/loss. Interestingly, in each of these correlates, Barton and Coley (2009) found gaps between minority and majority student groups, meaning that these conditions and experiences, "exercise strong influence on cognitive development and academic achievement" (p. 6). It is not the race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status of students that leads to achievement gaps in schools, but rather it is the inequalities found among them in our society that these researchers say are linked.

Though much research and literature exists on topics surrounding the achievement gaps in American education, most often these center on issues involving the core curriculum and core courses: English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies (Texas Education Code. ch. 28 § 28, 1995). For example, the National

Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is, “regarded as the nation’s report card of student achievement in key subject areas” and is often cited in research (Lee, 2002, p. 3). This benchmark and assessment is important, for according to Lewis, James, Hancock, and Hill-Jackson (2008), “the first step towards framing African American students’ achievement in the United States is a clear articulation of the current status of the Black-White Achievement gap in K-12 settings” (p. 129). However, by not including achievement measures from other areas, such as foreign language, the assessment is overlooking a contributing component to academic success in high school.

It may be important to consider the complicity of non-core courses, such as foreign language, with the broader achievement gaps among African American, White, Hispanic, and Asian students in education. If one were to assume that aptitude for learning a foreign language is distributed equally among student groups of all intersectionalities, then the starkly differential rates and lengths of progression of African Americans in high school foreign language courses, compared with White, Asian, and Hispanic students at both the state level in Texas and at the local campus to be studied, should highlight a significant problem (TEA Data Request, 2010). Although foreign language is classified as a non-core course, this achievement gap in foreign language presents obstacles for African American students’ academic trajectories both during and after high school. Since the majority of students in Texas public schools do not begin the study of a foreign language until high school, this data reveals an alarming trend that appears to manifest itself in the span of one school year or less, with the gap increasing further with time (TEA Data Request, 2010).

This study focused specifically on the achievement gaps in Texas public high school foreign language courses. Texas was chosen for this research inquiry, because in an era of increasing accountability at the national level (NCLB, 2001) and as a state with one of the longest histories in accountability (Texas Education Agency, 2007), our students are quite literally products of the accountability system. In fact, according to Heilig and Darling-Hammond (2008), “the accountability system adopted in the early 1990s [in Texas] provided the model for the No Child Left Behind Act a decade later” (p. 76). Almost two decades after the establishment of the accountability system in Texas, sizeable achievement gaps persist among African American and other student ethnic groups, yet those found in high school foreign language are largely silent in the research.

Foreign language courses are not considered part of the “foundational curriculum” or core courses required for students in Texas schools (Texas Education Code, ch. 28, § 28, 1995). Instead, foreign language is classified as “enrichment curriculum” or non-core course. Nonetheless, two to three years of successful foreign language study are a requirement for all but the lowest of three graduation plans in Texas: the minimum high school program², the recommended high school program, and the distinguished achievement program (Texas Administrative Code, ch. 74 § 11B, 2000). Beyond satisfying graduation requirements for Texas, the length in years of foreign language study serves in determining at which institutions of higher learning a student may be eligible to study. Many of the large, public universities in Texas, such as Texas Tech University, Texas A&M University, The University of Texas, and Texas State

² In the sections of this dissertation that follow, the terms graduation *plan* and graduation *programs* are referred to as graduation *plan* and graduation *plans*.

University require as a minimum two years of a foreign language for admission, with three years being recommended (Texas A&M University, 2010; Texas Tech University, 2010; University of Texas, 2010). Other prestigious institutions throughout the nation, such as Columbia University and Stanford University, require a minimum of three years study in one foreign language for entrance (Columbia University, 2010; Stanford University, 2010) Harvard College requires a minimum of four years (Harvard College, 2010).

Research Question

This research study responded to the following question:

1. What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers, counselors, and administrators at a central Texas high school concerning the enrollment and advancement of African American students in foreign language courses, as compared to other student ethnic groups?

Significance of the Study

According to Oakes, Selvin, Karoly, and Guiton (1992), despite our knowledge of tracking and ability grouping, their histories, and contemporary forms found in public schools, “prior research provides little insight into the decision-making processes that shape the curriculum offerings and students course taking patterns in today’s high schools and the rationale that support patterns we observe. . . . although a number of theories have been offered to explain them” (p. 5). This research provided insight into

the perceptions of stakeholders regarding part of the achievement gap largely silent in the research literature: that of tracking, ability-grouping, gatekeeping, and the achievement gap among African American students and other student ethnic groups, as applied to foreign language courses. The existence of tracking, ability-grouping, and gatekeeping was grounded from a survey of school district course descriptions and sequences throughout Texas by the author of this study.

By exploring the perceptions of teachers, counselors, and administrators at a single high school in Texas, this study provided an opportunity for understanding these achievement gaps in foreign language courses. Smith (2000) suggests that researchers, “must critically investigate schooling objectives and processes to explore how the educational system may be implicated in reproducing marginalized youths’ academic failure” (p. 294). Coupling this interpretive case study with a critical lens, this research aimed to not only understand the perceptions of stakeholders regarding why African American students are not being as successful in foreign language courses as other student ethnic groups, but also to utilize this information to develop solutions for addressing this achievement gap, which seemed to remain silent, unnoticed, and/or not addressed at both the school and in the research literature.

Definition of Terms

Ability-Grouping – This practice generally denotes the assigning of students to different classes or groups based on predicted learning rates and abilities, although researchers disagree about the use of names for the different types of programs (Kulik,

2004, p. 159). Schools use ability-grouping for different purposes, using such names as: comprehensive grouping, single-class grouping, cross-grade grouping, within-class grouping, advanced/accelerated classes, and enriched classes (Kulik, 2004, p. 160)

Correspondence – “The search for meaning often is a search for patterns, for consistency, for consistency within certain conditions, which we call ‘correspondence’” (Stake, 1995, p. 78).

Critical Theory – “A broad band of arguments about power – how the marginalization of people is constructed through the practices of school . . . [and] the various forms in which power operates” (Popkewitz, 1999, p. 2).

Curriculum Differentiation – The organization of content into hierarchies of courses (Loveless, 1999).

Detracking – “Defined by many scholars and practitioners as the process of replacing tracked course programs or so-called ability-grouped classrooms with ‘mixed-ability’ classrooms” (Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002, p. 41). Another definition is the creation of college-prep classes and/or groups for minority students, although this is often not done on a large scale in schools. An example of the second definition includes the program Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), which currently exists in forty-seven states and provides support for minority and other at-risk students, encouraging participation and enrollment in advanced courses (AVID, 2010). While the program focuses on the traditionally least-served students, its emphasis is on students in the academic middle, rather than all of these students.

Gatekeeper Courses – There are several commonly used definitions and references for this term, which are used in secondary and post-secondary contexts. Gatekeepers can be prerequisites that students must take and pass, before moving onto more advanced courses in a pipeline for that subject (Atanda, 1999; Stinson, 2004; The College Board, 2000). These can also be courses that help determine whether students meet the minimum admission requirements to universities (Stone, 1998); earning credit in a gatekeeper course is factored into whether the student is considered sufficiently prepared for study at that institution.

Hybrid Tracking Policies – Also referred to as mixed systems, these policies characterize schools where some subjects offer tracked courses, while other courses may remain heterogeneously grouped, whether in that subject or others. This can also describe subject courses that delay grouping practices until a specified time or point in the sequence of courses (Loveless, 1999). These terms express the shades of gray that can exist between rigidly tracked and detracked policies in schools.

Neotracking – “Combined older versions of rigid, comprehensive tracking with the newer, more flexible within-subject area curricular differentiation to form an overarching, multilevel framework for high school curricula” (Mickelson & Everett, 2008, p. 535).

Race/Ethnicity – For the purpose of collecting student data for Texas Public schools up to the current 2009-2010 school year, I cite and operate under the Texas Education Agency (2006b) definitions for the terms African American, Hispanic, Asian and White, which problematically do not separate ethnicity and race; instead the Texas Education

Agency treats these as one and the same. The Texas Education Agency is implementing new federal standards beginning with data for the 2009-2010 school year (Texas Education Agency, 2009b). However, since my student data have been collected from the 2005-2006, 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 school years, I must operate under the previous data collection standards.

Second-Generation (Re-)Segregation – Whereas first-generation segregation was largely between-school separation of students by race, second-generation segregation and re-segregation refer to the use of tracking and ability-grouping producing similar racially identifiable effects, except now mostly within desegregated schools (Mickelson, 2005).

Triangulation – “A process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Stake, 2005, p. 454).

Unitary – The term “unitary status” stems from the decision in *Green v. County School Board* (1968), where the Supreme Court stated when courts should remove school districts from supervision of desegregation. According to the Supreme Court, schools would not achieve such unitary status, “[until] six aspects of education no longer reflected any of the vestiges of past racial discrimination. . . . now commonly called the *Green* factors. . . . [including] student assignment, faculty, staff, transportation, extracurricular activities, and facilities” (Moore, 2002, p. 315). However, this definition is problematic, for it gave no further guidance to lower courts as to when each of these factors no longer reflects vestiges of past racial discrimination (Poser, 2002, p. 286). Later, in *Board of Education v. Dowell* (1991), the Court explained that, “unitary status

is achieved if ‘the Board has complied in good faith with the desegregation degree since it was entered. . . . [and] the vestiges of past discrimination had been eliminated to the extent practicable’” (Moore, 2002, p. 315). This definition, too, is unclear and ineffective in guiding court decisions regarding ending desegregation orders and, “as a result, district and circuit courts have developed somewhat arbitrary criteria to measure when school districts have eliminated the vestiges of prior discrimination” (p. 316).

Methodology Overview

In this interpretive case study, I documented the perceptions of foreign language teachers, counselors, and administrators regarding factors they saw as contributing to the differential progression and enrollment patterns of African American students in the high school’s foreign language courses. This was an intrinsic case study, whose purpose was to gather comprehensive, systemic, and in-depth information about the case of interest: the foreign language program at a high school (Patton, 2002, p. 447). Through the use of purposive, maximum variation sampling: the perceptions of various stakeholders at the school were examined.

This research study utilized a qualitative design because of the, “interest in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). The purpose of this research was to help address an apparent gap in the literature regarding the underserving of African American students in education by examining perceptions of stakeholders regarding a non-core course: foreign language.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I began by sharing a personal experience as a high school foreign language teacher and its influence on me to research achievement gaps in high school foreign language courses. Afterwards, I provided a general overview and discussion of the research surrounding the achievement gap, which led into my argument that it may also be important to consider the complicity of non-core courses, such as foreign language, with the broader achievement gaps among African American, White, Hispanic, and Asian students in our public schools. To support this argument, I cited an earlier analysis of high school student enrollment and progression data for the State of Texas revealing stark achievement gaps among African American and other student ethnic groups, along with how success in foreign language, even as a non-core course, can wield considerable influence on secondary and post-secondary academic trajectories for students. To close, I explained how this interpretive case study has provided an opportunity for understanding these achievement gaps in foreign language courses by examining the perceptions of various stakeholders at the high school campus as to why African American students are not progressing in foreign language courses, as compared to other student ethnic groups.

In Chapter II, a review of the literature is presented as it pertains to the achievement gaps with African Americans in Texas high school foreign language courses. This review parses the history of public education in the United States and in Texas, both before and following *Brown v Board of Education* in 1954, including how the practice and purpose of tracking and ability grouping have changed since the beginnings of

desegregation. Concluding this chapter is a review of the theoretical frameworks guiding this study, including the Interpretive Paradigm, Critical Theory, and Critical Theories of Race.

Contained in Chapter III is a description of the method of inquiry used for this study, including the research context, selection of the site and participants, the research design, and the analysis of data. Also included in this chapter is a brief introduction to each of the nine participants, which included administrators, counselors, and teachers.

In Chapter IV is the analysis of the data collected, including the themes of deficit views, racial erasure, paralogical beliefs and behaviors, and organizational constraints that emerged, borrowing from the research of McKenzie and Scheurich (2004).

Chapter V concludes this dissertation with a review of the research study, accompanied by a presentation of my interpretations of the research findings. Following these are implications for future research, as well as recommendations for educational policy and practice to help address the sizeable achievement gaps in high school foreign language courses among African Americans and other student ethnic groups.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Of the 1,290,924 students enrolled in public high schools in Texas for the 2007-2008 school year, 624,801 (TEA Data Request, 2010) were enrolled in a Spanish, French, Latin, or German foreign language course [APPENDIX C]. In each of the schools and districts surveyed across Texas by the author of this study, tracking or ability grouping was found to be a common structural component in the foreign language programs, as revealed in schools' and districts' course description guides. The major difference among these programs was shown in whether tracking or ability-grouping is implemented beginning at first-, second-, or third-year foreign language courses in the programs.

Regardless of at which course level ability-grouping or tracking is initiated, foreign language can be seen as one of the gatekeeper courses in high schools or as performing a gatekeeping role; another commonly identified gatekeeper course in the literature, for example, is mathematics (Atanda, 1999; Stinson, 2004; The College Board, 2000). Stinson (2004) defines gatekeeper courses or gatekeeping as, “an exclusive instrument for stratification” where it is decided not what should be taught in a subject, but rather whom should be taught the subject (p. 10). While this process of choosing whom belongs where is purported to be meritocratic and based on objective measures of

student academic abilities, instead it often acts as a stratifier, reproducing and perpetuating racial, ethnic, class, and other divisions (Stinson, 2004; Stone, 1998).

In examining the achievement gap in high school foreign language courses in Texas, it is first necessary to examine the history, structures, purposes, and practices of tracking and ability grouping in public schools in general, for although research is sparse regarding its application in foreign languages, there is extensive literature citing tracking and ability grouping as main contributors and perpetuators of achievement gaps between student racial/ethnic groups (Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Oakes, 2005; Mickelson, 2005). For example, tracking and ability grouping have been repeatedly shown to be strongly correlated with students' race/ethnicity and social class (Oakes, Selvin, Karoly, & Guiton, 1992; Mickelson, 2005); student academic outcomes in gatekeeper courses has also been shown to be correlated with race, ethnicity, class, and other divisions (Stinson, 2004). While much research exists on tracking and ability grouping, "what we do not know from all this scholarship is how these eventualities are played out in schools – how the day-to-day experiences in classrooms contribute to such consequences" (Oakes, 2005, p. 41).

Oakes (2005) asserts that, "we need to lift tracking to above this taken-for-granted level in order to reflect critically about whether it is appropriate, given today's educational problems, today's social context, and today's students – in short we need to unlock the tradition" which traces back roughly a century in American schools (p. 15). In order to understand how tracking may influence progression and enrollment patterns among student groups in high school foreign language courses, we must first understand

how tracking has influenced American public education in general. In reviewing the history of tracking, it is essential to underscore, however, that until the mid-1950s the educational system in the United States was racially segregated by law, meaning African Americans and Whites were educated in separate systems purported to be “separate but equal” (Jackson, 2007, p. 197). It is not until after desegregation of schools began following *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 that African American students would begin to experience tracking in both common and unique ways as compared to other students.

One cannot understand the current context of these achievement gaps with African Americans in public high school foreign language courses in Texas as being entirely isolated or altogether unique from those found in the core curriculum. While a paucity of literature exists on the evolution of high school foreign language in Texas and the United States, a wealth exists on courses found in the core curriculum. In this chapter, I present a review of the literature mostly surrounding the evolution of achievement gaps in the core curriculum in order to build a context and springboard for the exploration of those in the non-core curriculum of foreign language. This review includes a background of public education, both before and after the beginning of desegregation, along with a history of the purposes and practices of tracking, gatekeeping, and ability grouping in public schools. Concluding this chapter is a description of the theoretical frameworks used in guiding this inquiry, including the Interpretive Paradigm, Critical Theory, and Critical Theories of Race.

Background of Public Education and the Emergence of Tracking in America

United States Public Schools Prior to Desegregation

The United States Constitution makes no specific provision for public education, instead granting this power to the states through the Tenth Amendment (Johnson, Collins, Dupuis, & Johansen, 1979, p. 165). Public elementary schools established during the end of the eighteenth century in America were, “dedicated largely to achieving a functional literacy for the socio-civic, economic, and religious aims of the times. . . . [when] learning to read, and perhaps to write, largely sufficed” (Ryan, 1968, p. 224). Moving into the nineteenth century, the curriculum of the public elementary schools, “assumed the function of a liberal regimen. . . . [meaning] that all children were to receive more or less integrated instruction sampling the range of man’s accumulated knowledges, as well as guidance in character development for the democratic way of life” (Ryan, 1968, p. 259).

Lucas (1999) points out that, “tracking rose in concert with promulgation of compulsory schooling laws, the expansion of schooling, and the construction of the comprehensive high school (p. 61). Compulsory school attendance laws did not exist for many years throughout the United States. Massachusetts was the first state to pass such a law in 1852, with only thirty-two of the then forty-five states having passed such laws by 1900 (Johnson, Collins, Dupuis, & Johansen, 1979, p. 267). These thirty-two states that enacted laws for compulsory school attendance included eleven southern states, which were: Texas, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Louisiana,

Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, and Florida (Ryan, 1968, p. 256). It was not until 1918 that all states had passed compulsory attendance statutes (Ryan, 1968, p. 296). By this time, these compulsory schooling laws had been passed throughout the country to push immigrant children into schools so that they could be socialized and “Americanized” (Lucas, 1999, p. 61).

The first public high school in the United States was established in 1821 in Boston, named the “English High School” (Monroe, 1971). The future State of Texas would not establish its first public school system until a school law was passed in 1854 (Hill, 1998, p. 3) and its first public high school, Austin High School, until 1881 (Texas Historical Commission, 1981). By the time of the American Civil War, the public high school had been established in many states, although for some time secondary education would be largely limited to private academies; high schools would not become a mass institution in the United States until the 1920s and 1930s (Hammack, 2004; Monroe, 1971; Spring, 2008). In Texas, public education for African Americans did not exist before the Civil War. In 1871, the Texas legislature passed a law that established public education for African Americans, although education would not be provided for years to come (Hill, 1998, p. 6).

The purpose of secondary education at private academies during the nineteenth century was college preparation and entrance to institutions of higher learning, for often academies were connected to colleges (Krug, 1964). As public schools began to emerge in increasing numbers, a college preparatory curriculum, including the study of foreign languages, was their initial focus as well (Meiss, 2004). However, by the 1880s, the

curriculum in public high schools began to broaden beyond merely a college preparatory focus, instead responding to what a growingly diverse clientele of students attending these institutions was thought to need (Hammack, 2004).

With the aims of public schools broadening beyond the original focus of college preparation, tensions began to arise regarding these conflicting purposes of secondary education (Krug, 1964, p. 27). Would colleges accept students that had taken high school courses not intended for college preparation? Would they accept students initially not college-bound, but who later became inspired to enroll in college preparatory classes? If such decisions were made further into high school, this would present issues for both the students and the colleges that would decide whether to accept them. To address these growing tensions and other concerns, the National Education Association formed the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies in 1892, which issued a report containing a general framework discussing the goals of secondary education (Spring, 2008, p. 255). Confronted with whether different courses of study should be offered to students, depending on whether they would pursue post-secondary education, the Committee of Ten recommended in its report against any such differentiation (Krug, 1964, p. 65). Instead, four courses of study were recommended, regardless of whether students would pursue college: the Classical, the Latin-Scientific, Modern Languages (i.e. Foreign Languages), and English (Hammack, 2004, p. 8).

As the United States moved into the twentieth century, demand for public secondary education continued to grow, fueled by educational and social forces of the time, like changes in the organization of work, the large influx of immigrants, and the expansion of

schooling from its earlier purpose and audience (Lucas, 1999, p. 2; Oakes, 2005, p. 17). Krug (1964) states that, “it was an age which many more young people than ever before decided to go to high school – or had it decided for them – possibly to develop power, possibly to absorb the heritage of their civilization, or perhaps just to get ahead in the world. . . . [although] just why this upsurge took place is not easily answered” (p. 169).

By the first quarter of the twentieth century, the intent of public schools had transformed into one of dealing with the large influx of European immigrants, both Americanizing them culturally and, “sorting them and their native peers scientifically into distinct academic tracks and differentiated vocational destinations” (Olneck, 1995, p. 312). Signaling this transition, in 1913 the National Education Association organized another group, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, which followed the Committee of Ten established roughly two decades earlier. By 1918 this committee had published its report entitled the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, which was influenced by the growing concern for social efficiency and universal secondary education (Spring, 2008, p. 259). The report called for a universal, comprehensive high school offering a differentiated curricula to meet the needs of a range of students, including vocational training, which is in contrast to the previous report by the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies just two decades earlier (Krug, 1966; Oakes, 2005; Spring, 2008).

During the 1920s, the contemporary notion of tracking was formed, whereby American high schools would offer a mix of courses, ranging from academics, the arts, vocational preparation, and physical education; courses of varying difficulties would be

offered, ranging from remedial courses to more demanding academic and technical courses (Oakes, Selvin Karoly, & Guiton, 1992). The differentiated curriculum found in these comprehensive schools, justified by the need for social efficiency, would train students to perform specific roles for the benefit of society. Part of this differentiated curriculum included foreign language. Because foreign languages were considered part of a college preparatory curriculum, they were no longer purposed for every high school student, but rather only for those on a college track (Meiss, 2004).

Although a differentiated curricula meant that not all students were exposed to the same knowledge and skills, by housing different types of schools and courses under one roof, the comprehensive high school aimed, “to help develop the common knowledge, common ideals, and common interests essential to American democracy” (Hammack, 2004, p. 8). “Before long this new kind of education had become thoroughly cloaked in the jargon of democracy. . . . [that of a] ‘new’ kind of equality, taking individual needs, interests, and abilities into account in defining equal opportunity” (Oakes, 2005, p. 34).

During the 1930s, enrollment in public high schools continued to grow (Krug, 1972, p. 218). One of the catalysts for enrollment growth was the lack of jobs to attract the students elsewhere (McDonald, 2004, p. 29). Comparing growth of enrollments, in 1930, roughly half of the at-age children were enrolled. By 1940, this percentage had grown to two-thirds of the at-age population, meaning most teenagers now attended high school (Krug, 1972; Petrovich, 2005a). However, not all Americans saw the growth of high school enrollments as a positive force, instead seeing it as a lowering of student quality. During this period rose what would soon be referred to as Life Adjustment Education,

meaning the categorizing of students not only into academic or vocational tracks, but also non-academic/non-vocational.

In 1944, a report was published by the National Education Association and the American Association of School Administrators entitled, *Education for All American Youth*, which would later become known as the Life Adjustment movement (Hammack, 2004, p. 9). Some of the recommendations in the report included compulsory school attendance until age eighteen or graduation from high school. The commission defined life adjustment education as addressing the educational and training needs of all students, meaning addressing the estimated sixty percent of the student population that were deemed incapable or inappropriate for either vocational training or college preparation; these students had not been seen as receiving “life adjustment” through the conventional routes existing in the past (Krug, 1966, p. 132). By offering general education programs alongside vocation- and college-track programs, secondary education was initially touted as more democratic compared to other school systems around the world, although domestically it would become increasingly regarded as problematic and intellectually weak due to domestic and world developments of the 1950s and 1960s (Hammack, 2004).

By the early 1950s, the purpose of public high schools in the United States had already changed considerably from that of the first public high school established in 1821. No longer were public high schools solely intended for college preparation. Instead, they had transformed into mass institutions catering to a majority of Americans, where students were sorted and educated for a variety of post-secondary destinations.

While the Committee of Ten had recommended in 1892 that the study of Modern Languages (i.e. Foreign Languages), among other subjects, be included for all students in public high schools, by 1918 the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education had already called for a reversal of this by means of a differentiated curricula, whereby students were tracked on academic, vocational, and general, non-vocational, non-academic paths during high school (Spring, 2008).

Beginning of Desegregation until the 1990s

Until 1954, with the United States Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, American public schools had operated under a system of de jure segregation. Issues concerning equality and equity with the institution of tracking and a differentiated curricula, including foreign languages, had been limited to a context of segregated, public high schools. Not only had African American children and other students of color been forced to attend separate schools from Whites up until this time, but many African American students continued to be educated in separate schools for years and sometimes decades to come, due to the slow pace of integration and other forms of discrimination (Spring, 2008). According to Mickelson (2005), since the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, "school desegregation has played a central role in efforts to provide the equality of educational opportunity that is essential to the American dream. . . . [and] any serious discussion about desegregation must include the topic of tracking" (p. 49). Losen (1999) refers to tracking as, "an oblique method of school segregation" (p. 1).

The practice of tracking and ability grouping has ebbed and flowed in the history of American public education. However, following *Brown v. Board of Education* tracking and ability grouping made sizeable comebacks in public schools, most notably being resurgences of these practices in the South (Brown, 2005, p. 248). During the 1960s and 1970s, tracking and ability grouping were common ways within the curricula to circumvent desegregation plans. Losen (1999) goes so far as saying, “*Brown* marked the beginning of the end to de jure apartheid in America, but the evidence suggests that apartheid in education was modified, not ended” (p. 27). Often the effects of these practices produced racially identifiable classrooms and schools, although selections could be officially pronounced as based on nonracial, academic factors.

The federal courts during the 1960s and 1970s recognized, regardless of legitimate educational justifications, the likelihood of tracking and ability grouping practices to undermine the benefits of desegregation plans (Mickelson, 2005, p. 51). Numerous challenges to tracking and ability grouping were decided in the courts; the early court rulings generally struck down the practice of tracking during desegregation of schools. The first major legal attack on the use of tracking came in 1967 with *Hobson v. Hansen*, when the United States District Court for the District of Columbia ruled against the grouping of students into Basic, General, Honors, and College Preparatory curricular tracks based on differing levels of academic abilities (Brown, 2005, p. 248). Presiding Circuit Court Judge Skelly Wright noted that under the tracking system, African American students were disproportionately assigned to the lower tracks, whereby the school district, “would have deprived the black students of the enriched educational

environment they needed in order to elevate themselves beyond the limited horizons of their disadvantaged backgrounds” (Brown, 2005, p. 251).

Tracking and ability grouping has not only been a debated issue involving the sorting and separation of students within a school. In 1969, the United States Fifth Circuit court rejected a desegregation plan for two school districts in *Singleton v. Jackson Municipal Separate School District*, in which the plan had called for the two school districts to assign students to schools based on students’ achievement test scores, which would have undoubtedly ensured that schools remained largely segregated within the district and racially identifiable (Brown, 2005, p. 251). It was ruled that until a school system has been established as fully unitary, schools could not use academic achievement to assign students to different schools.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a retreat in many areas of the country from the use of overarching programs or tracks for students (Lucas, 1999, p. 6). Instead of using track labels to refer to overarching programs, such as honors, remedial, essential, and basic, these labels were being applied to courses (p. 6). Tracking and ability grouping remained. However, they had now taken different forms. In 1975, the court system moved on to address the issue of tracking within schools, in contrast to previous decisions regarding the assignment of students to schools according to academic abilities. In *McNeal v. Tate*, the Fifth Circuit court ruled that tracking and/or grouping of students is permissible if it does not have a racially discriminatory effect (*McNeal v. Tate*, 1975). However, Circuit Judge Clark provided in his opinion that even if ability grouping does cause segregation, “[it] may nevertheless be permitted in an

otherwise unitary system if the school district can demonstrate that its assignment method is not based on the present results of past segregation or will remedy such results through better educational opportunities” (*McNeal v. Tate*, 1975).

The language and opinions found in *McNeal v. Tate* would form the basis for a number of later court rulings involving tracking in public schools, often referred to as the *McNeal test* or *McNeal standard*. According to Brown (2005), during the 1980s the Fifth and Eleventh Circuit Courts used *McNeal v. Tate* to invalidate tracking only when results were based on present effects of past segregation and/or were not part of remedying results of prior segregation through better educational opportunities for African American students (p. 253). Leiding (2006) points to the changing mood in the United States, “[for] as laws were passed to protect the rights of minority and economically challenged students, backlash mounted. . . . [and] the United States witnessed a groundswell of opposition to the equality principle. . . . as opponents demanded a greater deference to the individual rights of the majority” (Leiding, 2006, p. 55). If the courts saw ability grouping and/or tracking as producing results clearly traceable to a formerly dual school system, such practices were deemed not permissible. However, if a school district had followed a desegregation decree for twelve years or longer, then such practices were permissible, for it was argued that none of the students would have attended the previous dual school system that had been in place.

By upholding tracking systems during the 1980s, the United States Fifth and Eleventh Circuit courts marked a shift in approach from the preceding two decades. While tracking and ability grouping practices had often been rejected during the 1960s and

1970s by the courts, the 1980s saw a near reversal of such positions. During the decade, the Reagan Administration developed theories characterizing desegregation as having failed, helping usher a shift in the Justice Department to oppose desegregation litigation and even the continuation of existing desegregation plans (Orfield, 2001, p. 4). If school districts have operated under a valid desegregation decree for twelve or more years, the use of ability grouping was permissible, even if African Americans were disproportionately found in lower groups and, “even if the school district had not yet eradicated all of the vestiges of its prior *de jure* conduct” (Brown, 2005, p. 254). Although some courts struck down tracking systems moving into the 1990s, Brown (2005) points out that the district courts largely approached the, “confinement of black students in the lower ability skills tracks . . . [as] the unfortunate result of the application of race-neutral academic judgments that do not raise any equal protection violations” (p. 258).

By the 1980s, most high schools in the United States no longer had clearly marked tracks, such as college preparatory, general, or vocational (Lucas & Gamoran, 2002, p. 173). While many states offered different high school graduation plans, they refrained from using the term *college preparatory* for the higher graduation plans and instead substituted other terms for what remained a similar distinction (NCES, 1994). Lucas (1999) refers to this period as, “[the] unremarked revolution. . . [for] it ushered in an era in which students could enroll in discrepant levels of different courses for different subjects” (p. 131). This meant, in theory, that opportunities for student mobility among various levels would be more possible, although in reality it made in-school stratification

less visible than before. In fact, the word tracking was generally avoided, with students now being divided more on a subject-to-subject basis rather than by all subjects (Lucas & Gamoran, 2002, p. 173). Reports, such as *A Nation at Risk* published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 and *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* by Jeannie Oakes in 1985, led to reforms in the United States that would last for decades, including ability grouping and tracking being seen as harmful practices (Kulik, 2004, p. 157). With the impetus created in part by these publications, the elimination of tracking and ability grouping became important issues on the reform agenda for education.

In 1994, the Improving America's Schools Act was passed, as part of the Clinton Administration's efforts to reform education, which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Part of the congressional legislation specially addressed the need for high expectations and rigor for all students, including, "developing and evaluating strategies for eliminating ability-grouping practices, and developing policies and programs that place all students on a college-preparatory path of study, particularly in academic fields such as mathematics, science, English, and social studies" (Improving America's Schools Act, 1994). While legislation was concentrated on the core curricular subjects, it demonstrated the impetus at the national level to promote detracking across the curriculum in schools.

This congressional legislation revealed a changing, national perception of tracking and ability grouping, for just a decade earlier in 1985, in *NAACP v. Georgia*, the courts justified the continued use of such practices, which were seen as being able to, "correct

the effects of past segregation by providing remediation to blacks” (Brown, 2005, p. 14). However, such acceptance during the 1990s and on continued to wane, instead being seen as lowering expectations and rigor for disadvantaged students. During the 1990s, reformers across the United States, “embarked on ambitious ‘detracking’ reforms, seeking alternatives to tracking and ability grouping” (Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002, p. 38). Although reformers were confronted with social, cultural, and political resistance, support for these efforts came from state education agencies, including Texas, and nonprofit agencies like the Children’s Fund, the College Board, and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (p. 38).

At the turn of the millennium, the United States Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This legislation was seen as a standards-based educational reform, hailing the belief in high standards and measureable goals as vehicles to improving our educational system and individual student performance across the nation. In a keyword search of the entire 670 page document, there are no mentions of the terms “ability-grouping” and/or “tracking”, as pertaining to the separation of students by purported ability levels (NCLB, 2001). Although forms of tracking and ability grouping are still present within many of our schools, at the national level, these practices are neither prescribed, nor supported in a climate that not only encourages, but in effect mandates high expectations and standards for all students.

In the context of the State of Texas for this study, both tracking and ability grouping remain in practice in public high schools to this day. Part of this is shown in the continued maintenance by the state of different high school graduation plans. Currently,

these include the minimum, recommended, and distinguished achievement plans (TEA, 2011a). Although these were intended to, “rais[e] performance standards and levels of expectations for all students” beyond the minimum, advanced, and recommended graduation plans that they replaced (TEA, 1994, p. 5), tracking remained a component; students on the higher graduation plans were required to earn more credits and enroll in more rigorous courses (TEA, 1994, 2011a).

In the case of foreign languages, the current minimum graduation plan continues to require no credits in these courses, just as the bottom, non-college preparatory plan of the same name that it had replaced (NCES, 1994; TEA, 1994, 2000, 2010). Resisting the impetus at both the state and national levels to eliminate tracking and assure that all high school students are on a college preparatory path (Improving America’s Schools Act, 1994; NCLB, 2001; Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002), differentiated graduation plans in Texas illuminate a history dating back nearly a century in both the state and the nation. Whereas the Committee of Ten had earlier recommended against the differentiation of curricula for students, including foreign language, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education in 1918 had overturned this, setting in motion a design that continues in similar form today, meaning that foreign language should not be part of the curriculum for students not on a college preparatory track in high school.

The context for public high schools today has changed considerably from those when the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education published their report in 1918, calling for the creation of universal, comprehensive high schools in the United

States. At that time, any issues concerning whether tracking and a differentiated curricula were truly meritocratic were confined to discussions of segregated public schools, both in Texas and the United States. For almost sixty years now, tracking and related practices, including ability grouping, have operated in public schools that no longer operate within a system of de jure segregation. Although tracking and ability grouping reform have become issues of both state and national priority over the past three decades due to their strong correlation with persisting achievement gaps with African Americans and other student racial/ethnic groups (Improving America's Schools Act, 1994; Kulik, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Mickelson, 2005; NCLB, 2001; Oakes, 2005), these practices continue in public high schools throughout the United States, including Texas. In the following section, tracking, gatekeeping, and ability grouping are discussed in terms of how they operate within present-day public schools, contributing to achievement gaps both in foreign languages and across the entire curriculum.

Tracking, Gatekeeping, and Ability Grouping in Schools Today

Today, tracking, gatekeeping, and ability-grouping are still actively engaged in our educational system and schools, although often in more oblique ways. How far have our schools come since *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954? Feagin (2006) argues that, "African American children are about as segregated from White children [and vice versa] in public schools today as they were in the legally segregated United States of the 1950s" (p. 50). It is no longer the case of merely separate, unequal schools; because of

practices like tracking, gatekeeping, and ability-grouping, segregation continues, often taking new guises with some being more visible than others.

According to Orfield (2001), much progress in integration has been made in the South, with segregation reaching its lowest point nationally for African Americans in the late 1980s. However, he warns that, “it is moving backwards at an accelerating rate” (p. 2). Furthermore, while between-school segregation may be highly visible for reform efforts, within-school segregation by means of tracking and ability grouping remains oblique and often less noticed. The focus of this study serves as a case in point of within-school segregation and the patterns of enrollment and progression of African American students in foreign language courses, compared to other student ethnic groups.

Following trends in the United States federal courts over the past fifty years, Brown (2005) points to, “change[s] in the background assumptions against which rights of black schoolchildren derived from the equal protection clause are interpreted” (p. 237). One of these shifts is that programs and policies drawn up by schools, districts, and state legislatures to address racial performance gaps are limited from the beginning, for they cannot employ racial or ethnic classifications in their workings. Another shift is that policies and practices by schools can no longer be deemed unconstitutionally discriminatory, unless they result from racially discriminatory motives. Brown (2005) notes that, “educational policies and practices such as tracking and achievement skills grouping. . . . can almost always be justified based on legitimate educational concerns. . . . thus, it is difficult to prove that they were primarily motivated by discriminatory intent” (p. 239).

While a review of ability-grouping, tracking, and gatekeeping in all subject courses is beyond the scope of this study, a survey of high school foreign language programs in Texas reveals the continued use of ability-grouping, tracking, and gatekeeping. This is occurring amid sizeable achievement gaps in enrollment and progression patterns of African American students, compared to other student ethnic groups throughout the state. Of the various public schools and districts in Texas surveyed, not only are forms of ability-grouping, tracking, and gatekeeping continuing to be practiced amid such achievement gaps, but some districts in recent years have even expanded their reach, instituting ability-grouping, tracking, and gatekeeping at earlier levels than traditionally seen. How this may exacerbate the growth of such achievement gaps can only be measured as time progresses.

According to Brown (2005) on the shifts in federal courts over the past several decades, “[such] legitimate educational concerns [surrounding achievement gaps among African Americans and other student groups in public schools] is now understood as an unfortunate side effect of racially-neutral educational decision making. . . . thus, equal protection lawsuits calling into question racially neutral educational policies and procedures which have a disparate racial impact generally do not succeed” (p. 239). By employing the Interpretive Paradigm, Critical Theory, and Critical Theories of Race as theoretical frameworks, as described in the following section, this inquiry seeks to critically examine and come to understand the purportedly meritocratic, objective, and racially neutral policies of tracking, ability grouping, and gatekeeping in foreign languages at a public school in Texas.

Theoretical Frameworks Guiding the Understanding of Achievement Gaps in High School Foreign Language Courses

Introduction

In contrast to positivistic research, which purports to objectively come to know, measure, describe, and/or generalize upon an existent, external reality, the design of this research inquiry has been heavily influenced by the Interpretive Paradigm, Critical Theory, and Critical Theories of Race. In the following sections, each of these paradigms will be described.

Interpretive Paradigm

Interpretivism stems from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century hermeneutic philosophy, focusing on the problem of interpretation, which states that nothing can ever be proven absolutely correct or true (Patton, 2002, p. 114). Interpretivism refers to both a paradigm and method of inquiry, which views research as a, “socially constructed activity. . . . [and who] is influenced and shaped by the preexisting theories and world views of the researchers . . . [and whose] terms, procedures, and data of research have meaning because a group of scholars has agreed on that meaning” (Willis, 2007, p. 96). Contrary to positivism, research from this perspective is socially constructed from the multiple realities of the research participants, which the research seeks to understand.

Largely a reaction to positivism, the interpretivist paradigm asserts that inquiry, “must focus on the study of multiple social realities . . . created by different individuals

as they interact in a social environment” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2006, p. 22). Different individuals construct reality differently, which emphasizes that unlike positivism, interpretivists do not accept the existence of objective methods in coming to know reality (Willis, 2007, p. 96). Instead of designing and/or undertaking experiments, this interpretive inquiry accepts the use of subjective research methods, including the interviewing of a variety of different stakeholders at the high school and the analysis of various school records and written documents. Although an infinite number of realities may exist, this inquiry will heed the four criteria for determining the length of and extent for data collection to contend with this: exhaustion of sources, saturation of categories when analyzing data, emergence of regularities, and overextension (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 350). In order to maintain epistemological congruence with the belief in and existence of multiple realities, each research participant will be provided opportunities for member checks in order to correct errors found in the interpretations and understandings of the researcher during the inquiry process.

Unlike positivistic research, which purports and intends to find universal truths and cast generalizations based on such so-called findings, the purpose of this interpretive research is to reflect understanding, which is contextual and not generalizable in the positivistic sense (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). However, in the sense of naturalistic generalization, the degree of transferability and fittingness for this case study to other contexts will be provided for the discernment of the reader through “thick description” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Critical Theory

The term critical theory refers to the general theoretical foundations of contemporary society developed by Horkheimer and other early critical theorists connected to the Institut für Sozialforschung, often referred to as the Frankfurt School, in Germany during the first decades of the 20th century (Bronner & Kellner, 1989; Kellner, 1989). While critical theory has been influenced by Marxism since its beginning, over time critical traditions have drawn upon other thinkers and positions in order to provide expanded and more complex perspectives on modernity (Kellner, 1989; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Young, 1990). Consequently, Kellner (1989) asserts that, “[critical theory] provides one of the most comprehensive vantage points from which to address a broad spectrum of issues involved in the current debates over the fate of modernity” (p. 5).

Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) admit that a precise definition of critical theory is difficult, “because (a) there are many critical theories, not just one; (b) the critical tradition is always changing and evolving; and (c) critical theory attempts to avoid too much specificity, as there is room for disagreement among critical theorists” (p. 303). While a precise definition of critical theory is neither easy nor desirable, Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) define a criticalist as, “a researcher or theorist who attempts to use his or her work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumptions (p. 304). These basic assumptions include:

That all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of

values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; that the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and is often mediated by the social relations of capitalist production and consumption; that language is central to the formation of subjectivity (conscious and unconscious awareness); that certain groups in any society and particular societies are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely, the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable; that oppression has many faces and that focusing on only one at the expense of others (e.g., class oppression versus racism) often elides the interconnections among them; and, finally, that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression. (p. 304)

Critical theory presents an opportunity for this inquiry not only to understand the dynamics and structures of power within the high school for this study, but also to serve as an instrument for liberation. Willis (2007) criticizes much of the existing research that proclaims to be critical, “[for] critical theorists have demonstrated much more skill at criticizing than at empowering or freeing” (p. 85). This research must not only critique, but also strive to help bring about change in what is occurring in the foreign language program at the high school.

Critical Theories of Race

Critical Theories of Race refers to another critical lens pertinent to this research inquiry. While this inquiry borrows from Critical Race Theory (CRT), it cannot claim CRT, for it does not draw upon all of the tools of Critical Race Theory; an example of one such tool is counter storytelling, “[which is] a foundational precept and methodological tool of CRT” (Horsford, 2010, p. 295). However, by operating under Critical Theories of Race, this study will draw upon aspects of Critical Race Theory in this research.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework and, “growing body of legal scholarship. . . . [that] challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, in American society as a whole” (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1996, p. xiii). Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) cite six elements that generally unify and define Critical Race Theory scholarship: it recognizes that racism is endemic to American life; it expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy; it challenges ahistoricism; it insists on the recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color; it is interdisciplinary and eclectic; and it works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression (p. 6). Above all premises, however, stands the proposition that racism is normal in American society, “[which] provides an important tool for identifying other such ‘normal, ordinary’ thinking in the society” (Ladson-Billings, 2004, p. 51).

Historically, Critical Race Theory can be traced back to the mid-1970s with the work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman arguing that traditional legal and social approaches were yielding slow racial reform in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2009b, p. 20). Critical Race Theory can be viewed as being borne from Critical Legal Studies (CLS) (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 2). Although separate from Critical Legal Studies, “critical race theorists claimed that CLS scholars not only failed to address issues of racial inequality directly but also overlooked and underplayed the role that race and racism played in the very construction of the legal foundations upon which our society rests” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 9). Dixson and Rousseau (2005) cite the emergence of Critical Race Theory as, “part of the search for a new vocabulary. . . . that could name the race-related structures of oppression in the law and society that had not been adequately addressed in existing [Critical Legal Studies] scholarship” (p. 9). Phrased in another way, “critical race theory . . . provides the theoretical justification for taking seriously oppositional accounts of race” (Roithmayr, 1999, p. 5).

As defined by Matsuda et al. (1993), Critical Race Theory is interdisciplinary; its growth into different areas and fields has not been at the same rate. The term Critical Race Theory was introduced into the field of education by William Tate and Gloria Ladson-Billings with a presentation in 1994 at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association and subsequently with their paper ‘Toward a critical race theory of education’ published in 1995. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) openly stated their intention of theorizing race in education as an attempt to analyze and understand inequity in schools; these authors asserted that up until now, race remained,

“untheorized. . . . [for] inequalities [in education and schools] are a logical and predictable result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized” (p. 47). Ladson-Billings (1999) states that, “the strategy [of CRT] becomes one of unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations” (p. 12).

The focus of this research study is that African American students are not continuing in high school foreign language courses at the same rate and length as White, Hispanic, and Asian students; this is the case both at the local high school campus and throughout the state (TEA Data Request, 2010). It is the assertion of this research study that these observed achievement patterns cannot be attributed to ordinary or unfortunate coincidence. Bernal (2002) critiques the traditional “Eurocentric perspective” that is common among European-Americans, “founded upon assumptions of meritocracy, objectivity, and individuality. . . . [which] means that their way of knowing and understanding the world around them is very naturally and subconsciously interpreted through these beliefs” (p. 111). Examples of this in the literature include the gatekeeping process, ability-grouping, and tracking in schools, which are purported to be meritocratic and based on objective measures (Oakes, 2005; Stone, 1998), yet have shown to reproduce and perpetuate existing racial, ethnic, class, and other divisions (Stinson, 2004). By teachers, counselors, administrators, researchers, and other stakeholders not observing and/or addressing these achievement gaps in foreign language courses, we are sidelining the issues of race and maintaining our complicity in the underserving of students of color (Nebeker, 1998, p. 34). Scheurich and Young (1997) assert that, “one

of the worst racisms, though, for any generation or group is the one that we do not see, that is invisible to our lens . . . [and which] we participate in without consciously knowing or intending it” (p. 12). By employing Critical Theories of Race in this inquiry, race is being placed center stage.

Conclusion

The research reviewed in this chapter underscores how the continued practices of tracking and ability grouping stand as road blocks in addressing achievement gaps among African Americans and other student racial/ethnic groups in American public high schools. While a paucity of research exists on tracking and ability grouping in foreign language courses, correlations of these practices with racially-identifiable achievement gaps in the core curriculum are well-documented (Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Oakes, 2005; Mickelson, 2005). While this particular research inquiry is interested in achievement gaps in the context of public high school foreign language courses in Texas, this literature review draws upon the wealth of research on the tracking, ability grouping, and achievement gaps in the core curriculum to serve as both a foundation and springboard for extending the investigation into the achievement gaps found in foreign languages (TEA Data Request, 2010).

Tracing the history of tracking and ability grouping revealed that although they have traditionally been purported as meritocratic and objective systems in the United States for differentiating the education of students, a review of their histories speaks to the contrary in how these practices have actually played out in public high schools over the

past century. By coupling this review of ability grouping and tracking with a history of public education in general in both Texas and the United States, this review reveals how tracking and ability grouping stand in opposition to the original purpose and design of public high schools, part of which includes the study of foreign language for all students. Over the past century, as public high schools became mass institutions and in more recent history, desegregated following *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954, tracking and ability grouping have produced differences among students that have not only been correlated to social class, but following desegregation they have also become strongly correlated to race/ethnicity (Oaks, Selvin, Karoly, & Guiton, 1992; Mickelson, 2005). Although in recent decades, the acceptance of tracking and ability-grouping has declined (Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002), they remain in place, albeit in various guises (Atanda, 1999; Stone, 1998).

In order to understand how tracking, ability grouping, and other mechanisms play into the achievement gaps in high school foreign language courses, several lenses form the theoretical framework for this study, including the interpretive paradigm, critical theory, and critical theories of race. As interpretivist research, this study focuses on the existence of multiple realities, meaning those that have been socially constructed by the participants. Critical Theory lends itself as a lens in understanding the dynamics and structures of power within the high school, while critical theories of race add to this by keeping race at the center of this research inquiry, borrowing elements from Critical Race Theory.

The next chapter is a discussion of the methodology for this study. Employing a

qualitative design, this study examined the perceptions of nine stakeholders, including administrators, counselors, and teachers at a central Texas high school campus.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Lincoln and Guba (1985) cite one of the purposes of research inquiry as, “accumulating sufficient knowledge to lead to an understanding or explanation. . . . [of] a perplexing or enigmatic state (a conceptual problem)” (p. 226). The purpose of this dissertation was to address the lack of research on and awareness of the achievement gap in high school foreign language courses by documenting and examining in depth, the perceptions of nine stakeholders regarding why they believe African American students in their school are not progressing at comparable rates and/or lengths as other student ethnic groups.

Epistemological Frame

The design of this qualitative study was guided by an interpretive epistemology, coupled with a critical lens. In interpretive research, Merriam (1998) describes education as a process and school as a lived experience while critical research looks at power, privilege, and oppression in how education acts to reproduce and transform society. Patton (2002) acknowledges that such conceptual orientations can be combined. Employing an interpretive framework, this research study was accompanied by the use of a critical lens to, “focus on how injustice and subjugation shape people’s experiences and understandings of the world. . . . [and] not just to study and understand society but rather to critique and change society” (Patton, 2002, p. 130). Therefore, to understand

the meaning of these processes and experiences, this research sought to understand the multiple realities and truths socially constructed by the individual or stakeholders at the high school, including foreign language teachers, counselors, and administrators.

The ontological position for this inquiry was the world as experienced by the participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that, “it is dubious whether there is a reality. . . . [for] if there is, we can never know it” (p. 83). Therefore, one of the key tasks for this interpretive research was to uncover how stakeholders construct their meanings and realities from the social interaction process that occurs both in the school and the community (Smith, 2000, p. 304; Willis, 2007, p. 95).

In drawing upon critical theories of race as a lens for this study, the axiology of this inquiry was one of opposition and resistance to hegemonic discourses that both oppress and privilege different student groups and voices in education. According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2005), critical research traditions recognize how claims to truth are always discursively situated and involved in relations of power (p. 327). The authors argue that, “claims to universality must be recognized in each particular normative claim, and questions must be raised about whether such norms represent the entire group. . . . [for] when the limited claim of universality is seen to be contradictory to the practices under observation, power relations become visible” (p. 327). In this study, I employed Critical Theories of Race to theoretically examine race rather than employing Critical Race Theory as my methodological lens.

Research Questions

In naturalistic inquiry, the research question(s) guide us through the entire process. Creswell (2007) provides caution to, “refrain from assuming the role as the expert researcher with the ‘best’ questions. . . . [for] our questions change during the process of research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem” (Creswell, 2007, p. 43). We the researchers present participants with open-ended questions and concentrate on listening in an effort to reflect an increased understanding of the problem.

Stake (1995) asserts that, “perhaps the most difficult task of the researcher is to design good questions, research questions, that will direct the looking and thinking enough and not too much” (p. 15). One type of question offered is issue questions. These provide a conceptual structure to help organize a case study, “[for] issues draw us toward observing, even teasing out, the problems of the case, the conflictual outpourings, the complex backgrounds of the human concern. . . . help[ing] us expand upon the moment, help[ing] us see the instance in a more historical light, help[ing] us recognize the pervasive problems in human interaction” (p. 17).

The research question that guided this study was: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers, counselors, and administrators at a Texas high school concerning the enrollment and advancement of African American students in foreign language courses, as compared to other student ethnic groups?

Research Context

Central Independent School District is a small, urban district in the town of Central, Texas with two comprehensive high schools. Although the district hosts an alternative campus serving as a dropout prevention and dropout recovery education program, this campus offers no foreign language courses; the curriculum offered is not designed for students seeking to graduate on the recommended and DAP graduation plans. As of the 2010-2011 school year, the entire district serves 15,750 students through all grade levels, while General High School has an enrollment of 1,219 students ranging grades 9-12 (TEA, 2011b, 2011c).

The structure for foreign language courses at the high school includes heterogeneously grouped first-year foreign language courses, meaning there is no ability grouping of students into regular and pre-AP levels for these courses during the first year. However, beginning in second-year foreign language courses, students are tracked into regular and pre-AP. Regular level foreign language courses are only offered for two years, with the latter being considered a terminal course, meaning that its curriculum is not designed to prepare students for study beyond two years in the foreign language. In contrast, pre-AP courses are offered for second- and third-year foreign language courses, in which they provide a more rigorous curriculum preparing students to continue into AP foreign language.

In order for students to enroll in second- and subsequent-year pre-AP foreign language courses, they must have maintained a minimum grade point average in the previous course, along with having secured a teacher recommendation. Students not

meeting these requirements are placed in regular second-year foreign language courses. Because of an open enrollment policy that exists in the school district, parents and guardians retain the option of overriding these requirements, including the teacher recommendations, in order to place their children in the pre-AP courses.

Comparing Central Independent School District to other districts throughout the state, it was found that high school foreign language courses in Texas public high schools are loosely organized along one of three general formats. While most high schools offer at least four years of coursework in a foreign language, depending on the school district, these courses are tracked beginning in the first, second, or third year of study for students. The lower track courses allow students to study only two years of a foreign language, whereas higher track courses allow students to continue study into third- and subsequent-year language courses, depending on grades and teacher/counselor approval. In short, the main difference in the arrangement of foreign language programs in Texas school districts has shown to be how long classes remain heterogeneous, before students are tracked by perceived abilities.

Methodology

The methodology for this research was a case study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that, “definitions for case study vary widely” (p. 215). Creswell (2007) defines a case study as both a methodology and type of design in qualitative research involving the study of one or multiple cases in a bounded system, which in this study was the foreign language program at the high school (p. 73).

According to Stake (2005), one seldom chooses a case, but rather it chooses them (p. 450). This particular study was an intrinsic case study, because although foreign language enrollment and progression data suggested a broader-occurring achievement gap between African American and other student ethnic groups at the state level in Texas, I wanted a better understanding of the particular case at this high school campus (Stake, 2005). The interest of this research was, “in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. . . . and the process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, [and] discovery rather than confirmation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). As an intrinsic case study, the interest for this inquiry was not in generalizing understandings to all high school foreign language programs in Texas, but rather examining this particular case in this school district.

Participants

Principal, Mr. Smith

Mr. Smith is a European-American, who was born and raised in Oklahoma. He has been the principal of General High School since it opened four years ago. Before coming to this newest high school campus, he worked as an assistant principal at the other high school campus in the district. Before moving into administration, he worked as a school counselor and also taught and coached for thirteen years.

Dean of Instruction, Mrs. Greene

Mrs. Greene is a European-American. She has been at General High School since it opened four years ago. At the beginning, she worked as the assistant principal at the campus, but now her duties consist exclusively of those as the Dean of Instruction. Before coming to General High School she taught at the middle school level in both this district and the neighboring district for nine years, before coming to work as an assistant principal at a middle school in the Central Independent School District for four years.

Counselor, Mrs. Huston

Mrs. Huston is a European-American, who works as the Lead Academic Advisor or counselor at General High School. Before moving into counseling, she worked seven years in private schools teaching various subjects in both elementary and secondary grades. This is her fourteenth year in this school district, all of which she has been a counselor. Before becoming a counselor in this district, she worked as a counselor at a middle school in the neighboring district for six years.

Counselor, Mrs. Redding

Mrs. Redding is an African American and serves as an Academic Advisor at General High School. This is her eighteenth year working in the district. Before coming to this campus, she was a counselor at the other high school campus in the district for four years. This is her first year as a counselor at General High School. As a teacher, she taught English and Physical Education at all the high school levels.

Counselor, Mrs. Calderon

Mrs. Calderon is a European-American, although her surname is Hispanic from marriage. She works as an Academic Advisor at General High School. She has been a counselor in this district for eight years, seven of which were at one of the middle schools. This is her first year as a counselor at the high school. Before going into counseling, she taught Reading Recovery and English at the middle school level in the district and then English for two years in a nearby district.

Foreign Language Teacher, Ms. English

Ms. English is a European-American who teaches Latin I, Latin II, Latin II pre-AP, Latin III pre-AP, and Latin IV AP at both General High School and the other high school campus in the district. Since the two schools' Latin programs are very small, she is assigned to teaching half of the day at each campus. This is both her second year as a teacher and working in the school district.

Foreign Language Teacher, Ms. Garcia

Ms. Garcia is a Hispanic teacher who teaches Spanish II and Spanish III pre-AP at General High School. This is her third year teaching, but it is her first year working in this school district. She is the only Spanish teacher at the campus that is a native speaker of the language.

Foreign Language Teacher, Mrs. Berlin

Mrs. Berlin is a European-American teacher and teaches German II, German II pre-AP, and German III pre-AP at General High School. Since German is a smaller program at the campus, she also teaches Speech classes here. Although Mrs. Berlin has taught in several school districts on and off over the past twenty years, this is her first year teaching at General High School and in this school district.

Foreign Language Teacher, Mr. Bird

Mr. Bird is European-American and is one of the Spanish teachers at General High School. This is his second year teaching and also his second year to work at the campus. He teaches Spanish I and Spanish II and also coaches basketball. Mr. Bird was born and raised in this community; the only time he lived away was for college.

Site Selection

Qualitative research designs embrace purposive or theoretical sampling in order to select, “information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study. . . . [while] yielding insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Lincoln and Guba (1985) cite purposive sampling as one of the fourteen axioms or characteristics of naturalistic inquiry, because it not only, “increases the scope and range of data exposed . . . [but also] the likelihood that the full array of multiple realities will be uncovered” (p. 40). In case studies, the case is the unit of analysis, which for this inquiry made the high school the basis for purposive

sampling, since it housed the foreign language program (Patton, 2002, p. 447). Denzin (1978) states that, “the case need not be a person or enterprise . . . [but instead] it can be whatever ‘bounded system’ is of interest . . . [such as] an institution, program, a responsibility, a collection, or a population” (p. 7).

Of the varying types of purposive sampling, the design of this inquiry drew upon a mixture of convenience, criterion, and maximum variation sampling. It followed criterion sampling in that participants were chosen based on meeting a predetermined importance or criterion, which involved being a stakeholder at the high school campus (Patton, 2002, p. 238). Foreign language teachers, counselors, and administrators were stakeholders sought as participants in this study, for each was connected and relevant at some level as an informant regarding the foreign language courses at the high school. While it remains a valid and persuasive argument that students would have lent themselves as further information-rich participants in this study, they did not lay within the interest or breadth of this particular researcher’s inquiry; however, the inclusion of students remains an option and addition for future studies. Loveless (1999) identifies teachers and principals as primary influences at local schools regarding tracking decisions and policy (p. 84). Departments, or more specifically, the faculty within departments, are also important decision-makers, for they assist with the scheduling of classes and determine course prerequisites (Loveless, 1999, p.116).

This study utilized maximum variation sampling, for according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is the most useful type of purposive sampling in that it, “provides the broadest range of information possible” (p. 233). The logic of maximum variation sampling is

that, “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program” (Patton, 1987, p. 53). By inviting foreign language teachers, counselors, and administrators to serve as participants, a broader range of positions at the school and perspectives were brought into the inquiry.

Lastly, the site for this study could be viewed as a convenience sample. The school district and high school campus selected for this study were chosen because of the proximity, convenience, and access that they provided, given the limited time and other resources for the undertaking of this study.

Researcher’s Positionality

As a qualitative research study, I served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2007). Because of this, my positionality as the researcher became evermore critical to the integrity of the study and my status as the investigator, for ultimately, the findings of this dissertation were my interpretations of participants’ perceptions on African American enrollment and progression patterns in high school foreign language courses. Guba and Lincoln (2005) define positionality, also commonly referred to as researcher’s position or reflexivity (Merriam, 2009), “[as] the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, ‘the human as instrument’” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 210). The importance of researchers explaining their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken allows the reader to better understand how the individual researcher might have arrived at the particular

interpretation of the data (Merriam, 2009, p. 219). By setting forth my positionality as the researcher, I am inviting the reader to consider how who I am may have affected what I was able to observe and come to understand as an investigator in the field (Hertz, 1997; Patton, 2002).

To begin, I acknowledge that this research study was written from the lens of a White, male doctoral student and public school teacher of seven years. I was born in Texas to a middle-class family and have lived in the state for the majority of my life. Growing up in Austin, I attended majority-White elementary, middle, and high schools. In fact, even as a student teacher and later a professional educator, I have only taught in majority-White schools. It was not until my graduate study at the Texas A&M University that I began to seriously question, explore, and challenge my own White racial identity, privilege, and social position of dominance; the journey in my White identity racial development has been and continues to be a struggle and a life-changing process for me as a citizen, as a scholar, and as an educator working in public education (Howard, 2006). As Feagin (2006) has stated, “no one is born thinking critically about the oppressive realities of the society around them” (p. 308).

My interest in understanding the perceptions of foreign language teachers, counselors, and administrators concerning the achievement gap among African American and other student groups in foreign language courses stemmed from the influence of my graduate coursework, professors, and classmates, as well as my growing critical awareness of racial inequity issues in public schools as a foreign language teacher. It has been my desire to add to the body of literature on the achievement gaps,

while addressing a part largely silent in the research: African American student achievement in foreign language courses at public, secondary schools.

Methods

Qualitative methods consist of three type of data collection, including: in-depth, open-ended interviews; direct observation; and written documents (Patton, 1987, p. 7). According to Merriam (1998), central to all forms of qualitative research, the researcher acts as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; the strength of this lies in the human instrument's ability to tolerate ambiguity, exercise sensitivity and be highly intuitive, thereby maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information (p. 20).

Although case study research does not claim any particular methods for the collection of data, this study drew upon individual interviews, focus group sessions, field notes, written documents, and school records (Merriam, 1998, p. 28). Two of the principal uses of case study research are to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of the participants, “[since] the case will not be seen the same by everyone. . . . [and] much of what we cannot observe for ourselves has been or is being observed by others . . . [therefore] the interview is the main road to multiple realities” (Stake, 1995, p. 64). Alongside individual interviews and focus group sessions, school district documents and records also served as data sources for this study, since not all of the activities of administrators, counselors, and foreign language teachers can be observed directly (Stake, 1995, p. 68).

In naturalistic inquiry, it is difficult to separate data collection and analysis, for they are part of a continuous, cyclical process that occurs throughout most of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) conceptualize naturalistic inquiry as a process that includes three phases: the orientation and overview phase, the focused exploration phase, and the member check phase. During this first phase, the orientation and overview, the approach to working with participants in the study was more open-ended, so that the researcher could, “get a handle on what *is* salient” mainly through the use of interviews (p. 235). However, throughout each step of the inquiry, the investigator was required to, “engage in continuous data analysis, so that every new act of investigation takes into account everything that has been learned so far” (p. 209).

In the second phase, the focused exploration phase, the data that were analyzed during the first phase were used to inform the creation of more structured protocols so that in-depth information could be obtained about salient elements (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 235). Although the early stages of naturalistic fieldwork are often more generative and emergent, “later stages bring to closure by moving toward confirmatory data collection – deepening insights into and confirming (or disconfirming) patterns that seem to have appeared” (Patton, 2002, p. 436).

During the third phase of the inquiry, the member check phase, the provisional case study report was taken back to the high school campus in order to be subjected to the scrutiny of the stakeholders that provided the information (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 236). This phase of inquiry was important in filling any informational gaps that were discovered during the previous phase.

Data Analysis

The raw data for this case analysis consisted of individual interviews, focus group sessions, field notes, documents, and campus records. Data collected were analyzed according to the constant comparative method, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Merriam (1998, 2009), and Glaser and Strauss (1967, 1999). Central to the tenets of naturalistic inquiry, the analysis of data was continuous and emergent, meaning that, “every new act of investigation takes into account everything that has been learned so far. . . . so that insights, elements of theory, hypotheses, questions, gaps, can be identified and pursued beginning with the next day’s work” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 209). Since data collection and data analysis are part of a fluid cycle, the distinction between these two processes is difficult to pinpoint (Patton, 2002, p. 436).

In order to move from concrete descriptions during data analysis to a more abstract level, Merriam (1998) describes, “using concepts to describe phenomena. . . . [wherein] categories describe the data, but to some extent they also interpret data” (p. 187). For data analysis and the construction of categories and themes during this inquiry, the constant comparative method, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Merriam (1998, 2009), and Glaser and Strauss (1967, 1999) was followed. Central to this method was the continuous comparison of units of data with each other throughout the inquiry, searching for recurring regularities and patterns that could be brought together under categories (Merriam, 1998). “The process of data analysis . . . is essentially a synthetic one, in which the constructions that have emerged (been shaped by) inquirer-source interactions are reconstructed into meaningful wholes” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 332).

Constant comparative data analysis and the construction of categories began with the reading of the first interview transcript, set of field notes, and other documents looking for units of data that might be important, interesting, or somehow relevant to the study (Merriam, 2009). Afterwards, the entire transcript was reviewed once again in order to group bits of information that seemed to go together. This procedure was repeated with the subsequent interview transcripts, field notes, documents, or other data, checking for recurring concepts and groupings from the previous data and new ones that emerged, comparing and combining these into a master list, which represented the patterns and regularities that became the categories and themes used to sort my data (Merriam, 2009).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that units of data must satisfy two characteristics: they should be aimed at some understanding that the inquirer needs to have or take, and the unit must only be large enough to stand by itself and be interpretable in the absence of any additional information, ranging from a sentence to more than a paragraph (p. 345). Merriam (1998) points out that, “it should be clear that categories are abstractions derived from the data, not the data themselves” (p. 181).

After data were collected and unitized, the analysis moved to categorizing, thereby bringing into “provisional” categories those units of data that seemed to relate to the same content (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) underscore that at this point, “the category set that emerges cannot be described as *the* set; all that can reasonably be required of the analyst is that he or she produce *a* set that provides “reasonable” construction of data” (p. 347). By method of constant comparison, units of data were continually set side by side in order to compile a list of categories. After the

processing of units of data were exhausted, the entire category set was reviewed in order to determine units of data remaining that were irrelevant and that should be discarded. When the tentative list of categories had emerged, the categories were refined, subdivided, and/or subsumed under others. Lincoln and Guba (1985) caution that some categories that emerge, “may be incomplete, showing sufficient presence to have been included but not sufficient to be definitively established. . . . [therefore] missing, incomplete, or otherwise unsatisfactory categories should be earmarked for follow-up as part of the continuous data collection / processing sequence” (p. 349).

Merriam (1998) asserts that, “categories should *reflect the purpose of the research*. . . . [and] in effect, categories are the *answers* to your research question,” while also being exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitizing, and conceptually congruent (p. 183). The naming of categories comes from among three sources: the researcher, the participants, and the literature; however, most commonly, terms, concepts, and categories reflect abstractions the researcher derives from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998).

“Inductive analysis . . . begins not with theories or hypotheses, but with the data themselves, from which the theoretical categories and relational propositions may be arrived at by inductive reasoning processes” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 333). This is characterized by a bottom-up approach, as opposed to a top-down approach, which is a hallmark of positivistic research. “The research literature or previous work on the issue may provide categories . . . but, far more often than not, the researcher will need to define the variable and devise the categories” (Stake, 1995, p. 30).

Trustworthiness

The criteria for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (p. 300). In this study, triangulation was employed through the use of multiple methods and sources of data collection, so that any findings and interpretations would be received as credible. Multiple methods of data collection included individual interviews, focus groups, field notes, and documents (Denzin, 1978), in order to test for consistency of findings generated among different kinds of data (Patton, 2002, p. 556). Within the same method of interviewing, multiple sources of data consisted of the various stakeholders at the campus, who agreed to participate in the study.

Another technique for establishing credibility was the continuous use of member checks, both formally and informally, in order to represent the perceptions and multiple realities of stakeholders as faithfully as possible. While the researcher is not expected to concede in all criticisms during member checking (Stake, 1995, p. 115), Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that, “the investigator who has received the agreement of [participant] groups on the credibility of his or her work has established a strong beachhead toward convincing readers and critics of the authenticity of the work” (p. 315).

Conclusion

The design for this inquiry was an interpretive case study, which relied on a mixture of sampling techniques, including convenience, criterion, and maximum variation

sampling. Qualitative methods for data collection consisted of open-ended interviews, focus groups, field notes, documents, and records. Data analysis was performed according to the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 1999). Participants for this study included foreign language teachers, counselors, and administrators at a large, public high school campus. As a qualitative research study, I served as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2007). In order to establish trustworthiness, triangulation was used, in order to test for consistency of findings generated among different kinds of data (Patton, 2002).

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter represents my analysis of the perceptions of teachers, counselors, and administrators on the differential achievement among African Americans and other student ethnic groups in foreign language courses at General High School. From stakeholders' responses in the individual interviews and focus group sessions, four general themes emerged during this study that captured their general perceptions of these achievement gaps. Three of these themes included deficit views, racial erasure, and paralogical beliefs and behaviors, borrowing extensively from the research of McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) on "Equity Traps: A Useful Construct for Preparing Principals to Lead Schools That Are Successful With Racially Diverse Students," which refer to, "ways of thinking or assumptions that prevent educators from believing that their students of color can be successful learners" (pp. 601-602). In contrast to these, the fourth theme of organizational constraints that emerged describes *traps* that are more of a structural nature that stand in the way of creating an equitable school for all students.

This chapter is organized thematically around each of the four general themes. Subsumed under each of these are numerous sub-themes that undergirded the connection to McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), as well as the development of a fourth theme to encompass those traps that were more of a structural nature. Within deficit views, these sub-themes included: *blaming the student*, *blaming the family*, and *blaming the community*. Under the theme of racial erasure, the following sub-themes emerged: *a*

colorblind illusion of meritocracy, prioritizing economics over race, and denying White dominance and oppression. Within the theme of paralogical beliefs and behaviors, sub-themes included: *denying achievement gaps by citing extraordinary counterexamples of students* and *organizational issues in the foreign languages are the problem.* Finally, under organizational constraints, sub-themes that emerged were: *general organizational challenges, characteristics of ability-grouping as barriers, and issues concerning differential counseling.*

Theme One: Deficit Views

The first theme that emerged during this study was *deficit views*, borrowing from the research of McKenzie and Scheurich (2004). While Valencia (2010) defines *deficit thinking* as, “an endogenous theory – positing that the student who fails does so because of his/her internal deficits or deficiencies” (p. 6), the term deficit views as used by McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) emphasizes how teachers in their study often blamed their students of color for, “what [these] teachers perceived as inherent or endogenous student deficits” (p. 608). For this research study, the concept of deficit views has been borrowed and expanded to include not only the sub-theme blaming of the student, but also blaming of the family and blaming of the community.

It is important to note every time I conducted interviews and focus group sessions with stakeholders, each of my questions asked specifically about African American students. However, in stakeholders’ responses oftentimes instead of referring explicitly to African Americans, they would use substitute words such as kids, at-risk students, and

other terms. Although stakeholders generally refrained from using the term *African American* during individual interviews and focus group discussions, the use of member checks often clarified that they were indeed referring to their African American students.

Blaming the Student

One of the most common permutations of *deficit views* that emerged during this study was heard in administrators, counselors, and teachers often blaming African American students for the achievement gaps in foreign languages at the campus. This was revealed by stakeholders commonly challenging and even blaming the *value* (or lack thereof) that they felt these students placed on their education. They blamed the students for not valuing or appreciating the education that these stakeholders felt had been given to them. This then allowed the stakeholders to absolve themselves from responsibility for these failures by ascribing them to internal deficits of the students, including what was perceived by stakeholders as valued and not valued at school.

One illustration of stakeholders blaming the student emerged during my interview with Mr. Smith, the principal of General High School, who repeatedly expressed a concern for the lack of value that he felt African American students placed in their education and the opportunities that have been offered to them, both in foreign language courses and across academics in general. In fact, during my interview with him, he referred to the term *value* twenty-two times in conveying this perception. For example, in discussing the underrepresentation of African American students in advanced, third-year pre-AP foreign language courses at the campus, he espoused:

The most underrepresented group in that pre-AP course is gonna be your African American kids . . . and I would say that [African American kids are underrepresented] for every foreign language, regardless of whether it's . . . German, or Latin, or whatever. . . . [because] they don't see the value . . . [and] the importance of what this could get them.

In this statement, it was evident that Principal Smith held deficit views of his African American students by blaming them for not pursuing advanced level studies because of what he perceived as a lack of value and importance placed in such learning by them. This sentiment was also expressed by the dean of instruction. While Principal Smith had emphasized the lack of value and importance as being largely attributable to the lack of relevance that most African Americans see in learning a foreign language, Mrs. Greene, the dean of instruction, went beyond this, asserting this lack of value and importance applies to all of their academics in general. She explained:

The kids that tend to fail your first years of a foreign language, that's not the only class they're failing. . . . It tends to be a consistent track record across a lot of their classes, and it's just, maybe no concern for the education that they're being offered. It really has no concern for why it should be learned. . . . so they don't have any value and importance in it . . . at all.

Although Dean Greene couched her perspective in terms of at-risk and low-SES students, it remained obvious that she held deficit views of African Americans with such comments from member checks and further discussion during the interview that clarified such ambiguities. The principal and the dean of instruction were not alone in sharing

such perspectives; counselors also revealed similar perceptions on the achievement gaps. Representative of this is a comment from Mrs. Huston, who also focused much of the blame on African American students themselves for their lack of success, particularly for the purported lack of value that they placed on education. She contended:

I've been in the district for fourteen years. . . . [and] it's always been an issue . . . watching the African American students and the way that they deal with education or approach education. . . . but how to get them to do that is the . . . ya know . . . \$24,000 question.

In this excerpt, it seemed Mrs. Huston did not think African American students cared about their education, including both their study of a foreign language and their academics in general. This kind of comment, revealing deficit views of African American students, was communicated by each of the counselors interviewed during this study.

A blaming of African American students for the achievement gaps in foreign languages was not only common among individual interviews with administrators and counselors, but also it was pervasive throughout interviews and focus group sessions with foreign language teachers. Representative of this is an excerpt from one of the focus group sessions where a teacher explained the achievement gaps in foreign languages as:

A lot of these [African American] kids will never go anywhere else, ya know? They'll get married, have babies, whatever order you want to put that in . . . and they'll get a job. A lot of them won't go to college, [and] if they do, they'll go to [our local community college] for a year or two . . . and that'll be it, and so, this is it. This is all

they're gonna achieve and so . . . if I was in that position, why would I waste my credits on Spanish?

From the sentiment shared by this teacher, it appeared she held deficit views of African American students. Not only did she blame them for supposedly not valuing foreign language study and for not grasping the importance of what learning another language could afford them, but also she described them as base, unrefined and unmotivated as human beings.

Each of the above statements seemed to indicate that the administrators, counselors, and teachers in this study held deficit views of their African American students.

Congruent with McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), “[stakeholders] attributed the lack of success of their [African American] students . . . [to purportedly] inherent or endogenous student deficits, such as cultural inadequacies, lack of motivation, [and] poor behavior” (p. 608).

Blaming the Family

Another permutation of *deficit views* (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004) that emerged during this study was heard in the voices of administrators, counselors, and teachers often blaming families for the achievement gaps in the foreign languages, along with academic disparities across the campus in general. By characterizing many of the African American families as faulty or deficit, stakeholders appeared to exculpate both themselves and the school from responsibility for these students' academic failures. Blame was often ascribed to the families for creating pre-determining conditions in the

students that have led to such academic failures, including little to no parental support and involvement and an ignorance of how to support their children in the educational process.

One representation of such blaming of the family emerged during my interview with Dean Greene. She blamed part of the achievement gaps in foreign languages on what she perceived as an ignorance of many African American parents and families in how to support their children in education. For example, she contended, “Generally they [African American parents] don’t ever come and question academics. . . . [although] they’ll come and question athletics . . . [because] they think athletics is the way out, not the academics.” From this sentiment, one could conclude Dean Greene held deficit views about many of the African American students’ families, since she described them as deficit in the ability to effectively set priorities for their children. While she conceded, “I’m sure they [African American parents and families] say I want you to get a good education,” she tempered this with further deficit views adding, “but they all . . . take them more to the park to play basketball than they do to come do general math tutorials.” Along this perspective, Dean Greene maintained African American families place a greater importance on sports than they do on academics to the disservice of their children’s education.

Such blaming of the family was not exclusive to the dean of instruction, for it was also a common thread among interviews with counselors. One example comes from Mrs. Calderon, who contended African Americans are less successful in the foreign languages

and in their academics in general because their parents and families have not instilled an importance of education in them. She said:

If you were to ask a White child why they are so successful, one of the things they would say is . . . it's been instilled in me by my parents that education is important and a lot of times your Black kids aren't going to answer it that way. . . . [because] it's easier to go pick up a paycheck. . . from welfare than it is to go to try to find a job and keep a job and keep your kids acting all right and keep your kids in school. . . . [and so] family dynamics [among African American families] definitely play into it because, a lot of times grandmas, and aunts, and uncles, and grandpas are raising the kids, ya know? Not mom and dad . . . [and] you [also] see a . . . higher rate of incarcerations a lot of times . . . among the Black families.

From this excerpt it appeared Mrs. Calderon held deficit views about African American parents and families at General High School. Not only did she see them as deficit in their ability to inculcate an importance of education in their children, but also she characterized them as failures as families in general. Other counselors interviewed made similar remarks.

Deficit views were also evident among teachers, where a blaming of families for the achievement gaps in foreign languages was equally pervasive among interviews and focus group sessions with these stakeholders. One example of this emerged in the focus group when one of the teachers contended a *culture of poverty* (Lewis, 1966) is purportedly more prevalent among African American families, leading their children to approach education and school in a similar fashion. He explained that because:

[Many of the African American families live] paycheck to paycheck, whether they're waiting on the first and fifteenth government check or whatever it is . . . obviously you're gonna be a student paycheck to paycheck, you're gonna live test to test, you're not going to be able to see the [long-term] future, [and] you're not going to be able to see the value of taking [a foreign language]. . . . [so] why would they think that far ahead if they don't live that far ahead?

This excerpt seemed to reveal this teacher, as well as the other three teachers in the focus group who concurred with this statement, held deficit views not only about their African American students, but also about the families of these students. This teacher perceived many of the African American families as deficit for seemingly being able to function only in the here and now and thereby inculcating this deficit mindset in their children. Adding to this comment, another teacher in the focus group contended, "if you can't fill those basic sleep, eat, [and other basic needs] . . . [then it is] Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, [because] you can't build that bottom level, [and so] you can't do anything else."

Each of the above statements indicated the administrators, counselors, and teachers held deficit views of their African American students' families. Because of such "negative, preconceived notions" these stakeholders held concerning the African American families of their students (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 610), stakeholders perceived the achievement gaps with African Americans in the foreign languages as outside of their control and therefore, outside the realm of their responsibility.

Blaming the Community

During this study, the sub-theme of blaming the community emerged as one situated in close proximity and relationship with the other two sub-themes of blaming the student and blaming the family. Stakeholders not only attributed achievement gaps in the foreign languages and across the campus to supposed deficiencies in African American students and their families, but also to a presumed, negative Black culture that they felt was pervasive within the community due to Central's large African American population. This African American community culture was often described by stakeholders as seemingly deficient, infectious, and self-perpetuating. During individual interviews, the town name of *Central* was often used when referring to the *African American* students, their families, and their community. For example, stakeholders would make references to the "Central kids" and "the Central way." Central is one of the two connecting towns, where the majority of the people of color in the community live, whereas *Moore* is populated predominantly with White and higher income families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The neighboring town of Moore was often used interchangeably with White, carrying with it many of the exalted stereotypes assumed to be attributed with Whiteness due to that community's less-diverse demographical profile.

Representative of such blaming of the community among administrators were comments made by Principal Smith during our interview. While discussing the achievement gaps with African Americans throughout the levels of foreign language courses at the campus, he contended:

[Even after adjusting for lower socioeconomic backgrounds] I really think you'll find that African American kids will still be underrepresented in the foreign languages, and I still think it's [the problem underlying these achievement gaps] . . . it's a culture thing at some point in time. It has to come up, ya know . . . that it's not, what's the value in it [learning a foreign language]. . . . Ya know, ya just got to, just got to get it [the importance and value of an education in general] to those [African American] people.

From this statement, one could conclude Principal Smith held deficit views about the African American community, because he blamed part of the achievement gaps in foreign languages on what he perceived as an African American deficit culture. By "those people," member checks revealed the principal was referring to African Americans. Principal Smith was not alone as an administrator in revealing deficit views about the community of Central.

Dean Greene also placed blame on the African American community. However, she attributed the achievement gaps in foreign languages and others across the campus more to a *fear of acting White* that she perceived as prevalent in *Central*. One way in which she described this was through an example of an African American girl in the community whom she and her husband had wanted to adopt. However, on the day before the adoption was to occur, the girl backed out because of pressure from her neighborhood. Dean Greene said that friends and relatives dissuaded the child by saying, "You're trying to act White . . . [and] you think you'll be better than us." Dean Greene connected this to General High School by sharing her perception that the same fear of

acting White in the community translates to the school and acts to dissuade many African Americans from enrolling in pre-AP foreign languages and other advanced courses. She used an example of the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program at the campus and the perceived difficulty that the students in this program, many of whom are African American, experience trying to resist the negative pull from within the African American community. Dean Greene said:

Those [African American] kids. . . . They have that AVID bond and they go into those [advanced] classes and they say, I'm in AVID and I'm going to college . . . and they have to hold onto that, because in the neighborhood . . . they're not the cool kid[s].

By the term *the neighborhood*, she was referring to the African American community of Central. This example seemed to reveal deficit views held by Dean Greene about the culture of her African American students. She described AVID as a sort of bulwark against what she perceived as a deficit African American culture, which places little to no importance and value in academics. Counter to how she felt about the African American community, she explained among the White and Hispanic ethnic groups in the community, she knew of none that would discourage children who were trying to better themselves by pursuing an education. However, Dean Greene stated, "I see that more in African American culture of anybody trying to act White or know the answers in class, it's just not the cool thing."

A blaming of the community was also a common thread among interviews with counselors. Representative of this is a comment from Mrs. Calderon, who espoused a

deficient African American culture existing within the Central community that she saw as partly to blame for the achievement gaps at the high school. She shared her perception, “if you got down to why [these achievement gaps exist in the foreign languages], it would definitely be because education is not as valued a lot of times in the Black culture.” This sentiment appeared to reveal Mrs. Calderon held deficit views about the community of Central and more specifically, the African American community within it. Because she perceived education as not being as valued in this community, African Americans growing up in Central were as a consequence assumed to also be deficit in their ability to obtain an education.

A blaming of the community was not only pervasive among administrators and counselors, but also it was common during interviews and focus group sessions with teachers. Representative of this is a comment from one of the Spanish teachers, Mr. Bird, who during an interview portrayed the inhabitants of Central as a particular stock of people. He explained:

I’ve heard plenty of kids say it’s [the Central] way . . . [and] it’s [the problems are] these Central kids . . . [and] like [Sigmund] Freud said about the Irish, they’re impervious to Psychoanalysis . . . [Central] kids are also impervious to psychoanalysis. . . . [That is] how someone referred to them one time and um, ya know . . . it seems so.

From this comment, it appeared the point Mr. Bird was trying to make is, much like Sigmund Freud’s perception about the Irish, there is similarly no way for teachers to get through to and help the African American kids in this community. He seemed to feel the

African American culture that was at deficit was so strong and entrenching that it kept the kids from valuing learning and academic achievement. In contrast, he described the neighboring community of Moore and its inhabitants in positive terms because, “there’s a whole lot more White kids in there and they come from better homes . . . [and] more stable homes, richer homes, I mean a lot of things like that.” From these excerpts, it was clear that Mr. Bird held deficit views about the Central community because of its larger African American population that he perceived as poorer and having less stable families and homes than the predominantly White neighboring community.

This sentiment was also expressed by the other teachers in the focus group, revealing similar deficit views of the community. Such blaming could be heard in the same usage of the terms *the Central way* and *these Central kids* as used by Mr. Bird during the individual interview. These terms revealed how teachers in the focus group saw the Central community as deficit because of its large African American population and culture that they perceived as deficit. Similar to the interview with Mr. Bird, teachers in the focus group juxtaposed the community of Central with that of neighboring Moore. Whereas Central was depicted by stakeholders as more negative because of its larger African American population, in contrast Moore was seen in a much more positive light because of its larger White population. For example, one of the teachers explained:

[People] perceive [Moore] . . . [as] that’s where you go if you’re rich, [and] that’s where you go if you’re White, and Central . . . that’s where you go if you’re poor, [and] if . . . you’re from the hood. . . . It’s seen [as] more Black . . . [and] it’s feels more Black. . . . [because] they [African Americans] get so caught up in that . . .

[where] they just wanna be hood, [and] they wanna be gangsters, I mean . . . everybody has it in their classes [here] and that's the difference between the two to me . . . the perception of White versus Black.

Other teachers in the focus group voiced agreement with this and also shared their own examples of a negative African American culture that they felt in large measure defined the community of Central. Representative of this is a comment from one of the teachers, who shared:

I had a student . . . who's extremely intelligent, African American, [and] very creative. . . . He knows how to talk properly. . . . [and when he came here] he would answer questions, interact, be involved, and all the other African American children made fun of him in the room and by the third six-weeks he . . . just shut down. . . . [because] there's tremendous pressure for them . . . [and] it's sad.

Another teacher in the focus group followed this comment, adding:

Even though there are those good [African American] kids that do have the good home life and the good structure, being that they are friends with their peers which are other African American students, I think they get caught up in . . . everyone else's turmoil. . . . [and] even though they may have both parents at home and only, ya know, two brothers and sisters as opposed to some . . . that have the fifteen . . . they get caught up in . . . in the mix and they hear all of the you can't do it, you don't need to do it, [and] why would you do that?

Evident in these statements are the deficit views that were held by teachers, counselors, and administrators regarding the community of Central in which General High School resides. Because the community was perceived as deficit due to its large African American population that stakeholders perceived as dominant, infectious, and self-perpetuating, these stakeholders generally felt in the current conditions, achievement gaps with African Americans in the foreign languages and across the campus were almost insurmountable.

Summary

Each of the sub-themes presented in this section served to undergird the general theme of deficit views that emerged during this study, which borrowed from the research of McKenzie and Scheurich (2004). Revealing the multiple facets of deficit views were the sub-themes blaming the student, blaming the family, and blaming the community, which served to illustrate one of the threads among stakeholders and their perceptions on the achievement gaps with African Americans in foreign language courses at General High School. In the following section, another common thread is presented, adding another layer to the data analysis.

Theme Two: Racial Erasure

The second theme of *racial erasure* that emerged during this study draws upon McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), who define this concept as, “the notion that by refusing to see color, by acting as if we can erase the race of those of color, and by prioritizing

other factors— such as economics—over race, we can deny our own racism” (p. 613). During the individual interviews and focus group sessions in this study, several sub-themes emerged that undergirded the concept of *racial erasure*, while also revealing numerous ways in which it manifested itself in the perceptions of various stakeholders at the high school. These sub-themes include: *a colorblind illusion of meritocracy*, *prioritizing economics over race*, and *denying White dominance and oppression*.

A Colorblind Illusion of Meritocracy

During each of the individual interviews, stakeholders repeatedly shared their perception that a student’s race does not play a role in determining his or her academic achievement. In doing this, stakeholders generally deflected or deemphasized connections of race to the achievement gap in foreign language courses by insisting one must instead look at the merits of each individual student; one cannot generalize beyond the person. The definition of *merit* as used in this section borrows from Delgado and Stefancic (2001) who define it as, “individual worthiness . . . and that distribution of benefits is rational and just” (p. 150). Through employment of a colorblind approach by administrators, counselors, and teachers, coupled with an emphasis on the individual merits of students, these stakeholders generally disregarded race as relevant to academic gaps in the foreign languages at General High School.

One example of this perspective was articulated by Principal Smith. Asked how he would respond to a community member asserting African American students are not as

successful in foreign language courses at the campus as White, Hispanic, and Asian students, he contended:

You can't look at the race, you gotta look at the kid . . . [because] some of our brightest kids are our African American kids. . . . [so] why as a group are they not successful? . . . [Well,] I think they are, it's just, I get caught up in that . . . you can't generalize . . . especially your [African Americans]

This excerpt illustrates racial erasure in that Principal Smith seemed to avoid topics of race and racism in looking at student performance in foreign languages at the high school. Instead, he implied the existence of a meritocratic system at the campus that is responsive not to race, but rather to the merits of individual students. Dismissing race as an issue in student performance, the principal touted African Americans were not only well-represented and successful in the foreign languages, but also on par with Hispanic and White students across the campus in general, contrary to student achievement data showing this was not the case. For example, Principal Smith contended:

As we get closer to graduation and I see the top . . . two percent [and ten percent] list[s] . . . it's very diverse, [and] it looks just like our student body, and uh, so that's a good thing . . . [and] in order to do that, those [African American] kids have to have [also] taken [not only first- and second-, but also third- and fourth-year] foreign languages [to be on those lists].

Principal Smith's comments illustrate racial erasure in that he deemphasized the importance of race in student achievement by insisting African American, Hispanic, and White students are equally represented on top two and ten percent lists, looking "just like

our student body.” In checking this assertion with school records, such data painted a vastly different picture of what was occurring at the campus. According to school records, African American students accounted for roughly thirteen percent of the top ten percent list, whereas White students accounted for seventy percent and Hispanic students accounted for almost seventeen percent. It is important to note when the lists were limited to students in the top two percent, African Americans showed zero representation. Comparing this data to the demographics of the campus, African Americans represented thirty-three percent of the total student population, Whites represented thirty-nine percent, and Hispanics represented twenty-eight percent (TEA, 2011c).

The perceptions of foreign language teachers were strikingly similar to those of the principal regarding how they would respond to a parent or community member asserting African American students are not as successful in foreign language courses as the other student ethnic groups at the campus. For example, Ms. Garcia, one of the Spanish teachers, shared:

I would say they [African Americans] are equally as successful . . . it all just depends on effort and . . . I have a great amount of African American students in my classes and . . . many that are successful, so I would say that’s just a, I guess a bad stereotype.

From this statement, one could conclude that Ms. Garcia was also performing racial erasure. Similar to the principal, Ms. Garcia dismissed the notion of a racially identifiable achievement gap in foreign language courses. Instead, she redirected

discussion to the merits of individual students, dismissing race as a factor in student performance at the campus.

This sentiment was also expressed by Mrs. Berlin, the German teacher at the campus. In discussing achievement gaps in foreign languages, she insisted:

That's not my experience [that African Americans are performing lower in these courses] . . . [because] my experience has been it's within, ya know, character, personality and a willingness . . . to learn, and I have had African American students be very successful in German . . . which is wonderful.

From this excerpt, it appeared that Mrs. Berlin was also employing racial erasure by dismissing race as a factor in student achievement in the foreign languages. Instead, she referred to the merit of individual students as being the governing factor for success rather than race. In each of the teacher interviews during this study, it was as if stakeholders tried to distance themselves from questions of race and their own racism by not only dismissing racially identifiable achievement gaps with African American students in foreign languages at the campus, but also by redirecting discussions of student performance to one surrounding the merit of individual students.

Interviews with counselors revealed similar perceptions to those of the principal and the foreign language teachers. One example of this comes from my interview with Mrs. Calderon, who questioned the existence of a genuine achievement gap in foreign languages by insisting most African American students are eventually successful. She contended:

I would have to . . . pretty much say . . . if that is a trend that the, the Blacks are not being as successful . . . [to the contrary] I think as far as my alphabet [of students as a counselor at the campus] goes, the Blacks eventually are as successful. Sometimes it might take them a little while longer, but then again . . . [you have] the same thing with the Hispanics. You get the ones in there that get lazy and have to retake it.

From her comment, it appeared that Mrs. Calderon was employing racial erasure. By deemphasizing the salience of race, she moved the discussion from one with African Americans performing lower than other student ethnic groups to one of merit, where some students, regardless of race, are presumed to be more motivated than others.

Another example of this perspective is from my interview with Mrs. Huston, who also deemphasized the issue of an achievement gap in the foreign languages with African Americans, instead painting it mostly as a misperception. In other words, race is not such a big factor that some community members make it out to be. She asserted:

I can definitely hear somebody saying that [African Americans are not performing at the same levels as Hispanic and White students in the foreign languages] and . . . based on my experience, it's kind of hard to argue against them, but . . . I do think a large number of our African Americans do get their two years of foreign language [credit] . . . [and] it just happens . . . when you look at the whole picture and you see how many [African Americans] don't, there's a larger number of them that, that don't.

By administrators, counselors, and teachers often denying or deemphasizing the existence of an achievement gap in foreign languages at the campus, these stakeholders

suggested the school is based on a meritocratic system rather than one where race is a factor in determining student achievement. Stakeholders contended individual merit is what determines students' academic successes and failures in the foreign languages and at the campus in general.

Prioritizing Economics Over Race

Another sub-theme that emerged, undergirding the general theme of *racial erasure* in this study was the prioritization of economics over race by administrators, counselors, and teachers. Similar to findings of McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), stakeholders in this study:

Were quick to respond that the issue had nothing to do with race but rather, it was because the students were poor. However, although economics over race was what they would argue, they would frequently use words and phrases in their conversation that would clearly indicate that the primary marker that they had for their students was race. (p. 613)

An example of this prioritization of economics over race is an excerpt from my interview with Principal Smith, who asserted when looking at achievement gaps and student performance, “you can’t look at the race [of students], you gotta look at the [individual] kid.” When asked what a better way might be in approaching and looking at student achievement data, he explained:

If you’re gonna take [student data] and break it down. . . . You start with race, [then] look at economics . . . [and then] look at home. . . . [and see if they] have the same

common thread. . . . [in which case, regardless of race, those students would then] have about the same chance of being successful.

From this excerpt, one could conclude Principal Smith was employing racial erasure, for he was arguing economics rather than race were at the heart of the achievement disparities with African American students. Some of his later comments, however, suggested quite the opposite: that race was front and center as a contributing factor. For example, at the end of the interview Principal Smith stated if one were to compare White and African American students who are all economically disadvantaged, “I really think you’ll find that African American kids will still be underrepresented in the foreign languages, and I still think it’s, it’s a culture thing at some point in time . . . it has to come up.” In his response, the term “culture thing” appeared to be reference to African Americans and African American culture. This echoed McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), who found:

[Stakeholders] were quick to respond that the issue [of achievement gaps] had nothing to do with race, but rather, it was because the students [of color] were poor. . . . [however,] they would use words and phrases in their conversation that would clearly indicate the primary marker that they had for their students was race. (p. 613)

Another example of prioritizing economics over race was evident in my interview with Dean Greene. For example, her response to my questions regarding achievement gaps with African Americans in the foreign languages was to share with me data displaying the socioeconomic breakdown of students by ethnic group at the campus. This was disaggregated data that she and Principal Smith had generated after my earlier

interview with him. In sharing this information, her argument was closely aligned with that of the principal: the root of these performance disparities lay with issues concerning poverty rather than those of race.

Because data shared by the dean of instruction indicated African Americans were overrepresented in the category of free or reduced lunch at the campus, Dean Greene argued this is why they are underperforming their White and Hispanic peers. She asserted:

I bet if you if you looked at these White kids that were not passing [foreign language courses], I bet you most of them were free and reduced lunch . . . [and] if I had to lay money on it, I would say your kids that are not passing are economically disadvantaged, no matter what.

From this comment, it seemed Dean Greene was employing racial erasure in her approach to achievement gaps in the foreign languages. Rather than viewing race as a factor in the disparities with African Americans, she contended it was economics. Although the dean of instruction had argued the importance of socioeconomic status as underlying these achievement gaps, contradictions later emerged during the interview that signaled quite the opposite: that from her perception, race was clearly a contributing factor. While in the beginning of the interview Dean Greene had maintained a posture of economics over race in discussing the achievement gaps, her speech later transformed into what appeared as almost a confession that race was truly dominating the problem. This appeared to reinforce the suggestion Dean Greene had been employing racial

erasure during much of the discussion. Not one mention of socioeconomics was made after this point in the interview when she said:

Realistically . . . in education, where everything would be a perfect world, your [foreign language] classes should be reflective of your population and they're not. . . . You should have a third, a third, and a third [like the ethnic breakdown at this campus] . . . [and] in your athletics . . . a third of your team should be Hispanic, a third of your team should be White, [and] a third of your team should be Black, but it doesn't work out that way, so it . . . it all comes to fruition. You have your African Americans going more towards the sports trying to get out [of poverty] or break a cycle, you have your Hispanics just looking to get a good job, and your Whites are taking more of the academic [route].

Interviews with counselors seemed to reveal a similar prioritizing of economics over race as those with the principal and the dean of instruction. One example of this emerged during my interview with Mrs. Calderon, who asserted, "I think it's [the root of the achievement gaps with African Americans in the foreign languages] definitely poverty." When asked whether she perceived there to be differences among students of various ethnic groups when they are classified as low socioeconomic status, she responded:

For some reason, your Hispanics . . . even though they are low income . . . and sometimes the kids get in trouble, you just see it [problems] more among . . . the Black kids getting involved . . . in drugs and getting in[to] trouble . . . [and] a lot of times, when you look back at the family structure, you look at their family tree, [and] the Black kids' parents have done the same thing, [or] they've gotten in trouble with

the law. . . . You don't see the Hispanics having the backgrounds . . . that the Black kids' families do, so there's definitely a difference there [among the ethnic groups].

From her response, one could conclude Mrs. Calderon was operating under racial erasure. In this comment, she contradicted her earlier statement that economics were at the heart of the achievement gaps. Instead, it seemed clear she attributed the gaps to differences among ethnic groups and not economics. She appeared to confirm this later during the interview with her assertion, "across the board, education is not as valued among the Black population as it is among the Hispanic and among the White [populations]." In these statements, African American students and their families were depicted as deficit compared to Hispanics and Whites, in which Mrs. Calderon blamed the achievement gaps on purported racial and ethnic deficits, rather than economics.

The prioritizing of economics over race was not exclusive to interviews with administrators and counselors, for it also emerged with foreign language teachers. Representative of this is a comment from one of the teachers in the focus group, who contended economics remains the governing factor underlying these achievement gaps, for it affects students' abilities to see the future and find motivation in their academics. The teacher explained:

I think that poverty has a lot to do with it [the achievement gaps in foreign languages and in general], I mean, we have like, what is it? [A] sixty percent or seventy percent poverty rate in our district? And a lot of them [students classified as poor] are focused on [the] now, right now, immediate now, [so] they don't understand [the concept of] future. . . . [because] their future might be two days from now and like, I think that it

plays a significant role in their school[work]. . . . They can't focus on [the] future because . . . they can't fix their, their basic needs [for day-to-day survival].

From the language in this teacher's comment and from others in the focus group, my response as the researcher was to seek further clarification as to whether these teachers' perceptions were also about race and not just economics. Because the perception of a culture of poverty among the African American community had emerged during an earlier teacher interview, I asked the focus group whether this discussion of economics included a culture of poverty being more prevalent among the African American population in Central. One of the teachers in the focus group quickly responded, "Yeah, oh yeah, I definitely think so," while other teachers in the focus group also voiced their agreement with this statement. In these excerpts from the focus group, one could conclude foreign language teachers were operating under racial erasure, for although they were espousing the centrality of economics in the achievement gaps, race remained a contributing factor in their perceptions of this.

In this section, stakeholders appeared to employ racial erasure in their prioritizing of economics over race while discussing achievement gaps with African Americans in the foreign languages. Although administrators, counselors, and teachers argued economics underlay these achievement gaps, contradictions often appeared in their logic revealing quite the opposite: for these stakeholders, race clearly remained a contributing factor in these achievement gaps.

Denying White Dominance and Oppression

The third sub-theme that emerged within the overarching framework and theme of *racial erasure* (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004) was a denying of White dominance and oppression by stakeholders while discussing achievement gaps in the foreign languages and across the campus in general. In denying White dominance and oppression, stakeholders appeared to distance themselves from discussions of their own race and racism by instead distributing the blame for achievement gaps among the student ethnic groups at the campus, particularly those of color.

One of the ways in which stakeholders seemed to deny White dominance and oppression was by asserting racism is instead common everywhere in the world, regardless of time period, place, or people one studies. Teachers framed this as a general misconception held among African American students concerning American history, world history, slavery, and racism. Namely, if African American students were purportedly more knowledgeable about their history and the world, they would not become caught up in this seeming notion that their situation is unique or significant. Representative of this is an excerpt from the focus group, where foreign language teachers contended such misconceptions are part of the driving force behind African Americans' underperformance in academics and not genuine issues of racism and White dominance. Mrs. Berlin, the German teacher, provided an example from a Speech class that she also teaches at the campus, where she:

Shared a little bit about how this guy fought against the slave trade and she [an African American student in the class] said, well was he Black? And I said no, he was

a White man. . . . Racism [is] across the board: it is the African American against the White, the White against the, ya know, anyway. . . . they [African Americans] have this mentality that the White man was never in slavery and I said you need to study your history. There were so many Caucasian White people in slavery, so I think that that's like, like a, a root issue . . . there's a lot of animosity that they [African Americans] don't know how to deal with it and they don't even know where it comes from and I just feel like if, if they were more knowledgeable about everyone. . . . because they [African Americans] get so caught up in what happened in our country . . . that they think that that's like the only slavery that there ever was and they hold this huge chip on their shoulder. . . . and I think that that feeds into everything that they do and even with the [achievement gaps in the foreign] language[s].

This excerpt from the focus group appeared to represent racial erasure, for Mrs. Berlin seemed to deny any dominance and racism on her part as a White teacher by contending gross misconceptions exist among the African American students. She argued the “root issue” of the achievement gaps with African Americans lay with this supposed misconception. Following her comment, the other teachers in the focus group voiced agreement with the argument that racism and oppression can be found among all peoples and places around the the world. For example, Ms. English, the Latin teacher added:

[I had a] French rap song in my head all day and . . . so I played it and . . . there's this kid that thinks he's a thug that sits in the back of the room . . . he's African American, doesn't do anything [work in the class] . . . and then him and this other girl, they were

both snickering and laughing in the back of the classroom [while the French rap song was playing] and I was like, what? It's rap . . . it's African Americans that live in, in France. . . . I don't understand it, there's just no tolerance for other languages or other cultures and I was like, do you understand that like all the Algerians that live in Paris . . . [wrote this] because they didn't feel like they were having their rights met in France? . . . [But] they [African American students] don't realize that their reality that they feel they have in [Central] happens everywhere.

This statement from the focus group appeared to serve as another example of racial erasure by teachers, for it seemed as if Ms. English was trying to deny her own race and racism as a White teacher by arguing racism and oppression occur everywhere. In her comment, she was blaming these African American students for not acknowledging that racism is not unique to persons in the United States and “happens everywhere.”

Another example of stakeholders denying White dominance and oppression was revealed with teachers in the focus group shifting the emphasis of racism from a tension between White and Black instead to a focus on racisms existing among non-White student ethnic groups. This came across as almost a misdirection performed by stakeholders, similar to an illusionist drawing attention elsewhere when an item exists that the performer wishes to conceal, yet it remains in plain sight. Representative of this is a statement from Mr. Bird, a Spanish teacher, who explained:

I think there's a lot of conflict with all these different cultural sub-groups, like the, the Black kids and the Mexican kids [fighting] . . . because, like I always hear the Black kids . . . they'll come and they'll say it was this Mexican kid that was talking trash,

this Mexican kid that da, da, da, da and then . . . like in class, they'll [African Americans] say no disrespect, but y'all Mexicans need to learn English. Ya know, they'll [African Americans] say stuff like this, [and] I think there may be some resentment toward the Mexican kids and so they think, oh this is their language, maybe I don't wanna learn [it], I mean that could just be it [part of the issue with the achievement gaps].

In this excerpt, it appeared as if Mr. Bird was using examples of conflicts between African American and Mexican American students at the campus as a means to redirect or misdirect discussion from any racism of his as a White teacher or that of the school. Instead, his comment appeared to shift discussion to one centering around students of color. By citing prejudices that he had witnessed with his African American and Mexican American students, it seemed Mr. Bird was deemphasizing the influence of White dominance and racism on the achievement gaps by the argument, "I just think their [African American students'] perception is all messed up." Mr. Bird was not alone, for this type of comment was also communicated by other teachers in the focus group.

From these arguments and examples of teachers in the focus group, one could conclude these stakeholders were performing a type of racial erasure by means of denying White dominance and oppression. Two ways in which this appeared to be performed by stakeholders included framing racism as either existing everywhere or as predominantly occurring among non-White student ethnic groups at the campus.

Summary

The three sub-themes presented in this section served to undergird how racial erasure (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004) emerged as an overarching theme during this study. Furthermore, a *colorblind illusion of meritocracy, prioritizing economics over race*, and *denying White dominance and oppression* illustrated the different means by which racial erasure manifested itself in the perceptions of administrators, counselors, and teachers concerning the achievement gaps in the foreign languages at the campus. In the following section of this chapter, another overarching theme is presented, providing yet another layer to the analysis of data.

Theme Three: Paralogical Beliefs and Behaviors

The third theme that emerged during this study was *paralogical beliefs and behaviors*. Similar to *deficit views* and *racial erasure* described earlier in this chapter, this theme also borrows from McKenzie and Scheurich (2004). According to these authors, the concept of paralogical beliefs and behaviors, “exists when a conclusion is drawn from premises that logically do not warrant that conclusion. . . . [which] in other words . . . is false reasoning that involves self-deception” (p. 624). In this section, two ways in which paralogical beliefs and behaviors emerged during this study are described, including stakeholders denying achievement gaps with African American students by citing extraordinary counterexamples of whom were successful and insisting changes necessary to ensure success of African American students in the foreign languages are organizational.

Denying Achievement Gaps by Citing Extraordinary Counterexamples of Students

One type of paralogical belief and behavior that emerged during this study was heard in stakeholders denying racially identifiable achievement gaps with African Americans in foreign languages and in general at the campus. Such denials of achievement gaps appeared to be of a paralogical nature, for stakeholders' assertions were commonly accompanied by extraordinary counterexamples of successful African American students at the campus, both past and present. This appeared to be similar to what Rains (1999) termed the *citation-of-exception*. By citing extraordinary counterexamples of students, a sort of self-deception seemed to be performed by stakeholders, as if they were trying to shift the focus away from any claims of achievement gaps with African Americans in foreign languages at the campus instead to the successes of extraordinary counterexamples of African American students (p. 87). By dismissing achievement gaps by means of such counterexamples, whether nonspecific or particular, stakeholders were able to deny any complicity of theirs in the creation and maintenance of such performance disparities with students.

One example of stakeholders denying achievement gaps by citing extraordinary counterexamples of successful students emerged during my interview with Principal Smith. Discussing the achievement gaps with African Americans and the diversity (or lack thereof) in the advanced and upper-level foreign language courses, he openly acknowledged African Americans are the least likely of the student ethnic groups at the campus to progress into these courses. However, when asked how he would respond if someone were to make the assertion that African Americans are not as successful in the

foreign languages as White, Hispanic, and Asian students at the campus, he dismissed race as a variable in determining achievement gaps, contending:

Some of our brightest kids are our African American kids, um, we got kids . . . in fourth year foreign language[s] . . . that are awesome African American kids. . . . [and so] why as a [student ethnic] group are they not successful? . . . [Well] I think they are, it's just . . . you gotta break it [the examining of achievement gaps] down further than that.

From this statement, one could conclude Principal Smith was demonstrating paralogical beliefs and behaviors, because his argument seemed to be based on the existence of “some” successful African American students at the campus serving to deny assertions of racially-identifiable achievement gaps existing among the remaining African American student population at the high school. Furthermore, by denying achievement gaps with African Americans, it was as if Principal Smith could remove any question of responsibility on his part for such academic disparities. The principal’s reasoning appeared to involve not only false logic, but also self-deception, for only minutes earlier Principal Smith had openly acknowledged racially-identifiable achievement gaps in the foreign languages, yet later he appeared to argue quite the opposite by means of broad, undefined counterexamples of “some” successful African American students serving to speak for the academic achievement of the entire ethnic group at the campus.

The principal seemed to employ paralogical beliefs and behaviors not only with foreign languages, but also in the broader curricular context at the campus. For instance,

Principal Smith argued African Americans are represented in roughly equal terms to White and Hispanic students on the top two and top ten percent lists for seniors. By his comments, it was as if such purported representation at the campus level also served to compensate for, deemphasize, or altogether deny academic gaps with African Americans in the foreign languages. Principal Smith argued:

A lot of our kids [all student ethnic groups at the campus] . . . they're really successful, so, as a matter of fact, as we get closer to graduation and I see the top . . . two percent list. . . . many of our [African American students are represented] . . . it's [the list is] very diverse, [and] it looks just like our student body [of roughly a third African American, a third White, and a third Hispanic] . . . so that's a good thing . . . [and] in order to do that, those kids have to have taken foreign languages III [third-year] and IV [fourth-year].

From this excerpt, one could conclude Principal Smith held paralogical beliefs and behaviors about the students, for his argument appeared to be grounded on false reasoning, including self-deception. The principal suggested the success of some students served as a sort of assurance that African Americans in general are progressing into the advanced and upper-level foreign language courses. Later during the interview, the principal reiterated this contention. However, this second time he specifically referred to African American representation on the top ten percent list rather on than the top two percent list and argued that “a larger number” of African Americans comprised this list. He contended:

Percentage wise in our . . . top ten percent at [General] High School, there's the same number of, of percentage, [that] it [our top ten percent list] looks just like our campus . . . and so we have a large number of African American kids in our top ten percent.

This comment from Principal Smith suggests further paralogical beliefs and behaviors on at least two grounds. First, the inclusion of some African American students on the top two percent and top ten percent lists does not speak for the academic performance of all members of this student ethnic group; it is paralogical to base such an argument, for an achievement gap can still exist with African Americans in the foreign languages, which was acknowledged by the principal early in the interview. Secondly, in verifying the demographical composition of both the top two and top ten percent lists, the premises for the arguments cited by the principal were either only partially true or unequivocally false. Verifying the accuracy of these statements with school records, African Americans in actuality comprised only thirteen percent of the top ten percent list rather than the roughly thirty-three percent representation contended by the principal. On the top two percent list there was absolutely zero representation for African Americans as compared to “a large number,” as maintained by the principal.

Similar examples of paralogical beliefs and behaviors seemed to also emerge during interviews with teachers. For instance, it was not uncommon to hear teachers preface discussions about racially-identifiable achievement gaps in foreign languages with broad statements about them having many successful African Americans in their classes. It was also not uncommon to hear teachers contend their particular classrooms were somehow an exception to the academic disparities experienced by students of color at the campus.

One example of teachers seeming to deny achievement gaps with African Americans by providing extraordinary counterexamples of successful students emerged during my interview with Ms. English, who teaches Latin. Discussing achievement gaps in foreign languages at the campus, she explained:

I have really high numbers of African American students . . . [and] I have high pass rates in my classes and it's not because I'm fudging numbers. It's because that's the grades they're [the African American students are] getting, . . . I think it depends on the class they're in, [and] it depends on the teacher, and how well you are at building a relationship with those kids. . . . [so] I don't know, like if I'm just different (laughing), but I have really successful African American kids, [and] like some of my best students are African American.

In this comment, one could conclude Ms. English held paralogical beliefs and behaviors about her students. By contending “some of my best students are African American,” it was as if Ms. English was denying the existence of achievement gaps with African Americans in foreign languages at the high school or in the least, her classroom was somehow an exception to the rest of the campus. Her logic appeared to include self-deception, for if racially-identifiable achievement gaps existed in foreign languages at the campus, yet her classroom and her students were somehow an exception, she could dismiss responsibility in academic disparities occurring elsewhere.

Ms. Garcia, one of the Spanish teachers at the campus, appeared to share similar paralogical beliefs and behaviors as the Latin teacher. For instance, in discussing

achievement gaps with African Americans in the foreign languages at the campus, Ms. Garcia responded:

I would say they [African Americans] are equally as successful. . . . [because] I have a great amount of African American students in my [Spanish] classes and . . . many that are successful, so, I would say that's just a, I guess a bad stereotype [that African Americans are performing lower than their Hispanic, White, and Asian peers in the foreign languages].

In these examples, one could conclude these various stakeholders held paralogical beliefs and behaviors about the academic achievement of their students. By providing extraordinary counterexamples of successful African American students in their classrooms and across the campus in general, it appeared as if such logic was intended to refute, disprove, or in the least disempower claims of racially-identifiable achievement gaps. In the absence of racially-identifiable achievement gaps at the campus or within the sphere of their influence, these stakeholders could dismiss culpability on their part for the creation and maintenance of such academic disparities with the African American students. In addition to false reasoning, a form of self-deception appeared to also be at work, for stakeholders would often contradict themselves concerning their perceptions of student achievement among African Americans and other student ethnic groups at the campus.

Organizational Issues in the Foreign Languages Are the Problem

Another sort of paralogical belief and behavior that emerged during this study involved teachers insisting organizational issues in the foreign languages are the problem. In other words, to address achievement gaps with African Americans in these courses, teachers contended foreign languages should be changed to where children are taught much earlier and that high school foreign language requirements should be raised considerably. While these suggestions from teachers might hold promise for the advancement of foreign language instruction at a general level for all students, their reasoning appeared to be paralogical in nature, for it treated the entire student population as a single, monolithic whole, in which all students were currently performing at the same levels. In other words, teachers' solutions failed to respond to the specific issue at hand, in which African Americans are consistently performing lower than other student ethnic groups in foreign languages at the campus. Therefore, by either resisting or failing to acknowledge these specific achievement gaps with African Americans, teachers' arguments were in either respect based on unsound premises. Furthermore, self-deception appeared to be a common variable governing the logic of these teachers, for their proposals refrained from considering any complicity on their part or that of the school in the creation and maintenance of these achievement gaps with African American students.

One example of such paralogical beliefs and behaviors is a statement from my interview with Mrs. Berlin, the German teacher. Discussing achievement gaps with

African Americans in foreign languages at the campus, she explained if a student is not successful, regardless of their ethnicity, part of the problem may be that:

Language just . . . wasn't for them [a student of any ethnic group] and . . . we cannot expect it to be for them if we don't start them out at first and second grade. I mean how can we expect them to learn a foreign language when that period in their life is over for them to soak all that in and it's really frustrating because the system is really setup in a way where they can't achieve as much as they could had they started earlier.

From this excerpt, one could conclude Mrs. Berlin demonstrated paralogical beliefs and behaviors, for her argument that students could not be expected to be as successful in foreign languages when they do not begin study during a critical period for language acquisition (Lenneberg, 1967) ignored achievement gaps with African Americans in particular. While *all* students may begin language study later than is thought to be optimal (with the exception of heritage speakers growing up learning a foreign language in their home), *all* students in the Central school district officially begin study of a foreign language at roughly the same time: during either late middle school or early high school. While the proposition of students beginning foreign language study much earlier may hold promise on a broader level for improving language learning, her argument appeared to include self-deception in that it ignored the particular achievement gaps with African Americans, as well as any responsibility of hers or the school in the creation and maintenance of such disparities.

Another example of paralogical beliefs and behaviors emerged later during the same interview with Mrs. Berlin. However, this second example comes from after she had examined the student achievement data visually illustrating the stark achievement gaps occurring among African American, White, and Hispanic students in foreign languages at the campus. Following this analysis of data, Mrs. Berlin repeated the same, broad reasoning she offered earlier, contending:

[Part of the solution to addressing these disparities with African Americans would include] starting foreign language at first and second grade for everyone [all students, regardless of ethnic group]. . . . We live in a state that borders a foreign country . . . [so] that only makes sense, and so if we started them [all students] early when they normally learn a foreign language [naturally as small children], where you are able to soak it all in, I don't think you would have this [achievement gap] problem [with African Americans] once you got to high school . . . it would be a non-issue.

These kinds of comments illustrating paralogical beliefs and behaviors appeared to also emerge in the focus group with teachers. For example, during one of the focus group sessions, teachers were asked what they could do to fix some of the current trends they were seeing, particularly with African American students, in the foreign languages. In other words, what could they do as foreign language teachers to help ensure all students, regardless of ethnic group, perform at comparable levels? In the discussion that followed, one of the teachers responded:

I think if we [schools] set our expectations. . . . let's just say statewide, let's have all the kids in Texas. . . . [now be required] to take four years of [a] foreign language,

[because] they've been taking four years of English and four years of Math and four years of Science and four years of History since day one [of high school], [and] they don't complain about it, [because for example] they know they have to pass [core courses such as] English IV to graduate.

None of the teachers in the focus group voiced any disagreement with this teacher's proposal for increasing foreign language requirements for graduation as a way to address the achievement disparities with African Americans in these courses. In fact, several teachers voiced their support. To guide the discussion further, I pointed out that along this reasoning:

If we had four years of foreign language and say it were mandated starting tomorrow . . . still it [is] this one [student ethnic] group . . . [that] for some reason . . . it's the nut we cannot seem to crack as far as bringing [up] the . . . African American performance in the foreign languages.

In response to my comment, the teacher who had offered the proposal provided further detail about such an increase in the foreign language requirements, explaining:

So like they [African Americans] . . . [would] have to, just like [other student groups]. . . I'm sure their [African Americans'] scores and such may be lower in English or whatever core course you want to throw out there, but then they [African Americans] have to do it [any given course required for graduation] or they [African Americans] just don't graduate, just like White kids.

At this point in the discussion, other foreign language teachers interjected additional comments supporting this teacher's proposal, such as, "right", "like they [African

Americans] have to”, and “[then] there’s no option [to fail or drop out of foreign languages at any level].” I aimed to check my understanding of these teachers’ by posing the question, “so you’re saying if we could mandate it [then African Americans would be successful because they would be forced to be]?” The proposed reform among these teachers was that by increasing the minimum requirements for foreign language to four years from the current requirement of zero years, it would compel African Americans and all students in general to stay in and pass foreign language courses. Otherwise, such students would have no alternative route to be able to graduate from high school.

Under the current requirements for graduation, all students are required to complete either two or three years of a foreign language to graduate, depending on whether they are on the recommended or the distinguished achievement (DAP) graduation plan; on the minimum graduation plan, on which African Americans are disproportionately overrepresented at both the campus and throughout the state, no foreign language credits are required. In response to my question as to whether the current achievement gap could be addressed by simply mandating a drastic increase in foreign language requirements, the teacher in the focus group who had offered the proposal responded, “it’s my opinion] . . . I mean, it’s an option.” Serving to continue discussion of this issue further, I pointed out:

Right now. . . . [all high school students are] supposed to have two years [of a foreign language to graduate on the recommended plan]. . . . [but] it seems . . . in most of the interviews and . . . in the focus group . . . [teachers agreed] the minimum plan [with no foreign language requirement] is really discouraged, [yet] even [then] the African

American kids are the most [over] represented on the minimum plan, so it's like, what's [the point in now further increasing the language requirement]?

It was my intent to echo the reasoning presented by these teachers to make sure they were hearing their arguments as I was hearing them. In response, one of the teachers continued the argument, "because with two years [of a foreign language], they [African Americans] . . . [currently] have the ability to fail." My response as the researcher was to again emphasize, "but the other [student ethnic] groups aren't doing that . . . it's only African American[s] . . . [because] Whites are making it through [the foreign language courses, along with] the Hispanic[s]." This teacher countered:

But, like we said before, Hispanics . . . some of them speak, [or] a lot of them speak . . . two languages, [so] they already know how to learn a language, [because] they've had to, so . . . I mean . . . African Americans know English . . . OK, I don't know.

From the arguments of these teachers in the focus group in either proposing or supporting the increase of foreign language requirements for graduation, one could conclude they were demonstrating paralogical beliefs and behaviors. By purporting African American students are performing lower than their Hispanic, White, and Asian peers because African Americans in the current system "have the ability to fail," teachers seemed to base their argument on false logic. Furthermore, teachers appeared to be employing a sort of self-deception in that by blaming achievement gaps on the way foreign languages are currently organized, they could avoid considering any complicity on their part as teachers in the creation and maintenance of these racially-identifiable gaps.

During interviews and focus group sessions with foreign language teachers, these stakeholders appeared to maintain paralogical beliefs and behaviors about their students and the achievement gaps with African Americans in the foreign languages. By contending changes necessary in the foreign languages for addressing these achievement gaps are organizational, not only did teachers seem to ground their arguments on premises incompatible with their conclusions, but also teachers appeared to engage in self-deception by avoiding any complicity of theirs in these gaps.

Summary

The two sub-themes presented in this section served to demonstrate how paralogical beliefs and behaviors (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004) emerged as a third overarching theme during this study. By providing examples of these sub-themes from individual interviews and focus group sessions, the intention of this section was to illustrate how paralogical beliefs and behaviors appeared to be active among administrators and teachers in approaching achievement gaps with African Americans at the campus. In the section that follows, the last of four overarching themes will be presented in the analysis of data from this study.

Theme Four: Organizational Constraints

The fourth theme that emerged during this study, *organizational constraints*, situates itself in close proximity to the constructs of *equity traps* from McKenzie and Scheurich (2004). Whereas the four original equity traps conceptualized by these researchers

describe, “[the] conscious and unconscious thinking patterns and behaviors that trap teachers, administrators, and others, preventing them from creating schools that are equitable, particularly for students of color” (p. 601), the theme and concept of organizational constraints that emerged from this dissertation relates to impediments or *traps* that are often more of a structural nature within the high school. Examples of such organizational constraints that emerged as sub-themes during this study included *general organizational challenges*, *characteristics of ability grouping serving as barriers to African American achievement*, and *issues concerning differential counseling* that is provided to students.

General Organizational Challenges

In the interviews and focus group sessions during this study stakeholders often referred to various organizational constraints at the campus that they perceived as presenting challenges to addressing achievement gaps with African Americans in the foreign language courses. In this section, general organizational challenges refers to organizational constraints at General High School that were of a general nature, revolving around foreign languages often being afforded less emphasis and importance at the campus.

One of the general organizational challenges that emerged included administrators, counselors, and teachers often perceiving the campus as placing an inordinately greater emphasis on core subjects, oftentimes to the neglect of non-core subjects such as foreign languages. Representative of this is a statement from my interview with Principal Smith,

who described the size of achievement gaps among the student population, particularly with African American students, as tremendous at the campus. One of the interventions to address students who are not successful their freshmen or sophomore years of high school is a credit recovery program. The credit recovery program helps the school identify at-risk students and then assists them in gaining credits in core courses that they failed or are missing. However, the principal admitted it overlooks credits missing in non-core courses, such as foreign languages. Principal Smith pointed out:

[If students are] repeating that freshmen [or sophomore] year, one of the things we don't do is to do credit recovery for foreign languages. . . . so I'm sitting here trying to talk myself into maybe we ought to figure out a way to do that . . . [because] this [data on achievement gaps in foreign languages disaggregated by ethnicities] is pretty telling that these [enrollments of White students] go up in year two and these [enrollments of African American students] are going down, so I mean that's even a larger shift . . . and a percentage of the [African American student] group drops no matter [which of the previous five school years we are looking at].

In this excerpt, the principal admitted foreign languages almost entirely evade the purview of campus efforts to address achievement gaps with at-risk students, a predominant number of whom are African American. This sort of statement was also communicated by other administrators.

During my interview with the dean of instruction, Dean Greene also cited the predominant focus on core courses as a challenge in addressing achievement gaps in non-core courses, such as foreign languages. Similar to the nonexistence of a credit

recovery program for foreign languages as described by the principal, the dean of instruction pointed out the high school also lacks a summer school program for foreign languages, because:

There is no Spanish [or any of the foreign languages] for remediation [during the school year], so they [students] have to take it again during the school year. So basically, they would be losing the place of a full year elective or ya know, two semesters of electives, to where they have to catch up. If they're gonna stay on the recommended plan.

The lack of summer school for foreign languages presents a similar organizational challenge as the lack of a credit recovery program for these courses, because at-risk students must find space in their course schedules during the regular school year if they have failed or are missing credits in foreign languages, since no other options exist. Otherwise, these students have no choice but to be relegated to the minimum graduation plan that requires no foreign language. Since African Americans are overrepresented among the at-risk students at the campus, the focus on them gaining credits for core courses in order to simply graduate in general organizationally sidelines efforts to address achievement gaps in non-core courses, such as foreign languages.

Not only does the lack of summer school and credit recovery programs for foreign languages present organizational challenges for addressing achievement gaps with African Americans at the high school. These organizational challenges also affect post-secondary options for students, as most colleges and universities require a minimum of two years of high school foreign language credit for admittance, although the high

school still allows students to graduate on the minimum plan with zero credits in these courses. According to Dean Greene, students already falling through the cracks and behind in their core courses are simply allowed to default to the minimum plan. She explained that:

[With kids who are failing foreign language courses,] it tends to be a consistent track record across a lot of their classes. . . . [for] these same kids are failing Algebra I or another core subject. . . . [so] a lot of these kids . . . they end up getting moved to the minimum plan by the time they're a junior.

During my interviews with counselors, similar perspectives emerged on the emphasis at the campus on core courses, oftentimes to the neglect of non-core courses like foreign languages. According to counselors, because statewide standardized TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) exams are centered on proficiency in core courses, interventions designed to address performance disparities in these subjects often divert time, attention, and energy away from non-core courses, such as foreign languages.

Representative of this is a comment from Mrs. Huston, who explained these interventions consume space in students' schedules, often inhibiting their ability to gain credits required for the recommended and distinguished graduation plans. She explained:

Sometimes those [African American] kids generally don't do as well on their TAKS tests and so they [African American kids] have to do [an] extra . . . block class where they have math two periods and . . . they're having to give up an elective . . . for that spot or they need extra help in reading and so they're having to give up a spot for that

and some [of these] kids even have to give up . . . two [spots] . . . for math and for reading.

In this statement, Mrs. Huston pointed to the emphasis of student achievement on standardized exams in core subjects as preventing some at-risk students from getting enough foreign language credits for the recommended and distinguished graduation plans. This is because these students are often pulled out of foreign languages and other non-core courses in order to receive remediation in these core subjects. Consequently, they are moved to the minimum graduation plan because they cannot fit in enough foreign language credit during high school to graduate on any other plan. Although Mrs. Huston did not feel that foreign languages are the only reason that more African Americans become defaulted to the minimum plan, she conceded more African American students are moved to this plan because of foreign languages than any of the other student ethnic groups at the campus.

Interviews and focus group sessions with teachers revealed similar perceptions of core subjects receiving inordinate emphasis as compared to foreign languages and other non-core subjects. Two general reasons provided by teachers for this included foreign languages not being assessed on standardized TAKS exams by the state and students being able to graduate without any credits in foreign languages. Representative of this, one of the teachers in the focus group explained:

You kinda get that backburner feeling a lot of times. . . . like your language [or subject] isn't complicated or it's not important for the kids to learn. . . . [not just from students, but also] from administrators and other core teachers.

From comments such as this one, it appeared as if foreign language teachers felt because the campus is held accountable for the learning of all students that occurs in core subjects, achievement gaps in those areas are considered important, whereas those in foreign languages and non-core courses are deemed unimportant. For instance, one of the teachers in the focus group explained if student learning in foreign languages were to be assessed on TAKS exams or if foreign languages were to be required for students to graduate, “[foreign languages] would have to be taken as seriously as all the other [core subject] classes.” In the way the campus currently organizes foreign languages, teachers in the focus group asserted that addressing achievement gaps to meet these requirements would be nearly impossible. For example, one of the teachers commented:

If we [foreign language teachers] had . . . [just] one or two levels [of courses to teach] and then someone else helped [us] . . . [by teaching] the higher levels, then I could see that [making foreign language a graduation requirement and a subject tested on the TAKS exams], but doing all three, [or] four levels [like many foreign language teachers do now] . . . that would be too overwhelming.

According to these teachers, if student foreign language learning were to be considered important by the campus, the way in which the high school currently organizes these courses would have to be changed significantly. In their current form, unlike core subjects, foreign languages are often stacked, meaning two courses are combined and taught by a single teacher during a class period. For example, Ms. English, contended stacked classes are an organizational challenge, because they present tremendous challenges for the teacher in meeting diverse student needs, which are

already difficult to address during one class, let alone two classes combined during a single class period. She explained:

You have a job, [yet] you feel like you're not doing either one of them well. . . . [and] not being able to split those levels up is definitely a huge challenge, . . . especially in [level] twos, because. . . . you have kids that barely passed [the first year course] and kids that made straight As . . . [and so] they [counselors, administrators, or other stakeholders tasked with master scheduling at the campus] put all the II pre-AP and all the II regulars in the same classroom.

Another organizational challenge in foreign languages was perceived by teachers to be excessively large class sizes that one would unlikely find in core subject classes. Representative of this is a statement from Mrs. Berlin, who argued excessively large class sizes would present even more organizational challenges in addressing achievement gaps than stacked classes, which are common among Latin and German, because they have much smaller enrollments. She contended, "I would think that in Spanish, there's a higher rate [of failures] because they [Spanish classes] have thirty to thirty-five kids packed in a room and some of them are not going to excel in that environment, [because] it's too much." During my interview with Ms. English, she shared a similar sentiment, that:

In Spanish, those class numbers are so high . . . [that] if there's like three or four bad kids in a class. . . . they're going to take all of that teacher's time. . . . [and] how else are the kids going to learn the language when all of the time is being taken up. . . . so I could [also] see how high numbers in classes can really affect the achievement.

During interviews and focus group sessions, stakeholders referred to a variety of organizational challenges at the campus that they felt inhibited the school in addressing achievement gaps with African Americans in the foreign languages. Most of these challenges involved foreign languages being afforded neither the importance, nor the organization of core subjects. As a consequence, stakeholders generally felt foreign languages in their current form could not be realistically expected to address the needs of all students.

Characteristics of Ability Grouping as Barriers

Another organizational constraint that emerged was the practice of ability grouping that presented barriers in addressing achievement gaps at the campus. From the perceptions of stakeholders, characteristics of ability grouping in foreign languages appeared to differentially impede the academic achievement of African American students.

To begin, a brief overview of the ability grouping at General High School is provided. In the foreign languages, all first-year courses are heterogeneously composed. In other words, all students study their first year of any foreign language together, since there are no options of honors or pre-AP for these courses. However, beginning in second-year foreign language courses, students are grouped by purported abilities into either regular or pre-AP courses; the latter is characterized as being more advanced. While both courses allow a student to continue into third-year pre-AP foreign languages, the curriculum in the second-year pre-AP course is specifically designed to provide

students the rigor necessary to be successful in third-year language courses and beyond. According to the General High School Course Guide 2010-2011, “students intending to continue the study of [French, German, Latin, or Spanish] in the third year are STRONGLY encouraged to enroll in level 2 pre-AP.”

One characteristic of ability grouping that emerged during interviews and in the focus group is that parents commonly use this practice as a form of in-school racial segregation, rather than necessarily as a means of addressing various student aptitudes in foreign languages. Representative of this is an excerpt from my interview with the dean of instruction at the high school. Dean Greene shared her perception many students at the campus take pre-AP courses for reasons other than necessarily an aptitude, motivation, or interest in the discipline. She contended many students enroll in pre-AP courses:

[Because] their parents are pushing for them . . . [and] not their burning desire to take pre-AP. . . . [Instead it is] because [their parents] don't want them in those . . . regular classes with those other [African American and Hispanic] kids. . . . [because] parents use pre-AP open enrollment [referring to the school policy allowing students to be enrolled, regardless of grades or recommendations by the school] . . . as a racial and social divide[r].

When asked whether she felt this was because parents who are not of color perceive regular foreign language courses as having more African American and Hispanic students, she responded:

Very much so, . . . I've had that said to me, point blank . . . by many parents, after I tell them that their child is] a bright child, but [that] they're really not moving at a pre-AP level . . . [These parents will respond they] don't care, I [they] don't want them in with those other [African American and Hispanic] kids.

When Dean Greene was asked whether there are indeed noticeable differences in the demographics between regular and pre-AP foreign language classes, Dean Greene explained:

There are many more White kids in pre-AP classes than there are Hispanic or Black. . . . [and] it starts in elementary . . . when they start offering advanced level courses . . . [and] parents start pushing for their kids to go towards advanced. . . . [because] parents try and sub-divide their kids from other kids. . . . [and even as a] middle school administrator [in this school district]. . . . [parents] didn't want them in the regular classes. . . . [and these parents would say] they're [their child is] a good kid and I [the parent] don't want them with those other [African American and Hispanic] kids.

The perception of pre-AP courses (including foreign languages) being used by parents as a sort of racial divider was not exclusive to the dean of instruction, for the similar perceptions emerged during the focus group with foreign language teachers. When asked if this ever occurs in the foreign languages, all but one of the four teachers acknowledged this. One of the teachers asserted, "I think it does [serve as a racial divider], I mean I've had students tell me . . . my mom put me in the class so I'm not sitting. . . . [with] a whole bunch of Mexicans and Blacks." While this teacher shared this

comment, another teacher added, “with the hooligans,” which led a third teacher to ask the focus group, “but you also have to think about it, in your regular classes, who are the disruptive students?” Of the four teachers in the focus group, only one hesitated in referring to pre-AP foreign language courses as a means for some parents to racially separate their children. However, in her explanation, she appeared to contradict herself, instead suggesting her acknowledgement that race *is* a key issue informing some parents’ decisions to place their children in pre-AP. She explained:

I don’t think it’s necessarily a racial [divider], I think it’s just a disruptive [divider], I mean, normal classes are usually much more chaotic and disruptive and then the AP classes should be . . . hopefully tend to be . . . calmer and [with] people who are more focused, but I don’t think it . . . has to do necessarily [with race], . . . but then [again] . . . pre-AP [courses] are less diverse.

Another characteristic associated with ability grouping in the foreign languages that appeared to present barriers to African American achievement included stakeholders suggesting students at the campus were not being grouped by their purported abilities, but instead by their behavior and motivation. If this is the case, this raises serious concerns in that African American students are currently disproportionately overrepresented among the regular foreign language courses by a practice administrators, counselors, and teachers seemed to suggest has little to no relationship with grouping students by ability or aptitude.

Representative of this is a comment from my interview with Principal Smith. He explained the differences between regular and pre-AP courses as:

Most of those [students who enroll in pre-AP] would be our college-bound kids. . . . whether they're in it [the pre-AP course] to learn the [foreign] language or just in it for the GPA . . . [they are] trying to make sure they're in the top ten percent³, so they can get into any college they want.

In this excerpt, it seemed as if Principal Smith felt students in pre-AP foreign language courses were not necessarily there due to a higher intelligence or aptitude for learning foreign languages, but rather because of a motivation to get a good GPA (grade point average) and to go to college after high school. This kind of sentiment was not exclusive to administrators, for similar perceptions emerged during interviews with counselors. For instance, Mrs. Redding described a student continuing into pre-AP foreign language as:

[The] high-achieving student who tends to focus on their GPA and their class rank. . . . [and] maybe has some specific colleges in mind and is concerned about . . . [making sure they] have taken all the right courses to be selected by those colleges.

Another counselor, Mrs. Calderon, echoed a similar perception that students in pre-AP foreign languages tend to be:

College-seeking . . . goal-oriented. . . . [and] GPA driven. . . . [as well as being] ones who enjoy learning, who don't mind doing the homework, who don't mind pushing themselves. . . . [and] usually their parents are well-educated or pushing them to become well-educated. . . . [so] usually you've got a force behind them.

³ In the State of Texas, by law students graduating in the top ten percent of their high school class are guaranteed automatic admission to any of the state-funded universities (Texas Education Code ch. 51, 1997).

In these statements from counselors, one could conclude the practice of ability grouping in foreign languages at the campus was perceived less as a means of grouping students by supposed abilities and instead about grouping them by their assumed motivation, whether this stems from the students themselves or from the parents. These types of perspectives were also communicated by teachers. Representative of these is a comment from my interview with Mrs. Garcia, describing students in regular foreign languages as those students:

Who aren't so much concerned about getting into the four-year college[s] . . . [or] aren't even thinking about going to college at all. . . . [and high school is] the highest that they're trying to get, [so they are] the students who . . . stay at the regular . . . academic level throughout high school . . . [and] don't do pre-AP or AP [regardless of the course].

Even for foreign language teachers, whose teaching assignments did not include pre-AP courses, their perceptions suggested the differences in students between regular and pre-AP generally involved motivation, whether originating from the students or from the parents. Illustrative of this is an excerpt my interview with Mr. Bird. He contended:

It would seem like there would be a lot more . . . motivated students [in pre-AP versus regular foreign language courses], whether it be self-motivated or motivated by their parents . . . [because] if you got parents that care enough that [they] want you [their child] in pre-AP . . . then obviously they're gonna care enough about you passing and you doing well in pre-AP, [so] I think there would be a big difference [between regular and pre-AP students] . . . whether it [be] self-motivation or parent

motivation. . . . [because] if the kid ain't gonna do it [and] the parent ain't gonna do it . . . [then] you can have a lost cause [as the teacher of that student].

From this excerpt, it seemed as if Mr. Bird perceived students in pre-AP courses as not only more motivated, but also caring more about their education, or in the least, having parents who care, seemingly implying in regular foreign language courses where such caring and motivation may be absent, teachers “can have a lost cause” trying to teach such students.

From the perceptions of stakeholders shared in this section, characteristics of ability grouping in foreign languages at the campus appeared to present significant barriers to the academic achievement of African American students. Not only was ability grouping described as a vehicle for White parents to racially segregate their children from students of color, but also the practice of ability grouping seemed to be based more on the perceived motivation of students rather than their academic abilities.

Differential Counseling Issues

Another sub-theme that emerged as an organizational constraint involved what appeared to be differential counseling of students at the campus, particularly with African Americans. During interviews and focus group sessions with stakeholders, issues concerning this seemed to emerge as a contributing factor in a disproportionately smaller number of African American students enrolling in pre-AP foreign language courses. These issues of differential counseling included not only academic guidance from counselors, but also such academic guidance provided by teachers.

One issue emerging within this sub-theme was that each of the foreign language teachers interviewed during this study appeared to be unknowingly ignorant in varying degrees with official school policy regarding student registration for regular and pre-AP foreign language courses at the campus. According to official school policy stated in the *General High School Course Guide 2011-2012*, enrollment in advanced courses, including pre-AP foreign languages, “is open to all students. . . . [although] students intending to continue the study of [any language] in[to] the third year are STRONGLY encouraged to enroll in level 2 pre-AP.” However, during interviews with teachers, their understandings of such official policy often varied considerably.

An example of this is a comment from Ms. English, who explained although second-year pre-AP language courses are open to all students, “I know with third year [pre-AP]. . . . we can cross kids’ [names] off that should not be in III [pre-AP]. . . . [and] I think the counselors generally respect that [and do not allow the student into that pre-AP course].” Another example came from Ms. Garcia, who contended, “[foreign language] teachers are pretty much who gets to decide [who may enroll in the pre-AP foreign language courses, which seems the case because students and their families] may not know until the summer when they pick up their schedules if they’re in [regular or] pre-AP.” In contrast to the comment by the Latin teacher, Ms. Garcia explained not only are third-year pre-AP courses restricted by teacher recommendations and approval, but also second-year pre-AP courses hold the same restrictions.

In these excerpts from teacher interviews, one could conclude these teachers were either unknowingly unaware of official school policy or they were choosing to practice

policy contrary to this. Regardless, this raised several concerns. First, such practices by teachers, if occurring, appeared to be going unnoticed by other teachers, counselors, and administrators, as if a strengthening of stakeholder accountability systems is needed. Secondly, if such differential counseling is occurring at the campus, such malpractice of school policy by teachers could be leading to the subsequent disservice of students and families who rely foremost on these stakeholders for being knowledgeable and trusted resources.

Another issue concerning differential counseling that emerged included what appeared to be teachers and counselors at the campus often knowingly or unwittingly serving as *gatekeepers* for African American students in foreign language courses. In the context of this study, the term gatekeepers refers to stakeholders who decide *which* students have access to the advanced pre-AP courses and curriculum, oftentimes at the expense of students of color in order to maintain the current status quo (Bemak & Chung, 2005; Schaeffer, 2008; West-Olatunji et al., 2010). Although an official open enrollment policy at the high school dictates pre-AP courses being open to all students, nonetheless some teachers and counselors by various means serve to filter incoming students, in effect negating open enrollment policies at the campus.

Representative of this is an excerpt from the dean of instruction. In explaining the course registration process for foreign languages, Dean Greene said, “we ask all . . . teachers to talk to [students] as a class . . . beforehand about what pre-AP expectations are and what our regular expectations are.” From her description of the course

registration process, teachers seemed to be the first line of gatekeepers for students interested in enrolling in pre-AP foreign languages. Dean Greene explained:

That's [encouragement or discouragement is] usually the teachers saying, who can do this? You've done really well. . . . [or] OK, you weren't real good about turning in your homework this year, pre-AP is a whole different animal and it moves a lot faster, are you gonna be able to keep up with it?

From this statement, not only could one conclude teachers are a first line of gatekeepers for pre-AP foreign languages at the campus, but also they can effectually negate the school's open enrollment policy intended to allow any and all students into these courses. According to Dean Greene, another line of gatekeepers seemed to be counselors. Representative of this is her explanation of the course registration process at the campus, where:

Counselors come in . . . and counsel with [entire] classes and then they individually work with each child . . . [and ask], what do you want to take? What does your teacher recommend that you take? And then they're [students are] allowed to choose . . . which one [regular or pre-AP] they do. . . . [and afterwards counselors] print out what's called a pre-sign-up list and we give them to the teachers. . . . [who] look at the kids that signed up. . . . [and] go through and say, this one may or may not need to be in pre-AP . . . and then we [the counseling department] have individual conversations with [those students regarding their selections]

In this excerpt from the dean of instruction, one could conclude teachers and counselors are able to, individually or collectively, consciously or unknowingly, serve as

gatekeepers for students. For example, Mrs. Calderon explained although the school officially has an open door policy concerning students enrolling in pre-AP and other advanced courses, she admitted by encouraging and dissuading students, she can essentially filter who enters these courses. As a former middle school counselor in the school district, she compared the difference at the middle school level with the process at General High School. She stated:

You have to be a lot more careful at the middle school, because the parents, this is going to sound bad, [but] parents are a lot more involved at the middle school [level] than they are here [at the high school level]. . . . so at the middle school, boy, if you were changing a kid out of a pre-AP class into a regular . . . you had to make a phone call. . . . [but] here, not so much . . . I don't ever . . . say anything negative, but I point out the facts, [like] look at your grades, look at where you are, [and] how much of a challenge [this was]. . . . are you sure you're ready for that challenge next year? . . . so I will word it like that and they'll [the students will] usually [follow the suggestion].

Another one of the counselors, Mrs. Huston, also shared how she acts as a gatekeeper, discouraging some students seeking to enroll in pre-AP foreign language courses. Although it is officially up to the student, she explained that:

We kind of have a policy . . . [that] if they [the students] wanna sign up for pre-AP they can sign up. . . . [although] we may talk to them and say . . . your grades weren't that strong in regular, [and] pre-AP is gonna be a whole lot . . . more challenging . . . [and] Mrs. So-and-so, or Mr. So-and-so . . . is really concerned about you jumping up to pre-AP.

In the focus group with teachers, perceptions shared among these stakeholders appeared to suggest they may also serve as gatekeepers, using the practice of ability grouping as a means to filter *which* students enter pre-AP, even if such filtering is not necessarily based solely on ability. Representative of this are comments from teachers sharing their perspectives on the ability grouping of students into regular and pre-AP courses. For example, one of them contended, “I think it’s just a disruptive [issue], I mean, normal classes are usually much more chaotic and disruptive and then the [pre-AP and] AP classes . . . tend to be . . . calmer and [with] people who are more focused.” After this, another teacher shared, “I’ve had students tell me . . . my mom put me in the [pre-AP] class so I’m not sitting in class with . . . the hooligans.” Another teacher added, “[with] a whole bunch of Mexicans and Blacks.” Following these comments, one of the teachers asserted, “but you also have to think about it . . . in your regular classes, who are the disruptive students,” followed by acknowledgement and no disagreement from other teachers in the focus group. While this discussion began with teachers’ perspectives on grouping students by claimed abilities, perceptions shared by teachers seemed to suggest racial prejudices and subjectivities underlay the practice of ability grouping in the foreign languages at the campus.

From individual interviews and focus group sessions with stakeholders, issues concerning the differential counseling of students appeared to emerge. Some of these seemed to relate in particular to a differential counseling of African American students at the campus, suggesting these may serve as factors contributing to the disproportionately

smaller number of African American students enrolling in pre-AP foreign language courses.

Summary

In contrast to the three themes presented earlier in this chapter, which draw from McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) and their constructs of equity traps, organizational constraints emerged as a fourth theme encompassing impediments that are more of a structural nature. Undergirded by the three sub-themes presented in this section, the theme and construct of organizational constraints revealed how structural traps can similarly prevent schools from becoming equitable institutions for all students, most notably for students of color.

Conclusion

This chapter consisted of my analysis concerning the perceptions of administrators, counselors, and teachers on the differential achievement among African Americans and other student ethnic groups in foreign languages at General High School. From stakeholders' responses during individual interviews and in the focus group, four overarching themes emerged, capturing the general perceptions of these stakeholders. Three of these overarching themes included deficit views, racial erasure, and paralogical beliefs and behaviors, borrowing extensively from McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), while the fourth theme, organizational constraints, emerged as a concept organic to this

research study in order to describe obstacles that are more of a structural nature standing in the way of creating an equitable campus for all students.

The following chapter includes a summary of this dissertation study, along with my interpretation of the four themes that were presented in this chapter. Concluding the Chapter Five are implications concerning this study, followed by recommendations for future policy, practice, and research.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final chapter, I begin with a review of the study on which this dissertation is based. Following the review is an interpretation of the research findings, including three of the themes that emerged as examples of *equity traps*, consistent with McKenzie and Scheurich (2004). Building onto this interpretation, the fourth theme of organizational constraints is presented as another type of *equity trap*, referring to obstacles that are more of a structural nature that stand in the way of creating equitable schools. The chapter concludes with implications and recommendations for informing future policy, practice, and research.

Review of the Research Study

This qualitative study examined the perceptions of administrators, counselors, and teachers at a central Texas high school campus concerning the enrollment and advancement of African Americans in foreign language courses, as compared to Asian, White, and Hispanic students. Coupled with a critical lens, this interpretivist study sought to understand the multiple realities and truths socially constructed by stakeholders, and how power, privilege, and oppression in education act to reproduce and transform society (Merriam, 1998).

Within a broader context of achievement gaps among African Americans and other student ethnic groups in high school foreign language courses across the state of Texas,

this intrinsic case study sought a better understanding of the particular case at this high school campus. It was not the intention of this inquiry to generalize beyond the particular case (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005). Through the employment of purposive sampling, I selected, “information-rich cases whose study [would] illuminate the questions under study. . . . [while] yielding insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations” (Patton, 2002, p. 230). In drawing upon several types of purposive sampling, including convenience, criterion, and maximum variation sampling, I sought to utilize the broadest range of information possible within the parameters of various stakeholders connected to foreign language courses at one high school campus (Lincoln & Guba 1985).

A total of nine stakeholders from General High School served as participants in this study by means of convenience, criterion, and maximum variation sampling. These stakeholders included the principal, the dean of instruction, three counselors, and four foreign language teachers. Each stakeholder participated in an individual interview that lasted approximately one hour or more, while foreign language teachers participated in two one-hour focus group sessions in addition to the interviews. All interviews and focus group sessions were audio recorded and immediately transcribed afterwards, in order to allow the analysis of data to be continuous and emergent, meaning, “every new act of investigation takes into account everything that has been learned so far. . . . so that insights, elements of theory, hypotheses, questions, [and] gaps can be identified and pursued beginning with the next day’s work” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 209). Member

checks were conducted continuously, both formally and informally, during interviews and focus group sessions.

The collection of data for this study included individual interviews, focus group sessions, field notes, documents, and school records. Four general themes emerged from the analysis of this data, which include deficit views, racial erasure, and paralogical beliefs and behaviors borrowing from the research of McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), followed by a fourth theme of organizational constraints.

The Research and Current Literature

The four themes that emerged from individual interviews and focus group sessions with stakeholders were (1) deficit views, (2) racial erasure, (3) paralogical beliefs and behaviors, and (4) organizational constraints. These general themes help frame a response to the central research question guiding this study: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers, counselors, and administrators at General High School on the enrollment and advancement of African American students in foreign language courses, as compared to other student ethnic groups at the campus? In other words, what are the perceptions of stakeholders on why these particular achievement gaps are occurring with African Americans at the campus?

Three themes—deficit views, racial erasure, and paralogical beliefs and behaviors—emerged during this study and drew from the research of McKenzie and Scheurich (2004). These themes illustrated stakeholders' perceptions concerning achievement gaps with African Americans in foreign language courses, and also showed themselves as

examples consistent with the construct of *equity traps*. According to McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), *equity traps* are, “conscious and unconscious thinking patterns and behaviors that trap teachers, [counselors,] administrators, and others, preventing them from creating schools that are equitable, particularly with [African Americans and other] students of color” (p. 601). At the high school campus where this study was conducted, stakeholders demonstrated similar patterns and behaviors, revealing how they became entangled in various types of *equity traps*, thereby inhibiting their ability to address achievement gaps with African American students enrolled in foreign language courses.

Deficit Views

The theme deficit views, drawing from Valencia (2010), helped to answer the central research question guiding this study, and served as an illustration of an *equity trap*, consistent with McKenzie and Scheurich (2004). A *deficit view* is characterized by ways in which administrators, counselors, and teachers attribute achievement gaps with African Americans and other students of color as, “inherent or endogenous student deficits, such as cultural inadequacies, lack of motivation, poor behavior, or failed families and communities” (p. 608). In this study, the connection of the theme *deficit views* to this equity trap was both undergirded and illustrated by the sub-themes of *blaming the student*, *blaming the family*, and *blaming the community*.

Within the overarching theme of deficit views, *blaming the student* was found to be pervasive among administrators, counselors, and teachers. Discussing the achievement gaps with African Americans in foreign languages at the campus, these stakeholders

often challenged and even blamed the supposed lack of value that African American students placed on their education, which stakeholders felt largely contributed to students' lack of success in academics. For example, when Mr. Smith contended, "the most underrepresented group in that pre-AP course is gonna be your African American kids . . . regardless of whether it is German, Latin, or whatever . . . [because] they don't see the value . . . [and] importance of what this can get them," this served as an illustration of blaming of the student. This example echoed McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), who noted the main reason teachers in their study felt students were unsuccessful in their learning was because students did not place value in their education (p. 608). However, in this study, blaming of students for their presumed lack of value in education was heard among teachers, administrators and counselors. Furthermore, in contrast to the study conducted by McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), stakeholders in this study worked at a high school rather than an elementary school.

The sub-theme *blaming the family* further demonstrated consistency with a *deficit view*. Representative of this sub-theme were administrators, counselors, and teachers who often ascribed achievement gaps with African Americans in foreign languages to what they perceived as an ignorance of education and its value on the part of students' families. This paralleled McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), who found such perceptions to be a predominate reason for educators becoming ensnared by the equity trap of a deficit view. For example, Mrs. Greene said, "I'm sure they [African American parents and families] say I want you to get a good education. . . . but they all . . . take them more to the park to play basketball than they do to come to do general math tutorials." In other

words, stakeholders perceived families as not having inculcated in their children a value of education and as a consequence, the school could not be expected to help students who were deficit. This view stands in contrast to an anti-deficit perspective, which would argue neither the students nor their families are deficit, but rather it is the school in which these students are placed that is deficit, because it is organized in such a way that makes it difficult for at risk students, many of whom are of color, to be successful (Valencia, 2010, p. 117).

Parents and families were blamed for a supposed ignorance of education and its value, and were perceived by stakeholders as having immersed their children in a *culture of poverty* (Lewis, 1966), whose deleterious effects on the students the school could not be expected to overcome. This observation connects with McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), who noted stakeholders holding a deficit view often saw students' families as failures in their roles as care-givers for their children. Furthermore, they viewed the families as "living in a culture based on deficits that [are] generational" (p. 608).

The third sub-theme, *blaming the community*, demonstrated further consistency with the equity trap of a deficit view from McKenzie and Scheurich (2004). Within this study stakeholders equated the community of Central with "Black culture" and therefore "deficit." This form of blaming the community resonates with McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), who explained how employment of a deficit view includes educators who see their students and families as living in a culture based on deficits that are generational, as well as extending such deficit views to also include the community.

Racial Erasure

The second theme that emerged, *racial erasure*, helped answer the central question for this study and served as an example of an equity trap, consistent with McKenzie and Scheurich (2004). These researchers define this particular equity trap as, “the notion that by refusing to see color, by acting as if we can erase the race of those of color, and by prioritizing other factors – such as economics – over race, we can deny our own racism” (p. 613). Sub-themes that illustrate this prioritization of other factors include *a colorblind illusion of meritocracy, prioritizing economics over race, and the denying of White dominance and oppression.*

The first sub-theme, a colorblind illusion of meritocracy, served as an example of racial erasure in that administrators, counselors, and teachers often portrayed the high school as operating on meritocratic principles, colorblind to race. This echoes Hooks (1992), McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), and Sleeter (1993) in that stakeholders often prioritized factors other than race as contributing to the achievement gaps in foreign languages, where such prioritizing appeared to be a vehicle for them to deny their own racism. For example, Ms. Garcia said, “I would say they [African Americans] are equally as successful . . . [because] it all just depends on [individual students’] effort and . . . I have a great amount of African American students . . . that are successful, so I would say that’s just, I guess a bad stereotype.” In other words, stakeholders insisted academic achievement was based on the merit of each individual student, rather than race serving as a factor in any way. However, this apparent colorblind illusion of meritocracy was exposed after checking assertions by stakeholders that African

Americans were roughly as successful in their academics as other student groups, for sizeable, racially identifiable achievement gaps existed at the campus.

Prioritizing economics over race served as another example of racial erasure. Parallel to the findings of McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), stakeholders in this study were quick to veer discussions from issues concerning achievement gaps with African Americans at the campus to discussions concerning economics and poverty. While administrators, counselors, and teachers argued that economics rather than race was at the heart of the achievement disparities in the foreign language courses, they used terms and phrases, such as *Central*, *the Central way*, and *these Central kids* as proxies that clearly indicated race as being front and center as a variable and contributing factor to these gaps. According to McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), by employment of this equity trap, “attributing . . . students’ lack of success to an overarching societal ill of poverty, the teachers could absolve themselves of any culpability for the low academic performance of their students” (p. 614). A colorblind illusion of meritocracy and a prioritizing of economics over race were two vehicles by which stakeholders appeared to perform racial erasure in discussions concerning the achievement gaps.

A denying of White dominance and oppression by administrators, counselors, and teachers served as a third example of racial erasure. Many of the stakeholders seemed to distance themselves from their own race and racism in discussions of achievement gaps with African Americans. These stakeholders emphasized racism not as a tension between Black and White students, but instead as a tension among peoples of all races and ethnicities. In other words, because racism is across the board and not limited to a

tension between Black and White, it is therefore irrelevant to the achievement gaps. Similarly, Hooks (1992), asserts, “such a vision of homogeneity that seeks to deflect attention away from or even excuse the oppressive, dehumanizing impact of white supremacy . . . indicates that the [White] culture remains ignorant of what racist is and how it works” (p. 15). This *vision of homogeneity* was exemplified by stakeholders who contended a general misconception exists among African Americans about American history, world history, slavery, and racism. Similarly, McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), found, “teachers worked hard to ‘erase’ race as a key issue in their lack of success with [African Americans] and children of color” (p. 616). For example, Mrs. Berlin said, “racism is across the board. . . . [but] they [African Americans] get so caught up in what happened in our country . . . [and] they think that’s like the only slavery that there ever was.” This supposed misconception among African Americans was perceived by stakeholders as part of the driving force behind the achievement gaps, rather than genuine issues of race, racism, and White dominance.

Paralogical Beliefs and Behaviors

Paralogical beliefs and behaviors emerged as a theme in this study and showed itself as an example of an equity trap (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). The equity trap of *paralogical beliefs and behaviors* is, “a conclusion [that] is drawn from premises that logically do not warrant that conclusion, . . . [meaning a] false reasoning that involves self-deception” (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 624). Two sub-themes undergirding this connection included stakeholders *denying achievement gaps by citing extraordinary*

counterexamples of students and their assertions that *changes necessary in the foreign languages are organizational*.

The first sub-theme that illustrated *paralogical beliefs and behaviors* was stakeholders denying achievement gaps with African Americans at the high school by citing extraordinary counterexamples of successful African American students at the campus. This response is an example of what Rains (1999) termed *citation-of-exception*. For example, when Mr. Smith asserted, “as we get closer to graduation and I see the top [ten percent list]. . . . it’s very diverse , [and] looks just like our student body [including representation of African Americans],” this served as one illustration of the sub-theme. Such reasoning was paralogical on at least two grounds. First, the success of only a portion of African Americans at the campus did not speak for the academic performance of all members of the student ethnic group. Secondly, in verifying the purported success of African American students in foreign languages and across the campus, the premise of such arguments by stakeholders against the existence of achievement gaps were either partially true or unequivocally false. Self-deception appeared to also be involved in the reasoning of stakeholders, for regardless of the veracity of their extraordinary counterexamples, sizeable achievement gaps nonetheless existed with African American students at General High School.

Another example of *paralogical beliefs and behaviors* was the sub-theme in which the stakeholders appeared to believe the achievement gaps in foreign languages were due to organizational issues. *Organizational issues in the foreign languages are the problem* referred to policy changes suggested by administrators, counselors, and teachers in order

to address achievement gaps with African Americans in foreign languages at the campus. For example, Mrs. Berlin said, “we [cannot] expect them to learn a foreign language when that period in their life is over . . . [because in the current system] they can’t achievement as much as they could had they started earlier.” While some of stakeholders’ suggestions, including this illustration, may have offered promise for the general improvement of foreign language instruction, their suggestions for organizational changes in the context of achievement gaps with African Americans seemed to be paralogical. First, these stakeholders treated the school population as a single, monolithic whole, as if all student ethnic groups were performing at the same levels. Secondly, the organizational changes that they suggested ignored the performance disparities with African Americans that were the very focus of the discussions. Self-deception appeared to be a common thread governing the reasoning of these stakeholders, for in their suggestions for organizational changes to the foreign languages, they refrained from considering any complicity on their part or that of the school in the creation and maintenance of these achievement gaps with African Americans.

Organizational Constraints

The fourth theme, *organizational constraints*, situates itself closely with the original *equity traps* conceptualized by McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) in which, “some substantial portion of . . . inequity [in schools] is caused by the attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors of teachers, [counselors,] and administrators” (p. 628).

Organizational constraints emerged as a theme, and as another type of equity trap, both borrowing from and building on the original construct by McKenzie and Scheurich (2004). However, rather than referring to inequities caused by habits and thought patterns of administrators, counselors, and teachers at the high school, *organizational constraints*, undergirded by numerous sub-themes that emerged within this framework, refers to the obstacles or equity traps that are often more structural in nature. These constraints act to shield, facilitate, and support such, “attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors of teachers, [counselors,] and administrators” that stand in the way of creating an equitable school (p. 628). For example, the sizeable achievement gaps with African Americans in foreign language courses at the high school remained largely unproblematic in part because of organizational constraints, such as ability grouping, that seemed to justify these racially identifiable performance disparities as natural and uncontrived, although the achievement gaps were seen as unfortunate.

In this section, I present the metaphor of a greenhouse for plants (APPENDIX D), that represents how the overarching theme and construct of *organizational constraints*, in tandem with equity traps by McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), reveals a further interplay of factors contributing to inequity, such as the achievement gaps with African Americans at the high school campus in this study. The greenhouse metaphor is applied specifically in this study to the context of foreign language courses at General High School. As applied to this research, the greenhouse is a glass structure that shields plants from outside conditions in which such plants would otherwise not thrive, or perhaps not even be able to survive. I visualize the metaphor of the greenhouse as a structure for

nurturing plants, or in this case, abetting monstrous types of plants: the three examples of equity traps that emerged from themes during this study. The protective structure of this figurative greenhouse is built upon the sub-themes of organizational constraints as fabrication materials, framing, and trussing. These sub-themes included *general organizational challenges*, *characteristics of ability grouping serving as barriers to African American achievement*, and *issues of differential counseling*. While the greenhouse does not in and of itself beget equity traps, it instead provides conditions conducive for the abetting of them, including shielding them from harsh sunlight coming into the high school, whereby sunlight metaphorically functions as the problematizing of inequities at the campus. In other climates and environments without the shelter of such organizational constraints to shield equity traps from such intense light, the maintenance of these traps may be more difficult or altogether unsustainable.

General organizational challenges were one type of organizational constraint during this study. These challenges comprised structures situated outside the realms of ability grouping and differential counseling that also appeared unproblematized by administrators, counselors, and teachers at the campus, thereby facilitating various types of equity traps (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004) among these stakeholders.

An example of a general organizational challenge is when foreign languages are considered non-core courses (Texas Education Code, ch. 28, § 28, 1995). This classification appeared to facilitate achievement gaps among African Americans and other student groups in foreign languages as going unnoticed and/or ignored by stakeholders. Since student performance in core courses is assessed on standardized

exams by the state and underperformance by any student group can carry serious consequences for the high school, the campus placed an inordinate amount of importance on English, Social Studies, Mathematics, and Science. This inordinate emphasis on core courses included monitoring student progress in their learning and providing various types of interventions to address any achievement gaps vis-à-vis remediation. However, accountability for learning among African Americans and other student ethnic groups in foreign languages was essentially shielded from such oversight that as core courses would have otherwise called into question such glaring, racially identifiable achievement disparities that existed in these non-core courses. Such a narrowing of the curriculum and accountability for student learning at General High School is not altogether anomalous. According to McKenzie (2004), “in an effort to have all their students do well on the [standardized] test, [it is not uncommon that] some schools have narrowed the curriculum to address only the subjects that are tested [which excludes non-core courses such as foreign languages]” (p. 241). If schools are not held accountable for all student learning, then some areas of the curriculum may be neglected when the school concentrates resources and energy where accountability is situated: student learning in core courses.

Another example of a general organizational challenge is the existence of the minimum graduation plan that requires no credits in foreign languages for students to be able to graduate from high school (Texas Administrative Code, ch. 74 § 11B, 2000). In contrast to the recommended and distinguished achievement graduation plans requiring two to three years of a foreign language, stakeholders described the minimum graduation

plan as essentially allowing students to be unsuccessful in foreign language courses or not even to attempt learning one, yet still be able to graduate from high school.

Conversely, this also appeared to be a route for administrators, counselors, and teachers to write off student failures without problematizing equity traps that may have contributed to these. For example, one of the teachers in the focus group asserted with the minimum plan, “[students] have the ability to fail [foreign language].” In other words, foreign languages remain outside the purview of statewide accountability standards for student learning vis-à-vis TAKS standardized exams where students must demonstrate a minimum proficiency in core subjects in order to graduate, and foreign languages permit student failure without punitive action against schools or students, albeit relegation of the latter to the minimum graduation plan. Although both the original intent of American public high schools (Hammack, 2004; Krug, 1964; Meiss, 2004; Monroe, 1971; Spring, 2008) and recent No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation consider foreign languages as part of the core curriculum for all students, the minimum graduation plan in Texas serves as a general organizational challenge by essentially allowing administrators, counselors, and teachers to circumvent this area of the public high school curriculum.

A second type of organizational constraint are characteristics of ability grouping that serve as barriers to African American achievement. One such characteristic was the objective and meritocratic basis purported by administrators, counselors, and teachers for the grouping and tracking of students into regular and pre-AP foreign language courses at the high school. Contention regarding the supposed objectivity and

meritocracy of ability grouping and tracking practices is well-documented in the research literature (Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Losen, 1999; Loveless, 1999; Lucas, 1999; Lucas & Gamoran, 2002; Mickelson, 2005; Mickelson & Everett, 2008; Oakes, 1992, 2005; Oakes & Guiton, 1995; Petrovich, 2005b; Stone, 1998; Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002). In the context of General High School, it appeared as if assumptions regarding the objectivity and meritocracy of these practices served to shield stakeholders from problematizing inequities that ability grouping facilitated, including the assigning of a disproportionately high number of African American students to the lower tracks, meaning regular foreign language courses. For example, Mrs. Calderon stated students placed in the pre-AP foreign language courses tend to be, “college-seeking . . . goal-oriented. . . [and] don’t mind pushing themselves.” However, from contradictions that emerged during interviews and focus group sessions with stakeholders, this supposedly meritocratic and objective sorting of students appeared instead to abet the equity traps of deficit views and racial erasure, because stakeholders’ subjectivities and prejudices seemed to be clearly intertwined in the sorting of students (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). For example, most teachers in the focus group agreed pre-AP foreign language courses tend to serve as a racial divider of students at the campus, including one teacher commenting, “but you have to also think about it, in your regular classes, who are the disruptive students?” In this comment, the teacher was referring to African American and Hispanic students.

By administrators, counselors, and teachers uncritically accepting the use of ability grouping in the foreign languages as an assumedly appropriate and fair system of

differentiating curriculum and instruction for students, this also appeared to facilitate these stakeholders becoming ensnared by the equity trap of paralogical beliefs and behaviors. Explanations provided by stakeholders for the achievement gaps with African Americans in foreign languages were often based on false reasoning, including what appeared to be self-deception. For example, teachers in the focus group stated students are placed in regular and pre-AP foreign language courses according to their academic abilities. However, further discussion seemed to reveal student behavior and motivation perceived by teachers were stronger determiners for their placements in regular or pre-AP. This example echoes Oakes (2005), who points out:

Many school practices seem to be the *natural* way to conduct schooling. . . . [and] as a result, we don't tend to think critically about [these]. . . . [because] we have deep-seated beliefs and long-held assumptions about the appropriateness of what we do in schools [including the use of tracking and ability grouping]. . . . [and] these beliefs are so ingrained in our thinking and behavior – so much a part of the school culture – that we [school stakeholders] rarely submit them to careful scrutiny. . . . and I think that this uncritical, unreflective attitude gets us into trouble (p. 5).

Oakes (2005) argues administrators, counselors, and teachers contribute to the underserving of students, predominately those of color, by dysconsciously accepting traditional ability grouping and tracking practices to be fair, when in actuality these practices differentially inflict harm among the student population. Similarly, Losen (1999) notes, if one were to look to American history, “ability grouping was originally instituted in our public schools with the goal of limiting participation by certain racial

and ethnic groups” (p. 4). After almost a century of ability grouping and tracking in American public schools, these practices continue to be used.

Another characteristic of ability grouping was the existence of high and low tracks in foreign languages. The offering of regular and pre-AP classes appeared to facilitate and abet deficit views among administrators, counselors, and teachers of African American students because this student ethnic group was the most represented among the lower track foreign language classes. For example, Mr. Bird said between regular and pre-AP students, “I think there would be a big difference. . . . [whether] self-motivation or parent motivation. . . . [because] if the kid ain’t gonna do it [and the parent] ain’t . . . you can have a lost cause.” Stakeholders seemed to fall into the equity trap of a deficit view by assuming these students’ placements in these lower track classes were due to internal deficits, rather than prejudices and subjectivities encapsulated inside the unproblematized system of sorting students at the campus.

A third type of organizational constraint included issues of differential counseling. These issues concerned the system at General High School by which students are recommended and enrolled in regular and pre-AP foreign language courses. While Burkard, Martinez, and Holtz (2010) point out, “school counselors are positioned to significantly influence students’ selection of academically rigorous programs [including foreign languages] that promote academic achievement, thus addressing . . . achievement gap[s]” (p. 551), administrators, counselors, and teachers often described the system at their campus as having a general lack of accountability among stakeholders involved vis-à-vis their specific inputs during the process. For example, Mrs. Huston explained

although the high school has an open door policy allowing any student to enroll in a pre-AP course, “[teachers or counselors] may talk to them and say . . . your grades weren’t that strong in regular, [and] pre-AP is gonna be a whole lot . . . more challenging . . . [and we are] really concerned about you jumping up to pre-AP.” This serves as one illustration of stakeholders’ ability to serve as a gatekeeper and effectively negate the school’s open door policy allowing any student to enroll in pre-AP. What this lack of accountability appeared to create were conditions that facilitated a variety of equity traps among counselors and teachers, since any actions on the part of these stakeholders in steering or gatekeeping (Atanda, 1999; Bemak & Chung, 2005; Schaeffer, 2008; Stone, 1998; West-Olatunji et al., 2010) *some* students from pre-AP courses, particularly students of color, remained altogether unproblematized.

On the surface the high school officially maintained an open door policy that left the choice of ability group (or track) to students and their families. However, only one sentence in the school’s ninety-eight page student registration guide informs students and their families of the open door policy for pre-AP foreign languages and other advanced courses. In other words, stakeholders could effectively negate this policy by means of differential counseling, either individually or collectively, consciously or unknowingly. As Oakes (2005) points out, “although these [course and track] choices are made by students [and families]. . . . [guided in part by] recommendations of counselors and teachers. . . . how can these [supposedly informed] choices be seen as free and uncontaminated?” (p. 13). With issues of differential counseling during the

registration process, official school policies cannot successfully promote equity without the structure allowing such differential counseling by stakeholders to first be addressed.

The three types of organizational constraints described above combine to form what I figuratively describe as a greenhouse. While the three equity traps from McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) serve to explain the, “attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions [of administrators, counselors, and teachers]” that contribute to inequities at the high school (p. 628), the greenhouse is also complicit, albeit in a different way. The greenhouse abets these equity traps by shielding them from intense sunlight (i.e. the problematizing of inequities at the high school). For example, enrollment and progression data showed sizeable achievement gaps among African Americans and other student ethnic groups in the foreign languages at the campus. However, organizational constraints appeared to abet equity traps contributing to such unnatural disparities by suggesting such achievement gaps were occurring naturally. Such harsh light, metaphorically referring to the problematizing of such inequities, might otherwise help create conditions to prevent these equity traps from growing, spreading, or flourishing among stakeholders, thus leading to increased equity among students at the high school. As long as general organizational challenges, ability grouping, and differential counseling remain intact at the campus, the greenhouse they combine to form will continue to shield and abet the deleterious attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions, the equity traps, stakeholders fall into that promote inequity.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Here, I offer a set of recommendations based on the findings of this study and the current literature. These recommendations concern policies at the federal and state levels and practice for teachers, counselors, and administrators at the campus level in ensuring the high school is moving towards equity and social justice for everyone rather than just for some.

Policy: School Accountability and High School Graduation Requirements in Texas

For policy recommendations, the current high school graduation requirements in Texas, as outlined in the Texas Administrative Code (TAC, 2010), should be modified so that foreign language is required on all graduation plans, including the minimum high school program. Public schools are charged with preparing all of our students for a global society, yet not all graduation programs in the State of Texas require students to study a foreign language in order to obtain a high school diploma. In addition to the need for preparing students for a global society, foreign languages have been considered a part of the foundational, college preparatory curriculum since the first public high school was established in the United States in 1821 (Meiss, 2004; Monroe, 1971). By not requiring foreign language on each of the high school graduation programs, the State of Texas is neglecting part of the curriculum on which American public high schools were founded almost two centuries ago.

Another policy recommendation is for foreign language requirements on the recommended and distinguished achievement programs in Texas to be increased. The

two years of foreign language currently required on the *recommended* program is aligned with only the *minimum* requirements for entrance to many colleges and universities in Texas and throughout the nation, rather than with the three years that these institutions *recommend* (see for example the requirements for Texas A&M University, 2010; Texas Tech University, 2010; University of Texas, 2010).

Third, I recommend the distinguished achievement program in Texas should also be changed. It should require four years of foreign language credit in order to align itself with the requirements of the most competitive and *distinguished* institutions of higher learning (Columbia University, 2010; Harvard College, 2010; Stanford University, 2010). In their current forms, foreign language requirements on the high school graduation programs in Texas are not aligned with the college preparation both required and recommended by many colleges and universities in the state and across the nation.

A fourth recommendation is for state and federal education policies to include accountability measures for student learning in foreign languages. In the current system of accountability (NCLB, 2001; TAC, 1999), public schools assess and are held accountable for student learning in core courses, such as Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. However, no accountability systems are currently in place to identify and address the achievement gaps that exist among student ethnic groups in foreign language courses, which Texas considers non-core subjects (TEC, 1995). While at the federal level, No Child Left Behind (2001) considers foreign languages to be core courses, they do not require Texas to assess student learning in these subjects on standardized exams.

Practice: Addressing Equity Traps and Organizational Constraints

In order to create schools that are equitable for all students, particularly students of color, McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) assert, “it is necessary to find ways to change teacher, [counselor,] and administrator attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors” that stand as barriers to this (p. 628). In the context of foreign languages at the high school, administrators, counselors, and teachers must “interrupt and remove” the equity traps that prevent them from creating an equitable school for everyone; particularly with African American students (p. 628). One recommendation for practice is for high schools to commit staff development days throughout the school year for stakeholders, the majority of whom are not of color, to read and discuss in small groups, chapters of *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know* by Howard (1999) or similar transformational books on multicultural education. Although this is difficult work that would take sustained, yearlong dialogue and examination of issues surrounding multiculturalism and culturally responsive teaching, this approach would offer prompts for conversations about multiculturalism on a campus entrenched in equity traps. Feagin (2006) acknowledges although, “many whites and others will never change their racial framing of society [including schools] . . . [many] can begin to rethink their positions if only they encounter the new information that is necessary to begin that journey” (p. 309). While stakeholders, many of whom are White, cannot be forced to change their beliefs and behaviors about working with students of color, it is essential that this staff development have the support of the campus principal. These dialogues and examinations of issues

surrounding multiculturalism and culturally responsive teaching must persist, even with inevitable resistance from some stakeholders.

A second recommendation for practice is for small group discussions with administrators, counselors, and foreign language teachers to be supplemented by the use of student achievement data in foreign language courses to help guide discussions about the stark achievement gaps with African Americans and other student ethnic groups in these courses at the campus. Looking at such data would encourage stakeholders to confront the stark performance disparities, particularly with African Americans. Zinn (2005), notes “we all have an enormous responsibility to bring to the attention of others information they do not have, which has the potential of causing them to rethink long-held ideas” (p. 23). In this study, not a single administrator, counselor, or foreign language teacher had ever seen data on racially identifiable achievement gaps in foreign language courses. In other words, before stakeholders were shown enrollment and progression data in the foreign language courses, administrators, counselors, and teachers were unable to articulate the racially identifiable achievement gaps occurring both at their campus and in public high schools across the state of Texas.

Further recommendations for practice include identifying and addressing organizational constraints that exist, such as general organizational challenges, ability grouping, and differential counseling. These unproblematized structures at the campus appeared to both shield and abet equity traps commonly befalling administrators, counselors, and teachers that seemed to be contributing to these achievement gaps with African Americans in the foreign languages. To borrow from an old English idiom, the

school and its stakeholders must “leave no stone unturned” if they are to effectively address these performance disparities. Otherwise, unproblematized structures at the campus may act to subvert efforts to address equity traps among administrators, counselors, and teachers .

One such organizational constraint is ability grouping, also commonly referred to as tracking. A myriad of research exists in the literature on such practices, including those who oppose, support, and/or seek to reform the use of ability grouping and tracking in public schools (Burriss & Garrity, 2008; Burriss & Welner, 2005; Kulik, 2004; Kulik & Kulik, 1982; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Losen, 1999; Loveless, 1999; Lucas, 1999; Lucas & Gamoran, 2002; Mickelson, 2005; Mickelson & Everett, 2008; Oakes, 1992, 2005; Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Oakes, Selvin, Karoly, & Guiton, 1992; Orfield & Lee, 2006; Petrovich, 2005a, 2005b; Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002). It is the stance of this dissertation to situate with the research literature, arguing against the use of such practices. In the context of high school foreign languages, data from this inquiry supports the contention that ability grouping (and tracking) function at the disservice and even harm of some groups of students in schools, particularly students of color.

The other major organizational constraint emerging from this study is differential counseling, which closely relates to the practices of ability grouping and tracking at the high school. According to Burkard, Martinez, & Holtz (2010), school counselors must address injustices and inequities in our schools, “by challenging biased school practices such as restricting access to advanced placement courses. . . . [and] educat[ing] students and their families about . . . coursework that ensures that students are college ready” (p.

549). However, the system currently in place at General High School for recommending and enrolling students in foreign language courses appeared to displace, or at least de-center counselors in their roles as academic advisers. Aside from issues of equity traps (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004) befalling counselors, it is the recommendation of this study that a system be arranged where counselors may play a more active role during the course registration process, “[including] examining what evidence we have about . . . [whether student placements in regular and pre-AP are] accurate, appropriate, or even fair” (Oakes, 2005; p. 13). In the current system, there appears to be a lack of accountability among stakeholders involved and their inputs that largely decided student placements in regular and pre-AP foreign language courses. In other words, if counselors were given a more active role in the process, they might more effectively provide checks and balances regarding teacher recommendations and their appropriateness as measured by other indicators.

Implications for Future Research

This study aimed to interpret the perceptions of administrators, counselors, and teachers concerning the achievement gaps among African Americans and other student ethnic groups in foreign languages at a public high school in central Texas. In this section, suggestions are provided to facilitate scholars in continuing and building upon research from this study.

Although the equity trap of avoidance and employment of the gaze, as conceptualized by McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), did not emerge as a major, recurring theme during

this study, hints of this concept arose during the focus group with foreign language teachers at the end of the fieldwork. For example, teachers insinuated that if foreign languages were assessed on standardized exams and part of the statewide accountability with TAKS, not only would they as educators be less willing to teach these courses, but also they felt the school would be forced to both organize and treat foreign languages more similarly to core courses, because any current inequities in foreign languages would henceforth carry serious consequences for the school by means of state and federal accountability. Given the opportunity for additional time in the field to interview and conduct focus groups with administrators, counselors, and teachers, research that investigates the existence of this particular equity trap in the context of public high school foreign language courses would be valuable in coming to further understand the existence of racially identifiable achievement gaps in these courses.

Another suggestion for future research would be to examine the *transferability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of this study's findings by conducting similar studies at other public high schools across Texas. To undergird such studies at the high school level, it would also be beneficial to conduct research looking at the perceptions of administrators, counselors, and teachers at middle schools feeding into these high schools concerning racially identifiable disparities in foreign language enrollment and progression in the earlier grades. Although the current study was limited to the high school, the literature indicates that achievement gaps often begin much earlier, including foreign languages and other courses playing a role as gatekeepers for students during middle school, affecting not only their academic trajectories during high school, but also their post-

secondary trajectories as well (Atanda,1999; Ayalon, 1995; Chavez, 2001; Roksa et al., 2009; Stone, 1998).

For researchers with a more positivistic research orientation, future studies might include supplementing those cited above with quantitative studies to parse the achievement gaps among student ethnic groups in middle school and high school foreign language courses using the wealth of data available from the Texas Education Agency store housed at numerous universities across the state, including the State of Texas Education Research Center (ERC) at Texas A&M University. Different forms of statistical analyses using student data could serve to further our understanding of racially identifiable achievement gaps in middle school and high school foreign language courses and thus serve in informing where to situate further studies in this area.

Conclusion

Achievement gaps among African American, White, Hispanic, and Asian students are a matter of national concern. In the context of this dissertation study, Texas was as one of the first states to establish a statewide accountability system in order to monitor such student progress and achievement (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008). While this accountability system has had both intended and unintended consequences (McKenzie, 2004), it is critical to point out student progress and achievement in non-core courses, such as foreign languages, have remained almost entirely outside the purview of accountability in Texas schools, as well as literature concerning these efforts to promote equity and social justice for all students.

This study was an effort to draw attention to these achievement gaps among African Americans and other student ethnic groups in Texas public high school foreign language courses that appeared to be going unmentioned, unnoticed, and/or unaddressed. From interviews and focus group sessions with administrators, counselors, and teachers, four general themes emerged concerning the perceptions of these stakeholders on the achievement gaps. Deficit views, racial erasure, and paralogical beliefs and behaviors emerged as themes that serve to help answer the research question guiding this study, and showed themselves as examples of equity traps that were complicit in preventing these stakeholders from creating an equitable school for all of their students, including African Americans (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). The fourth theme, organizational constraints, emerged as a structural sort of equity trap that appeared to facilitate these “[inequitable] attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors” that were befalling administrators, counselors, and teachers (p. 628). While strategies can be employed in addressing these with stakeholders, it is critical that schools, policymakers, and researchers also address the organizational constraints that serve to both shield and abet these behaviors and ways of thinking among stakeholders.

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APPENDIX A**SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

- What are foreign language teachers' perceptions about the experiences of African American students in foreign language courses?
- What are some conflicts and barriers that African American students experience in Foreign Language courses?
- What are your thoughts about African American students concerning their enrollment and progression patterns in foreign language courses compared to Hispanic, White, and Asian American students?
- Why do African American students continue or discontinue in Foreign Language courses?
- How do you explain the achievement gaps of African American students in foreign language courses? (Show interviewee enrollment and progression charts for Central High School, as well as the State of Texas.)
- In your experiences, how would you explain the lack of progress of African American students?

APPENDIX B

HIGH SCHOOL FOREIGN LANGUAGE ENROLLMENT: CENTRAL ISD

	2005-2006	% Level	2006-2007	% Level	2007-2008	% Level	2008-2009	% Level	2009-2010	% Level
Year 1 African Amer.	211	29%	235	30%	266	30%	222	30%	210	24%
Hispanic	274	38%	293	37%	367	42%	304	41%	399	46%
White	232	32%	263	33%	241	28%	219	29%	250	29%
Total	717		791		874		745		859	
Year 2 African Amer.	152	20%	153	21%	171	21%	182	21%	181	20%
Hispanic	287	38%	257	35%	318	39%	381	45%	394	44%
White	314	42%	319	44%	325	40%	286	34%	322	36%
Total	753		729		814		849		897	
Year 3 African Amer.	19	9%	13	7%	6	3%	19	9%	12	7%
Hispanic	97	44%	96	49%	100	53%	105	47%	76	46%
White	106	48%	86	44%	82	44%	98	44%	79	47%
Total	222		195		188		222		167	

* Insufficient data available for Asian and Native American student groups for calculation due to FERPA masking rules (<5)

** Enrollment at each level includes French, German, Latin, Spanish, and Spanish for Spanish Speakers

*** Increases in enrollment from Year 1 to Year 2 may be affected by incoming 9th graders with middle school foreign language credit

Source: Texas Education Agency, 2011

APPENDIX C

HIGH SCHOOL FOREIGN LANGUAGE ENROLLMENT:

TEXAS PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

	2005-2006	% Level	2006-2007	% Level	2007-2008	% Level	2008-2009	% Level	2009-2010	% Level
Year 1 African Amer.	43205	16%	46112	17%	47931	17%	48577	17%	46731	17%
Asian	6468	2%	6858	2%	7218	3%	7534	3%	7283	3%
Hispanic	108358	41%	116761	42%	121856	43%	124659	44%	124327	45%
White	104217	40%	106417	39%	104835	37%	103383	36%	99182	36%
Total	262248		276148		281840		284153		277523	
Year 2 African Amer.	34411	14%	36099	14%	39007	14%	42260	14%	44464	15%
Asian	8523	3%	8882	3%	9178	3%	10279	3%	10791	4%
Hispanic	104773	41%	113757	43%	121007	43%	129648	44%	136388	45%
White	105201	42%	107862	40%	109018	39%	111653	38%	112211	37%
Total	252908		266600		278210		293840		303854	
Year 3 African Amer.	5515	7%	5487	7%	5670	7%	6109	7%	6763	7%
Asian	4560	6%	4555	6%	4768	6%	5186	6%	5583	6%
Hispanic	30154	38%	31814	40%	34113	42%	38785	44%	43332	46%
White	38715	49%	38068	48%	36664	45%	37302	43%	37711	40%
Total	78944		79924		81215		87382		93389	

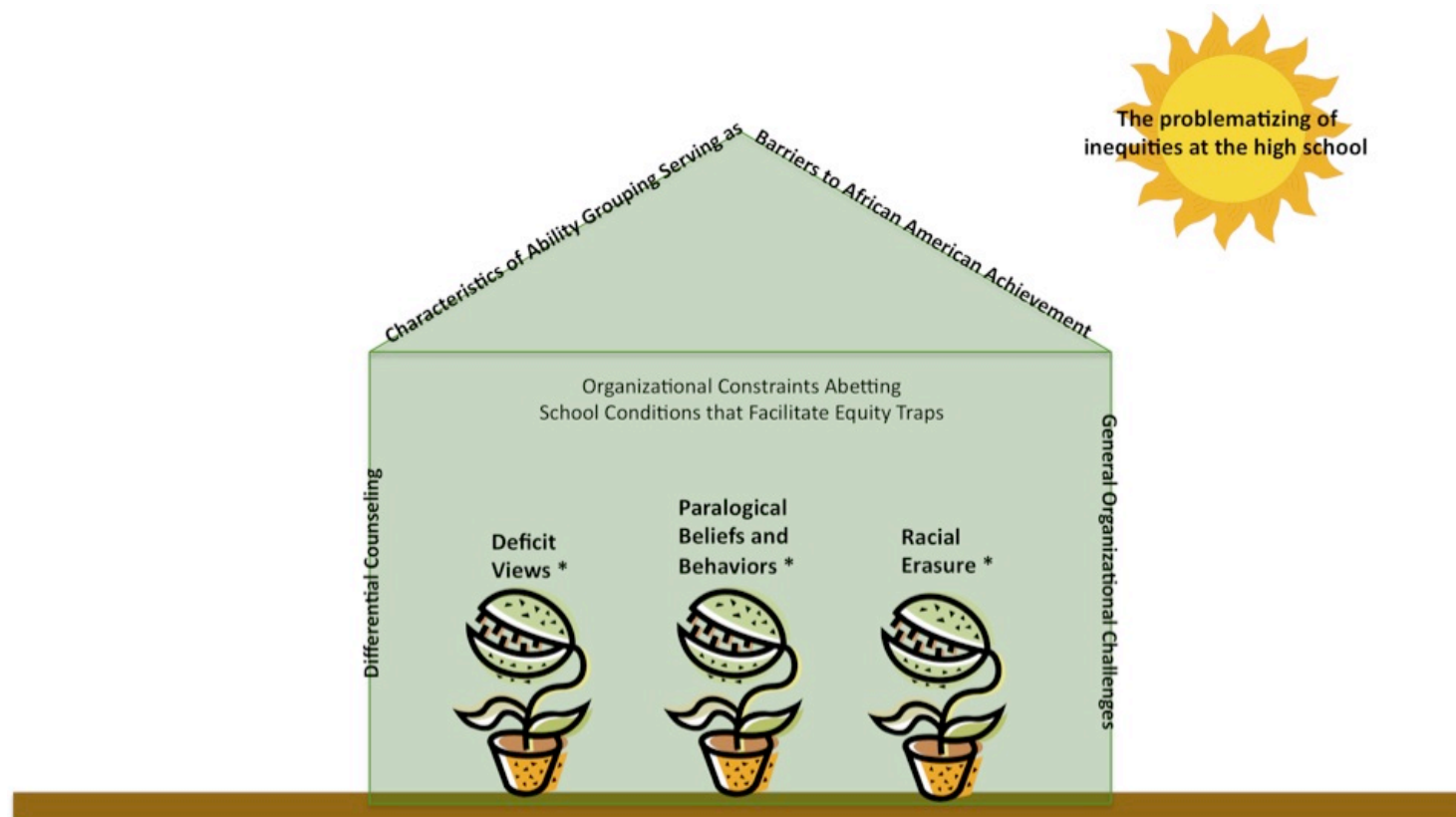
* Enrollment at each level includes French, German, Latin, Spanish, and Spanish for Spanish Speakers

** Increases in enrollment from Year 1 to Year 2 may be affected by incoming 9th graders with middle school language credit

Source: Texas Education Agency, 2011

APPENDIX D

GREENHOUSE METAPHOR



McKenzie, K. B., & Scheurich, J. J. (2004). Equity traps: A useful construct for preparing principals to lead schools that are successful with racially diverse students. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40(5), 601-632.

APPENDIX E
PERSONAL REFLECTION

May 30, 2012

Conducting interviews and focus group sessions with foreign language teachers, counselors, and administrators was a difficult experience for me. As the researcher, my role was to remain neutral and facilitate discussion. However, listening to the stakeholders in this study (who had known me for only a very short time) speak so openly and comfortably about their racist attitudes and views of their African American students was extremely troubling for me and fueled an anger that was difficult to hide. This study changed my thinking, for it made me realize how much remains to be done in our public schools concerning white racism, equity, and social justice.

My responsibility as a foreign language teacher is to interrupt the achievement gaps that are occurring by challenging foreign language teachers, counselors, and administrators “in the trenches” with me in our public schools to do their jobs and to put all of our students first, rather than just some of them. Public high school stakeholders, the majority of whom are White, must be shown the injuries and injustices that they are inflicting upon their students. Only then will they be able to reflect upon and be invited to change their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and practices with their students of color. Because of the unearned privilege that comes with my position as a

White educator, I have a unique power, responsibility, and role in helping to raise awareness and concern for these equity issues that may not be acknowledged or received in the same way if they were coming from a person of color.

My next steps as an emerging scholar include building a research agenda related to reforming public schools in order to eliminate achievement gaps, with a specific focus on foreign language curriculum and instructional practices. Addressing achievement gaps in this area of the public high school curriculum and practice is a research line in and of itself that has garnered far too little attention and concern in practice, policy, and the research literature.

VITA

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