STORIES OF THE UNHEARD: A CASE STUDY OF FIVE MEXICAN

AMERICAN DROPOUTS LABELED AS DEMONSTRATING

LEARNING DISABILITIES

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined the dropout crises from the perspectives of Mexican American dropouts labeled as learner disabled who were receiving special education services. Such study is imperative as this group increases both in school and in special education classes. There were two research questions that guided the study.

1. What are the perceptions of Mexican American dropouts who participated in a special education program regarding their educational experiences?

2. What were the factors that influenced these students' decisions to drop out of school?

From the participant interviews, historical academic documents, and rich-descriptive information gathered from the students' voices, three themes were revealed as the primary reason for dropping out of school:

- Nonresponsive school culture,

- Lack of supportive environment, and

- Social factors.

It was evident in the data collected that the school culture was unfavorable toward their learning and in meeting successful graduation requirements. Under nonresponsive school culture, the following subthemes emerged as underlining factors to their dropping out: (a) low expectations, (b) non-caring for the student, (c) ineffective curriculum content, and (d) social issues at school. School-related factors such as the lack of a supportive environment revealed the following subthemes: (a) symptoms of

school failure, (b) negative learning environment, and (c) culturally nonresponsive instruction. Other attributing factors for dropping out of school included family structures and peer pressure.

While each of the participants had unique experiences, each attributed nonresponsive school culture, lack of supportive environment, and social context as major factors for dropping out of school. Therefore, the significance of this study lies in the potential to impact Mexican American student achievement in the reduction of dropouts.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my friends and family, especially:

- To Ramon for encouraging me to become an Aggie as well;

- to Trey for creating the spark and motivation;

- to Anyssa for understanding those long nights without mommy;

- to Alejandro for allowing me to appreciate the gift of life;

- to my parents, Blanca and Robert Griessel, for instilling the significance of perseverance and dedication;

- to my in-laws for their never-ending support and love;

- to all the students who we failed to reach; and

- to all the educators who make a difference in our students' lives.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is imperative to examine the dropout crises from the perspectives of Mexican American dropouts labeled as learner disabled who were receiving special education services for three main reasons. First, the large number of students in this country who do not achieve a high school diploma is a grave problem for which a remedy must be found. The majority of dropouts have the intellectual capacity to be productive citizens (Dunn, 1968; Edgar, 1987; Hasazi, Gordon, & Rowe, 1985; Hippolitus, 1980; Levin, Zigmond, & Birch, 1985); however, without a high school diploma, their options are restricted. Second, it is necessary to understand the students' experiences that led to their decision to drop out of high school in order to find solutions to the dropout problem. Third, preceding research of students who drop out of school has not investigated specifically Mexican American students who received special education services from a qualitative approach.

Although federal and state reforms, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and House Bill 3, have developed efforts to close the achievement gap, increase student success and high school completion rates, and ensure educational and social equity, the dropout crisis persists in the United States of America and in South Texas. In spite of these reforms, the accountability for school districts and campuses regarding the completion rate is 75% (NCLB, 2001; Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2010b). Therefore, 25% of the student population within a high school is considered 'acceptable' dropouts. An alarming fact is that approximately 1.3 million students drop out of school

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in a given year, and approximately 7,000 students drop out of school on a daily basis in the United States (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). Of the 7,000 students who are dropping out of school, many are students of color, low income, and English language learners (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010).

In Texas, according to the Academic Excellence Indicator System, 84.3% of students grade 9th-12th completed high school in 2010 (TEA, 2011a, 2011b). This also included that 78.8% of Mexican Americans and 74.4% of students in special education graduated in 2010 (TEA, 2011c) (Appendix A). It is also alarming to know that 12 states including Texas have policies in place that do not include racial or ethnic accountability measures for graduation rates, which mask dropout crisis for students of color (Orfield, Losen, Wald, and Swanson (2004). These researchers contend that, "So long as the graduation rate accountability structure from NCLB is applied weakly or monitored poorly, few schools with very low Black and Mexican American graduation rates will be flagged for failing to make AYP on that basis" (Orfield et al., 2004, p. 24). In reality, most educational policies presume that there are few inequities in our educational system and focus on promoting college and career readiness.

In spite of policy implementation, there are determined voices asserting that high school attrition remains a major crisis (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Child Trends Data Bank, 2010; Dalton, Glennie, & Ingels, 2009). The persistent voices exclaim the disproportionality disparities of students of color, especially Mexican American. Students of color are more likely to drop out of high school than are White American youth (Planty et al., 2009; Rodriguez, 2008; Stillwell, 2010). In

addition, research also supported the fact that students of color from low-income families are more likely to disengage completely from school than Whites and Asians (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002; Dunn, 1968). There are voices that are relentless in uncovering the true picture regarding high school completion and attrition rates. For example, Orfield et al. (2004) and Swanson (2004) concluded that the "on-time high school graduation rate" (p. 15) in our Nation is only 68%, about 15 to 20 percentage points lower than traditional reports that state that 85 to 90% of American youth graduate from high school. Therefore, it is vital that we examine the educational experiences, factors, and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) of Mexican American students receiving special education services to determine factors that may or may not hinder "on-time high school graduation" (Swanson, 2004, p. 15).

Furthermore, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (P.L. 101-476) set substantial importance on improving the condition of secondary special education and transition services to foster more productive outcomes for students receiving special education services because historically there were low employment rates among these youths (Lichtenstein, 1993). Much data and research findings indicate that students with disabilities who dropped out of school are at a greater jeopardy of economic and social hardship due to the historical trends of inadequate and deficient educational opportunities and lack of self-advocacy (Hasazi et al., 1985; Lichtenstein, 1993). The economic and social hardships affect the students who drop out of school and society. For example, students without a high school diploma will earn approximately $260,000 less than a high school graduate within their lifetime (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010).

The social benefits of completing a high school diploma are imperative. Research suggested that the higher levels of education attainment would reduce crime, improve health, and increase democratic participation (Swanson, 2004), which will save society money. For example, According to *The Economic Benefits from Halving the Dropout Rate: A Boom in Businesses in the Nation's Largest Metropolitan Areas* (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010), if the number of dropouts for the Class of 2008 were reduced by 50%, 'new graduates' would earn a combined income of $4.1 billion, which $2.9 billion would be used on additional spending that would likely create 30,000 new jobs, but most importantly increase human capital of 65% attending postsecondary educational institutions. Therefore, it is imperative that we understand the complex variables that lead to high school attrition, particularly Mexican American students receiving special education services.

Besides the policies in place regarding graduation and completion rates along with masked accountability measures, there is even less agreement on the factors of high school dropouts. Numerous studies found high correlations between high school completion and impoverished social backgrounds, including low social economic background, urban cities, and disrupted families structures (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Barber & McClellan, 1987). In addition, school factors such as high absenteeism, failing grades, grade retention, student discipline problems, and student mobility are also associated with dropping out (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Rumberger, 1983, 2004). Other research stresses deficiencies in the school organizational structures and class size as contributing factors for student dropping out (Lee & Burkham 2003).

Understanding these dropout phenomena is the starting point. It is evident that

dropping out is not an event; it is a cumulative process that happens over time.

Therefore, a closer look as to the educational experiences of Mexican American students

in special education who are labeled as learner disabled is needed because dropout

factors are multi-dimensional and multifaceted (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew,

2007; Hupfeld, 2007; Rumberger, 1983; Rumberger & Sun, 2008). Therefore, the goal of

this study was to examine the students' educational experiences and the factors that

contributed to the high school attrition. Such information is valuable in examining,

designing, and implementing equitable educational practices, policies and procedures.

Statement of the Problem

National statistics have revealed that the United States' population is becoming

more ethnically diverse and the achievement gap still exists among students of color

compared to White students (Bernstein, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ladson-

Billings, 2001; Planty et al., 2009). Although the dropout rates declined among students

ages 16 to 24 between 1992 and 2010 (Child Trends Data Bank, 2010; Planty et al.,

2009), there were wide disparities by race (Fry, 2010; Stillwell, 2010; TEA, 2012) (Table

1.1).

In addition, national data for culturally and linguistically diverse students

revealed high dropout rates (Child Trends Data Bank, 2010; National Research Council

and the Institute of Medicine, 2004; Wagner, Newman, & Cameto, 2004). According to

High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 2010, which provided

data in dropout and school-completion rates over the last three decades (1992-2010) and

examined the characteristics of high school dropouts and high school completers,

Mexican American students were more likely to drop out of school than were White

students (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009; Child Trends Data Bank, 2010) (Table

1.2).

Table 1.1. Status Dropout Rates, Number of Status Dropouts, and Population of 16-
Through 24-Year-Olds: October 1992 Through October 2007

Year	Status Dropout Rate (percent)	Number of Status Dropouts (thousands)	Population (thousands)
1992	11.0	3,410	30,944
1993	11.0	3,396	30,845
1994	11.5	3,727	32,560
1995	12.0	3,876	32,379
1996	11.1	3,611	32,452
1997	11.0	3,624	32,960
1998	11.8	3,942	33,445
1999	11.2	3,829	34,173
2000	10.9	3,776	34,568
2001	10.7	3,774	35,195
2002	10.5	3,721	35,495
2003	9.9	3,552	36,017
2004	10.3	3,766	36,504
2005	9.4	3,458	36,761
2006	9.3	3,462	37,047
2007	8.7	3,278	37,480

Note. The status dropout rate indicates the percentage of 16- through 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in high school and who lack a high school credential. High school credentials include high school diplomas and equivalent credentials, such as a General Educational Development (GED) certificate.
Source. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2009).

Table 1.1 indicates the status dropout rates of 16 through 24-year-olds have

slowly declined. Eleven of the 16 reported years show some slight decline that lack high

school credentials or a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Most

importantly, Table 1.2 illustrates the disproportional discrepancies of students of color

compared to White students.

Table 1.2. Declining Dropout Rates Among Students Ages 16-24 and the Wide
Disparities by Race

	Total Status Dropout Rate			Male Status Dropout Rate				Female Status Dropout Rate			
Year	All races	White	Black	Hispanic	All races	White	Black	Hispanic	All races	White	Black	Hispanic
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1993	11.0	7.9	13.6	27.5	11.2	8.2	12.6	28.1	10.9	7.6	14.4	26.9
1994	11.4	7.7	12.6	30.0	12.3	8.0	14.1	31.6	10.6	7.5	11.3	28.1
1995	12.0	8.6	12.1	30.0	12.2	9.0	11.1	30.0	11.7	8.2	12.9	30.0
1996	11.1	7.3	13.0	29.4	11.4	7.3	13.5	30.3	10.9	7.3	12.5	28.3
1997	11.0	7.6	13.4	25.3	11.9	8.5	13.3	27.0	10.1	6.7	13.5	23.4
1998	11.8	7.7	13.8	29.5	13.3	8.6	15.5	33.5	10.3	6.9	12.2	25.0
1999	11.2	7.3	12.6	28.6	11.9	7.7	12.1	31.0	10.5	6.9	13.0	26.0
2000	10.9	6.9	13.1	27.8	12.0	7.0	15.3	31.8	9.9	6.9	11.1	23.5
2001	10.7	7.3	10.9	27.0	12.2	7.9	13.0	31.6	9.3	6.7	9.0	22.1
2002	10.5	6.5	11.3	25.7	11.8	6.7	12.8	29.6	9.2	6.3	9.9	21.2
2003	9.9	6.3	10.9	23.5	11.3	7.1	12.5	26.7	8.4	5.6	9.5	20.1
2004	10.3	6.8	11.8	23.8	11.6	7.1	13.5	28.5	9.0	6.4	10.2	18.5
2005	9.4	6.0	10.4	22.4	10.8	6.6	12.0	26.4	8.0	5.3	9.0	18.1
2006	9.3	5.8	10.7	22.1	10.3	6.4	9.7	25.7	8.3	5.3	11.7	18.1
2007	8.7	5.3	8.4	21.4	9.8	6.0	8.0	24.7	7.7	4.5	8.8	18.0
2008	8.0	4.8	9.9	18.3	8.5	5.4	8.7	19.9	7.5	4.2	11.1	16.7
2009	8.1	5.2	9.3	17.6	9.1	6.3	10.6	19.0	7.0	4.1	8.1	16.1
2010	7.4	5.1	8.0	15.1	8.5	5.9	9.5	17.3	6.3	4.2	6.7	12.8

Table 1.2 consistently depicts a disproportion of students of color dropping out of

school compared to White from 1993 to 2010. In addition, it is also evident that male

students are more likely to drop out of school compared to female students. In some

cases males are twice as likely to drop out of school compared to females. The pattern of

male students of color also shows that males are more likely to drop out of school

compared to female students of color. However, the percentages are almost equivalent.

For example, 17.3% of Hispanic male students did not complete or received their GED and Hispanic females were not far behind at 12.8%.

In addition, Congress also noted in IDEA that students of color with disabilities are more likely to drop out of high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). To add to the dropout problem, the southern region of the United States had a disproportionately high dropout rate with 42.1% of 16 through 24 year-olds leaving school prior to graduation (Cataldi et al., 2009; Stillwell, 2010). Accordingly, *Texas Education Agency 2012 Adequate Yearly Progress: State Data Tables* (TEA, 2012) revealed that in Texas, 81.8% of Mexican American students graduated in 2011, and 76.7% of students in special education graduated in 2011. Data also revealed that in Region One, 82.3% of Mexican American students graduated in 2010 and a mere 74.8% of students in special education graduated in 2010, as opposed to 93.6% White students graduating in 2010 (TEA, 2012) (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3. State and Education Service Center Regional Graduation Rates, Class of 2010

Class of 2010 & 2011 (preliminary results)	+All Students	+African American	+Hispanic	+White	Special Education	+ELL	White-Hispanic Graduation Gap	White-SPED Graduation Gap
Texas Average AYP Class 2010	84.3%	78.8%	78.8%	91.6%	74.4%	54.8%	12.8%	17.2%
*AYP Class 2011	85.9%	80.9%	81.8%	92.0%	76.7%	Na	10.2%	15.3%
ESC 1-AYP Class 2010	82.3%	77.1%	81.8%	93.6%	74.8%	57.5%	11.8%	18.8%

Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2011a).

Although Texas increased their graduation rate from Class of 2010 and Class of 2011, it is evident that the graduation gap between Mexican American and White and the

gap between students in special education and White exist. Therefore, to address this disproportionality between Mexican American students in special education and White students, this study focused on the perceptual data from Mexican American former students who participated in special education.

Consequently, dropping out of school is a critical problem for the individual, school, and society (Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007; Dalton et al., 2009). This problem is exceptionally relevant today, as the negative consequences of not attaining a high school diploma have increased with technological advancements and global communication (Day & Newburger, 2002; Englund, Egeland, & Collins, 2008). The disparity between the income of high school dropouts and the income of high school graduates has widened over the last 30 years (Day & Newburger, 2002).

Currently, individuals who have graduated from high school earn on average 1.6 times more than individuals who have dropped out of high school (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, Smith, & U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). For instance, the average income of persons ages 18 through 24 who did not graduate high school was roughly $15,816 in 2008, compared to persons with a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate, with an income of $16,296 (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2010). Regardless of the potential earnings, students do not decide to drop out of school from one day to the next; it is a long-term process of disengagement from school (National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, 2004).

However, there is a discrepancy between graduation rates among the different states. This discrepancy is due to the definition of what constitutes a dropout. While no uniform definition of 'dropout' exists among the states and our nation, interpretation of dropout statistics and comparisons of dropout rates are often invalid (Barber & McClellan, 1987; West, 1991; Williams, 1987). For instance, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the Current Population Survey (CPS), and the annual Common Core of Data (CCD) collections only accounted for non-institutionalized population in the United States (Stillwell, 2010). Data have indicated that a disproportionately higher percentage of dropouts are inmates in our national incarceration intuitions. For instance, data from America's prisons revealed that 75% of state inmates were high school dropouts and 59% of America's federal prison inmates did not complete high school (Harlow, 2003). Inmates of color were more likely to be high school dropouts than White inmates (Harlow, 2003; Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2009).

Furthermore, students who drop out of school are eight times more likely to be incarcerated, compared to high school graduates (Sum et al., 2009). Even in Texas, 90.7% of 60,896 of students who began ninth grade in 2004-2005, or transferred into the cohort, left school for reasons other than graduating, receiving a GED, or dropping out (TEA, 2009). Ambiguously, final statuses are unknown for those 90.7% of students who withdrew to enroll in an out-of-state school, to attend Texas private schools, to be homeschooled, or to go back to their home country (TEA, 2009).

In addition, the dropout rate calculations differ depending on the year they were reported. Thus, the U.S. Department of Education criticized the TEA for depicting an inaccurate picture of the dropout phenomenon in Texas public schools (TEA, 2006). TEA Rider 71 of the General Appropriations Act of 2000 directed the Legislative Budget Board, State Auditor's Office, and TEA to conduct a study of the current system used to identify and account for students who do not graduate from high school. This directive was due to the criticism and inaccurate presentation of the dropout data (TEA, 2006). There are researchers quarrelling that the dropout crises is worse than perceived (Orfield et al., 2004) due to the inaccuracy and misleading data. This is the case because states do not account for the vast number of students who do not graduate from high school (TEA, 2010b).

This study determined that a unified dropout definition was needed; therefore, in 2003, the TEA adopted the National Center of Education and Statistics' dropout definition that was implemented during the 2005-2006 school year (TEA, 2006). According to the TEA's most current definition, a dropout is a student enrolled in a Texas public school in grades 7-12 who does not return to a Texas public school the following fall. Furthermore, according to this definition, a dropout does not return to school for reasons other than death, expulsion, receiving a GED, continuing high school outside the Texas public school system, or beginning college (TEA, 2010b, 2012). Although Texas adopted the federal definition of what constitutes a dropout; the dropout comparison rate for Texas youth was still subject to different dropout definitions due to the year a particular class completes their high school credentials. For instance,

completion rates for classes of 2006-2009, under the national definition were incomparable to completion rates for classes prior to 2005, or the class of 2005 (TEA, 2012).

Therefore, in Texas, the dropout count was determined according to the dropout definition in place the year that the students dropped out of school (TEA, 2012). Regardless of the differences in reporting student dropouts, there were differences found between the types of students who drop out and those who matriculate (Christle et al., 2007).

Significance of the Study

Given the significance for personal and community success "in the flat world we now inhibit, inequality in the provision of education is an antiquated tradition the United States can no longer afford" (Darling Hammond, 2010, p. 327). Racial demographic projections indicated that the United States' population would experience considerable growth among diverse groups by 2050. The continuing increase of Mexican American students (24.5%) in public schools merited the importance of educating and transforming the beliefs of teachers (Planty et al., 2009). Based on a 1.9% overall average increase in enrollment over the past 20 years, Texas would have the third largest increase, at 32.9%, in public enrollment (NCES, 2008). Of this increased enrollment, Mexican American students are the largest ethnic group in the state (TEA, 2011b) (Appendixes B-D).

The student demographic population in Texas accounted for 50.3% Mexican American and 12.9% African American (TEA, 2011b). The combined percent of Mexican American and African American populations (63.2%) constituted the majority

compared to White students, 31.2% (TEA, 2011b). The percentage of students considered economically disadvantaged based on the free or reduced-price lunch data accounted for 59.2% of the student population in Texas (TEA, 2011b). In addition, students enrolled in an instructional program indicated 16.2% of students enrolled in Bilingual/ESL and 8.8% students enrolled in special education (TEA, 2011b). According to the Texas Education Agency (2011b) Academic Excellence Indicator System, Region Profile Report, the growing population of Mexican American students is more prevalent in the demographic Region One Educational Service Center (ESC) area, which services south Texas local education agencies that are close to the United States-Mexico border (Appendixes E-G).

In Region One Education Service Center, the demographic data accounted for 97.4% Mexican American students, 0.2% African American students, and 1.8% White students (TEA, 2011a). The percent of students considered economically disadvantaged accounted for 85.2% of the student population (TEA, 2011a). Furthermore, student enrollment for the Bilingual/ESL instructional program was more than twice that of the state, 35.5%, and 8.0% of students serviced by special education programs (TEA, 2011a).

Despite the importance of graduating from high school, students continue to drop out of school. Under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, states are required to report graduation rates disaggregated by ethnicity, gender, income status, English Language Proficiency, migrant status, and disability status.

The discrepancies were prominent in Texas schools (Appendix H). For instance, the dropout rates for Texas 7th-12th graders in 2010-2011 were as follows: Whites, 16.2%; African American, 20.7%; Mexican American, 60.3%; American Indian, 0.6%; Asian, 1.1%; Pacific Islanders,.1%; Economically Disadvantaged, 58.9%; and Special Education, 14.4% (TEA, 2012). In Texas, Mexican American students made up a larger percentage of the dropout population progressively for the years 2005-2011; for instance, in 2010-2011, Mexican American students in Texas made up 47.5% of students in grades 7-12, 60.3% of whom were dropouts, a difference of 12.8 percentage points (TEA, 2012). In addition, compared to White students, the most significant dropout rates were for Mexican American students with a difference of 44.1percentage points (TEA, 2012). As you compare the dropout rates for students identified as receiving special education services and having an Individual Education Plan, which constituted 10.4% of the student population, 14.4% dropout signifying a difference of 4 percentage points (TEA, 2012). Similarly, approximately twice as many students with disabilities drop out of school compared to students without disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Edgar, 1987; Hasazi et al., 1985; Hehir, 2002; Hippolitus, 1980; Levin et al., 1985). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the educational experiences and factors that contributed to the high school attrition for five Mexican American former students who were labeled as learner disabled.

Research Questions

The primary focus of this research study was to understand the perceptions of former Mexican American students, who participated in special education services,

regarding their experiences that led them to decide to drop out of school. The following research questions helped to guide the study:

1. What are the perceptions of Mexican American dropouts who participated in a special education program regarding their educational experiences?

2. What were the factors that influenced these students' decisions to drop out of school?

Conceptual Framework

Educational systems must create effective learning environments for students to become productive citizens (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970; Gay, 2010; Nieto, 2009). For this reason, I appealed to culturally responsive teaching theory that is also referred to in the literature (Howard, 2003) as culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1992a, 1992b), culturally congruent pedagogy (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), and culturally sensitive pedagogy (Banks, as cited in Gay, 2000), because of the alignment of instruction with a positive impact on teaching and learning. Howard (2006) stated, "responsiveness has to do with our capacity as teachers to know and connect with the actual lived experience, personhood, and learning modalities of the students who are in our classroom" (p. 131).

Ladson-Billings (1992b) affirmed in *Culturally Relevant Teaching: The key to Making Multicultural Education Work*: "Critical theorists assert that schools function to reproduce the systematic inequalities of the society. Consequently, the way to break the cycle is to focus on the kind of education minority students need…culturally relevant teaching" (p. 109). Therefore, in order to prevent teachers from only depositing

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knowledge to an educational system, internal changes can increase educational equality (Freire, 1970) such as culturally relevant or responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1992b; Gay, 2000, 2002, 2010) to reduce the attrition rate between Mexican Americans and students in special education.

Assumptions

Recognizing assumptions and making them evident strengthens a research study (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). These assumptions reflect the researcher's beliefs about the conceptual framework, the methods, and the phenomenon under investigation. One assumption for this study was that a qualitative approach would bring to light factors that may help explain why some Mexican American students in special education drop out of school. The data collection tools utilized included interviews, educational records or documents, and participant observations. It was also assumed these tools would help me understand the perceptions and instructional experiences of former students in special education programs and further to understand events that may or may not have contributed to the students' decision to drop out of school (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). Another assumption was that the participants would understand each question and be truthful during the interview process. With regard to the educational records or documents, the assumption was that the records would be complete and accurate.

Additionally, the conceptual framework, culturally responsive teaching, was selected because I believed that it provided an adequate explanation of the substantive phenomenon under investigation. The investigation assumed the veracity of the research and expressed beliefs that verified the value of studying it. Furthermore, sensitivity refers

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to susceptibility to prevailing attitudes, feelings, or environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kerlinger & Lee, 2000).

Delimitations

The delimitations of a research study are certain attributes that limit the scope of the investigation as determined by the conscious omission and inclusion decisions that were made during the course of the development of the proposal (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). The first delimitation in this study was the researcher's experiences and observations with Texas students, predominantly Mexican American students, who received special education services. My 14 years of experience in educating Mexican American students with special needs, as a teacher and administrator, have yielded positive and negative awareness within the educational system. These biases were kept in check, and to my best ability, prevented excessive influence on the results of the research. Therefore, in wanting to represent how participants described their experiences, I worked diligently to maintain objectivity throughout the research. I chose to investigate Mexican American dropouts who were receiving special education services in south Texas near the United States-Mexico border.

Definitions

The terms defined relate to the current study. The primary reason for defining these terms is to have a clear indication of meaning when using these terms in the study. The researcher was aware that there are several definitions regarding multicultural education (Banks, 2004) and its misconceptions (Banks, 1993). In addition, this study used the term Hispanic or Mexican American instead of Latinas/os. Although the shared

common language might be Spanish, English, or "Spanglish," historical, racial, and

cultural differences were acknowledged (Banks, 1993). The term culture for some people

referred to culture as an appreciation of good quality literature, classical music, art, and

delicate cuisine and, therefore, redefined. However, culture for this study was the full

range of both specialized and everyday practices and learned human behavior patterns

that was ever-evolving (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The term

special education encompasses an educational program that serves students labeled with

mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral disabilities. According the Texas Education

Code (TEC), §29.003, Chapter 89 adapted from the 34 Code of Federal Regulations

(CFR), §300.8(a), the following 13 categories are special education eligibility (TEA,

2001):

- Autism
- Deaf-Blindness
- Auditory Impairment
- Emotional Disturbance
- Mental Retardation
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment
- Learning Disability
- Speech Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment
- Non-categorical (ages 3-5)

For this particular study, the term special education referred to one category of

services: learning disability. The term dropout referred to the most recent Texas and

National Center of Education Statistics' definition with modifications to the timespan out

of school. The following terms are redefined as follows:

Culture - It is the practices in everyday life; created through the processes of social

management (Ladson-Billings, as cited in Banks, 2004).

Dropout - A dropout is a student enrolled in a Texas public school in grades 7-12, who

does not return to a Texas public school the following fall, is not expelled, and

does not graduate, receive a GED, or continue high school outside the Texas

public school system, or begins college, or dies (TEA, 2006).

Hispanic student/Mexican American - Although some researchers choose to use the

term Latina/o, for the purpose of this study, this researcher chose the term

Hispanic to be consistent with Texas Education Agency's subgroup. The term

Mexican American is also used, because as a specialist who interacts and

communicates with students, I am aware that some students identify themselves

as Mexican.

Learning disability - Learning disability is a classification determined by the

Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committee documenting that a severe

discrepancy exists when the student's assessed intellectual ability is an above-

average intelligence score, but the student's assessed educational achievement is

more than one standard deviation below the student's intellectual ability (TEA,

2001). However, the category of learning disabilities in the United States is

basically a category for reading failure (Sleeter, 2010).

Multicultural education - Although different definitions exist, multicultural education

is a concept with a set of criteria for making decisions to meet the needs of all

culturally diverse students. It is a process to reform the educational system so that all students have equal opportunities to succeed in school (Banks, 2004).

Race - As a historical and social development, race refers to biologically-based, human characteristics used to describe a certain culture or group (Banks, 2004).

Special education - The term refers to an educational program that provides delivery of services to students with disabilities so that a free, appropriate public education is available to all of those students. For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on one eligibility criteria, which is learning disability (LD), students in the general curriculum (TEA, 2008).

Student of color - The term is used when referring to non-White students (Gay, 2010).

Organization of the Study

Research has indicated that many students of color are dropping out of school (Edgar, 1987; Hasazi et al., 1985; Hippolitus, 1980; Levin et al., 1985; TEA, 2012). Therefore, this study examined the perceptions of students of Mexican American heritage who had participated in special education and who disengaged from high school regarding their educational experiences. A goal of this study was to help uncover educational practices that may or may not be adding to the dropout crises.

Chapter I presents a statement of the problem, a significance of the study, research questions, a conceptual framework, assumptions and delimitations, definitions, and an organization of the study. Chapter II provides a review of literature on multicultural education, special education from an instructional perspective, and dropout factors from various research studies. In addition, Chapter II examines the research

regarding culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and caring

teachers as all-encompassing theories of multicultural education. In Chapter III, an

explanation of the primary focus of the research, methodology, and methods is discussed.

A brief profile of each participant is provided in Chapter IV. In addition, themes and

subthemes that emerged from the data analysis are shared. Chapter V presents

implications for critical educational reform regarding practices, culture, policies, and

extended research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In Chapter II, the researcher describes the extent in which the review of literature regarding Mexican American dropouts who were labeled as learner disabled receiving special education was accessible. This was provided to establish the most recent literature on this particular study. It was evident that in order to have a comprehensible understanding of this dropout phenomenon, a historical journey of the inequities in society and education needed to be illustrated. Therefore, the body of literature focused on the historical context of curriculum theory through multicultural and special education lenses to better understand the depth and complexity of the former students' educational experiences. This assisted in understanding the historical journey of a reconstructive and transformative endeavor for a more equitable and effective educational system for ethnically and culturally diverse students. The review of the literature examined how culturally relevant teaching is linked to multicultural education and how it addresses student achievement among students of color.

It is also necessary to review the literature regarding the practices and perspectives that contradict or oppress certain cultures in our educational system. It is of equal importance to understand how instructional practices may have an impact on the ever-increasing diversity of students. The diversity may include that of culture, ethnicity, race, social, and linguistic individuals socially and academically. For this study, the review of literature will discuss the following: (a) literature searches and this study, (b)

context of multicultural education, (c) context of special education program, (d) culturally responsive teaching, (e) school culture, and (f) dropout factors.

Past Research

Over the past decades, scholars have been prolific in producing research regarding the dropout crisis. Studies were conducted at the national, state, and local levels regarding characteristics of dropouts (Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Christle et al., 2007; Dalton et al., 2009; Stillwell, 2010) and characteristics of successful dropout prevention programs (Rumberger, 1987; West, 1991). In addition, numerous researchers examined the predictors of high school dropouts (Alexander et al., 1997; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, & Carlson, 2000; Rumberger, 1987). Despite the plethora of research, few studies investigated the perceptions of Mexican American students who participated in a special education program regarding the factors that may or may not have influenced their decision to drop out of school.

Literature Searches and This Study

Even with the recent growth of literature concerning high school dropouts, few studies have focused on the disproportional dropout rates involving students with physical and mental handicaps (Edgar, 1987; Hasazi et al., 1985; Hippolitus, 1980; Levin et al., 1985). To establish the most inclusionary literature set possible, extensive systematic searches of relevant electronic databases, hand searches of selected journals, author searches, searches of selected reference lists, and especially searches of peer reviewed articles was conducted. The databases searched included ERIC, Academic Search Complete (Ebsco), OmniFile FT Mega (Wilson), and PsycINFO (CSA). The two

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general terms, dropouts and special education, first used yielded 358 results. However, under each topic, dropout prevention and special education studies, a mere 12 and 9 articles, respectively, appeared.

In addition to the electronic search, a list of 10 representative journals was developed based on the recommendations of professors, researchers, and experts in the field of education from Texas A&M International University and Texas A&M University. As many as 358 studies were screened for suitability for these researchers' meta-analysis interests. The coding process used in the screening was to identify articles that combined dropout data with students in special education. This yielded a result of 103 research articles. Next, those 103 articles were subjected to detailed scrutiny using a three-stage coding process whereby a primary coder, the researcher, extracted all the relevant information from those research articles for review; and a secondary coder, a Ph.D. candidate from Capella University, completed the same coding process semi-independently. An agreement procedure was used to settle differences in codes assigned by the primary and secondary coders. The coding process needed to identify Mexican American students, students with special needs, and students between 7th and 12th grade or between the ages of 12 and 22.

This dual coding process reduced the number of research-based information by 79.6%. Some reviews/studies added to the literature base through this particular process. The reduction in the number of studies associated with this screening process was from 103 to 21 studies. In addition, only 11.6% of the 103 studies used qualitative methods. Most prior reviews have focused fundamentally on the effects of academic outcomes

(Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Christle et al., 2007), and dropout prevention programs (Rumberger, 1987; West, 1991), including cognitive-behavioral interventions for students with special needs. The purpose of this study was to qualitatively add to the body of knowledge regarding the perceptions of Mexican American students with special needs in the area of learner disabled, with regard to their educational and instructional experiences that may or may not have influenced their decision to drop out of school.

Academic underachievement has been the focus of much research for more than 35 years (Emerick, 1992; Stillwell, 2010; TEA, 2010a). Nevertheless, the United States, and specifically, Texas continues to have high numbers of students who drop out of school. Educators attempted to explain underachievement from the educators' perspective (Emerick, 1992), and several researchers have expressed the need for more studies, specifically including the perceptions' of Mexican American students who participated in special education (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Coleman, 2001; Emerick, 1992; Lee & Burkham, 2003; Rodriguez, 2008). For instance, Emerick (1992) suggested, "that reversing the underachievement pattern…has not progressed because researchers failed to understand the individual sufficiently and failed to investigate systematically all aspects of the problem" (p. 140). Unless researchers reinvestigate the school culture from the former students' perspectives, educators will continue to witness students dropping out of school with economic and social consequences (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Lee & Burkham, 2003; Rodriguez, 2008). Coleman (2001) who conducted a study on social relationships stated, "I recommend listening to the students because they have much to share with us about their own development and we have much to learn" (p. 173). To

analyze the perceptions and instructional experiences of Mexican American dropout students who participated in special education programs, the context of multicultural education, context of special education, culturally responsive teaching, school culture, and dropout factors were reviewed.

Context of Multicultural Education

A historical viewpoint is essential to offer a context for understanding the contemporary development and dialogue in multicultural education and to reform schools to mirror equity in education. Historically, multicultural education started back by intellectuals such as George Washington Williams, W.E.B. Dubois, Horace Mann Bond, Carter Woodson, among other scholars, which articulated a vision of human rights and brought to life the voice of Black history through ethnic studies and various publications (Banks, 2004). These scholars played a vital role in developing teacher materials that reflected an integrated content of the history, culture, and perspectives of African Americans. All of the different publications, journals, and discussions laid the foundation for needing equality in a pluralistic democracy (Banks, 2004). Therefore, multicultural education surfaced from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s in educational systems through Black studies using the integrated teaching materials from these scholars. Multicultural education emerged to educate society and stop institutional racism. This section examined the historical context and evolution of multicultural education in American society.

Educating American students has been a reflection of the perceptions' of society. By the most part, people of color were educated in separate schools due to the Supreme

Court decision *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896), which held that separate but equal facilities

did not violate the U.S. Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment. More than 50 years later,

racial segregation in public schools was still common in the United States. Nevertheless,

the 1896, ruling of separate but equal was not the case because most non-White schools

were exceedingly inferior to their White counterparts, inherently unequal (Garcia, 2004;

Nieto, 2004; Pang, 2005) regardless of the prior cases challenging the 'equal' aspect of

the law (Pang, 2005). Previous attempts to stop the oppressive educational conditions

were not successful until the Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education.* Prior

cases including the Brown case "were of physical and intellectual exclusion" (Pang,

2005, p. 193). Conversely, the Supreme Court asserted that all endeavors be made to

address equal access to education. This decision reinforced for all students regardless of

their race. This call for action reiterated on May 17, 1954, when Chief Justice Earl

Warren read the decision of the unanimous Court decision:

We come then to the question presented: Does segregation of children in public

schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other

"tangible" factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal

educational opportunities?

> We believe that it does....We conclude that in the field of public education the
> doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are
> inherently unequal. Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly
> situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation
> complained of, deprived of the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the
> Fourteenth Amendment. (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954, p. 483)

The Civil Rights Movement paved the way for diverse cultures demanding

cultural recognition. This outcry called for a stop to Americanization or assimilation that

has been a common practice in educational institutes. For the most part, culture is compared to non-Mexican American, White middle class, Eurocentric beliefs (Banks, 2004, Gay, 2010; Padilla, 2004; Pang, 2005). The trouble with Eurocentric ideologies or cultural hegemony in schools today is that it inflicts Eurocentric realities as universal truths; thus, non-White students are viewed as 'minority,' lesser than White (Pang, 2005). Though educators, parents, and students may not distinguish this deliberately, the subconscious absorption of the beliefs Eurocentric education transmits to children of color is truly damaging and detrimental to their social and academic development (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Sleeter, 2001).

It is through the critical analysis of Eurocentric epistemology that perpetuates the educational systems that educators can examine a variety of educational issues (Ladson-Billings, 1999). According to Gay (2010), "The failure to do so can cause irreversible damage to the intellectual development and academic achievement of some students" (p. 244). Freire (1970) affirmed, "the fundamental theme of our epoch is to be that of domination-which implies its opposite, the theme of liberation, as the objective to be achieved" (p. 93). Through multicultural education, liberation is achieved because multicultural education stands on the pillars of equity and equality for all students (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Pang, 2005). Thus, multicultural dimensions and practices are further explained in the following section of the literature review.

Multicultural Dimensions and Practices

The concept of multicultural education has various underlining philosophies, theories, and practices with a high level of agreement about its goals. Scholars agree that the goals of multicultural education are reform so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups experience educational equality and success (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Nieto, 2004). Therefore, in order to implement multicultural education successfully, educational reform must start with the vision of the school culture, curriculum, attitudes and beliefs of all educators, and the appropriate resources (Banks, 2004; Brophy & Good, 1970; Howard, 2001, 2003; Sleeter & Grant, 1999). Some scholars conceptualize multicultural education according to its practices and perspectives of the social groups they aim to study (Banks, 2004; Sleeter & Grant, 1999). According to Banks (2004),

> Multicultural education is a field of study designed to increase educational equity for all students that incorporates, for this purpose, content, concepts, principals, theories, and paradigms from history, the social and behavioral sciences, and particularly from ethnic studies and women studies. (p. xii)

The conceptual framework of multicultural education builds upon five dimensions created by Banks (2004): (a) content integration, (b) the knowledge construction process, (c) prejudice reduction, (d) equity pedagogy, and (e) an empowering school culture and social structures. A brief overview of each dimension is discussed.

Educators must focus on each of the five dimensions to implement multicultural education effectively. The first dimension is c*ontent integration*, which refers to what extent educators use a variety of cultures to illustrate key understandings, generalization, concepts, or theories in their subject area (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2010). Some districts

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believe that multicultural education lends itself better for social studies and English teachers. In doing so, districts or educators may limit multicultural education to seasonal celebrations such as *Cinco de Mayo* and/or Dr. Martin Luther King Day. By celebrating diversity on a given day or month, educators may be segmenting multicultural education when in actuality it is a process of transformations. Educators need to have knowledge of those cultures, customs, beliefs, and their students in order to integrate various cultural aspects into the content taught (Banks, 2004; Howard, 2006; Pang, 2005).

The second dimension, the *knowledge construction process*, relates to the extent educators help students understand, examine, and determine perspectives and prejudice within a discipline (Banks, 2004; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Educators help students understand how knowledge is partial due to racial, ethnic, and social-class position of individuals. Essentially, teachers help students understand how knowledge in the various disciplines is constructed. It is not teaching to the test. During the knowledge construct process, students are able to decipher the influence in which content and knowledge is constructed.

Another dimension is *prejudice reduction*. This dimension focuses on the characteristics of educators' and students' racial attitudes, teachers' pedagogy, and instructional materials to reduce their biases (Banks, 2004). The dimension of prejudice reduction is important because according to Allport (1954), children start internalizing racial attitudes by age three, but teachers can reduce those prejudices through curricular interventions, reinforcement, perceptual differentiation, and cooperative learning (Banks, 2004; Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2004; Moll, 2005).

The fourth dimension, *equity pedagogy*, transpires when teachers use instructional routines that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups (Banks, 2004; Marzano, 2003; Moll, 2005). Educators need to know their students' learning style, interests, and needs (Gardner, 1993; Gay, 2010; Joyce et al., 2004, Marzano, 2003). It is not teaching students who are 'teachable' (Pang, 2005) or perpetuating the status quo (Banks, 2004; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Gay, 2010). It is providing equitable education for all students. These four dimensions all cope with cultural or social system within the student's school.

The last dimension, *an empowering school culture and social structures*, transpires when all members of school staff examine the school culture and organization with the intent to restructure institutional practices to create equitable access for all groups (Banks, 2004). These actions of transformationists advocated "for people who have been marginalized by the forces of dominance and oppression" (p. 111) and "take responsibility for unraveling the classroom inequities that have perpetuated the achievement gap," which subsequently changes the school culture (Howard, 2006, p. 119). Many researchers have studied the characteristic of effective and ineffective schools and indicated that the difference in variation of student achievement is the school culture (Edmonds, 1979; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Lezotte, 2012; Marzano, 2003). Thus, multicultural education is a multidimensional process with five approaches that can empower schools to bring about meaningful change, if implemented properly (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Multicultural Education and Curriculum

Several approaches denote the evolution of multicultural education since its commencement. According to the typology developed by Sleeter and Grant (as cited in Banks, 2004; Hernandez, 2001) there are five approaches that are as follows: (a) teaching the exceptional and the culturally different, (b) human relations, (c) single-group studies, (d) multicultural education, and (e) education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist.

The first approach, *teaching the exceptional and the culturally different*, initiated in the 1960's, is to promote the academic achievement of students of color, students receiving special education services, English language learners, and students from low socioeconomic levels through culturally relevant practices, development of fundamental skills, and knowledge of individual learning styles (Hernandez, 2001). The majority of the literature regarding intergroup education can be categorized as *human relations*. In this approach interracial harmony, greater tolerance of individual differences and positive interaction is emphasized to combat stereotyping and discrimination (Banks, 2004; Hernandez, 2001).

Curriculum transformation efforts showed that integrating ethnic content into the curriculum moved cyclically from intergroup to *single-group studies*. The single-group studies approach goal is to raise social consciousness and encourage social action on behalf of an oppressed or marginalized group. During this period, a myriad of books, curriculum, programs, and other materials focused on the history and culture of ethnic groups. In the 1970's, the fourth approach, *multicultural education,* emerged in four

different phases (Banks, 2004) that starts with the integration of concepts and theories from ethnic studies into educational curriculum. The insertion of ethnic studies in the curriculum was not enough to bring about school reform; therefore, it examined the relationships and incorporated the voices of people of color in regard to culture, ethnicity, gender, language, handicap, and social class when developing educational programs (Hernandez, 2001).

The fourth phase of multicultural education is the fifth approach, *education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist*, of Sleeter and Grant (1999). This approach calls for social action and active student involvement in addressing social issues through the development of theories, research, and practices that interconnect race, class, and gender (Banks, 2004; Hernandez, 2001). The fifth approach advocates for students to challenge the status quo and actively unite to effect change. It is evident that multicultural education has evolved over time and continues to change. Schools today implement multicultural education in one or more of these approaches.

No matter what approach a school implements regarding multicultural education, instructional gaps are prevalent due to the lack of fidelity in the curriculum. In order to systematically reform educational institutions to promote educational and social equity, school structures need critical examination. Examples of school structures include the physical structures; location; policies; tracking; standardized testing; roles of students, teachers, and community; pedagogical practices; and curriculum (Nieto, 2004). For the purpose of this research, pedagogical practices and curriculum are discussed because equity pedagogy places importance of how and what to effectively teach diverse

students, especially concerning students who receive special education services.

Primarily, researchers revealed that there are three types of curriculum: (a) the intended

curriculum (b) the implemented curriculum, (c) and the attained curriculum (Marzano,

2003).

The *intended curriculum* is content specified by the state, district, or school in

which the teachers will teach in a particular course at a particular grade level. In Texas,

the school's formal curriculum framework is the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

(TEKS), which denotes the student expectations and skills they must acquire. The

implemented curriculum is content actually taught by the teacher, whereas the attained

curriculum is content actually learned by students. The reality of state-level standards,

TEKS, and school-level curriculum does not automatically mean that the implemented

curriculum and the intended curriculum are identical.

The implemented curriculum can also be affected by the 'hidden' curriculum that

encompasses the transactions between teacher and student (Hernandez, 2001). Gay

(2010) explained this hidden curriculum "by virtue of being unilaterally in charge of the

classroom, teachers control and monopolize academic interactions. They decide who will

participate in what, when, where, and how" (p. 59). One example is the questioning

patterns educators consciously or subconsciously control (Good & Brophy, 2003). For

example, some teachers tend to call on high achievers more frequently than struggling

learners, which, in turn provides these academically able students with an educational

advantage. Typical consequences of this practice are that over their years of instruction,

struggling learners ignore or exit the educational system (Gall, 1984). Therefore,

discrepancy between the intended curriculum and the implemented curriculum makes opportunity to learn an important factor in student achievement (Herman, Klein, & Abedi, 2000; Marzano, 2003). The evidence of opportunity to learn in federal and state accountability scores along with the high dropout rates is evident. The next section explores a closer look at opportunity to learn for students in special education.

In conclusion, multicultural education has grown through awareness and developmental phases. Multicultural education is a process that challenges racism, sexism, oppression, and the status quo of unequal educational opportunities. The ultimate goal is creating an equitable society by having high academic expectations that students become critically reflective of the world around them (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2010; Sleeter & Grant, 1999). In doing so, the curriculum must address students' cultural backgrounds, personal relevance, and learning style by promoting equitable access and rigorous educational achievement for all students, especially students receiving special education services, to progress toward social change.

Context of Special Education

People who experience intellectual or physical disability have traditionally epitomized a hidden 'minority' in American society (Percy, 1992). To begin with, students with disabilities did not receive the most appropriate education. In addition, special education was not always accepted in larger school communities before the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, PL94-142, in 1975, officially renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004, along with regulations devised to enforce section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Percy,

1992). Therefore, a closer look at the historical context of special education and the advances in special education depict the triumphs and tribulations for students who receive this service. These advances or laws set the stage for a new phase of policy implementation.

In the past, society viewed individuals with special needs as insignificant, evil spirits, or buffoons who were a hindrance locked away in some institution or kept at home isolated from mainstream society (Chesterton, 2000; Karten, 2005). Dunn (1968) asserted that throughout time, "socioculturally deprived" students who came "from poverty, broken and inadequate homes, and low status ethnic groups" were consistently segregated in classrooms with students who were identified as mentally retarded (p. 5). The oppressive treatment of individuals labeled as physically or mentally challenged makes me wonder who our Founding Fathers were referring to in the Declaration of Independence (1776). Our Founding Fathers wrote, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (Declaration of Independence, 1776, p. 1). Nearly 200 years after the Declaration of Independence asserted, "that all men are created equal," people with disabilities had few rights. Through the early nineteenth and twentieth century, millions of children with disabilities were denied an appropriate education, placed in institutions, or were left to die due to lack of care (Armstrong, 2002; Chesterton, 2000; Karten, 2005; Percy, 1992).

An ideal example of society's view or social context was the Congressional report, *The History and Growth of the United States Census*. Wright (1900) reported to Congress that the 1880 and 1890 United States Federal Census presented "several classes of people as mentally or physically defective such as insane, feeble-minded, idiotic, deaf or blind persons, or such as may be crippled, maimed, or deformed" (Wright, 1900, p. 179). By law, an enumerator had to return to the families and gather more detailed information, such as the onset of the disability, acute or chronic disease, and place of dwelling at home or in an asylum; how many and which family members suffered from insanity, feeble-mindedness, deafness, blindness or deformity, and the number of attacks of insanity (Wright, 1900). The enumerators gathered detailed information regarding the disabilities through interviews of the family members and neighbors. Neighbors were asked questions about the physical and mental capacity of other families because not all families with a disabled relative, especially their own child, interviewed were truthful in regard to mental or physical disabilities.

In addition, during the 1800s, the classification of entire Black populations as insane was erroneous data. According to Wright (1900), memorialists found, "in many towns all the colored population are stated to be insane…one-fourth, or one-tenth of this ill-starred race are reported to be thus afflicted" (p. 39). Although the memorialists brought several enormous discrepancies forth to Congress, the mistakes were acknowledged but not corrected. Thus, guidelines were set forth each year to improve the collection of information (Wright, 1900).

Improved guidelines for collecting information did not change discrimination. In fact, the official governmental classification system such as the U.S. Census created and reflected social, economic, and political inequality. According to Hochschild and Weaver (2007), "this process enshrines structurally the dominant group's belief about who belongs where, which groups deserve what, and ultimately who gets what" (p. 160). Thus, educational opportunities were minimal or nonexistent for people of color and/or people with a physical or mental disability. Hence, the way society has reacted to individuals with exceptionalities has changed dramatically through different movements such as Social Advocacy Movement, Civil Rights Movement, groundbreaking court cases, and laws.

Social Advocacy Movement: More Protective and Humanitarian Attitudes

Humanitarian attitudes and actions related to the interests of individuals with exceptionalities dawdlingly moved toward a more inclusive society. It was not until 1918, that compulsory education for all was the law of the land; however, it did not become an instant reality. Given that social norms isolate people with special needs unsympathetically, institutions and social advocacy awareness moved more toward collaboration. This was due to groundbreaking educational research. This research demonstrated that students with special needs improved their learning when they were part of a stimulating environment (Skeels & Dye, 1939).

Groundbreaking research altering perceptions. Starting in the 1930s, scholars and researchers such as Orton, Gillingham, Monroe, Fernald, and Kirk used European studies as a springboard to investigate the learning process of students with disabilities

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and employed effective instructional/teaching practices that contributed to improving education and the perception of students with disabilities (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010). For example, Neurologist, Samuel Orton, was baffled why a young teen could not read even though he was of average intelligence. Therefore, he created a study with a sample of teachers' recommendation of students "who were considered defective or who were retarded or failing in their school work" (Orton, 1925, p. 582). Orton determined a syndrome unrelated to brain damage, which he coined *strephosymbolia*, which made learning to read difficult (Orton, 1925). His theory described people with dyslexia caused by lack of left-brain dominance. Influenced by the kinesthetic work of Helen Keller, and her teacher Anne Sullivan, and Grace Fernald, Orton collaborated with educator Anna Gillingham to develop multisensory instruction (Gillingham & Stillman, 1997).

Similarly, Marion Monroe, Orton's research associate, combined the instructional methodologies of Orton-Gillingham, Fernald, and Keller at the Institute for Juvenile Research with boys labeled as mentally retarded. The combination of kinesthetic tracing techniques and sound blending, improved student-reading achievement. Fortunately, the success of synthetic phonetic approach allowed Monroe to train teachers to improve reading for students with reading difficulties (Monroe, 1932). Two approaches stand as pillars for special education that she introduced:

1. Discrepancy between actual achievement and expected achievement;
2. Diagnostic-prescriptive teaching

The discrepancy between actual achievement and expected achievement provided a reading index for educators and students. Monroe encouraged that analyzing specific

types of reading errors children made on the tests was imperative to instruction and student learning, hence, diagnostic-prescriptive teaching (Monroe, 1932), which is a mandate in Response to Intervention (RtI).

Based on Monroe's diagnostic-prescriptive teaching along with subsequent researchers, Dr. Samuel Kirk began his research on exceptional children and developed *Remedial Reading Drills* for students with reading difficulties. Kirk's (1976) contribution to research and society stemmed from a lived experience at the Institute for Juvenile Research where he worked. Kirk (1976) noticed this young 10-year-old boy labeled mentally retarded "had not learned to read" and was dedicated to teaching him how to read. Kirk (1976) wrote about the young mentally challenged boy:

> He was eager to learn, sneaked quietly out of bed at the appointed
> time each night and met me in a small space between the two
> dormitory rooms…actually, in the doorway of the boy's toilet.…
> I often state that my first experience in tutoring a case of reading
> disability was not in a school, was not in a clinic, but in a boy's
> lavatory. (pp. 242-243)

Kirks' high expectations, prescriptive teaching, and resilience to teach a human being labeled mentally retarded enabled this 10-year-old boy to learn how to read within seven months. The short period gave the boy a second chance on life. Fortunately, he was no longer considered mentally retarded and was released from the Institute for Juvenile Research to attend general school (Kirk, 1976).

Making its way! Compulsory education. The United States compulsory education for all children stimulated thought about educating children with disabilities. In 1963, a group of parents, professionals, and advocates attended the, "Exploration into the Problems of the Perceptually Handicapped" conference in Chicago where Dr. Samuel

Kirk coined the term "learning disability" (Kirk, 1976; Learning Disability Association of America, 2011). Motivated by Kirk's speech and without delay parents formed the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities (ACLD), currently recognized as the Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) (Kirk, 1976). Professionals and parents shared a universal concern: the urgent need for services for their children as the services were inexistent. Therefore, the pillars of that conference set the foundation for the principles for legislation, diagnostic measures and procedures, best practices, and research-based training paradigms. This, in turn, led the way to The Children with Specific Learning Disabilities Act of 1969, which federal law mandated support service for students with disabilities (Learning Disability Association of America, 2011).

However, leading advocates argued that the learning disability category surfaced because the majority of students with special needs were not provided equitable educational opportunities. This added pressure from parents to demand an appropriate education that is culturally congruent and differentiated could not be concealed. Thus Sleeter (2010) declared:

> That the category emerged for a political purpose: to differentiate and protect [W]hite middle class children who were failing in school from lower class and minority (children of color), during a time when schools were being called upon to raise standards for economic and military purposes. Rather than being a product of progress, the category was essentially conservative in that it helped schools continue to serve best those whom schools have always served best: the white middle and upper-middle class. This political purpose, however, has been cloaked in the ideology of individual differences and biological determinism, thus making it appear scientifically sound. (p. 213)

Sleeter (2010) argued, that the learning disability category (LD) was created to protect White middle class children from school failure. In addition, it is another opportunity for the American educational system and our society to oppress or to continue a sorting system for students on the basis of race, ethnicity, culture, linguistic or intellectual accommodation, and social class. As more time passed, more and more students of color were being labeled as LD.

This is evident in the data. Currently, disproportionality is measured using the Relative Risk Ratio, where you compare the risk of identification for students of color to White students. A risk ratio above 1.2 requires attention because it indicates disproportionally (Kozleski, 2005). For example, African American students have the highest risk ratio for being classified as having a learning disability (LD). The risk ratio for African American ranges from 1.1 to 2.85 and for Mexican Americans, the risk ratio ranges from .57 to 1.97 (National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems [NCCRESt], 2009). Students of color are identified with LD labels more frequently than White students. Once labeled as LD, students of color have a risk ratio of up to 3.62 times of being placed in segregated classrooms compared to White students (NCCRESt).

In 2011, national data revealed total of 5,785,203 students were served under IDEA, of which 22.6% were Hispanic students. Of these students, 40.7% were labeled as Learner Disability (LD), which was the highest percent compared to all the categories (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). In disaggregating the data by state, Texas had a total 398,919 students receiving special education services, of which 47.7% were Hispanic students. Of these students, 43.2% were labeled as Learner Disability (LD),

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which was the highest percent compared to all the categories (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Figures 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 depict the data of special education categories in the United States, Texas, and Region One for 2010-2011. At the National, Texas, and Region One level, it is crystal clear that the category most frequently used to classify students under special education was Learning Disability (LD). The percent of students for the Nation, Texas, and Region One are respectively 40.7%, 43.2%, and 50.6%.
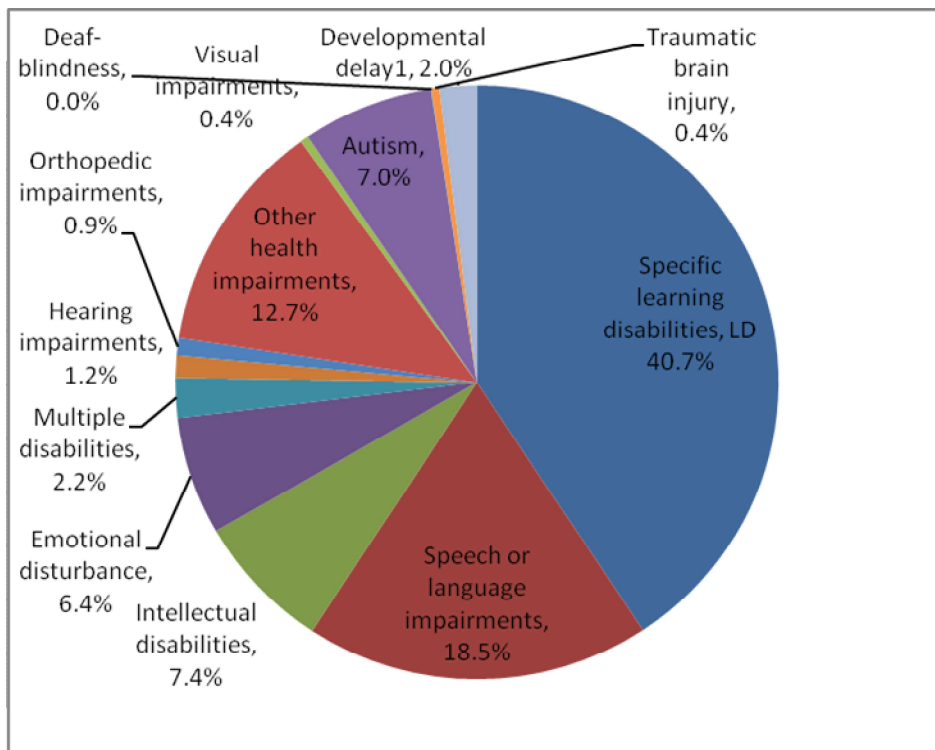

Figure 2.1. Percent of students in the United States serviced under IDEA by category.
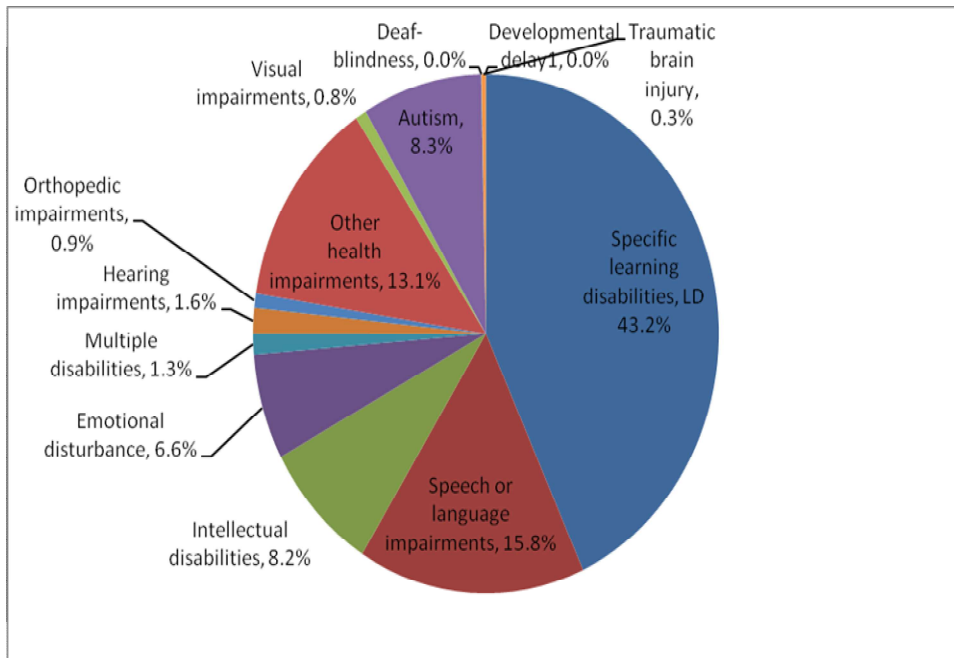*Source*. U.S. Department of Education (2012).

Figure 2.2. Percent of students in Texas serviced under IDEA by category.
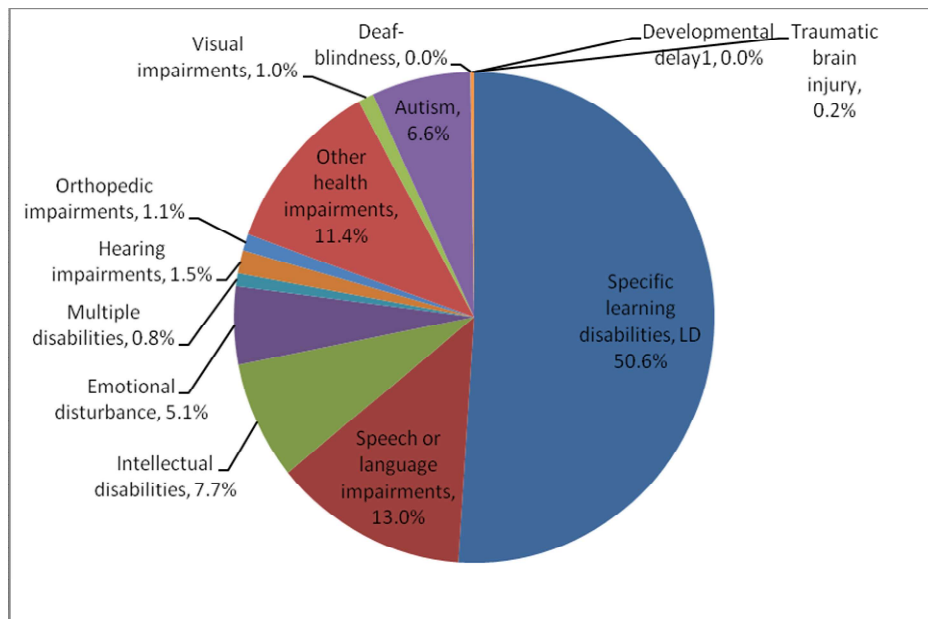*Source.* U.S. Department of Education (2012).

Figure 2.3. Percent of students in Region One serviced under IDEA by category.
Source. Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2011c).

The majority of students serviced under IDEA may be mislabeled as LD because this category has been utilized as a 'catch all' category for students who are of average or above average intelligence with literary difficulties (Cortiella, 2011; Sleeter, 2010; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Shinn, & McGue, 1982). Thus, in reality, many of the students of color are categorized as leaner disabled. When we consider the issue of disproportionality, we need to consider:

- Special education may not provide the supports that a student needs

- The disability label may stigmatize a student as inferior

- Results in lowered expectations

- Potentially separates a student from peers

- May lead to poor educational and life outcomes

- Students may be denied access to the general education curriculum

- May result in dropout

- Students may be misunderstood or underserved in general education. (Kozleski, 2005, p. 13)

Civil Rights Movement: *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. The critical actions taken by parents and advocates to push for a free, appropriate educational opportunity for students with exceptionalities led to the passage of many meaningful court cases. For example, during the Civil Rights Movement, special education was no longer a separate system; it was an integrated general educational system. The Supreme Court landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, established "separate but equal is not equal," which was used as the foundation to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for all students, including students with disabilities. Although the

integration of the two educational systems was slow, it served an imperative task for

serving, advocating, and ensuring inclusion for students with disabilities into an

appropriate education, but more importantly, into society. This monumental stepping-

stone gave social and legal implications that led to court decisions that affected special

education. Table 2.1 indicates historical court decisions that molded the perceptions' of

society, social constructs, and educational opportunities or lack of them (Wright &

Wright, 2004).

Table 2.1. Historical Court Decisions That Influenced Special Education

Date	Case	Influence on Special Education
1919	*Beattie v. State Board of Education*	Court ruled that students with physical impairments could be excluded from school if their presence was deemed depressing and nauseating to other students
1967	*Hobson v. Hansen*	Court ruled that the track system of placing students based upon standardized test scores was unconstitutional because it discriminated against African-Americans and poor children.
1970	*Diana v. State of California*	Court ruled that students must be assessed in their primary language to avoid overrepresentation of minorities in special education.
1972	*Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Pennsylvania*	Court ruled that a free appropriate education must be provided for all children with exceptionalities, regardless of severity of their disability.
1972	*Maryland Association for Retarded Citizens v. Maryland*	Court ruled that all children with intellectual disabilities have a right for a free and appropriate education.
1972	*Frederick v. Thomas*	Court ruled that children with learning disabilities are not receiving an appropriate education if their teachers are not qualified.
1972	*Mills v. Board of Education in the District of Columbia*	Court ruled that the district must provide a free and appropriate education for children with exceptionalities, regardless of the severity. Listed rights of parents to appeal, be notified of testing and placement, and have access to child's records.
1972	*Guadlaupe v. Tempe Elementary District*	Court delineated standards for placing students with mild cognitive impairments into special education classes such as: scores two standard deviations below the mean; the need to assess adaptive functioning of students; and the testing of students in their primary language.

Table 2.1 (continued)

Date	Case	Influence on Special Education
1972	*Larry v. Riles*	Court ruled that some IQ tests discriminated against African American children, as they were not validated procedures to accurately assess these children's cognitive abilities resulting in their misplacement into special education classes.
1973	*LeBanks v. Spears*	Court ruled that Louisiana schools must educate its students with exceptionalities appropriately and these students have the right to be educated with their peers without disabilities.
1975	*Lora v. Board of Education of City for New York*	Court ruled that students with emotional impairments must be educated with their peers without disabilities.
1982	*Rowley v. Hendrik Hudson School District*	Court ruled that each child with a disability has a right FAPE and to an individualized instructional plan and necessary supports.
1984	*Irving Independent School District v. Tatro*	Court ruled that the school must pay for catherization that was necessary for a student with a physical impairment.
1984	*Smith v. Robinson*	Court ruled that the State had to pay for a student with a disability for placement in a residential school.
1988	*Honig v. Doe*	Restricted suspension for students with disabilities even for violent and disruptive behavior to 10 days. Schools had to prove why these students should not be in school.
1989	*Timothy v. Rochester School District*	Court ruled that schools must provide an educational program and services that meet the needs of the child regardless of the extent of the disability and even if the child appears unable to profit from existing programs.
1993	*Zobrest v. Catalina School District*	Court ruled that LEA may pay for student services if needed even when the student attends a parochial school without violating separation of church and state.
1993	*Florence County School District vs. Carter*	If schools do not provide appropriate services and a private school does, the district may have to pay, even if they did not approve the placement and parents acted unilaterally.
1994	*Board of Education in Sacramento, CA vs. Holland*	Court ruled that Least Restrictive Environment include educational and non-academic benefits, the effects of the teacher and class, and cost to be considered for FAPE.
1999	*Cedar Rapids v. Garret F., 526 U.S. 66*	Supreme Court ruled that related services and decided cost is not a factor in providing Free Appropriate Public Education.

Through these laws and their regulations, school districts that receive federal

funds for special education are mandated to provide each student with a disability with

an education tailored to his or her individual education need. These needs form the basis

for an Individual Education Plan (IEP). This IEP outlines academic goals the student

needs to achieve, transition services, and support services the school has put in place to

assist the student making progress in the general education curriculum, and to receive a

free and appropriate public education (TEA, 2010a). The purpose of this requirement is

to focus attention on how the student's educational plan supports successful transition to

the student's life goals during and after high school. It is also the intent to provide a more

meaningful educational opportunity and allow more time for the student to develop skills

for self-advocacy (Kochhar, West, & Taymans, 2000). The term self-advocacy is

explored later in the review of literature.

Although an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is created as part of the Admission,

Review, and Dismissal process (ARD), according to Karten (2005), "nowhere does the

law explain what *appropriate* means, or use the word *inclusion*" (p. 16). In fact, the term

inclusion has a long history in our nation starting with the normalization philosophy of

the 1900s to 1960s that believed that individuals with a disability should have the same

freedom, choices, and opportunities as their nondisabled peers (Kochha et al., 2000).

During that era, students with exceptionalities who were being educated in public

schools were downgraded to an existence of isolation. Their isolated environment was in

the least desirable places within the school building (Karten, 2005). Percy (1992)

concurred, "Literally through institutionalization, and subtly through negative attitudes

and treatment, persons with disabilities have been isolated from the social mainstream

and denied the benefits and opportunities available to nondisabled persons" (p. 1). In the

1970s, special education laws such as *Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens

(PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972), *Education of All Handicapped*

Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142), the precursor to the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA, 2004), required that all students be provided universal access to education and be taught in the least restricted environment.

However, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 did not "define" the least restrictive environment (LRE), nor did it use the term "mainstreaming." Soon after, in the 1980s, mainstreaming was an effort to restructure school programs to allow students with disabilities to be served in the general education classes (Karten, 2005; Salser, 2001). This came about because parents, teachers, and policymakers believed that educating students with special needs in a separate classroom within the same campus was unconstitutional (*Timothy W. vs. Rochester School*, 1988). It was not until *Daniel R. R. vs. State Board of Education* (1989), that a two-part test arose from this case for determining the requirements of least restricted environment (LRE).

The test presented two questions:

1. With the use of supplementary aids and services, can an appropriate education in the general education classroom be achieved satisfactorily?

2. If a student is placed in a more restrictive setting, is the student "integrated" to the "maximum extent appropriate"?

The ARD committee answered these two questions regarding LRE. Additional factors have contributed to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general mainstream. According to Bell (1980), the importance of the convergence of Whites and African Americans, ending racial segregation is one aspect that determined the outcome of *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka*. The other aspect of this Supreme Court decision

was to enhance the attainment of equal educational opportunity for all students of our nation as those of nondisabled children. The reinterpretation of the law was due to critical race theory, parents, teachers, and policy set in place to remedy racial inequities. Thus, in early the 1990s, inclusion referred to students with a wider range of disabilities into the general education classes. The researchers of *In Successful Inclusion: Practical Strategies for a Shared Responsibility* (Kochha et al., 2000) noted the continuing effort to advance the ideology of inclusion through data-driven decision-making essential to meet the needs of each student. Although there have been many efforts to advance the ideology of inclusion, there are several court decisions due to the lack of clarity of what *appropriate* and *inclusion* mean (*Board of Education of Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley, 1982* and *Bonnadonna v. Cooperman, 1985*).

These cases have had repercussions in the social attitudes of students with special needs. The Supreme Court's decision denying a sign language interpreter for a deaf student to attain a higher academic level of achievement in the general education classroom was based on the low expectation of "it should be reasonably calculated to enable the child to achieve passing marks" (102 S. Ct. 3049). The expectation that the student could achieve "passing marks" disregarded the student's maximum potential to excel academically. This ruling incited major debates over expectations for students with special needs. Thus, low expectations exposed students with a disability to a watered-down curriculum and exemption from standardized assessments (Kochhar et al., 2000). Teachers who have been engrossed with students' "inabilities" rather than their capabilities have imposed an even greater hindrance to the opportunities of excellence.

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Research indicates that students with disabilities were excluded from equal and appropriate opportunities within the general education curriculum (Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007; Horne, 1985; Monaham, Marino, Miller, & Cronic, 1997). Moreover, some educators have systematically overlooked the needs of students with disabilities in regard to access to the general curriculum and the delivery of instruction (Cook et al., 2007; Karten, 2005; Percy, 1992). Nonetheless, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, reiterated efforts affecting inclusion and related services. IDEA requires that students be provided with:

1. placement in the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent possible;

2. provided due process protection;

3. free and appropriate public education;

4. individualized education plan;

5. early intervention services; and

6. transition services for students exiting the schools (IDEA, 2004).

The goal is to ensure that special education and related services are afforded in the general education curriculum, not separate from it. It is also based on *IDEA*'s strong presumption that students with disabilities are to be educated in general education classes and that every decision made is founded on what that individual student needs (Karten, 2005; Kochha et al., 2000). Therefore, the 1997 amendments to *IDEA* strengthen the role of the student in the ARD process, through self-advocacy and self-determination safe guards.

Educational reform cannot be successful under social conditions that are oppressive (Freire, 1970). Equity in education must be achieved because as Villegas and Lucas (2002) stated:

> Relative to White middle-class pupils, poor and minority students consistently attain lower scores on standardized achievement tests…are overrepresented in special education programs, in instructional groups designated as low-achieving and in vocational curricular tracks; and drop out of high school at much higher rates….This pattern of inequitable education is unacceptable in a democratic society, especially one as affluent as that of the United States. (p. xi)

Therefore, the IDEA requirements are set up to actively engage students in the planning for their future and empower students in the ARD decision-making process. The dialogue between the student, parent(s), and educators is based on the strengths and needs of the student to make well-informed decisions about his/her educational goals. Through this process, students will show improved self-reliance, self-esteem, self-awareness about their interests, learning styles, and strengths (Kochha et al., 2000). This ongoing dialogue is a form of empowerment in which school cultures and organization is restructured to allow input from the student, and thus, increase the experience of educational equality (Banks, 2004).

Similarly, the No Child Left Behind Act, signed into law January 2002, intended to ensure that all students achieve academic proficiency and gain the educational skills essential to succeed in life. The act intended for all students to graduate from high school within four years of starting their first year in high school. It also attempted to ensure that students are progress monitored at an early age to ensure that all students flourish to reduce the achievement gap between the subgroup. However, laws, policies, or regulations may be in place, but "only teachers in collaboration with parents and

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administrators, can do that," truly reform equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Darling-Hammond, 1996, p. 5).

Expectations for Mexican American students with disabilities. Legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind Act, (NCLB) have attempted to change the way society views students with disabilities; however, critical pedagogy must be in the forefront of education to ensure that all students are successful (Banks, 2004; Freire, 1970; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1999). All of this powerful evidence indicates an urgent matter, if implemented correctly, could critically alter the output and quality of education in our nation. Despite the fact that most educators agree in principle that no child should be left behind, teachers have different expectations for students in special education. In order to ensure student success, teachers must be knowledgeable in multicultural education. Despondently, there was substantial research that suggests that general education teachers feel inadequate when students with special needs are included in a general curriculum, (Cook et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Monahan et al., 1997; Thompson, 1992). According to Cook et al. (2007), teachers' attitudes toward inclusion directly related to the effectiveness of their pedagogy. Although the reasons for this may vary, one contributing factor was the lack of training in special education (Monahan et al., 1997; Thompson, 1992) or critical theory (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

The high achievement gap and dropout rates of students with disabilities are some of the reasons NCLB was reauthorized. NCLB has several mandates regarding the improvement of students' educational progress and teachers' professional development

to address our students' needs adequately. The federal No Child Left Behind Act, has required all high schools to show Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in graduation rates. Thus, the dropout rate continues to be a national concern. Some researchers speculated that NCLB mandates will cause more students to drop out of school, especially students with disabilities (Stodden, Dowrick, Stodden, & Gilmore, 2000). The following is a snapshot of the NCLB's requirements:

All students including subgroup must be proficient in reading/English language arts and mathematics by 2014, as measured by state standards, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) and Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). In Texas, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) replaced the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) for students enrolled in Grade 3 to Grade 9. The STAAR program assessed the same subjects and grades that were assessed on TAKS for Grades 3-8. Nevertheless, at high school, grade-specific cumulative assessments will be replaced with 12 end-of-course (EOC) assessments: Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II, biology, chemistry, physics, English, English II, English III, world geography, world history, U.S. history. Every public school receiving federal monies is evaluated on their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), based on the percentage of students scoring proficient on their STAAR, STAAR Modified (2% gap), STAAR Alternative (1% gap), and TAKS.

NCLB mandate implies that 100% of 3rd-10th grade students will pass the state assessment including the following subgroup: economically disadvantaged, Hispanic, African American, Whites, Asian/Pacific Island, Native American, students with

disabilities, and English language learners by 2014. The AYP accountability standards are as follows for 2013:

- 93% of students need to meet passing standard for Reading/ELA
- 92% of students need to meet passing standards in Mathematics
- 95% of student participation in STAAR/TAKS.
- 75% of 4-year Annual Graduation Rate Target (TEA, 2012).

The consequences for not meeting AYP vary in degree depending on the length of time the school/district has not met AYP. Schools that do not make AYP for two consecutive years are labeled as "needing improvement," which is communicated and published for parents/community. Schools that receive federal Title I funding and are identified as not meeting AYP must develop a school improvement plan to improve student achievement. Schools that do not make AYP must undertake specific actions based on each subsequent year and on the campus improvement plan. These schools are required to spend federal monies to implement research-based strategies, school choice, supplemental education services, corrective action, and restructuring.

To accomplish the goals of NCLB through Title I grant program, federal funds are provided to states and local independent school districts. Districts are moving forward with this funding to meet these mandates, but too many students, especially Mexican American students in special education, fall through the cracks. Stodden et al. (2000) reported that even though considerably more monies are consumed per pupil by students enrolled in special education courses than students enrolled in the general curriculum are, children with disabilities continue to drop out at approximately twice the

rate of general education students. President Obama (as cited in Duncan, 2010) stated, "We led all nations in college completion, but today, 10 countries have passed us…these countries are being smarter about how to educate their students" (p. 9). The U.S. Department of Education (2011) estimated that 48.8% of Mexican American students with special needs graduated with a diploma, 33% dropped out of school that reporting year, and of those dropouts, 25.1 % were students with learning disabilities. President Obamas' (as cited in Duncan, 2010), *Blueprint for Reform, The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education* calls for critical reform "instead of labeling failure …investing in the status quo, we must…accelerate student achievement, close the achievement gap" (p. 12). Thus, the conventional reform is inadequate because of the existence of deficit thinking, or the lack of caring teachers, or cultural integration in instruction (Gay, 2010; Mehan, 1997).

The stigma of labeling. Each year, NCLB and TEA publish a national and state report card with test scores and dropout rates for every subgroup. According to statistics of test scores and school completion rates, Mexican American students with disabilities are not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress in some districts. Therefore, schools are stigmatized with labels such as "unacceptable campus/district," "pre-unacceptable campus/district," or "needs improvement" creating negative stereotypes of that school or group of students. These labels may propagate a self-fulfilling prophecy or deficit syndrome, which places blame for underachievement on students and families (Cummins, 1984; Gay, 2010; Hamovitch, 2007; Karten, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2007). Consequently, this way of thinking detours attention away from the injustices

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perpetuated and institutionalized by the powerful and blames oppressed students, families, and communities for their lacking Eurocentric views (Gay, 2010; Mehan, 1997).

Within a school system, students carry their scarlet letter, too. The schools label students as at-risk, special ed. (SPED) or learner disabled (LD) to refer to a student receiving special education services, among other labels. The special education label brings forth a stigma that is negative for the student's self-image (Hamovitch, 2007). Many of the students perceive themselves as "dumb," "slow learners," or worst "incapable of learning." If teachers believe students in special education have deficits, then those students will internalize those institutionalized conceptions of themselves within the ethos and structures of the school (Brookover & Erickson, as cited in Banks, 2004). Culturally and linguistically diverse students are more susceptible to discrimination because they are students of color and labeled as having an intellectual disability (Orfield et al., 2004). It is evident that within school structures complex, multifaceted, and interactive negative self-fulfilling prophecies generate or perpetuate educational inequities and disproportionate academic achievements (Hehir, 2002; Weinstein, 1984, 2002). The negative perceptions and low expectations generate self-fulfilling prophesies, thus perpetuate standardized school practices (Good & Brophy, 2003). One way culturally diverse students in special education are placed at-risk is when educators assume that the failure of the student to thrive intellectually is due to a deficit in the child rather than a deficit in the teaching (Cummins, 1984; Delpit, 1992; Gay, 2010). Hamovitch (2007) pointed out in her observations that, "although all the teachers

speak the words that endorse special education inclusion, they nevertheless have limited expectations for inclusion students" (p. 117).

The negative perception of the student(s) bring to mind a new behavior making the false conception come true (Merton, 1948; Weinstein, 2002). Consequently, educators expect less and teach less when in the contrary should be teaching more to close the achievement gap (Shepard, 1987). This way of thinking creates marginalized and underachievement for diverse students (Good & Brophy, 2003). According to MacMillan and Reschly (1998), the low expectations of being placed in special education programs at the very least, create unequal access to post-secondary education and occupation. The deficit thinking is also perpetuated by so much negative indoctrination in teacher preparation program, research focus, and media that according to Delpit (1992), "when teachers receive that kind of education, there is a tendency to assume deficits in students rather than to locate and teach to strengths" (p. 242). Is it possible that the studies that have shown that students in the special education program drop out of school due to scholastic failure, inadequate accommodations, poor self-esteem, and truancy problems, repeating a grade and dislike of school (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996) might be linked to the teachers' deficit thinking?

Diminished intellectual capacity. Although the label of being in special education may have some negative connotations, the majority of the students in the program are of average to above-average intelligence (Hernandez, 2001; Ysseldyke et al., 1982). Although there is a perception that students in a special education program

have a diminished intellectual capacity, many students in special education have an average intellectual capacity (Hernandez, 2001). In Texas, the following disabilities are part of the special education program, which is not necessarily associated with limitations in the students' cognitive deficiencies: learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, autism, speech impaired, visually impaired, orthopedically impaired, multiple disabilities, or other health impairments. The following are the percentages of students receiving services from special education programs with disabilities mentioned above: Texas, 86.6% of students; Region One Education Service Center, 87.5% of students (TEA, 2009). The reality that these students must be identified as being part of the special education in order to receive support services and resources should not "adversely affect teacher and peer perceptions and expectations regarding their mental abilities" (Hernandez, 2001, p. 138).

As noted, individuals classified as learner disabled (LD) are the largest category within the special education program. For instance, in the United States 44.6% of students ages 6-21 serve under IDEA for having a specific learning disability, also known as LD. Of the 44.6%, 54.8% are Mexican American students categorized as LD (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). In Texas 5% of Mexican American students are categorized as learner disabled of the total 106,079. Alarmingly, a higher percentages are found in the Region One Education Service Center area with 19,395, which is 58.2% of Mexican American students with the same category within the special education program (TEA, 2009). According to Cummins (1984), students identified as LD was based on (a) a discrepancy between what appears to be their potential and their actual academic

performance and (b) a dysfunction related to the learning process that is not attributed to environmental, cultural, economic, or language.

Although there are different criteria across the states to qualify a student for a particular category (MacMillian & Reschly, 1998), the researcher focuses on the criteria used in Texas. Eligibility criteria are based on *Texas IDEA Eligibility Document: State Policies and Procedures* (TEA, 2008). After a thorough and full comprehensive evaluation, that includes cognitive assessments, academic achievement assessments, Response to Intervention (RtI) data, parent input, social and cultural background information, the evaluation staff determine eligibility for special education. Limited English proficiency students or lack of any formal education will not qualify students for services. According to the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), it reiterates that the "lack of appropriate instruction in reading" cannot result in learner disable (LD) diagnosis.

In addition, a student cannot meet LD eligibility requirements if the determinant factor is diversity in a student's racial, cultural, and language background (NCLB, 2001). Students must meet the requirements in accordance to the definition of a child with disability in the 34 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR, 2005) §300.7. It is important to note that the National Research Council Committee on Minority Representation in Special Education stated: "We reiterate that special education should not be considered unless there are effective general education programs" (Donovan & Cross, 2002, p. 302), which mirrors Response to Intervention. However, the majority of students identified as LD have difficulty in language acquisition and literacy, which is an indication of "an inappropriate response to academic underachievement resulting from instructional

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inadequacies" (Hernandez, 2001, p. 141) or low expectations (Gay, 2010; Good &

Brophy, 2003).

Deficit thinking perpetuates the status quo (Gay, 2010; McKenzie & Scheurich,

2004). It was deficit thinking that influenced segregation in schools, *Plessy v. Fergusen,*

1896, and perpetuated the resistance to desegregation during the Civil Rights era and

today (Menchaca, 1997). The deficit syndrome is blaming school failure on what

students of color lack such as good self-esteem, motivation, engagement, prior

knowledge, literacy or mathematical fluency, parental involvement, leaning disability or

affluent background among other excuses (Gay, 2010).

According to McKenzie and Scheurich (2004),

Employing a deficit view, the teachers…attributed the lack of success of their
students of color to what the teachers perceived as inherent or endogenous
student deficits, such as cultural inadequacies, lack of motivation, poor behavior,
or failed families and communities. Moreover, the teachers seem to believe that
unless the students came to school motivated to learn, they could not be taught.
(p. 608)

Scholars (Gay, 2010; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Valencia, 1997; Valencia,

Valenzuela, Sloan, & Foley, 2001) have conveyed that the problem with student

achievement lies mostly with the educational system instead of with students or other

deficits. These researchers imply that public educators characteristically try to educate

students of color from a deficit-thinking perspective. Therefore, educators who practice

under the deficit syndrome give students of color, especially students labeled as learner

disabled in special education, less opportunities to progress though the educational

system.

This is evident in a qualitative study conducted by McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) on the conscious and unconscious thinking patterns and behaviors of eight White elementary teachers at a small low-income school in a large urban city. The study revealed that many students of color are performing at lower levels compared to White students due to educators' deficit thinking. This study enlightened educators about the equity traps that exist in public schools. According to McKenzie and Scheurich (2004), the four equity traps are the Deficit View, Racial Erasure, Employment and Avoidance of the Gaze, and Paralogic Beliefs and Behaviors.

Therefore, it is essential for educators at all spectrums to change "their thinking about students, families, and communities, and thus move their thinking from a deficit organization to [an] assets-based one that recognizes…funds of knowledge" (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 609). When teachers "refer to the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being," students of color have prior knowledge to connect new learning (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2001, p. 133). Such teaching practices give educators the essential tools to understand their students and build upon their strengths (Moll et al., 2001). Thus, educators need to stop blaming the victim and start educating themselves and their students in order to close the achievement gap and decrease the dropout rates. Culturally responsive teaching recognizes the learners' funds of knowledge to help students achieve equitable educational success.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Gay's (2010) research indicated that culturally responsive teaching positively affects all children and educators in a variety of ways. According to Gay (2010), "culturally responsive teaching is a means for unleashing the higher learning potentials of ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their academic and psychosocial abilities" (p. 21). Gay (2010) examined culturally responsive teaching as a teacher-factor that affects student engagement and learning through four critical aspects of culturally responsive teaching are: (a) caring, (b) communication, (c) curriculum, and (d) instruction. There four critical aspects are mutually supportive of each other.

Caring Teachers

The power of caring "is one of the major pillars of culturally responsive pedagogy" because it encompasses "teacher attitudes, expectations, and behaviors about students' human value, intellectual capability, and performance responsibilities" (Gay, 2010, p. 48). Pang (2005) reviewed other definitions about the ethic of caring before offering her own. Pang stated that care, as related to educational institutions and the research of Rogers and Freiberg (1994), involves building relationships based on trust and teacher empathy and sympathy (Noddings, 2002) in order to develop a positive school environment that encourages confidence, develops self-esteem, and promotes a commitment to personal growth. Noblit, Rogers, and McCadden (1995) asserted that caring is a belief of how people should view and interact with others. Noddings (2002) affirmation begins from the position that care is basic in human life and that all people want to be cared-for. Thus, educators need to move toward a sense of social justice and

care-about students' academic success. On this basis, Noddings (2002) examined the notion of 'caring-about' and stated:

> The key, central to care theory, is this: caring-about (or, perhaps a sense of justice) must be seen as instrumental in establishing the conditions under which caring-for can flourish. Although the preferred form of caring is cared-for, caring-about can help in establishing, maintaining, and enhancing it. Those who care about others in the justice sense must keep in mind that the objective is to ensure that caring actually occurs. Caring-about is empty if it does not culminate in caring relations. (pp. 23-24)

In this manner, caring determines and guides educators in making decisions about content, instruction, discipline, and educational policy (Gay, 2010; Pang, 2005). Teachers who truly care about their students have high expectations, honor their humanity, encourage, provide choices, and use strategies to fulfill their expectations (Gay, 2010; Hernandez, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1992b; Pang, 2005). Based on the principles of efficacy, the more teachers provide opportunities of success, the more students will be successful. There are a number of studies that attribute student academic success and high levels of engagement to culturally relevant teaching (Emerick, 1992; Howard, 2001).

Qualitative case studies. The following studies have documented the importance of culturally relevant teaching for diverse students. The first study mentioned is a qualitative study conducted by Emerick (1992) about students who had overturned a pattern of underachievement to determine their perceptions of the influences that created the reversal. The 10 students in the study from schools in the Northeast ranged from 14 to 20 years in age. Of the 10 students, 8 were White and 2 were Black. Her analysis revealed six themes consistently addressed by all 10 participants: out of school activities,

parents, class, goals, teacher, and self. However, all 10 subjects, teacher and self,

identified two themes as primary importance. The students in Emerick's (1992) study

believed that "a specific teacher was the single most influential factor in the reversal of

the underachievement pattern" (p. 144). The teachers who motivated the students to learn

were teachers who sincerely cared for the students. They taught the whole student. These

caring teachers communicated and held students to high expectations. The students in the

study perceived these teachers as enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the topic they

taught.

Therefore, students demonstrated a personal desire to learn more because they

used a wide range of resources and teaching strategies and had high expectations for the

students' academic achievement. According to Emerick (1992), "the role of the teacher

and the effort to link the underachiever's areas of interest to academic pursuits need to be

investigated further" (p. 144). Undoubtedly, it is necessary to investigate if students who

dropped out of school were exposed to teachers who displayed or did not display any of

the characteristics described by Emerick's subjects.

The second qualitative study conducted by Howard (2001) across four urban

elementary schools examined the students' perceptions and interpretations of

instructional practices implemented by culturally responsive teachers. A purposeful

sampling of 10 girls and 7 boys grouped by low, medium, and high achievement

categories was used to reduce skewed attestations. The researcher's analysis revealed

three themes: (a) the importance of caring, (b) the establishment of family-type of

classroom environment, and (c) education was engaging. One particular fourth grade

student in the study stated, "She is a good teacher because she cares so much about us…because a teacher who cares makes sure that the kids learn" (Howard, 2001, p. 137). It was evident that the caring teachers encouraged their students, set high expectations for them to attain, respected them as individuals, and were firm when required.

Culturally responsive teaching applies at all levels of education, including postsecondary education. The following grounded theory research using naturalistic qualitative methods examined why a certain biology teacher at the university had an extremely low dropout rate compared to the other university professors (Straits, 2007). Straits' study was conducted in one semester-long biology course with 183 students. The participants ranged from freshman to post-baccalaureate with biology and non-biology majors. After extensive observations, single and group interviews, the researcher revealed that the professor exhibited teacher-caring attributes. According to the students, some of the caring attributes were exemplified by the professor in this manner, "she adjusts how she teaches; [uses] wealth of different resources for learning; I want to find the part that interests me, because she's telling me that there's a lot of value here; she knows my name" (Straits, 2007, p. 172). The students believed that these caring attributes increased their motivation and learning.

Social Relations and Communication

Although learning involves cognitive processes that rest within and among people, motivation to learn depends on a student's involvement in social relationship (Gay, 2010; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2004). According to Weinstein (2002), "Our capacity to learn is nourished in the concept of human

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relationships" that emphasizes the importance of a teacher-student relationship (p. 21). Hollins and Spencer's (1990) study examined the perceptions of African American and Latino children from 1st grade to 12th grade in a high poverty urban school on how they perceived the school climate.

In the study, three assertions emerged. The students believed that their favorite teachers were those who had positive interactions in and out of school and valued their opinions. These students' positive feelings led to increased efforts to do well in school and actively participate in class discussions. Thus, the personal relationships, positive interactions within their school and home environment, and self-realization of developing own ideas positively affected student achievement. Through a framework based on the ethics of caring and building reciprocal relationships through dialogue, shared responsibility to learn and achieve are mutually supported. This means that caring is a relation involving dialogue and exchange.

In other words, educators who truly care about their students help them succeed by using their cultural strengths (Straits, 2007). Educators have high expectations, believe in their students, and know that their students will succeed. This type of caring environment is reciprocated because students believe that their teacher cares about them and will not let them give up; therefore, they are motivated to learn and succeed (Gay, 2010; Noddings, 2002; Pang, 2005; Straits, 2007). In a caring-centered classroom, students are more important than the content teachers have to teach. Timelines do not dictate lessons. Students are given many opportunities to participate and become successful because teachers give extra time and effort so that these students can succeed

(Marzano, 2003). These students know and believe that someone cares about their achievement; but more importantly, someone cares about them. In turn, students are able to develop a sense of social justice as well as empathy for others (Gay, 2010; Noddings, 2002; Pang, 2005).

Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that understands the significance of including students' cultural references in all phases of learning (Ladson-Billings, 1992a, 1992b, 1994). Culture helps shape our thinking process, how we communicate, and understand information. Communication is strongly influenced by culture. Therefore, it is imperative for educators to understand that "communication cannot exist without culture; [sic] culture cannot be known without communication, and teaching and learning cannot occur without communication or culture" (Gay, 2010, p. 76).

Curriculum Content

The core belief of culturally responsive teaching is to empower ethnically diverse students through academic success, cultural affiliation, and personal efficacy using an effective curriculum (Banks, 2004, Gay, 2010, Ladson-Billings, 1992a, 1992b; Sleeter & Grant, 1991). Marzano (2003) indicated in his research that a guaranteed viable curriculum was crucial to academic performance. However, educators and students must also be aware of the resources that they use to teach the curriculum. According to Nieto (1996) educators must critically analyze their curriculum and pedagogy to determine if it is either empowering or bias for student learning. Nieto (2009) exclaimed, "A major lesson I would encourage teachers to think about is that curriculum and pedagogy can

either reproduce the inequality with which students are confronted every day, or they can have transformative power for both individuals and institutions" (p. 172).

Therefore, the selection of appropriate instructional materials is critical to the implementation of high-quality instruction. Educators and students need to recognize that there are various ways to interpret a statement, event, or curriculum content. Students become active participants in their learning when allowed to learn in different ways or when shared viewpoints and cultural aspects in an academic experience are based on their own cultural and social experiences (Nieto, 1996). High-quality culturally relevant instructional materials can significantly improve student learning (Gay, 2010; Nieto, 2009).

Case study. The study conducted by Matthews and Smith (1994) involved 203 Native American students from 4th to 8th grade, 10 teachers within 9 schools from the Bureau of Indian Affairs educational system. Participants were randomly assigned to an experimental group with one independent variable: use of Native-related teaching materials during instruction and two control groups (exceptional control & control) with non-use of culturally relevant instructional materials. The pretest-posttest-control group design with one independent variable and two dependent variables, science achievement and attitude toward American Natives and science yielded that the culturally relevant instructional materials created a more positive attitude and higher levels of achievement. According to Matthews and Smith (1994), "the most striking conclusion that can be drawn is that the experimental treatment seemed to be more effective in raising the achievement scores for non-Navajo students" (p. 372). Thus, the results suggested that

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curriculum content concerning Native Americans should deal specifically with cultural characteristics pertaining only to the tribe.

Therefore, the selected materials should be culturally relevant and consistent with the goals, objectives, and core content of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Educators should review all the resources they use to instruct to ensure that they are accurate and inclusive of the diverse cultures within the classroom (Gay, 2010). Although the TEKS are Texas' curriculum framework, most teachers rely on outdated generic textbooks to obtain their information and to teach their students. A culturally responsive pedagogy is a solution to the marginalized underachievement gap and reduces the dropout rate. Poor assessment scores and high dropout rates are indicators, not the reason, of the educational crisis of diverse student populations (Gay, 2010).

Teacher Instruction

The curriculum and instruction must connect to students' lives, experiences, and learning styles (Gay, 2010; Herman et al., 2000; Marzano, 2003). Several variables influence learning styles. However, by knowing how their students learn, educators can instruct toward different learning styles to help improve student achievement (Gardner, 1993; Moll, 2005). Along with the different learning styles, students also vary in preferred ways of working through an assignment (procedural), how thoughts are organized (communicative), preferred content or intellectualizing tasks (substantive), preferred setting (environmental), arrangement (organizational), and preferred stimulation for learning (motivational) (Gardner, 1993; Gay, 2010; Moll, 2005).

Educators need to know how ethnically diverse students learn in order to implement culturally responsive teaching effectively (Gay, 2010; Hernandez, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1992a, 1992b; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2004; Pang, 2005). Educators' intentions with action demonstrate that educators understand that culture is everywhere and influences how students learn, which in turn, needs to positively influence how teachers teach (Gay, 2010). However, ethnic learning styles share similar characteristics with "purer" ethnic affiliation, social class, education, and gender (Gay, 2010; Jordan, 1985). Moreover, cooperative learning and collaboration are key pillars of culturally relevant teaching because according to Gay (2010), "underlying values of human connectedness and collaborative problem solving are high priorities in the culture of most groups of color" and "cooperation plays a central role in these groups' learning styles" (p. 187).

Instructional premises. Educators should not succumb to the status quo and allow misperceptions to guide their teaching. Teachers must become culturally responsive educationalists. In order to achieve culturally responsive teaching (CRT), there are five premises that need to be fully realized and implemented for student success.

The first premise, *culture counts*, denotes that culture is everywhere (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2010). Culture is in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and school culture. It influences how we think and act and how we teach and learn. The second premise, *conventional reform*, is inadequate, denounces deficit thinking or cultural blindness (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2006). Educational reform is successful when research-based

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strategies are coupled with a caring teacher (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2001;

Noddings, 2002). The third premise, *intention without action*, is insufficient strength,

ascertains that educators have good intentions, but without adequate cultural knowledge

and pedagogical skills, the status quo perpetuates (Frerie, 1973; Gay, 2010; Matthews &

Smith, 1994; Osborne, 1996). The fourth premise, *vitality of cultural diversity*, asserts

cultural diversity as strength (Howard, 2006; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1992a, 1992b,

1995). Educators need to connect learning to students' cultural backgrounds and

incorporate students' experiences to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The fifth

premise, *test scores and grades are symptoms, not causes, of achievement problems*,

reaffirms that deficit thinking perpetuates the achievement gap.

Educators need to look beyond scores and understand the root cause(s) interfering

with student learning (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Discovering or realizing the factors

contributing to disproportionate achievement or attainment is crucial to closing the gap.

These five premises are intertwined with the theoretical framework of culturally

responsive teaching (CRT).

One idea of multicultural education is that teaching and learning are cultural

actions that take place in a social context such as the classroom. Therefore, each

student's culture needs to be more clearly understood to make teaching and learning

more accessible and equitable for diverse students. Educators can understand students'

culture by analyzing education from multiple cultural perspectives not just the dominant

cultural experience (Spindler, 1987). It is not one-dimensional; culturally responsive

teaching (CRT) is multidimensional. CRT develops social, emotional, and democratic

knowledge by according to Ladson-Billings (1992a) "using cultural referents to impact knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 320). The researcher, Ladson-Billings (1992a), stated that teachers who use cultural referents are actually teaching the "whole" child. Such a strategy helps students of color maintain their ethnic identity that, in turn, leads to increased student achievement. Culturally responsive teachers realize the importance of both academic achievement and maintaining the cultural identity of students by promoting a community of learners, a sense of belonging, honoring their human dignity, and promoting their individual self-concepts (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive teaching means knowing your students and making learning experiences relevant and meaningful through their culture, prior experiences, learning styles, and strengths. According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive teaching has the following characteristics:

- It recognizes the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of diverse ethnic groups.

- It builds relationships between the school and home environment.

- It uses an array of instructional strategies that are correlated to the different learning styles.

- It teaches students how to value their own and other cultural differences.

- It incorporates multicultural information and resources in all content areas.

Those characteristics were exemplified in Ladson-Billings (1994) qualitative ethnographic study of effective teachers of African American students. The study revealed that teacher-student relationships were caring, family-like, respectful, and supportive.

Culturally responsive framework is extremely important in teaching in a diverse classroom because it defines the expectations that caring teachers should have about their students (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Pang, 2005). The teacher supports the students, accepts them, and values their contributions to the class. They acknowledge the student's culture and language and integrate these elements into their classrooms as a means to enrich their instruction. By establishing a climate of mutual respect, care, and teamwork, these teachers and students are able to build trust and equity. There is a sense that all in the classroom are sharing life. Therefore, assignments, objectives, and assessments are relevant and make sense to the student because the teacher is addressing the "whole" student (Howard, 2006; Pang, 2005). There is a deliberate attempt by the teacher to understand students, and a teacher assumes that if a student does not learn, then the teacher did not teach (Pang, 2005). This strong point dispels the cultural deficit belief, and the blaming for students' failure is placed on the teacher pedagogy and not the student's culture (Gay, 2010).

Educating students is the primary responsibility of teachers; which in turn, they need to advocate for all students "taking on greater responsibility for changing the external factors within their control" (Gonzalez, Brusca-Vega, & Yawkey, 1997, p. 238). Although some educators use deficit thinking in blaming students of color, English language learners, perceived intellectual capacity, or poverty on lack of school success, the shift in blaming needs to make a 180 degree turn toward the educational system (Dunn, 1968; Gay, 2010; Pang, 2005). Researchers have exclaimed that race, culture, language, sex, or poverty cannot be presumed to be the reasons of unacceptable

educational outcomes. Schools, nevertheless, are the institutions accountable and responsible for educating all children (Artiles et al. 2002; Dunn, 1968). Marzano's (2003) last 35 years of research on school effectiveness outlines school-level and teacher-level factors, which are within the control of all educators.

The *school-level factors* that follow represent in order the impact on student achievement: (a) guaranteed and viable curriculum, (b) challenging goals and effective feedback, (c) parent and community involvement, (d) safe and orderly environment, and (e) collegiality and professionalism. The *teacher-level factors* are instruction, curriculum design, and classroom management. Therefore, educators have sole control over student achievement. These school-related and teacher-level factors are easier to change than presumed cognitive or cultural deficits (Cummins, 1984; Hernandez, 2001; Marzano 2003). Appropriate pedagogy used effectively helps students assume a greater control over their own learning and develop a sense of efficacy (Cummins, 1984; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Conclusion. This pedagogy increases academic achievement while developing a social awareness of the uniqueness of individuals. Moreover, culturally responsive pedagogy refers to incorporating teachers' adaptations of subject matter content to reflect the cultures of their students and assisting students to become more aware of and knowledgeable about their own cultures and the culture of others. The integration of culture into content and self-actualization enables students to become more self-confident and self-accepting. Case in point, students gain knowledge of how to collaborate in a variety of group settings. Through collaboration, students ultimately gain

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a greater insight into their peer's culture, language, racial, social, and gender background, which then establishes a rapport and respect for one another. This established rapport and esteem builds a community of learners bridging personal connections between home and the school experience.

Ultimately, students find meaning in relationships developed through culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010). People will no longer drift through life with these "invisible children" and will be able to relate to people of diverse backgrounds (Books, 2006). Joint efforts of educators and students will promote equity and excellence (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive teaching also mean empowering students intellectually, socially, psychologically, and politically by building on student cultural strengths and referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Gay, 2010).

School Culture

Students of color are among the highest dropout rate and overrepresentation in the special education program (Artiles, Palmer, & Trent, 2004; Bellis, 2003; Coutinho & Oswald, 2006; Stillwell, 2010). Schools fail to assist children of color in attaining successful outcomes (Freire, 1970; Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999). The above-mentioned scholars indicated that school districts and teachers have unsuccessfully implemented multicultural educational practices that are effective for and relevant to the needs of Mexican American students in special education. This is due to the cultural neutrality, homogeneity, or social dominance (Gay, 2010, Howard, 2006; King, as cited in Banks, 2004). Culturally blinded schools instruct diverse students from the middle social class, Eurocentric epistemology (Hernandez,

2001; Howard, 2006; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2003). This cultural blindness suggests the educational entities accept Eurocentric middle-class norms; therefore they "see deficits rather than difference within the rich variation of human beings" (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2003, p. 6).

Educators refuse to see dissimilarity among their students in efforts to be "fair, impartial, and objective" (Nieto, 1996, p. 109). However, Howard (2006), asserted, "The declaration of colorblindness assumes that we can erase our racial categories, ignore differences, and thereby achieve an illusory state of sameness or equality" (p. 57). When an educator is culturally blind, the educator ignores the individual because culture shapes who we are and how we think (Hernandez, 2001).

The school culture that refers to the norms, values, and beliefs, interconnected with routine practices or social interactions can affect student learning and disengagement (National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, 2004). The school culture or 'small society' as Dewey (1916) referred has ethos linked to student learning. The school culture or

> The ethos of an effective school is characterized by generally shared high expectations of teachers and respect for them; positive models of administration and other teachers for teacher behavior that reflects concern for one another; and some system of feedback through which teachers can evaluate work. (Driscoll, 1995, p. 217)

These shared high expectations predict relatively high achievement (Edmonds, 1979; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Lezotte, 2012; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

Further studies implied that supportive and caring schools may be especially advantageous for culturally diverse students (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Gay (2010) reiterated,

> Teachers who genuinely care about students generate higher levels of all kinds of success than those who do not. They have high performance expectations. Failure is simply unacceptable, so they work diligently to see that success for students happens. (p. 49)

Categorical Domains and Risk Factors of Dropping Out of School

The predictors and factors for dropping out of school are multifaceted and multifarious, particularly for students of color (Hammond et al., 2007; Hupfeld, 2007; Rumberger, 1983; Rumberger & Sun, 2008). According to several research studies, a myriad of factors contribute to the student dropping out of school. Rumberger and Sun's (2008) comprehensive review of 25 years of literature denoted that there are unique factors involved in the ultimate decision to drop out. Although the factors are multilayered, the researched findings fall under one or all of Hammond et al.'s (2007) analysis supporting categorization of at-risk variables. See Table 2.2 for dropout domains.

Table 2.2 represents several factors that are most prominent describing influences affecting the probability a student may become a high school dropout. Each domain describes factors about a particular student, life and family values, educational environment, and community environment. The categorical domains of dropout risk factors and exemplary programs are: (a) individual domain, (b) family domain, (c) school domain, and (d) community domain (Hammond et al., 2007). Table 2.2 organizes the

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factors within a categorical domain that contributes to a student's decision to drop out of school.

Table 2.2. Dropout Domains: Factors That Influence a Prospective Student Dropout

Individual Domain	Family Domain	School Domain	Community Domain
Attendance	Characteristics	Engaging	Demographics
Background	Discipline	Policies	High Crime
Behaviors	Education	Practices	High Unemployment
Engagement	Income	Procedures	Impoverished
Interest	Occupation	Programs	Location
Responsibilities	Structure	Recourses	Single Parent
Self-esteem	Work load	Structure	Unorganized
Values	View of Education	Support	Welfare

The risk factors in the *individual domain* included: (a) low attendance, (b) background, (c) school and social behaviors, (d) no extracurricular engagement, (e) lack of interest in school or subjects, (f) responsibilities outside of school, (g) low self-esteem, and (h) social values (Hammond et al., 2007).

Eckland's (2002) *Explorations in Equality of Opportunity (EEO) (1955-1970)* longitudinal survey was one of the earliest studies in the United States to investigate why some students dropped out of school. During this longitudinal study, a cluster sample of 2,077 was surveyed and 220 students responded to the dropout survey and provided the

following factors: marriage, pregnancy, poor health, enlisted in Armed Forces, sought to drop out of school by legal age, and 10 other factors that are listed by domain.

The *National Longitudinal Survey of Youth Labor Market Experience* (Center for Human Resource Research, The Ohio State University, 1994) provided the following as dropout indicators, which also fall under individual domain: marriage or pregnancy. Schargel, Thacker, and Bell's (2007) findings such as school attendance, previous grade retentions, low grades, disruptive behavior, substance abuse, and low self-esteem support the individual domain. This domain included being a student of color, English language learner, labeled as learner or emotionally disabled, over-aged, male, from a single parent household, and or having high mobility (Hupfeld, 2007). However, many studies showed that Mexican American students have a strong tie to family responsibilities and are more likely to drop out of school for economic reasons (Rumberger, 1983).

However, Mehan (1997) attributed that students drop out of school due to social terms that reproduce structures of inequality. This social reproduction is the effect of capital structures and forces that limit the mobility of lower-class youth. The major function of educational structures is to maintain the status-quo of the society (Durkheim, 1932). According to Durkheim's functionalist theory, the general moral values, transmission of core values, social placement, and social control keep society intact. In educational institutions, educators regulate behavior to accept general moral values through curriculum and hidden curriculum.

Similarly, conflict theory views the educational system as perpetuating the status-quo by boring the economically disadvantaged or students of color into being subservient

workers to maintain power structures and create a meek workforce for capitalism (Durkheim, 1932). According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), educational systems reinforce the hierarchy of cultural capital of middle-class Eurocentric norms by conflating cultural capital with academic ability.

For instance, predominately White students or economically advantaged students are tracked into college prep classes, while students of color or lower economic status are more likely to be tracked into vocational courses (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Gay, 2010; Kupchik & Monahan, 2006). The behavior of members of society is regulated in such a way that they accept their roles in society according to their social status. Thus, structural functionalism opposes social mobility. Thus, negative perceptions of students of color or economically disadvantaged students are indoctrinated for accepted marginal social, economic, and political roles. This, in turn, tracks students into a high possibility of minimal-wage income, unemployment, government welfare, and incarceration. On the other hand, middle-class White students are equipped for what are expected to be more self-ruling and prolific social, economic, and political roles (Chambliss, 1973; Kupchik & Monahan, 2006).

The *family domain* factors include family background regarding dynamics and value to education, low social economics, and stress levels (Hammond et al., 2007). If parents or siblings dropped out of school, lacked support structures, or were too laissez-faire, a potential student may drop out of school (Hammond et al., 2007; Rumberger, 1983). The dysfunctional family dynamics and structure contributed to increase dropouts

in the nation and our schools. In addition, school domain factors also contribute to a student's decision to drop out of school.

The *school domain* encompasses the school environment that includes school structures, policies and procedures, resources, along with teacher and student body characteristics. This type of school environment is known as a "dropout factory" because schools lack the critical foundation to support students and lower dropout rates (Hammond et al., 2007). Researchers affirmed that school factors have a stronger "holding power" on preventing school dropouts than do individual domain factors (Hupfeld, 2007; Jerald, 2007).

Within the school environment, educators who silence students' voices by not acknowledging the students' personal experiences or providing a relevant curriculum with culturally relevant pedagogy contribute to the dropout problem (Gay, 2010; Mehan, 1997; Nieto, 1996; Schargel et al., 2007). In addition, other factors that contributed to students dropping out of school were: (a) students did not like school or their teacher(s), (b) students were not successful in their course work, (c) students believed the negative perceptions of them by school personnel (Eckland, 2002), and (d) students were expelled/suspended or considered school as too dangerous (Rumberger, 1983). The students who dropped out of school because they "did not like it" or because they were not doing well in their studies (Eckland, 2002), translated this to mean that schools were structured in such a way that there was no culturally relevant pedagogy, only disengaging and disconnected (Mehan, 1997). Eventually, Eurocentric school structures contribute to the drop out problem in our nation and community.

The *community domain* included demographic characteristics of the home environment, such as low social economic communities, higher crime areas, unemployment, and welfare recipients as factors to higher dropout rates (Hammond et al., 2007). The report *Locating the dropout crisis: Which high schools produce the nation's dropouts? Where are they located? Who attends them?* (Balfanz & Legters, 2004) estimated that 80% of "dropout factories" are found in 15 states mostly in the northern, western, and southern parts of the United States in predominantly poverty-stricken communities with high crime, unemployment, and ill health rates. Although these "dropout factories" are 12% of the national sum, they are estimated to produce about half of the nation's dropouts, which are comprised disproportionately of students of color (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

The dropout rates of diverse schools are decidedly dependent on the surrounding deficiency of their locations. For example, the western and southern regions of Texas had more school districts with a graduating rate of 75% to 84.3%, which is lower compared to the other regions in Texas (TEA, 2011a, 2011b). Within the community domain, Mexican American populations have displayed a higher dropout rate compared to White populations. The organizational arrangements of the community dictate that predominantly poor Mexican American students tend to attend neighboring schools in the areas where they live. These schools offer more remedial courses, fewer advanced courses, and less experienced teachers than schools built in a more affluent White community (Gay, 2011; Mehan, 1997).

The decision to drop out of school is not an individual decision, but an established practice that reproduces the constructs of inequality in the educational, economic, and community domains of daily life (Mehan, 1997). Although school-related factors and at-risk characteristics are well documented, attention has to be given to the influence organizations, leadership, and educators have on the students' decision to drop out of school.

Chapter III will provide the methodology that will be used for this particular study. The Chapter III will provide the following: (a) a rationale for selecting qualitative methods, (b) the research design for this particular study, (c) a description of participant selection, (d) the data collection procedures, (e) validity, credibility and reliability, and (f) the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative study was conducted in a southern border-city in Texas. The rationale, research questions, research design, and sample are discussed in this chapter. In the data collection and analysis paragraph, the researcher explained the methodologies that were used to create validity, credibility, and reliability within the study.

Rationale for Qualitative Study

The rationale for deciding to use qualitative methods was based on its inquiry process of understanding a social phenomenon regarding student dropouts and based on constructing a multifaceted holistic picture. Qualitative studies allow the voices or perceptions of Mexican American students who participated in special education services and dropped out of school to be reported in detail. Qualitative studies place emphasis on understanding by looking closely at people's non-verbal language, words, actions, and documents (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Therefore, the rationale for using qualitative methods was to analyze the perceptions of Mexican American students in special education at a South Texas local education agency with high dropout rates compared to the state, 9.4%. The researcher used a constructivist approach to construct meaning of what selected students who disengaged from high school without their diploma said about their educational experiences in the interviews (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). By qualitatively exploring the beliefs, experiences, and listening to the participants' voice to bring meaning, the researcher better understands the

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reasons why these students dropped out of school (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Through qualitative research, participants are empowered to share their stories and hear their voices (Creswell, 2007). In addition, an analysis of the perceptions of Mexican American dropouts needed to examine perspectives from a source that is seldom heard – the students themselves (Howard, 2001).

Research Questions

The primary focus of this research study was to analyze the perceptions of former Mexican American students who participated in special education services and did not complete graduation requirements. The perceptions of their teachers, instruction, and school experiences were the focus of research questions. The following research questions will helped the researcher guide the study:

1. What are the perceptions of Mexican American dropouts who participated in a special education program regarding their educational experiences?

2. What were the factors that influenced these students' decisions to drop out of school?

Research Design

The researcher used qualitative case study methods (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008) with multiple interactive methods to collect data in the research setting. The interviews with the former students took place at Unique High School, Love Job Corp, and participants place of residence. The evolving and dynamic environment of qualitative design requires adaptability as the researcher discovers other participants and avenues of data collection (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Multiple data collection

strategies such as personal interviews of Mexican American dropout students who received special education services when they were enrolled in high school and document review of academic and/or behavior records, grades, and TAKS score will be employed. Although some descriptive statistics were utilized in examining the State Assessments or TAKS scores within the different subgroups, auxiliary data support the researcher's primary purpose of understanding the phenomenon.

This qualitative study examined the perceptions of dropout students' experiences of culturally relevant pedagogy through semi-structured audio-recorded interviews and document analysis of academic grades, assessments, and Individual Education Plans (IEPs). The in-depth analysis of the instructional experiences of former Mexican American students labeled as learner disabled in special education that disengaged from school was the focal point of this study.

Case Study

This qualitative collective case study was used in order to investigate some of the perceptions of Mexican American students labeled as learner disabled in special education in a South Texas local education agency near the United States-Mexico border. The in-depth case study of each of the participants' real-life context and specific instances of the phenomenon provided thick description within a bounded system that explains the patterns (Creswell, 2007). The conceptual framework of culturally responsive teaching pedagogy (Gay, 2010) with a constructivist approach that underlines interpretive qualitative research (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008) was utilized to examine

the extent to which the students' beliefs about their teachers, instruction, and factors influenced them to drop out of school.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the instrument in a qualitative study. The researcher interacts, interviews, collaborates, collects the data, and analyzes the data. Whereas, in quantitative research, the researcher is nonexistent and neither participates nor influences. In quantitative research, the researcher uses instruments, such as surveys or SPS Software, to collect and analyze data. A qualitative research model enables the researcher to examine the phenomena from a personal perspective and explore meaning outside numerical or statistical data. Data obtained through the researcher, which is the human instrument, assume a life of its own, adverse to an inanimate inventory, questionnaire, survey, or machine (Merriam, 1988). As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) claimed, "This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3).

The researcher is concerned with a detailed examination of individuals' lived educational experiences and how these individuals perceive that experience. It is the role of the researcher to make sense of the participants' experiences. Therefore, the researcher interacts closely with the case study participants. Researchers have affirmed that case studies have become "one of the most common ways to do qualitative inquiry" (Stake, 2000, p. 435) and case study researchers are the vital "primary measuring instrument" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 458). Thus, the human instrument, the researcher, explores,

collects, and analyzes the lived experiences and voices regarding the factors contributing to school dropouts. Stake (2000) rationalized that a "case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry," (p. 436) obtained by the human instrument.

The researcher's qualifications with regard to this study include 14 years of service to public education. The researcher was a mathematics teacher for five years servicing Mexican American students who received special education services, a school administrator at a Title I school district with 98% Mexican American students for four years, and currently a Region One Specialist for the past five years. The researcher's personal and professional experience as a public servant in education with student demographics similar to the study, successful completion of the coursework for the Texas A&M University Ph.D. program in Curriculum and Instruction, comprehensive examinations, and the proposal are qualification in itself.

As noted above, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; therefore, case studies are guarded by the truthfulness and integrity of the researcher (Merrian, 1988; Stake, 2000). Accordingly, interviews are semi-structured and audio-recorded to provide trustworthiness. In addition, the researcher limits any bias by keeping a reflective journal, minimizing comments, and "saying little during the interview" (Creswell, 1998, p. 131).

Sample

Sampling is a process or collection of data from a representative sample of the population, which is a collection of items that the researcher is interested in studying

(Kerlinger & Lee, 2000; Neuman, 2006; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). In studying the sample, the researcher may fairly generalize the results to the population from which the sample was chosen. In qualitative and quantitative research, the sampling approaches differ (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Qualitative researchers use nonrandom samples because they study specific content. In other words, qualitative research uses non-probability sampling, as it does not aim to produce a statistically representative sample, but more importantly to focus more in depth in the description. According to Kerlinger and Lee (2000), the following are examples of non-probability samples:

- *Convenience sampling* selects a case that is convenient and may misrepresent the population;
- *Quota*, the sample is fixed; *purposive*, selects cases with a specific purpose in mind; *snowball*, relies on referrals or network to obtain specific sample;
- *Deviant case*, selects the opposite characteristics of what research states;
- *Sequential*, is similar to purposive sampling; however, it stops after saturation is attain; and
- *Theoretical*, is based on grounded theory.

As mentioned above, snowball sampling is an approach for finding information-rich participants regarding the study (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). This sampling technique is normally utilized in populations that are difficult for the researcher to access. Due to the strict confidentiality and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) that protects the privacy of student education records, snowball sampling was used. The

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researcher knows of one student who meets the specific parameters of the study. The researcher contacted this individual and asked whether he knew of any other student with special needs who dropped out of school. The researcher then approached these individuals to invite them to contribute in this study. The goal was to select participants who were likely to be information-rich with respect to the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2007; Gall et al., 2007). In addition, former students selected in this study met the following criteria:

- Mexican American (2nd generation and above),

- Received special education services,

- Classified as learner disabled, and

- Dropped out of high school in 2005 to 2011.

The researcher compiled a list of names and possible phone numbers provided during the snowball sampling. This task proved to be taxing because many of the phone numbers were disconnected or incorrect. The researcher also gathered possible addresses or directions to potential participants' places of residence and conducted home visits. Due to the high mobility, the researcher tracked possible leads to their new residence in attempt to make contact for this study.

When contacting the first participant, Ray knew of a friend who met the criteria for this study. Ray provided his phone number and the researcher called him to explain the research study using the Information Sheet. From the second participant, the Preacher, other potential voices emerged; unfortunately, they did not meet all of the criteria for this particular study and some who did meet the criteria were not interested in

participating in the study. One of the researcher's friends referred the third participant. In speaking to the third participant, he informed the researcher of some other acquaintances that he knew had dropped out of school. From contacting them, the investigator found the fourth participant, Tania. The researcher also contacted Love Job Corps and spoke to the director and counselor regarding any potential participants. They allowed the researcher to speak to Tania and Keyla, who both agreed to participate.

The researcher attained five participants, two female, and three male, based upon their experiences of being a Mexican American high school dropout in South Texas enrolled in the special education program. Table 3.1 shows demographic information.

Table 3.1. Summary Distribution of the Study Sample Group in South Texas

Participant	Ethnicity	Gender	ESL/ELL	At-risk	Eco. Disadv
Ray	Hispanic	Male	No	Yes	Yes
Preacher	Hispanic	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes
Johnny	Hispanic	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tania	Hispanic	Female	Yes	Yes	Yes
Keyla	Hispanic	Female	Yes	Yes	Yes

The researcher's purpose for interviewing these students was to uncover true stories of their instructional and school experiences and to learn the factors that influenced their decision to drop out of school. If an individual met the above criteria and reenrolled at a high school, charter school, vocational training program to continue

his/her education, the researcher considered that individual for the study due to his/her experience of making the decision to drop out of school. It is fortunate that all four of the five participants continued to pursue their high school diploma, GED, and/or technical training.

Informed Consent

Permission to conduct this study and approval of research forms from the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix I) was obtained before contacting or speaking with potential participants. The IRB approved forms such as the Consent Form, and Consent Protocol were used to guide this study (Appendix I). In addition, the researcher obtained permission from Love Independent School District and Love Job Corps to conduct the study prior to contacting a student who had reenrolled. After permission was granted, the researcher contacted potential participants via phone or personal contact. The principal researcher explained clearly, verbally, and adequately the purpose of the research and the procedures of the study. A typewritten hard copy was provided of the Information Sheet and Consent Form. Then, informed consent was obtained from the participants before the study began.

After verbal or written consent for participation was acquired, the researcher scheduled a convenient time to meet and interview (Gall et al., 2007). Each former student was interviewed individually at his or her choice of preference. The researcher understood the needed flexibility; therefore, if the participant could not meet at the Region One Educational Service Center office, then other arrangements were made.

The researcher explained again that this study was on a volunteer basis. The researcher also verbally explained that they could choose not to participate in the study at any time, even during the interview phase. The researcher indicated that informed consent and a copy of their Permanent Cumulative File were needed for this particular study. The researcher provided a hard copy of the local education agency procedures for obtaining their transcript, ARD file, or Permanent Cumulative File. The researcher assured the participants of security measures to protect their identity, store audiotapes, transcripts, and field notes. Copies of these recorders, audiotapes, and transcripts were kept under lock and key and their names were blacked out. Confidentiality of the information provided to the researcher was kept throughout the study and participants chose their pseudonym. The researcher had a journal with the pseudonym matching the participants under lock and key, as well. Once the researcher obtained the participants' written informed consent, then the researcher started the data collection process.

Data Collection

In qualitative research, the interview is a major source of data collection through a form of discourse (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Creswell (2007) concurred that the foundation of qualitative research is the all-embracing compilation of data. Specifically regarding this case study research, data collection of educational records, observations, one-to-one interviews, and a focus-group interview were the main source of data. The type of one-to-one interview and focused group interview conducted were semi-structured and open-ended to allow for a smooth follow of dialog.

According to Crotty (1998), "Only through dialog can one become aware of the perceptions, feelings and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings and intent" (p. 73). Therefore, the perceptions of former students regarding their school experiences, factors for dropping out, and instructional pedagogy were collected through a series of opened-ended semi-formatted questions. The use of open-ended, semi-structured questions allow for the collection of consistent data and more in-depth examination of experiences across participants.

Phase I

There were two phases in the study: Phase I consisted of interviews with former students and Phase II consisted of meta-analysis of documents mentioned previously. In Phase I, all interview respondents were tape recorded as they gave detailed descriptions of their instructional experiences and their perceptions as to factors that may or may not have contributed to their educational attainment of a high school diploma. The face-to-face audio-recorded interviews allowed for accurate depiction of their stories.

Additionally, more data were collected during the member checking after the first interview that was transcribed by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher understood that people construct their own reality; therefore, the member checking allowed the versions of the truth to be depicted. In addition, this gave the researcher an opportunity to debrief with the participants and gather additional data. By looking for commonalities of experiences among participants, the researcher explained their perceptions of their teachers, instruction, and factors for dropping out of school. No field

notes were taken during this process because the researcher wanted to focus the attention on the interviewee and nonverbal cues (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000).

For the tape-recorded focus-group interviews, the researcher contacted all participants to determine an agreed upon date and time. Due to schedule conflicts and mobility, the researcher rescheduled three focus-group interviews. One particular participant, Johnny, did not attend the focus-group interview because he was incarcerated. The researcher tried to schedule the focus-group interview after his arraignment date, but he was not released; therefore, the researcher contacted committee chair, Dr. Larke, for advice. Taking her advice the focus-group interviews were conducted without him present.

The focus group interview was conducted in a private conference room at the Love Job Corp because the female participants were not allowed to leave the grounds. The researcher provided to and from transportation for the two of the young male participants in April 2012. The researcher introduced the participants to each other and allowed for some socialization over pizza and soft drinks to limit any apprehension and develop dynamic group interaction. The social, semi-public nature of the focus-group interview forms the data, conversations among participants that depicts a picture of mutual local perspectives (Creswell, 2007; Kerlinger & Lee, 2000).

During Phase I of the focus group interview, the researcher explained the norms and procedures using the Interview Protocol and Focus Group Interview Protocol before the interview to allow all participants to voice their experiences. This focus-group interview protocol was established to allow group members to ponder questions, open

up, and share their experiences without having some participants overtaking the conversation.

When first walking into the conference room, Ray and the Preacher sat on the right side of the long rectangular wood table and Tania and Keyla sat on the left side naturally separating themselves by gender. The researcher sat at the end of the table. You could feel the nervous energy of the participants because Tanya and Ray were swiveling their black leather conference chairs from side-to-side, while Keyla texted with her new boyfriend and the Preacher sat with his elbows at the edge of the table interlocking fingers. The focus group interviews were set up to allow participants to express their attitudes, feelings, concerns, and motivations regarding their educational experiences.

Nonetheless, they were not as willing to open up and share their stories in front of each other. As they told their stories, many details were left unsaid or implied as they would say, "remember like what I told you," "that thing," "pos, you know." Keyla eventually muttered, "I rather not say." As I would ask the questions related to the themes that emerged, the majority of the time Ray and the Preacher initiated the conversation and the girls would conquer or share a part of their educational experience. At times, side conversations would occur between both males and another side conversation between the females.

Although the focus group interviews did not progress as smoothly as anticipated, rich information was gathered and analyzed as part of the findings in Chapter IV. In addition, the focus group interviews did not restrict their voices to multiple-choice answers because their voices were an important source of information regarding

themselves and their lives. The focus group interviews provided trustworthy naturalistic data that led to important insights (Creswell, 2007; Kerlinger & Lee, 2000) about reasons students drop out of school.

After the focus-group interview, the researcher made arrangements and obtained permission (Appendix J) to visit Johnny in jail to allow him to make additional comments or elicit a conversation to gather data regarding commonalties found during the group interview. This visit took place on April 4, 2012, in a private booth with a plastic wall separating us conversing via phone. The researcher met with the Public Defender at his office and walked two blocks to the Water County Jail. It was the first time for the researcher to have stepped into that correctional facility. As you walk in, the first thing you see is a sheriff behind a rectangular office approximately 8 ft. by 6 ft. with a sliding glass window and people sitting on plastic office chairs waiting to speak to someone at the jail. The attorney explained to the sheriff my reason for being there and buzzed up into the 2nd waiting area.

In the waiting area, the attorney and the researcher signed their names on the logbook for visitors and waited for Johnny to arrive at the booth. After an hour wait, you hear a loud piercing buzz that vibrated through your body across the room unlocking a steal door with a small viewing window so you could see who was behind the steal trap door. We walked into a cinder block 3rd waiting area and stepped into the first 4 ft. by 4 ft. visitor's booth. Due to the strict regulations, his attorney was present and the researcher was not allowed to audio record the conversation. Therefore, the researcher wrote notes in her journal to capture as much data as possible.

The researcher sat down on the only folding chair and watched Johnny come into the visitor's area with a gleaming smile from ear-to-ear. Johnny sat down, picked up the antiquated black phone with his left hand, placing his right hand on the window. The researcher felt compelled to place her left hand on the window as well. The researcher reintroduced herself and asked for permission to continue with the study and it was granted. Then his lawyer stated that he was there to protect him from saying anything incriminating. After confirming with his lawyer that he understood, Johnny quickly apologized with a tender-hearted voice that felt like cool gliding aloe on a sunburned skin. In a comforting voice he stated: "I am sorry you had to come to a place like this for you to talk to me." Placing his right hand across his chest tapping it ever so slightly, he apologized again.

> I am so sorry. I am so sorry. You shouldn't have come to a place like this. But I am happy to see you. I haven't talked to anyone in a long time. Thank you for coming to see me and not giving up on me.

Then, the researcher shared some on the themes that emerged from the data and asked for comments or experience he would like to add. The 2nd interview continued while the researcher wrote precisely word-for-word and restated what Johnny had said for clarification.

Phase I of the data collection had an interview protocol based on the review of literature to acquire consistent areas of data. The interviewer, who was the researcher, asked open-ended scripted questions in a face-to-face interview to ensure that there was consistent information across participants. The duration of the interview did not exceed more than two hours. Probing use throughout the interview included phases such as, "tell

me more about…, please explain…, give me an example …"; however, the interviewer also used spontaneous probing to follow the lead of the interviewees and encourage comprehensive investigation. There was one tape for each participant with his or her pseudonym on it that kept under lock and key. A second meeting was set up to review the responses to the interview questions, which is member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

For the first phase, the researchers studied the detailed transcripts to determine trends in the data. Each idea (unit) was listed, without placement into categories. The researcher and a doctoral candidate from Texas A&M University drew upon inferred knowledge in making these preliminary judgments for early category formulation. In order to differentiate themes, keep the data in context, and provide visual indications of emerging categories, colored markers were used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Phase II

Nevertheless, in Phase II of the data collection, field notes were taken during the data collation process and analysis of educational records. The interviews, field notes, and educational records helped triangulate the data. In Phase II, data were collected via document analysis of the individual education plan; student's work, authentic products, or projects; attendance records; student grades, transcripts, students' neighborhood and home environment; and state assessment/TAKS scores. The researcher was aware that not all the same documents might be available, such as student's work or projects; however, every participant had a high school transcript on record.

Data Analysis

The various sources of data collected for this particular study included one-to-one interviews, a focus-group interview, and physical artifacts. The data were prearranged and prepared for analysis. Data were obtained from audio-recorded interviews and transcribed. The field notes gathered were used to analyze and interpret the representation of dialogue and instructional experiences. The data collection and analysis was a continuing process during this study. Each case study transcribed in its entirety to provide written transcripts. The qualitative researcher transcribed the data from one-to-one and focus-group interviews, field notes, and memos into word processing documents (Crotty, 1998). With help from a colleague, interview tapes were listened to prior to transcription on a Microsoft Word Processor to provide further opportunity for analysis. Member checking was applied subsequent to the transcriptions completion in order to ascertain credibility (Crotty, 1998). Next, to obtain an overall sense of the data and reflect on its meaning, each transcription was read. Then, each transcript was analyzed initially according to the interview questions and research questions.

The detailed analysis began with a coding process. Hence, open, axial, and selective coding processes used identified themes in the interview data (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000; Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). The researcher analyzed the transcripts to extract critical incidents and as well as the emerging themes. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985),

> The first rule of the constant comparative method is that while coding an incident for a category; compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category. This constant comparison of the incidents very soon starts to generate theoretical properties of the category" (p. 341).

This process is concerned with gathering many categories or properties about the phenomenon that may be causes, factors, conditions, environment, or consequences. This process requires saturation of data by: (a) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (b) integrating categories and their properties, (c) delimiting the theory, and (d) writing the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Commencing this process, the researcher established categories across the data set.

During the collection of all the data, the researcher began data analysis looking for more patterns, relationships or themes (open coding). The researcher open coded to break up the data and reorganize it into categories that depicted the relationship of data within and between these categories. Thus, the data were meticulously open coded subject-by-subject, categories formulated, and properties identified. Then, the researcher began a second stage of coding (axial coding) organizing the categories into themes and supporting conceptual definitions (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000; Neuman, 2006). The researcher inter-related the responses and categories to formulate categories and explanations in response to axial coding (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). The investigator looked for relationships that connected words or statements and events within a situation into a coherent whole. Relationships were hypothesized between the themes to continue to undertake and provide understanding to the former students' instructional experiences (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Therefore, as themes or categories materialized, the researcher compared them to those in the existing review of literature, research, and theory that resulted in the theoretical properties of the categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The process resulted in three themes: (a) school culture, (b) supportive

environment, and (c) delinquent behavior. In addition, further analysis within each theme yielded sub-themes, which will be discussed and explored in Chapter V with support of existing literature and theory.

Credibility, Transformability, Dependability, and Confirmability

For the purpose of this qualitative study, Guba's model of trustworthiness was chosen to support the argument that the researcher's findings are "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Methods were taken to establish authenticity or truthfulness of data gathered during this study, which are credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Creditability refers to whether the research conclusions embody a "creditable" conceptual interpretation of the data gathered from the participants' original data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). Transferability is the extent to which the conclusions of this research study apply beyond the limits of this qualitative study. Dependability is an evaluation of the quality of the integrated process of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation. The fourth strategy, confirmability, measures how well the research findings are authenticated by the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The strategies implemented in this study to enhance trustworthiness are detailed in Table 3.2.

In qualitative studies, trustworthiness represents the authenticity of the experiences or investigation. For instance, data gathering began after all participants' consented to be part of the study. Prolonged engagement was established because each interview took one to two hours. Secondly, the use of multiple data collection methods, such as interviews and document analysis data from former students, allowed for the

triangulation of data. Two different sources of data were used for triangulation purposes.

The researcher triangulated the interviews and educational documents.

Table 3.2. Summary of Strategies Used for Trustworthiness

Criterion	Strategy	Application
Credibility	Prolonged engagement	The researcher familiarized herself with the setting of local education agencies and participants. One-to-one and focus-group interviews were conducted using literature review and advisers' suggestions.
	Reflexivity	Field journal kept with notes of the study, participants' reactions, and reflective thoughts.
	Triangulation	Data collection methods, field notes, data analysis and literature review were used to verify observations and categorization of data.
	Member checking Interview technique	Participants verified accuracy "on the spot" and transcribed interviews and made changes or added more detail data. An interview protocol was developed and implemented for both individual and focus-group interviews.
Transferability	Snowball sampling	Specific criteria used for selecting participants. Sample was reflective of Region One Sped demographics.
	Time period	All participants dropped out of school within the past three years.
	Thick description	A thorough description of methodology including individual and focus-group interviews and document analysis was provided. Researcher related findings to existing body of knowledge.
Dependability	Dense description of research methods	Thorough description of the research design and its implementation were provided in detail, thereby enabling future researcher(s) to repeat the study.
	Dependability audit	Opportunities for scrutiny, suggestions, and corrections by advisers were seriously considered.
	Methodology triangulation	Overlapping methods, such as individual and focus group interviews, were employed along with document analysis of educational records.
Confirmability	Confirmability audit	In-depth methodological description was used to allow integrity of research results to be scrutinized.
	Raw data	Use of audio tapes, transcriptions, and field notes were used to show an audit trail.
	Triangulation	Triangulation was employed to reduce effect of research bias.
	Reflexivity	Researcher evaluated the study progress as it developed, monitored developing constructions or progressive subjectivity, and evaluated emerging patterns and theories.

In addition, member checks and inter-reliability from colleagues helped ensure that the data, grouping of themes, and interpretations represented the participants' true perceptions. The participants received a copy of the transcript to voice any clarifications or further contributions. Lastly, throughout the study, the researcher maintained a reflective journal to document initial reactions, questions, and hypotheses. This journal assisted in providing the means of exploring the assumptions and biases regarding the research and investigator for possible effects on data interpretation. With the tape recordings of the interviews, thick description was used when presenting the data, grouping of themes, and interpretations and conclusions of this study.

In the analysis of the educational artifacts, the researcher was looking for at least two of the five components of culturally responsive teaching. The components that serve as a measure are curriculum-content and cultural congruent instruction. The researcher analyzed the following: (a) Level of Academic Achievement and/or Functional Performance, (b) Applicable Accommodations/Modifications, (c) Summary of Full Individual Evaluation, (d) State-Mandated Assessment, (e) Transition Plan, (f) Behavior, (g) Linguistic Needs to determine if the Admission, Review Dismissal process, and committee were meeting the individualized needs' of each participant in this study(Appendix K). The educational artifacts/ARD reports describe the individual student's educational competencies and needs as well as recommendations to meet the needs of each culturally diverse student (TEA, 2010a). The researcher also evaluated the efforts made to address the different learning styles. Attendance, grades, and state assessments/TAKS scores were analyzed to determine student success. It is important to

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look at a student's attendance and grades because they are an indication of understanding the concept taught. If students were unsuccessful, had failing grades, it is important to know how the teachers reevaluated their instruction to meet the needs of the students. Further discussion on the findings are presented in Chapter IV.

Limitations of the Study

The limitation of a qualitative study is that their findings cannot extend to wider populations with the same degree of certainty as quantitative analyses (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). This is due to the fact that the findings of the research will not be tested to determine whether the findings are statistically significant or due to chance. Therefore, this qualitative study was limited to the experiences of Mexican American school dropouts who participated in the special education program from local education agencies in South Texas. The sample size of five is small compared to quantitative studies and generalization was limited to the extent of the former students' knowledge and experiences of multicultural education. In addition, the voices of parents were not examined concerning the instructional experiences their child may have encountered. Even though the data were specific to the experiences of the participants in the study, the implications of the data may be useful for comparable contexts.

Conclusion

Chapter III offered an in-depth description of the qualitative method used in this study, in particular, case study due to the relevance in educational research. A detailed account of the step-by-step data collection was shared. Along with data analysis of individual interviews, focus-group interviews, and educational records that provided

direction for framing themes, the researchers depicted the strategies used to establish

trustworthiness of the methodology. In staying neutral and unbiased, the researcher

provided possible limitations to this study.

Chapter IV presents the findings of this study because of the data analysis. It

discusses the data obtained and interprets the findings in relation to the research literature

and theoretical purpose. A brief portrait of each participant depicts the lives these

students experienced. It is through their stories that three main themes emerged: (a)

nonresponsive school culture, (b) quest for supportive environment, and (c) outside

social factors. These themes are discussed in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis and findings of the data collected. The focus of this research study was to analyze the perceptions of former Mexican American students who participated in special education services regarding the experiences that led them to drop out. The subsequent research questions guided the study:

1. What are the perceptions of Mexican American dropouts who participated in a special education program regarding their educational experiences?

2. What were the factors that influenced these students' decisions to drop out of school?

In addition, the review of literature revealed the historical context of the struggles to attain equality in educational structures, but most importantly, in society for students of color, along with a myriad of factors attributed to students dropping out of school.

The researcher used the voices of Mexican American dropouts who were labeled as learner disabled and received special education services to capture their experience(s) that led to their dropping out. It is with great hope that their voices can shed some light in the abyss of the dropout phenomenon for students of color. By capturing their voices, an explanation and/or solution surfaces to stop any student protected under Federal law with an individualized education plan from dropping out of school. Optimistically, this research study will add to the existing body of knowledge available to stakeholders such as superintendents, curriculum and instruction administrators, school administrators,

educators, students, parents, and policymakers to assist in reforming and implementing culturally responsive practices and policies.

The snowball sampling for this study desired outcome was 5 participants, 3 males and 2 females. National and state data reveal that there are more male students identified as needing services in special education compared to female students (Hibel, Farkas, & Morgan, 2010; Johnson, Lessem, Bergquist, Carmichael, & Whitten, 2000). In addition, there are more Mexican American males dropping out of school compared to Mexican American females (Garcia, 2004; TEA, 2011a, 2011b), which reflects the sample of this study. Although voices are represented by pseudonyms to provide anonymity and confidentiality, their stories represent their lived educational experiences, struggles they endured, and suggestions for educational reform or teaching practices.

Their Stories

The Texas PEIMS leavers coding cannot depict the accurate reason(s) for students leaving school and not completing their high school diploma. The coding is limited to one word or phrase that does not allow for an in-depth look as to the factors why students drop out of school (TEA, 2011a, 2011b). No amount of statistical analysis can divulge the nuanced tribulations of human experience and interaction. As noted by Bruner (1996) and Gay (2010), people live their lives and shape their identities through stories. Each participant had a crucial and convincing story to share during the interviews. Listening to their story allowed their voices to be heard and validated. Prior to having their voices heard and validated, a brief profile of participants was discussed. The brief profile was created from a compilation of information gathered from the

interviews, member-checking meetings, educational artifacts such as student-created

drawings, poems, rap songs, essays about their life, report cards, SchoolMax disciplinary

and absenteeism referral data, Academic Achievement Records, Individual Education

Plans, and observations made about their neighborhoods, and location of interviews for

triangulation to have a more complete picture of their lived educational experience and

perspective. Table 4.1 lists all the characteristics of all five participants based on the data

retrieved during this study. At a glance, it is evident that some of these students and some

characteristics are parallel profiles.

Table 4.1. Participants' Profiles

Characteristics	Ray	The Preacher	Johnny	Tania	Keyla
Mother's Birth Place	USA	USA	Mexico	Mexico	Mexico
Father's Birth Place	USA	USA	USA	USA	USA
2nd Generation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Female	Female
Age	20	19	18	17	17
ELL	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Household	Single parent	Married/Separated	Single parent	Single parent	Single parent
Social ECO	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Mobility	6	6	10	9	7
Siblings	1 older brother	Only child	1 older brother	2 older sisters 1 older brother	2 younger paternal siblings
1st to graduate	High School diploma	High School diploma	Will be GED	Will be from Job Corp	Will be from Job Corp
Teen Parent	Yes (2yrs old daughter)	No	No	No	Yes (1yr old daughter)
LD in Reading/Math	Reading /dyslexia	Reading comprehension	Reading comprehension	Reading Phonic/ comprehension	Reading comprehension
Psychological disorder	No	No	Bipolar	No	No
Academic performance last school yr	Failing (FF) NC Passing (AB)	Passing (AB)	Passing/failing (CF)	Passing/failing (CF)	Passing/failing (CF)
Retention	1st & 12th	2nd, 9th & 11th	1st & 9th (twice)	1st & 9th	9th &10th
Absenteeism	Yes >10	Yes>10	Yes>20	Yes>10	Yes>40
Discipline	Level I-Minor	Level I-Minor	Level IV-Serious Offenses	Level I-Minor	Level I-Minor
Affiliation	Track & football	Gangs	Gangs	Delinquent peers	Delinquent peers
Alcohol/Drug user	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes	Yes/No	Yes/No

Ray

  Ray is a 20-year-old Mexican American young man from a single parent household. Both his parents were born in the United States; thus, Ray is a 2nd generation native to Love, Texas. Although he is Mexican American, his first language was not Spanish; therefore, he is a non-English language learner (non-ELL). His mother and father divorced when he was four years of age. His father was issued primary custody of Ray and his older brother, but dad's occupation as a truck driver made it difficult for him to raise two young boys. Therefore, Ray and his brother were forced to reside at Saint Jude Orphanage up to the age of eight, respectively. At the age of eight, Ray was placed in Saint Francis Orphanage through 12 years of age. Ray took a deep breath as to sigh and exclaimed, "I don't want to talk about that place. All I wanted to do is go home! I didn't belong there; there were gangbangers, people court ordered, druggies. I was too young to be in a place like that!"

  Ray returned to the custody of his father in Love, Texas. Ray continued his education at Lezotte Middle School and Newton High School, but had to transfer to Unique High School as he was under the supervision of his uncle because his father was serving two years of prison time for smuggling undocumented aliens. The transition to his aunt and uncle's house was cumbersome although they attended church regularly. Ray expressed that at church, "I felt weird; I felt that I was not in the presence of God. Then, I found out that the pastor stole money. I started to lose faith." This conflict made him search for a place or for someone to make him feel he belonged.

Ray searched for his mother and asked if he could live with her. After agreeing to the house rules in North Carolina, Ray felt constricted because "I was 18 years old and on summer nights I had to be home by 8:00 pm. What kind of life is that?" While attending school, he felt that he did not belong because he was one of the few Mexicans in that school. Race was a dominant cultural clash in his new high school, so he associated with students who were Mexican American or who lived near his neighborhood. He recalled:

> Over there were only a few Mexicans and we would all eat together. There were always race fights, White and Black fighting each other, Mexican and White fighting, but I never saw two Black people fighting. There was some little beef with us and the Blacks, but we like had each other's back. You see, we didn't want any problems because we lived near Rutt Town, which is on the outskirts of my neighborhood.

Therefore, Ray started to engage in delinquent behavior such as not attending school, smoking marijuana, and not passing his classes. These behaviors led to a falling out with his mother, so he returned to Love with his dad and older brother.

Ray father's dwelling and neighborhood is located near the Love Cemetery, eight blocks from Newton High School. The average income near the 78041 area code is approximately $34,122 with an average house value of $88,000 (ZipAreaCode.net, 2012). According to the County Appraisal District (2012), the appraisal value of their 1500 square foot home is $71,540. Ray's house is a white wooden home with two bedrooms, living room, kitchen, and full bathroom with a lot size of 6389 square feet. They have two mixed breed dogs that seem to lie on the front porch trying to stay cool from the scorching hot climate. Although Ray has lived in six different locations and currently resides at this house, he does not consider it his home.

Ray explained in a louder tone, "There is too much drama to take," as if the type of home environment bothered him! As he continued to explain the daily "drama," his forehead starts to wrinkle in a downward motion and he got a bit flushed around his face with the right side of his vain pulsating on his temple, stating,

> There is always fighting going on between my brother and his wife, arguing between my brother and dad. They are bringing me into this, not doing nothing [anything] in the house. I don't have time for that…like drama. Me and drama don't get along.

Ray stopped and thought for a few seconds. "I know that TAMIU gots [has] a cross-country team." The fighting that occurs frequently is often verbal, and sometimes physical. At that point, in time, I was wondering if Ray enjoyed running for the love of the sport or because it was an escape outlet.

Ray described himself as a "funny person" who likes to hang out with friends. He also enjoys playing video games, and more importantly he stated, emphasizing and stretching the [o], "I love to run and exercise! I'm a strong runner…for being a smoker I'm a strong runner. I can keep my pace." Ray was in extracurricular activities while in high school. He was a football player and enjoyed Fridays because of the pep-rallies. He was also part of the high school cross-country running team that he really loved! Not only athletic, he possesses artistic abilities both in drawing and in lyrics that grasp the vivid truths of his life experiences. He was extremely proud to show me his drawings and poems or as he refers, "rap songs." One song in particular refers to him losing his dream and finding "a way back out of this hell hole." When asked, he was referring to the decision to drop out of school.

Ray dropped out of school first in North Carolina due to a combination of factors. According to Ray, he had received an *FF* in some of his classes, which stands for *future failure*. As he was giggling slightly, he proclaimed,

> Everybody knows that if you get FF, don't even go back to that class cause you failed. It's a free block. Here, if you get so many absences, you go to court for a second chance to change, but over there they just FF you. And if you get 3 FFs, they drop you out of school.

Ray also explained, "I dropped out because I wanted to come back to Texas. I knew I wasn't going to pass." In addition, Ray was suspended from school for smoking marijuana; therefore, his mother sent him back to Texas to live with his dad. Although Ray had serious infractions regarding discipline in North Carolina, his Texas disciplinary records for Newton High School indicate level I minor infractions and had no referral for excessive absences even though he had a combined total of 10 absences.

Ray reenrolled at Newton High School but was held back as a second year senior because not all the credits transferred. According to Ray, he felt that "they took 8 credits away from me!" Feeling frustrated because he "felt so far behind. But it was like they (refereeing to educators) didn't care if you got your credits or not." His frustrations regarding "teachers...only helping smart students, not students like me" perceiving that teachers didn't care or "it didn't matter if you were there or not," led him to drop out of school a second time. Ray's viewpoint is supported by Good and Brophy's (2003) research that indicated that some teachers tend to call on high achievers more frequently than struggling learners, which in turn, provides these academically able students with an educational advantage. Typical consequences of this practice are that over their years of instruction, struggling learners ignore or exit the educational system (Gall, 1984).

Fortunately, he held on to his dream, a promise to himself. He affirmed, "I made a promise to myself that I was never going to drop out. I was going to be better than my brother and my dad. I want to get my high school diploma and eventually go to college." Ray did attain his high school diploma at Unique High School in May 2011.

The Preacher

The Preacher is a young 19-year-old man who lives with both Mom and Dad who were both born in the United States, making him a 2nd generation Mexican American. The parents' primary language at home was Spanish; therefore, the Preacher entered school and was labeled as an English language learner (ELL). The Preacher understands the English language well, but is considered an intermediate level in TELPAS for speaking, reading and writing. This is evident in his code switching when speaking or use of Spanglish.

He is the only child who grew up in a family associated with gangs. Nevertheless, his mother and uncles are members of the family that belonged to the La M gang. La M is the Mexican Mafia gang that engages in organized criminal activities (Mallory, 2012). According to the Preacher, "it's part of my life." As far as he could recall, he, his father and mother moved dwellings frequently. It is evident in his Academic Achievement Record from attending Moore Elementary, Rodriguez Elementary, Kendra Gonzalez Elementary, then Devon Elementary, respectively. During his middle school years, the Preacher attended Lezotte Middle School and Love Christen Center. Then, he enrolled at Newton High School and his junior year returned to Love Christen Center for a year, and subsequently back to Newton High School. However, although the family moved during

his high school years, the reason for attending Love Christen Center was due to the lifestyle he was living, which involved gang affiliation, drug use and distribution.

Currently, the Preacher lives with mom and dad in a 1,288 square feet yellow wooden two-bedroom home near a creek. Their home was appraised at $53,720 for 2011 with a property size measuring 6,431 sq./ft. (County Appraisal District, 2012). The Preacher comes from a low social economic status because his mom does not work due to her disability as diagnosed as bipolar and dad is a retired veteran.

In elementary school, he was a model student, even though he was retained in 2nd grade that followed the rules for the "game of school." He would not misbehave, talk out of turn, or disrespect teachers or fellow classmates. As he explained, "I was a good kid; I liked to work, like to know everything." In other words, he enjoyed learning and attending elementary school, despite the negative effects associated with high mobility. In middle school, the Preacher described himself as "really friendly…keep to myself…didn't like fighting." However, as he transitioned into middle school, he struggled academically and socially. The Preacher recalled how his good days would turn into bad days when he was in middle school due to bullying:

> Like they would push me around, and tell me mean things, or humiliate me in front of the whole school. And *pos* I never did anything because I was afraid to fight and I got really depressed about it. I told my mom, but the way she would try to handle it by telling the principal, getting security to walk me to class, made it humiliating for me. And I like got really bad, I didn't have any friends, no one would talk to me. I only had two or three friends and uh I just went through life. But, when I went to the 8th grade *pos* I started having problems with this kid and his name was Julio and uh…he was bullying me the same way as everybody else. And one day I got tired of it and *pos* that's when I pushed back. I was tired of being bullied! I got in trouble and they sent me to LAP. Right there at that time, the instant I did that, like inside of me, I felt like if I could fight back! I know that I could defend myself from anybody. And for a while it (standing up for myself)

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got addicting cause I liked it! And I…I kind of like started putting people down the way they use to treat me and *pos* that was my way of…getting my revenge. It would make me feel good, powerful like they say.

The constant dehumanization the Preacher endured throughout middle school produced violence by the oppressed, the Preacher, which in turn reversed the role of the oppressed to oppressor. Freire (1970) explained the reaction to the dehumanization or violence of the oppressor is encountered with "an act which is always, or nearly always, as violent as the initial violence of the oppressor" (p. 56). This pathway of destruction led him to be part of the Latin Kings gang his freshman year. This lifestyle led to many violent acts of fighting that would take place in the back of Newton field house or the park next to the football field.

Fortunately, the Preacher's perception transformed from submersion to recognition and a desire to get out of the Latin King gang. He endured a beating from six other Latin King Gang members. Gazing toward an empty white wall with his eyes slightly to the right, he recalled, "I was all bruised up on my eye and face, *todo ponchado*! I had to go to school with a hoodie and sunglasses." During class, teachers would instruct "take off your sunglasses *pero* they wouldn't say anything…they didn't care. I remember one [teacher] said, '*a mi no me importa lo que le pase a este wuerco*!" However, his escape from the grasp of violence was short lived because his family quickly encouraged him to be part of La Mexican Mafia gang, which is associated with drug cartels.

La M considered the Preacher as a prospect, and he had to prove his loyalty by "getting involved in bigger stuff." His involvement with La M was at the intermediary

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level where he "would go and say '*compra le esto*,' deliver this here and there…that sort of stuff." Many of the illegal activities were taking place at the South Texas high school he attended. The Preacher knew that local, state, and national news reports on the drug war in Tamaulipas informed the public of recent killings involving the Zetas and Sinaloa drug cartels. The Sinaloa drug cartel is in alliance and contracts La M for illegal activities near the South Texas border up to San Antonio, Texas. Although the Preacher was a potential prospect to La M, the Preacher decided to leave that lifestyle. He explained, "It was getting too hot for me because I was getting involved in bigger stuff…[I am] going to get out, ya, not that I'm calling myself a coward cause I'm not dumb enough to be in something more dangerous!"

Therefore, in order to escape from that lifestyle, the Preacher dropped out of school. Before explaining the reason why he decided to drop out of school, he moved his upper body from the sitting position and leaned forward placing both hands on his knees in a prayer position against his chin, mouth, and nose. Then, in a serious tone exclaimed, "I wanted to be alive cause I knew that the school couldn't do anything about the gangs; there were too many."

After dropping out of school, the Preacher found refuge at Love Christian Academy with Mr. Burfurred, a 90-year-old pastor "who would straighten me out." The Preacher's father encouraged him to attend this school in order to "stop doing things for my mom's family." Love Christen Academy is an Assembly of God private school that educates coed-combined levels of elementary and secondary (PK through 12th grade students) with a low teacher student ratio. When first arriving at this school, the Preacher

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felt out of place because most of the students were younger. In addition, the he felt out of

place because the pastor directed: "don't speak to these kids about any of your

experiences about what you did." The Preacher believed that Mr. Burfurred did not care

about him, but soon realized that he did because "he had mad love for me, like he cared

about me but would also straighten me out if I was out of line." Pausing for a moment,

the Preacher cracks a slight smile and recalled,

> In the beginning I thought that he didn't care *pero ya despues*….Later,
> he came to talk to me about why I don't smile. I didn't talk about
> it and just walked away. The next day, in my desk I saw old picture of
> the way I used to be with a bandana throwing gang signs. Something
> got in me and I just started crying. Then, the teacher was very concerned
> and took me aside to talk to her....It made me think that if I keep on going
> like this maybe I won't have a chance. I started crying and ripped up the
> pictures.

This caring relationship allowed the Preacher to rethink his lifestyle and stop

using drugs. This change in thinking gave him the confidence to go back to school to

seek his high school diploma. Therefore, he decided to attend Unique High School. With

a smile he stated, "Here at Unique High School, I don't feel like dropping out; I want to

graduate. I like it here, it's like a family!"

By the following year, the Preacher's academic performance improved, passing

all his classes and meeting all the requirements for graduation. The Preacher was the first

to graduate in his family from Unique High School. He is currently working for a local

business as a security guard. Earning his high school diploma and working as a security

guard was an accomplishment that made him proud. He intends to pursue a career in law

enforcement and is currently studying for the Border Patrol entrance exam.

Tania

Tania is a 2nd generation Mexican American female with close ties to her Mexican relative in Tamaulipas. Her father was born in the United States and her mother and maternal grandmother were born in Tamaulipas. Her mother and father migrated to Love, Texas when her older siblings were toddlers, making Tania the only child born in the United States. Raised in a traditional Mexican culture where Spanish was the primary language spoken at home, she is identified as an English language learner.

Tania is a 17-year-old freshman who resides with her mom, brother, two sisters, three nephews and two nieces, and grandmother. In this multi-generational household, Tania is the youngest of all her siblings and is expected to be the first to complete her secondary studies and attain a GED. Although her siblings attended public education, it was unfortunate that the educational system allowed them to fall through the cracks. Hence, Tania's oldest sister dropped out in 8th grade, next oldest sister at 9th grade, and her brother dropped out at 11th grade. Leaning forward placing her left elbow on the table, resting her temple and forehead on her left hand, she began to relate her current family situation while angling her eyes downward:

> You see…we have been good students (referring to her siblings and herself). *Si siempre* trying to do our homework….But sometimes my sisters didn't understand it. I could hear them asking, *"com oases esto?"* to each other and they would try but would get frustrated. My brother would say, "We'll ask Mom," but my sister would say, like if she was all pisted off, "She doesn't know!" So, they just wouldn't do it. I guess school was hard for them, but I know they tried.

She paused and took a deep breath and stateds: "I need to graduate cuz I don't want to be like them having trouble trying to find a job or working so hard and not getting paid that much."

It is difficult for her siblings to find employment because they do not have their high school diploma or a social security number. However, they do receive government assistance and help each other out financially. For instance, Tania's mother works two different jobs to make ends meet, while her older sisters take on the responsibility of taking care of the children.

Tania's family is a close-knit family unit even though their father is "not around." Tania explained, "Well, my dad, he left us when I was small like 8 or 9 years old." With sadness in her eyes and a melancholy tone, Tania stated while blinking slowly, *Rara vez en que lo e visto,* meaning that it is rare when she visits with her father. His abandonment put a great deal of stress on the family because he was the main source of income while mom took care of the kids. In most Mexican American two-parent families, it is traditional for the father to be the financial provider and the mother is the source of nurturance and moral stability. Tania's family dynamics flipped and mom had to be the financial provider and her older female siblings became main caretakers.

Thus, "Mom was always working; she wouldn't get home 'till like 11 at night." By the time her mother arrived home, Tania would already be asleep and would not get to see or spend time with her mother. She believed that her acting up in school might be because "my mom was always working." For example, Tania struggled academically repeating 1st grade and 9th grade. Although she had difficulty learning, she behaved well, obeying all the school rules during her elementary and middle school years.

However, when she was socially promoted to ninth grade the spring semester, according to Tania, she "started acting all *chiflada* because of my friends." With a smile or slight smirk, Tanya recalled,

> Well, at school last year, well, I used to be like all *calmadita* (calm) in the beginning and then ya I started getting crazy. Well, that year I got my first referral [for] being mean to a substitute. Well, like I was talking a lot and she yelled at me and then the security came, they took me, asked me if I had anything to say and I went *porque esa pinche vieja no déjà entrar* and they called the vice principal and took me into the office.

The misbehavior at school consisted of talking in class, not completing school work, getting "bad grades and reports like 50s and 40s," "being mean to the substitute," disrespectful, destructive in class by going "all crazy…throwing papers and everything."

This deviant behavior got her into trouble at school. Tania was sent to the campus administrator often for disruptive behavior. The consequences according to Tania were not severe and continued to be disruptive in class. As time went by, Tania was known as a disruptive student and was constantly reminded to behave and go to class. Without hesitation, teachers would send her to the office for the slightest infraction. Thus, the class and school was not an effective learning environment because she was being removed from the least restrictive environment; yet, no Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP) was ever created according to her IEP. As per Tania, she dropped out of school because, "They were always getting after me. They would just like make me referrals or call my mom." Then, she paused for about three seconds and stated, "I think I was like super old for my grade." She was a 17-year-old freshmen and was embarrassed at times because of comments students would make about her being too old to be a freshmen. With embarrassment in her tone of voice and a change of demeanor, she shrugged her

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shoulders, tilting her head slightly to the right explaining how she told the counselor

about how she wanted to leave that school:

> *Bueno*, I went to her and told her I wanted to pull out of here. She gave it to me. My birthday came on November 4th, and I stayed at Miller High School for two more weeks and then, ya, I dropped out.

Tanya is currently aspiring to receive her GED and acquiring skills to prepare her

for the workforce. Tanya is participating at the local job corps keeping the promise she

made to her mom and herself to sustain a better quality of life.

Keyla

Kelya's father was born in the United States and her mother was born in

Tamaulipas. Both parents grew up and attended public schools near the United States-

Mexico border. Keyla's parents fell in love in high school and married; thus, they did not

complete their high school education. A few years later, Keyla was born, becoming the

2nd generation American citizen, attending the same schools that her parents attended.

Following in her parents footsteps, Keyla dropped out of Joaquin High School. However,

because of her father's unyielding and persistent pleas of having to be a responsible

mother, Keyla briefly explained how she came to here of the job corps she:

> My dad was the one who told me to go to the Job Corp cuz he used to come here. Well, not here, but the one in San Marcos. And he told me that he used to go to the Job Corps so, if I wasn't going to go back to high school, then I should go to the Job Corp. After a while I did.

Therefore, she applied to the job corps to acquire the necessary job skills and GED she

needed.

Keyla is a young teenage single mother of a 1-year-old daughter who is her

inspiration to strive for a better life. As she stated,

Honestly, honestly, if it wasn't for my daughter, I wouldn't be here right now. She is my inspiration. What I want out of life is to get a job and give her more than what my mom gave me. I mean, I don't know, I guess I want her to have a better life. Give her anything she needs. I wouldn't want her to get pregnant like me.

Keyla and the father of Baby K are in semi-speaking terms. He had not provided any type of child support until Keyla took him to court. Currently, he does provide some child support when he is employed, but is not actively involved in Baby K's life. Keyla knows that although she is out of town, she entrusted her mother with the care of Baby K in Joaquin, Texas while she completed her GED. The long distance separation makes it difficult for Keyla because she misses her baby dearly. Keyla exclaimed with a slight knot in her throat and glassy eyes flipping her cell phone open to look at the picture of her smiling baby girl on her cell's wallscreen:

> I don't like it. I mean I do like it, but I don't like that I do not get to see her (looking at a picture of her baby on her cell phone). I get to see her once a month cuz my mom doesn't have that much money to send me for the bus so I can see her. I miss her! (looking down sighing) Well, I could use my baby as an inspiration to do better, but ever since she was born, I have been with her every day. I am like 3 hours away from her. They should have like a daycare here so I can concentrate more on my future, then my baby.

In striving for a better life, Keyla is currently enrolled at the Love Job Corps and pursuing her GED. The Love Job Corps Center is a non-profit, no-cost educational and career building program governed by the U.S. Department of Labor (2012). Since Keyla has not received her high school diploma or GED, she is receiving academic instruction to prepare her in meeting all of the requirements to pass her GED exam. In addition, Keyla is completing courses in self-sufficient living, employability skills, communication skills, and career training in health occupations.

Keyla comes from a divorced family. Her mother and dad separated and divorced when she was in elementary school. Keyla is an only child, but has two younger half-siblings from her father's second marriage. Keyla stayed and lived with her mother up into her 8th grade year. At times, Keyla and her mother move to and from different apartments or her uncle's house within the parameters of Joaquin High School. It was difficult to make rent sometimes because her mom was not employed, and they would survive on Keyla's disability check and government assistance. The mobility was within the same neighborhood so Keyla did not have to switch schools.

This predominantly Mexican American neighborhood has an estimated median household income of $39,547 with 24.3% of the population living below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In addition, approximately 36.4% of these residents rent within this neighborhood. The educational attainment for zip code 78501 was 26.3% of the population had less than a high school education, 21.9% had a high school or GED, while 19.3% attained a Bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Currently, Keyla's mother and 1-year old daughter live in a one bedroom apartment, while Keyla resides at the Love Job Corps.

As a young child in elementary school, Keyla recalled getting good grades and being a model student. When she transitioned into middle school, her grades started to drop and she was referred to Special Education Program. However, after receiving content mastery as part of her accommodations, her grades improved and she passed all of her classes and TAKS exams. She recalled, "I would go to CMC, and they would help me finish my work, study for a test...and my grades improved."

However, when she transitioned into high school, her "nightmare" and "living hell" began. She was denied credits due to absences and failing grades; therefore, she repeated 9th and 10th grade. She explained,

> I guess elementary and middle school was good, but high school I didn't like it. I didn't like the teachers. Sometimes they were very nice, but most of the time they were like "You never come to class," "Why are you absent so much," and "You are?" They were just nagging all the time! I would get 90s and 80s, but as soon as I hit high school, I started flunking really bad! The people I started hanging out with were not good for me.

These friends lived down the road in her neighborhood and would skip class often. It was easy to skip class at Joaquin High School because the two-story campus had a lot of nooks and crannies that were ideal for hiding from staff, teachers, or administrators. Biting the left side of her bottom lip with a wincing smile, Keyla retold some of her escapes at school:

> I would just not go to class and be walking around school. Ya, Ms. Beck our principal would see us and start chasing us all over school (she chuckles a bit). When she would see us, she would start following us and we would start running and running, and she would run after us. And we would laugh our asses off cuz it was just funny! We had another one Ms. Richmond, wooh, nobody liked her cuz she would just bitch at us! It didn't matter. We still do the same thing.

With darting eyes, looking into mine, Keyla told me:

> We would get sent to ISS, but my friends would just walk out of there. I wouldn't walk out because I didn't want any more trouble, but my friends would walk out cuz they didn't care. In middle school we were good girls, but as soon as we hit high school we were like wow this is a huge school. There were two big buildings and we would go to the second building and just stay there, talk, write on each other.

In my observations of her facial expressions, it seemed that behind her eye, there was pain veiled by a thin wall of defensiveness.

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Keyla's educational records revealed more than 40 combined absences, 5 disciplinary referrals, and 2 court appearances. As some educators may preserve, her excessive absences had repercussions such as failing grades, failing TAKS, inaccessibility to extracurricular activities due to no pass no play rule, and court summonses. Although she understands that it was her choice to skip class, at first, she was not sure as to why she did not want to attend her classes. The perplexity was evident in her statement: "I was flunking everything!" shaking her head left to right as to say no. I observed how anchors seem to slowly drag the corners of his mouth down and how her eyebrows crunch together like waves against the bank.

> I don't know why. Maybe it was because I didn't go to class. I don't know why I didn't like going to school. I know my mom knew for a fact that I wasn't going to class because she would go looking (at school) for me and she wouldn't find me on campus.

> Then as if a light bulb flashed, she quickly justified her actions by stating that "class was boring," "teachers were always nagging," which were indications of a bigger problem within the educational environment to which she was subjected.

Keyla gave several reasons as to why she dropped out of school. First being, her pregnancy, then skipping class and school all together, not passing TAKS, apathy and so on. But then Keyla came to the realization that there were mainly three reasons she dropped out of school. In deep thought, she explained, "I said it was my baby, but already my freshman year, I was skipping class. So, I don't know." While trying to find logic and reason, Keyla paused for 30 seconds straightening her posture, then in an affirmative, modulated voice she asserted,

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They would lie; nag about a lot of things. They would nag about that I would never go to class, "you are always skipping," "you're not going to do anything anyways," "why come you are already failing." So, I was like why come to class. They are just telling me off! I guess…I think it was several things: teachers nagging, class being boring, and me getting pregnant.

Johnny

Johnny is an 18-year-old, 2nd generation Mexican American whose first language is Spanish and who comes from a low social economic background, single-parent household with high mobility from apartment to apartment. His father relocated out of town when Johnny was in 5th grade to search for a better paying job and after he was settled in, he was supposed to send for the family. Unfortunately, Johnny's mother, older brother, and he never heard from him again.

Despite the current situation of Johnny being incarcerated, he described himself in an honest silvery voice:

Normally, I'm outgoing; I like sports like football, basket, soccer…uhm. I like to talk to people, listen to what they have to say, hear them out. Maybe I could help them in some way. Give them advice, encourage them to do good in life, school. Even talk to them so they could give me advice. I just like talking about life. I'm bipolar. I like math, ya, I like math, [and] science. Also, I had a drug problem. I do [did] pills, marijuana, cocaine, and heroin, stuff like that. I think because I always felt depressed.

Thus, Johnny is a young 18-year-old outgoing, interpersonal, talkative man who suffers from bipolar disorder and substance abuse. When first meeting him, he was concerned about my perceptions of him. I recall explaining the research study regarding the perceptions he may have about his school experience. I believe the word 'perceptions' triggered him to feel the need to explain any assumptions I may or may not have had. As I was looking at him, I could see his cheeks turn fire engine red as if he was burning up

inside. To avoid eye contact, Johnny's sheepish eyes were cast downward and he

released a long breath as if to soothe his mind and emotions like a yoga instructor

meditates. In a contrite breathy voice, Johnny exposed his emotions through words:

> I know that when people look at me, you see a druggy, someone who's a loser. But, I am not a loser and have a kind heart. I know all the trouble and stress I have caused my mom, but I understand my condition. I can't control it because I am bipolar and my brain can't make me stop doing drugs. I am a good person and I want to help others.

Johnny quickly explained that people assume that drug abusers, like him, lack ethics or

self-discipline to stop doing drugs. When in reality substance dependence is a

multifarious disease and refraining from using drugs takes more than good intentions.

Johnny took the time to comment that drugs change the chemicals in our brain in ways

that encourage compulsive drug abuse, making quitting difficult. It was evident that

Johnny was honest and straightforward about his disorder because within two minutes of

our taped-recorded interview he stated, "I'm bipolar. Normally, I don't get mad due to

my medication. But, if I'm not on it, I explode, do things I regret." Furthermore, in a

forthright manner he stated:

> Also, I had a drug problem. I do [did] pills, marijuana, cocaine, and heroin, stuff like that. I think because I always felt depressed. The more I did, the more I felt I was staying depressed. I felt I was not worth being here. I wasn't valuable, had no reason to live cause all I did was cause too much problems with my mom. I did it not to think of my situation, my problems. I guess a way to escape reality, but it would only bring me misery.

A perfect example was his lost opportunity to compete for the Golden Gloves title in

Dallas, Texas "because I was using drugs. Not the kind of drugs, like juicing...but I came

out dirty. My trainer was disappointed in me, but I tried to explain that it wasn't roids

(refers to steroids)." As an athletic boxer, it was difficult for Johnny to cope with his vanished opportunity.

Johnny's first encounter with illegal drugs was at the age of 10. He smoked marijuana, which is known as the gateway drug, with kids from his neighborhood or as he referred, "*el barrio.*" Johnny recalled the first time he experimented with drugs:

> I was in elementary school. I tried marijuana for the first time. In my *barrio*, it was very tough. You had to show you were tough, too. So, I wanted to be part of the gang, well not a real gang, yet. I was a very good athletic person. I would get trophies anytime I would compete in school. I was also a boxer, undefeated. I didn't get to compete in the Golden Gloves because I was using drugs. Not the kind of drugs, like juicing. I was in Dallas for a competition, but I came out dirty. My trainer was disappointed in me, but I tried to explain that it wasn't roids. So, I couldn't box anymore cause I got mad, and I rebelled against everyone. So, I used drugs as a coping mechanism to avoid my problems.

Johnny's neighborhood is known as Spooky Town, which is 97% Mexican American with commercial and residential properties. There is one high school and middle school and two elementary schools that are within the parameters of Spooky Town. Johnny moved from an apartment complex to other apartments within the neighborhood and Minor Road. The last place of dwelling was in a four plex near the end of Corpus Christi Street and New York Street in his old neighborhood, Spooky Town.

Although they moved several times during his elementary years, he was a "pretty good person who would answer all the questions in class. I would help other students and the teacher." Fondly remembering he stated: "I really liked elementary school cause everyone liked me, even the teachers. I remember the teachers would say I was a good student, keep up the good work" Then looking into my eyes, his bleak chestnut-brown eyes become gleaming chestnut-eyes and he continued, "that they were proud of me!"

His good grades were short lived because as soon as he entered middle school, he started

struggling academically because he had reading difficulties. Johnny explained,

> In middle school, I changed. I got in a gang, the Latin Kings. I started doing more drugs, I even started to deal. I learned how to manipulate teachers. All I had to say was Miss I can't read and they would give me credit for not doing anything. Teaches would tell me just be quiet and I'll help you out.

> This mischievous behavior in and out of school continued through high school

and added to his police record because he was in and out of the Texas Youth

Correctional (TYC), facility and Water County Jail.

> Every time Johnny would complete his sentencing at TYC, he would reenroll at

Newton High School to continue his education. He would try to earn as many credits as

possible, but his tardiness and absences made it difficult to obtain credit. According to

his Academic Achievement record, he repeated 1st grade and 9th grade as well. In the last

juncture after being released from a three-month sentence severed at Water County Jail,

he went to Newton High School to enroll but was *pushed out*. He explained:

> I went back to Newton to reenroll, but they said that I was 18 and too old to be in school. I told them that I had friends here at this school who were older than me. The assistant principal for attendance, just said with an attitude, I don't know about that. I kept on telling her that it wasn't fair, *por que*? I....I could feel myself getting mad cause it wasn't right! I told her that I wanted to speak to the principal and she said come back tomorrow cause she's not here. But when I was in the car leaving I saw the principal. I went back and they said we are not going to accept you cause you hit a kid and you are over age. I could tell that there was nothing I could do.

Feeling helpless as if there was nothing he could do, he accepted the lie as a truth coming

from a person with authority and did not return to school to complete his high school

diploma. The heart-wrenching thing is that Johnny is protected under state and federal

laws and may attend school until the age of 21 as of September 1st of that year.

Johnny is currently awaiting trial and to be released from jail. He is studying to receive his GED, but struggles with reading and comprehension. His reading deficiency exacerbates his frustration level and he gives up. It is with great hope, that Johnny will receive some assistance and complete his GED.

Summary of Participants' Profiles

In our society with much cultural, linguistic, and racial diversity, it is evident that there are distinctive differences. Knowing this, the researcher respectfully recognized some similarities in their lived experiences. For instance, all of the participants had disciplinary and attendance problems at school. Due to the focus of this study, all participants were 2nd generation Americans, who disengaged from traditional public schooling within the last three years. In addition, they all were being served under IDEA for being labeled as demonstrating learning disabled (LD). The participants shared parallel demographics in regard to them receiving free lunch, thus, were identified as low social economic status in PEIMS, moved residences more than five times within their educational career. They all voiced their concerns on how their classes were "boring," "teachers didn't care," and how teachers would not provide the instructional support they needed to equalize their opportunity for success.

All of the participants were identified in elementary school as needing special education services because they were labeled as demonstrating learning disabilities. Keyla was the only participant who started being served under IDEA in 6th grade. Although their ARD identified all of the participants to demonstrate reading difficulties, Keyla and Tanya both voiced that they struggled in the area of mathematics. Once again,

everyone except for Keyla, were retained in elementary school, first grade, being the most common grade in which participants were retained. The next common grade all participants were retained was 9th grade even though systematic meta-analyses examining research of collective evidence and data revealed that the use of grade retention as an intervention for academic achievement is not beneficial and had negative effects on student achievement and socio-emotional well being (Jimerson, 2001).

All except for the Preacher and Karla had siblings who did not graduate from high school or attain their general education development (GED) diploma. Research indicated that low parent educational attainment and having a sibling that dropped out of school are significant risk factors for dropping out of school (NCES, 2009; National Research and the Institute of Medicine, 2004) However, this is the case because the Preacher and Keyla do not have any siblings. In addition, at most, all had one or both parents receiving a high school diploma or GED.

The connectedness to school was missing in all participants in the study, except for Ray. Ray participated in football and track and field, the Preacher, Tania, Karla and Johnny did not partake in any extracurricular activities. However, all had a social and emotional connection with disobedient/delinquent peers who helped exacerbate disruptive behavior and absenteeism, which led to illegal drug utilization and distribution for Johnny, Ray, and the Preacher. Johnny was the only one who had a criminal record for possession of illegal drugs and felony assault. These outside social factors influence the school culture and make it easier for educators to perpetuate deficit thinking (Gay, 2000; Mehan, 1997; Trent, Artiles, & Englert 1998). Historically, deficit thinking

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has shifted from the soul, to heart, to brain, it has always remained inside children—successfully, up until now at least—deflecting attempts to redefine disability as social or environmental in nature. It deflects attention away from injustices perpetuated and institutionalized by the powerful and once again blames oppressed students, families, and communities for lacking the culture and moral resources for advancement. (Mehan, 1997, pp. 3-4)

Ray, the Preacher, and Johnny grasp this demoralizing way of thinking and have been persecuted within the walls of knowledge, school environment, and classroom. Educators perceived and believed that these students consciously made a choice, were in control of their own actions, and were to blame for all of their failures. The comments and inactions made by educators provided a scare to their soul, heart, and brain, once again blaming them instead of pointing the blame within the school culture:

- They didn't care. Like since I was kind of a bully, I remember one said, '*a mi no me importa lo que le pase a este wuerco*!'(I don't care what happens to this kid!)

- But it was like they didn't care if you got your credits or not. Like if it didn't matter if you were there or not. No matter what, it was, it was like my fault. And sometimes I felt like it is not my fault, only if someone would have helped me. But teachers would only help smart students, not students like me.

- I started noticing that some of the teachers would just find everything to get mad at you. Before I didn't pay attention cuz I was trying to be good but this one teacher would get mad…She would tell me I was a gangbanger, that I wasn't going to amount to anything! She would threaten to call my PO, so they could send me back to jail.

All of the participants aspired and set self-goals to graduate from high school or obtain their GED. Self-fulfilling prophecy can either create negative or positive results (Merton, 1948). This study revealed that 100% of the participants had a goal or a promise that needed to be fulfilled. Since this study, Ray and the Preacher have graduated from Unique High School. Tania and Karla continue to strive to reach their

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goal of receiving a GED from the Love Job Corps. Despondently, Johnny continues to be incarcerated.

Findings of the Data

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of former Mexican American students who participated in special education services regarding the experiences that led them to drop out. Data for this study were taped recorded individual, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, focus-group interviews, field notes, observations, and educational records. Transcription of each interview was completed and member-checked by the participants. Field notes, educational records, and observations were used to triangulate the data. The data generated from each interview were analyzed for themes.

The themes surfaced from patterns found in the participants' responses to the different questions in the interview. It is through their stories and the constant comparative data analysis that three main themes emerged: (a) nonresponsive school culture, (b) lack of supportive environment, and (c) outside social factors. Their stories emerged the theme *nonresponsive school culture* that was associated with the contributing factor emerging from the traditions, beliefs, values, assumptions, and norms that shape the school (Banks, 2004; Edmonds, 1979; Gay, 2010; Peterson & Deal, 1998). School culture is a set of implicit expectations and assumptions that direct the thinking and actions of school personnel and students. Thus, school culture was subdivided into subthemes: (a) low expectations, (b) non-caring for the student, (c) ineffective curriculum content, and (d) social issues at school.

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The second theme that emerged from the data was *lack of supportive environment* as a contributing factor from the participants' decision to drop out of school. This theme also included school-related factors that influenced their decision to drop out of school. Under the theme *supportive environment* the following subthemes emerged: (a) symptoms of the lack of a supportive environment, (b) negative learning environment, and (c) culturally nonresponsive instruction.

An additional theme emerged from the data: *outside social factors*. Investigation of these outside social factors concern the degree to which family structures support schooling, or the degree to which peer pressure supports schooling (Rumberger, 1987). Thus, the following subthemes emerged: (a) family structures and (b) peer pressure. To better understand the concepts that emerged from the data a concept map was provided to display the interconnected hierarchical themes.

Concept Mapping

Concept mapping was used in this study to help the researcher focus on the meaning of the data and to provide a visual display of the themes, patterns, and meaning of the participants' interviews. According to Trochim (2006), "concept mapping is a structured process, focused on a topic or construct of interest, involving input from one or more participants, that produces an interpretable pictorial view (concept map) of their ideas and concepts and how these are interrelated" (p. 1). Figure 4.1 (concept map) conceptualizes the themes that emerged from the study that attributed to their dropout. The concept map facilitates the unraveling of the complex factors that contributed to their dropout. The following paragraphs describe the findings in more detail.
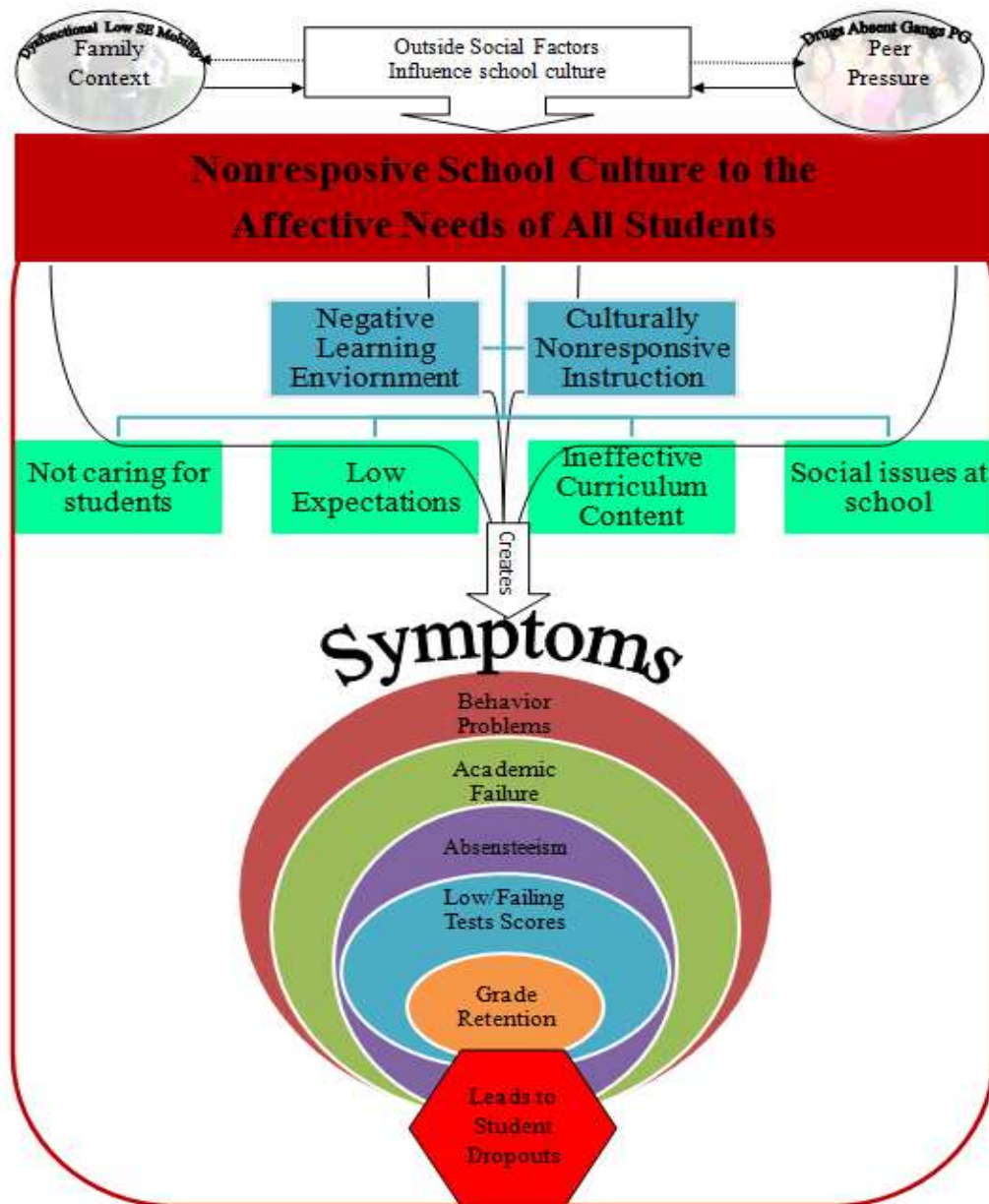
Figure 4.1. Concept map.

This study revealed that Mexican Americans who were labeled as demonstrating

learning disabilities were at a higher risk of dropping out of a nonresponsive school

because it constructs webs of negative learning environments and proliferate culturally

nonresponsive instruction (Gay, 2000, 2010;Hollins & Spencer, 1990; Jerald, 2007; Lee & Burkham, 2003). Therefore, the network of silken thread spun by negative learning environments and culturally nonresponsive instruction are used as a trap for students of color who are labeled as demonstrating learning disabilities.

Within a nonresponsive school culture, the web that is spun creates encapsulating interlaced threads of low expectations, non-caring for the student, ineffective curriculum content, and social issues at school. Once a student of color is captured (at-risk of dropping out), without culturally responsive instruction, the student will display symptoms of distress such as academic and behavior problems, absenteeism, low or failing test scores, and/or grade retention. At times, the translucent silky threads are difficult to spot; therefore, educators may see the symptoms and quickly shake them off as treads of failure and dismiss them as lack of effort, student motivation, and deficit thinking (Gay, 2000; Trent et al., 1998; Valencia, 1997).

The outside social factors influence the school culture and based on the school culture may contribute directly and indirectly to student dropouts. The outside social factors such as family context, influence the school culture because educators view family context of coming from a single-parent household, living in poverty, high mobility, or fluent in another language other than English as disabling conditions (Gay, 2000; Mehan, 1997; Trent et al., 1998; Valencia, 1997). In addition, this study revealed another outside social factor that influences school culture is peer pressure. Thus,

> If we are to understand the reason why thousands of America's youth do not complete high school, we need to go beyond reducing social class, ethnicity, language, and all the rest to people's individual characteristics. Focusing on the

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dynamics of social life will help learn how such characteristics of people convert into social action. (Mehan, 1997, p. 9)

The social context as to why these Mexican American young adults who were serviced under IDEA because they were labeled as demonstrating learning disabilities dropped out is interconnected to the school culture, family context, and peer pressure. The Preacher's self-reflection illustrated the complex social factors that influenced his behavior. He stated:

> I found my way by looking back at my past, looking at myself like looking at my body, my soul. Seeing how I was, everything I've been through, seeing who I used to hang out with or the people I was raised with. Like, I was tired of it; I felt alone! I saw that and I was tired of it and wanted a good life. I would see other people that had their family, brothers, sisters, everything. Then, I would see me and I would get all depressed, you know, sad.

The key findings of this study revealed culturally nonresponsive and culturally responsive teaching as factors for dropping out of school and attaining their high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate. In addition, dropping out of school for these Mexican Americans who were labeled as demonstrating learning disabilities was not a dead end for them. This study revealed 12 key findings that were contributing factors to their final disengagement of school that contradicted mainstream research about the phenomenon of dropping out which is frequently identified as an issue of individual failure.

Finding 1: Nonresponsive School Culture

Nonresponsive school culture is a contributing factor for Mexican Americans who are labeled as demonstrating learning disabilities to their final disengagement of school.

School culture is the underpinning role to student learning and success (Peterson & Deal, 1998). These beliefs, assumptions, and values drive the day-to-day operations of the school. Thus, if educators operate with care for students, they are more likely to develop a school culture with equivalent expectations (Stolp, 1994). However, in a nonresponsive school culture:

- Adult relationships are unprofessional and often conflicted;

- Negative attitudes saturate the culture;

- Educators exacerbate delinquent behavior;

- Educators do not perceive that ALL students can succeed, therefore, set low expectations;

- Educators operate from a deficit-thinking perspective; and

- Educators perpetuate the status quo and achievement gap (Delpit, 1992; Edmonds, 1979; Gay, 2010; Lee & Burkham, 2003; Lezotte, 2012; Shepard, 1987).

The classroom environment plays a major role in determining the quality of school life, student learning, teaching, and academic and behavioral support (Howard, 2006; Pang, 2005). School and classroom climate are visible qualities of the classroom setting that surface from the multifaceted interactions of many factors. In turn, the classroom environment mirrors the impact of the core values, beliefs, norms, and ideologies (Gay, 2000, 2010) of educators. Therefore, the level of support in a classroom determines the academic success, classroom management and discipline, and the value and utilization of culturally congruent instruction.

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It was evident in the data collected from the students' perceptions that the school culture was unfavorable toward their learning and successful graduation requirements. The following findings are a subset of the nonresponsive school culture and clearly depict the factors that contributed to their dropout.

Finding 2: Deficit Thinking Propagates Low Expectations

Deficit think perpetuates low-expectations for Mexican American students who are labeled as learning disabled, which leads to student disengagement of school.

Mottos like *No Child Left Behind* provide a belief of the quality a school culture should embrace. Educators might profess that no child is left behind and that all children can learn, but the grim reality is that not all educators hold these expectations for all students (Gay, 2010; Good & Brophy, 2003). This was the reality for Ray as he believed that some teachers did not want to teach him. He explained:

> But it was like they didn't care if you got your credits or not. Like if it didn't matter if you were there or not. No matter what, it was...it was like my fault. And sometimes I felt like it was not my fault, only if someone would have helped me. But teachers would only help smart students, not students like me.

Deficit think perpetuates low-expectation for students (Gay, 2000; Trent et al., 1998; Valencia, 1997). Educators who have low expectations of their students are more likely to accept poor performance from students and are less likely to praise good performance from these students when it transpires (Brophy & Good, 1970). It is evident that these teachers have low expectations for students in special education.

Johnny explained how some teachers had low expectations and did not require him to do what other students were expected to do. Johnny stated, "But, in my reports, I always had 70s even though I didn't do it [class work]. I feel that teachers wouldn't give

you that effort." Johnny's educational transcript corroborated that the majority of his classes had a final grade of 70.

Keyla felt that there was no expectation of her to complete her high school diploma requirements or to refrain from skipping. In comparing the educational data of her Academic Achievement Record, it was evident that Keyla had acquired more than 42 combined absences. In addition, the educational records for Ray, the Preacher, Tanya and Johnny reflected absenteeism because they all had more than 10 absences. Although Texas Education Code §25.094, Failure to Attend School, issues forth that a student commits an offense prosecutable by county, justice, or municipal court if the student fails to attend school on 10 or more days. This also includes failure to attend school on 10 or more parts of days within a six-month period. Keyla went to court a couple of times. The first time she was sent to court on her mothers' appeal. While Keyla cleared her throat, she recalled:

> Ya, she even sent me to court. They didn't even do anything. They would just check my absences and whatever. Since I was pregnant, he could give me community hours or whatever. I went back to court cause I kept on skipping. And I was like you know what sir; I am just going to get my GED. So, he sent me to get my GED, but I didn't get it.

She clarified with a slight smile:

> I think I would have still dropped out of high school cause they would never pay attention to you and there was really no consequences. I only went to ISS for 7 days and hum....I was like oh awesome! They hardly gave you any work, just copy this. I was like I am going to keep skipping!

Keyla also mentioned that when she did attend classes, teachers would just nag at her. She recalled how high school "was a nightmare; it was a living hell!" She explained, "I didn't like the teachers. Sometime they were very nice, but most of the time they were

like 'you never come to class,' 'why are you absent so much', and 'you are?' They were just nagging. I was like get over yourself."

Teachers contributed to the learned helplessness with comments such as, "why come – you are already failing." This type of communication, perceived attitudes, and interactions was seen as harassment as opposed to influential. Communication that is not culturally responsive has an adverse effect on some students (Gay, 2000; 2002; 2010). Therefore, teachers have the power to influence student behaviors and shape the future because "communication is the quintessential way in which humans make meaningful connections with one another, whether as caring, sharing, loving, teaching, or learning" (Gay, 2010, p. 79). However, the expectations of daily attendance and student achievement were misconstrued.

The teachers' power to influence student behaviors comes from the cultural setting of being in charge of the classroom, curriculum content presented, and instructional strategies employed (Gay, 2000; 2002, 2010; Goodlad, 1984). They are in the power position in selecting what, when, where, how, and who to teach. Gay (2010) reiterated this fact, "These decisions, and their consequences, are direct reflections of teacher attitudes and expectations, and whether they care for students" (p. 59). Therefore, caring for students naturally emerged as an underline theme in the data.

Finding 3: Caring for Students

Dropout prevention commences with caring teachers who give Mexican Americans who are labeled as demonstrating learning disabilities every opportunity to

succeed in the classroom through rigorous, relevant, and culturally appropriate curriculum.

The power of caring "is one of the major pillars of culturally responsive pedagogy" (Gay, 2000, p. 45) because it encompasses "teacher attitudes, expectations, and behaviors about students' human value, intellectual capability, and performance responsibilities" (Gay, 2010, p. 48). Bottom line, teachers who truly care about their students have high expectations, honor their humanity, encourage, provide choices, and use strategies to fulfill their expectations (Gay, 2000, 2002, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1992a, 1992b; Pang, 2005). The findings revealed experiences of teacher caring for these Mexican American students who participated in special education and experiences of non-caring.

The more teachers provide opportunities of success, the more students will be successful. This was evident in Ray's final grade of A's in the courses he felt that teachers were caring. The A's he earned were in courses such as Geometry, Biology, Tech Math, Sports Medicine, and the majority of his Unique classes. Ray expressed his warm feeling for his caring teachers:

> She [referring to his Geometry teacher] was a cool teacher because she treated me like if I was her son. She bought me something to eat sometimes. . . She would help me with my classwork and not just hers. Can you tell her thanks for all the help she gave me and I miss her! I hadn't had teachers like her until Unique....I wanted to go to his [referring to Mr. Elizondo] science class. He made everything in class fun, worth going.

Both Ray and the Preacher commended the teachers and Principal at Unique High School. The Preacher explained with a gleam in his eyes:

I feel like we are one big family. Everyone understands each other. And we all share the same type of experiences, being in gangs, doing drugs, fighting, getting kicked out of school, *pos* wanting to do better for life. This school is like a family; we all help each other. And the teachers really care if you do your work; pass your classes, or the TAKS test. They worry about it; you can see it.

Profoundly Ray reiterated the same feeling of belonging, cared for, and sense of family. He "would take a bullet for them" referring to the faculty staff and students. In examining the participants' grades, high marks (A's and B's) reflected courses they felt were "worth going to" and felt "they [teachers] cared."

It was also evident that these caring teachers had high expectations coupled with "mad love" because they are "getting after you because [they] care about you." This mad love or as Gay (2002) referred:

Tough love and unequivocal caring in the classroom means teachers are diligent and creative in their efforts to do everything possible to ensure that students achieve to the best of their ability. They keep raising the bar of achievement standards, within reasonable and reachable levels. (p. 621)

Finding 4: Not Caring for Students

Teachers who do not care for their Mexican American students who are serviced under IDEA, have lower levels of student success, increased discipline problems, and do not provide an individualized education to meet the needs of diverse learners.

This study also revealed how apathetic teachers contributed to the dropout phenomenon because they had low expectations about their intellectual abilities (Good & Brophy, 2003), were impatient, teacher-centered, did not empower (Gay, 2002, 2010). Teacher who do not *care about* or *care for* their students, have lower levels of success compared to teachers who care for their students (Gay 2000, 2010; Noddings, 2002). This was evident in this study because the participants did not attend class because

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teachers would not "stop nagging" and "talking and talking" making class "boring."

Keyla felt that she could learn and excel in school "with a little help." She professed, "I

just needed for teachers to be patient with me. And try to help me learn and understand

the information. I remember they would always have meetings with my mom and they

would tell her that I was doing fine."

Despondingly, her ARD records indicated that everything was not fine because

she was failing her classes and was chronically absent. Yet, these two issues were not

addressed in her IEP or BIP. This was also the case for all of the other ARDs and IEPs.

Nevertheless, the ARD committee addressed state assessments and requirements, but did

not communicate explicitly that participation on the state assessments would suffice for

graduation requirements. Unfortunately, this lack of empowerment contributed to

Keyla's truancy. She explained, "I knew for a fact that I wasn't going to pass, so why

care. The whole school would be like, like, announcing that everyone needed to pass

TAKS. So, it made me feel like why even come to school."

According to Gay (2010), culturally responsive caring is building student-teacher

relationships were "students feel, recognized, respected, valued, seen and heard" (p. 51).

Johnny voiced his distress about uncaring teachers and one in particular:

> It's as if they didn't care. I didn't want to go to school, for what, I wasn't going to
> graduate. So, I started skipping and not caring about school or being good. I
> started noticing that some of the teachers would just find everything to get mad at
> you. Before I didn't pay attention cause I was trying to be good, but this one
> teacher would get mad cause *no tenia lapis* [didn't have a pencil], notebook and
> would scream at me. *Ya, no me llebava bien* [I wouldn't tolerate it]. She would
> tell me I was a gang banger that I wasn't going to amount to anything. She would
> threaten to call my PO, so they could send me back to jail. I got mad and told her
> off. I told her to stop f#&*'em criticizing. She got mad and said you need to
> respect. I told her I'm not going to respect you cause you don't respect me or

anyone! She said she was going to call my PO. So, I left class cause I could feel myself starting to lose control. I felt that she was just out to destroy me! So, I would skip her class all the time.

Even though time has passed, this teacher still aggravated and stirred up negative emotions that caused Johnny to breathe deeply and rapidly while he spoke of her. The researcher could see Johnny's temple veins inflaming and pulsating while recalling the events right before she threatened to call his Parole Officer (PO).

Finding 5: Culturally Nonresponsive Curriculum

Providing Mexican American students who were labeled as demonstrating learning disabilities with curriculum that is rigorous and relevant with appropriate scaffolding prevents student disengagement from school and helps students to reengage in school.

Cultural blindness, in deciding what curriculum to use, stems from educators' beliefs that schooling is impartial and apolitical (Gay, 2000, 2010). Curricula have the predisposition to ignore the diverse groups of students. Researchers argue that this failure to notice may contribute to the inferior academic progress of students of color (Gay 2000, 2010). One size fits all perpetuates the academic achievement gap. Therefore, curriculum needs to be relevant to students and their instructional styles to meet the needs of students (Artiles et al., 2002; Gay, 2010; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

This is evident with comments such as "sometime they [teachers] would tell us to read and answer questions in the back of the book or handouts, and I would still fall

asleep." The curriculum was irrelevant to their lives, "boring," just a "handout." Tania

recalled one particular male teacher:

> Well, no like, he just wouldn't give us help. He gives us a handout and says do it
> or just reads the directions. Yea, like we need help and then he came in and just
> read the directions. He wouldn't explain anything. It made me feel dumb, like
> why don't I get it. I would say that I didn't get it and he would just read the
> directions or tell me to pay attention. I hated that class so I wouldn't go
> sometimes.

Providing handouts that do not facilitate multiple contexts of learning are a waste of time

for students, especially for students who need the enrichment. The Preacher concurred

regarding the curriculum content that the teachers would choose to implement in class;

he stated, "The teacher would talk and then give us a handout."

Understandably, the use of multimedia or other resources is essential and

beneficial if it is relevant, on grade level, engaging, and culturally responsive (Moll,

2005). The Preacher recalled why he and his classmates were disengaged:

> Sometimes teachers would yell, but I knew that they were frustrated cause no one
> would do their work or listen. It's just that class was boring. *Pos,* it was the same
> thing over and over again. The teacher would talk and then give us a handout.
> There were some teachers who were cool and say if you behave, I will let you see
> a movie on Friday. Those times were fun. I actually wanted to go to class.
> Regrettably, all of the participants in this study voiced that the curriculum that

they were exposed to was fragmented, boring, and irrelevant, just handouts. Yet, research

indicates that curriculum that is relevant to students' lives and is ethnic and culturally

diverse yields higher standardized scores, grades, engagement, and most importantly an

improved self-confidence (Gay, 2010). For example, Ladson-Billings (1994) described in

The Dreamkeeper: Successful Teachers of African American Children how culturally

relevant pedagogy improved students' learning and achievement:

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All of Margaret's students participated in algebra, even though it was beyond what the district's curriculum required for sixth grade. Margaret…exempted no one from the rigors of the class. One of Margaret's students was designated a special needs student. However, Margaret determined that with a few accommodations the student could remain in the classroom and benefit from her instruction. James performed well in the classroom. He participated in class discussions, posed problems as well as solved them, and accepted help from classmates when he struggled. By the end of the year, Margaret had convinced the principal that James had no need for services outside the classroom. (p. 119)

Thus, relevant, engaging, rigors curriculum provided students of color who were labeled as demonstrating learning disabilities the opportunities to succeed in school and ultimately in life; conversely, lack of academic engagement is predictive of dropping out of school (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Rumberger, 2004).

Finding 6: Symptoms

Educators spend too much time treating the symptoms of school failure instead of treating the cause.

Educators must recognize the underlining factors of academic failure, student retention, low test scores, and high dropout rates as the symptoms, not the cause of achievement problems (Gay, 2000; 2010; Valencia, 1997; Valencia et al., 2001). The data finding determined that stereotype threat or deficit thinking molds the classroom environment causing self-doubt and disengagement from educational efforts. The constant ridicule, derogatory comments, and insults made it difficult for Johnny to continue his academic efforts. The following is an example of what he endured:

She would just cut me down! Saying, *vete pa tu casa, no quiers aprender* [go home, you do not want to learn], stop doing drugs cuz they're making you stupider! I would tell myself just get through this class to graduate. *Pero, cuando me dejo el* [But, when the counselor told me] that I had to do one more year, I was like this isn't worth it.

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Tania described how she was harassed by a White female teacher for talking during

class. She goes on to describe how excessive, targeted, punitive measures:

> I was talking and everything and she'd be all "come over here!" She was all *gringa* [White girl]. And she was like um "Sra. Martinez, *quiero hablarle de su hija*." [I want to talk to you about your daughter] And she would make me call my mom and told her I was going to fail her class cuz I talk too much and have a bad attitude. She called my mom for 60 days. My mom was like "*Ay que hicistes Tania*?" [what did you do now, Tania] cause like every single day they used to call my mom from the principal's office at school.

The teasing and harassment was also conducted by the students in school. The

different ethnic groups of students would fight each other. Ray explained that:

> There were always race fights, White and Black fighting each other, Mexican and White fighting, but I never saw two Black people fighting. There was some little beef with us and the Blacks, but we like had each other's back. You see, we didn't want any problems because we lived near Rutt Town, which is on the outskirts of my neighborhood.

Societal stereotypes about Mexican Americans or students in a special education

program are seen as intellectually inferior (Kozleski, 2005), which is similar to the deficit

syndrome (Gay, 2000; 2010; Valencia, 1997). This is evident in the limits imposed to

educational access to on grade level curriculum and the lack of opportunity to learn

(Marzano, 2003). The deficit syndrome is blaming school failure on what students of

color lack, such as good self-esteem, motivation, engagement, prior knowledge, literacy

or mathematical fluency, parental involvement, leaning disability, or affluent

background, among other excuses (Gay, 2010; Valencia, 1997).

In one particular English class, Ray was asked to read aloud but refused. Ray

explained:

> It made me feel embarrassed and she gave me a note to send to the teacher. And the next day, I was longer in his class, but I was moved to another class with a

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cool, sexy Mexican teacher. I wanted to be a better reader and speller so, I have a better chance to learn something. The classes helped a little bit with the work but not with my reading problem.

Although he was moved to another class, according to his ARD, the reading interventions did not assist him in improving his reading fluency and comprehension. Thus, if the ARD committee had data to prove that the reading program was not helping him, why did they not try another type of intervention? The assumption was that the reading program was not the problem; Ray was a problem because he could not learn how to read.

Another important finding was the negative effects of grade retention. Research has indicated that "ninth grade is a make-or-break year for increasing graduation rates, schools with high ninth-grade retention rates face many challenges in improving their graduation rates" (West, 2009, p. 3). Data illustrate that students' freshman year is the last grade level along the K-12 educational system where a substantial number of students are retained before completely disengaging from school (West, 2009). To further understand ninth-grade retention and how school characteristics influence rates of retention, this study utilized student voices to have a clearer understanding of the symptoms that lead to their dropout.

Research data revealed that high retention rates in schools characteristically had a large number of low socially economic students based on the percent of students eligible for free and reduced lunch, large number of student enrollment and student-to-teacher ratio, and significantly a higher percentage of students of color enrolled compared to White students (Balfanz & Legters 2004; West, 2009) Blaming the students was

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demonstrated in various aspects of this study. For example, all of the students were denied credit due to failing grades and/or excessive absences, yet these concerns were not addressed in their IEPs. This is a case of failure to act appropriately and refuse to take action when there is documented evidence that there is a need to be addressed (O'Neill et al., 1997). The dismissive scenarios are perceived to be one of deficit thinking.

Finding 7: Negative Learning Environment

In a negative learning environment, Mexican American students who receive special education services for being labeled as learner disabled learn less perpetuating the achievement gaps and student dropouts.

Before students can begin to learn, they must feel safe and have a positive learning environment. Researchers speculate that cultural mismatch leads to school failure for students of color, predominantly from low-income backgrounds (Gay, 2000, 2010). Teachers must get to know their students and state the expectations clearly on succinctly. The underlining premise is simply stated, "In order to teach you, I must know you" (Delpit, 1995, p. 183). In doing so, educators use cultural references aligned to their students by adapting disciplinary strategies in a positive manner to avoid an escalation of misbehavior or referrals (Delpit, 1995).

Thus, classroom management is vital to the behavioral outcome of students of color to reduce disciplinary concerns (Karsh, Repp, Dahlquist, & Munk, 1995). For example, respect was a cultural aspect that these students felt was important. Comments such as, "My mom has always taught me to respect elders," and "I would respect my

teachers" is a powerful norm that builds and nurtures relationships. Ray respected and valued his administer, Mrs. Newsome, because

> She looked at me, she told me I wasn't the same as the other students. She would tell me that I was more responsible for my actions and stuff. I wasn't afraid to say that it was me doing all those bad things. And she respected me for that and I respected her for being an administrator. (He then giggled). I didn't want to get in trouble.

However, the delicate balance of respect can easily tip over. For instance, if Mexican American students feel they might get embarrassed, they struggle with the decision to save face or disrespect the teacher. The Preacher talked about how if he was asked to read aloud, he typically refused or disrespected the teacher to avoid reading. He explained, "Before, I would say something disrespectful to the teachers, so I wouldn't have to read." However, at Unique High School, the instructional resources were at the appropriate reading level based on my observations of the books. Johnny voiced his concern of lack of disrespect to his teacher, which tipped the delicate balance of respect when he expressed, "I'm not going to respect you cause you don't respect me or anyone!" To create a positive learning environment, educators must respect and build upon the cultural strengths that students from diverse groups bring to school (Gay, 2000, 2010; Banks, 2004).

Thus, in an inadequately managed classroom, students learn less than they should because the teacher struggles with discipline. On the other hand, a well-managed classroom creates an environment in which academic success flourishes (Marzano, 2003). Classroom management is seen as a major determiner of classroom behavior and learning.

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Finding 8: Discipline

Culturally mismatched middle-class social norms blind educators from developing an individualized behavior plan to address social, emotional, or behavioral needs.

Thus, without good classroom management, discipline problems will arise. Educators' biases and cultural mismatch is due to the subconscious absorption of the beliefs Eurocentric education transmitted to students of color. This is truly damaging and detrimental to the social and academic development for Mexican American students labeled as learner disabled (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Pang, 2005; Sleeter, 2001). It is damaging because culturally mismatched classroom management strategies and routine exposure to non-intellectually stimulating learning experiences perpetuate disciplinary referrals (Good & Brophy, 2003; Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998).

Thus, disciplinary referrals that lead to school suspension matter because it is an indicator for students dropping out of school and out of school suspension increases the likelihood of future incarcerations (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). The unequal treatment is evident among students of color and students receiving special education because national data of 7000 school districts revealed that more than 13% of students with disabilities were suspended, which is approximately twice the rate of non-disabled students (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Research indicated that effective classroom management can reduce disciplinary issues, grade repetition, involvement in the juvenile justice system, dropouts and increase student achievement because classroom disruptions increase or decrease with the teacher's skill in providing engaging instruction and

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managing the classroom (Good & Brophy, 2003; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Marzano 2003).

In this study, the following students received disciplinary referrals from the most frequent to least: Tania, Johnny, Keyla, the Preacher, and Ray. Thus, Tania had received the most disciplinary referrals and Ray the least. The most common infraction in the referral was Level I-Minor and Level II-Serious. Table 4.2 illustrates the types of offenses teachers and or administrators believed that the participants committed during their last school year. Offenses are in order from most frequently identified infractions.

Table 4.2. Disciplinary Offenses Reported During the Last Year of Schooling

	Tania	Johnny	Keyla	The Preacher	Ray
Level I Minor Offense	✓	✓	✓		✓
Classroom/Campus/Bus Misbehavior	✓	✓	✓		✓
Disrespectful/Impolite	✓	✓	✓		
Inappropriate Verbal/Physical Conduct	✓	✓	✓		
Excessive Absences/Tardiness			✓		
Leaving Class/Campus/School Activity Without Permission	✓		✓		
Level II Serious Offense					
Insubordination	✓			✓	✓
Disrespect/Profanity/Vulgar Language/Gestures Towards School Employee	✓				
Fighting		✓		✓	
Participating in Gang-Related Activities		✓		✓	
Level III Disciplinary Alternative Ed Program					
Selling/Giving/Delivering (less than 2 oz)/Possessing/Using Drugs or other		✓	✓		
Level IV Expellable Offenses					
Aggravated assault against someone other than a school district employee/ Volunteer		✓			
Criminal mischief		✓		✓	
Total Referrals	17	6	5	3	2

Perhaps some of the disciplinary problems exhibited by the students in the study may be their resistance to the type of social, personal, and academic mistreatment by their teachers or school administration.

Finding 9: Reading Difficulties

Failure to address the off-grade level illiteracy skills of Mexican American students who are labeled as learner disabled initiates student misbehavior, learner helplessness, and disregards low quality of teaching.

Research has indicated that 30% of eight graders do not read at proficiency level; more disheartening, approximately 50% of 9th graders in high poverty schools do not read at proficiency level, which mainly serve students of color (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). An overwhelming amount of evidence indicates that high quality instruction helps struggling readers succeed in all content areas experiencing success (Cortiella, 2011; Fry, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; U.S. Department of Education , 2007). Although Monroe (1932) encouraged that analyzing specific types of reading errors children made on the tests was imperative to instruction and student learning, which is a mandate in Response to Intervention (RtI), their voice and educational records indicated the failure of the school system to address off-grade level literacy skills. The Preacher disclosed his:

> I think it was in 4th grade because I would have problems reading. They would pull me out of class to a small room where the teacher would help me with my work. I feel frustrated cause I can't read fast and nervous cause I might not know the words. Before I would say something disrespectful to the teachers so I wouldn't have to read, but most of the time the teachers would read everything to the class.

Keyla also conquered, " I guess I would just get tired of reading. Sometimes I read well but other times I don't. I have trouble understanding what I read." Johnny's reading ability could be the bridge with coral reading, peer reading, or oral administration as he explained:

I was slow to understand. I had to read it 2-3 times before I could understand what I had to do. I would do better when the teacher would read it. If she read the story or assignment, I could answer everything correct. That made me feel good, but if I had to read it by myself I felt like a slow learner.

Ray also struggled with reading and would try to hide behind students or his book to avoid being called on by the teacher to read aloud. He stated, "I had trouble reading and spelling. I would feel uncomfortable reading in class because I was not a strong reader and I thought people would make fun of me." Therefore, if not provided with the literacy skills or accommodations to succeed, struggling readers act up in class to avoid embarrassment.

Finding 10: Lack of Cultural Congruent Instruction

Schools that promote culturally responsive teaching match their strategies to the Mexican American learning styles within the zone of proximal development to ensure academic success.

Cultural congruent instruction can be transmitted when teachers show an interest and call on their students' particular linguistic skills or cultural knowledge (Gay, 2000, 2002, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Cummins (1986) reiterated that students from "dominated societal groups are 'empowered' or 'disabled' as a direct result of their interactions with educators in the schools" (p. 21). Thus, educators must keep in mind that there is still diversity within cultural congruent instruction. For instance, interactional styles that are academically beneficial with students from the same ethnic group may not be appropriate simply because of the dominant group differences found within the same ethnic group (Cummins, 1986; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981).

Culturally congruent instruction for Mexican American students labeled as learner disabled is scaffolding instruction, using a constructivist approach with cultural and linguistic context (Dewey, 1916; Gay, 2010, Ladson-Billings, 1995). For example, a science teacher used scaffolding and a constructivist approach to teaching by investigating learning "about life, the plants, cells, how to look at things that were microscopic and learn how they work." This teacher also provided cooperative learning opportunities and positive learning outcomes. Johnny explained, "That was my favorite part of class when we would work in groups looking, exploring, and cutting things....It was so cool. I thought that maybe I could be a science teacher or something." It is evident that scaffolding was provided to some of the participants in the study, but only in a few classes. The majority of the classes these students attended were "boring" and "handout" driven with little direction or scaffolding.

Differentiated instruction. The purpose of differentiating instruction is to capitalize on each student's strengths by zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky, zone of proximal development is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). If the assignment is too easy, students will be bored; if it is too difficult, students will be frustrated. For instance Johnny explained:

> It's hard for me to say what they were feeling or thinking, but I think that they have a responsibility to teacher, *poreso le estan pagando* [that's why they are getting paid]. But not all teachers are the same; some are good and some are bad. What's worse is that I remember saying I don't understand and it was like *se*

offenian [they would get offended]. One teacher would say, *nimodo* [too bad], so, I wouldn't do it. I know that other people feel the same way about school.

After teachers have established student learning goals, teachers offer various ways of achieving those goals (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998; Tomlinson, 1999, 2003). When teachers differentiate instruction, they recognize students' different background knowledge, language, interests, learning styles, and teach accordingly (Tomlinson, 1999, 2003). This was evident in Johnny's science class:

> My science teacher would try to explain in a different way than before....He would give us tests to see what we knew or need to know to get better prepared on the real test. He would give different tests to students depending on what they knew. He would give me an easier test cuz I knew everything on it, and I would pass. He said that I needed a little at a time but was still going to have to learn everything. I felt like he knew how I learned cuz it was hard for me to remember a whole bunch of stuff. Sometimes he would ask me questions, and I would answer; and he would give me a passing grade instead of doing the regular work. He would encourage me to try to remember facts, asking me what is this? What is that in class. I was a part of the class and it felt good.

Other instances of differentiated instruction are refereeing to an AP teacher:

> I guess I aced it cause he would help me out by making the test shorter. He would...it was all multiple choice and he would remove one answer choice, or he would read it to me like all one-to-one.

When teachers differentiate instruction that is culturally relevant, students will be successful in their learning (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Tomlinson, 1999, 2003). As the Preacher reiterated about the differentiated instruction at Unique High School:

> Here they have workbooks that make it easier for me to read and understand the work. You go at your own pace and get help when you need it. It also helps that our classes are small; we have about 5 to 7 students per class.

Cooperative learning. According to Mehan (1997), teacher-centered classrooms prevalently show that most of the talking is done by the teacher, almost two times that of

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the students. Actually in more than 50% of the exchanges teachers had with the students, the students did not say one word (Mehan, 1997). Teachers in this scenario impede the student's ability to engage in more complex instruction. Johnny attained more information when "He [biology teacher] would pair me up with students who could help me."

Learning is a socially constituted interactive process that happens in the interaction between human beings, which is vital to a learning environment (Bruner, 1996; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981; Gay, 2010). Johnny expressed how cooperative learning was a strategy that helped him feel more confident when he stated, "That was my favorite part of class when we would work in groups looking, exploring, and cutting things." Ray explained why cooperative learning was utilized: "All I know is that we were always in groups cause he believed that that's the best way to learn. And I liked that about that class cause I could easily blend in like…like there was nothing wrong with me."

Finding 11: Educational Artifacts

Individual Education Plans (IEPs), revealed lack of caring for students, differentiated instruction, and high expectations.

Based on the student records reviewed, it is evident that the local education agencies entrusted to provide an appropriate education grounded on current and reliable student data did not utilize comprehensive student records and, therefore, were ill-equipped to provide a data-driven individualized instruction. In each student case reviewed, the in depth Annual Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) documents

were incomplete. Further, these educational agencies did not possess copies of the students' latest Full Individual Evaluation or documentation of current curriculum-based measurements. Such deficiency of baseline data creates gaps of information that preclude the agencies from providing prescriptive data-driven interventions and individualized instructional strategies. In addition, the lack of historical or current data regarding language, transition, and behavioral needs thwarts the schools from providing an all-embracing program, unique to the specific needs of the individuals. In order to provide a comprehensive and truly individualized educational program, schools must meaningfully engage in a thorough investigation of undivided student records. Without this piece in place, students with disabilities are left on their own to sink or swim.

Finding 12: Outside Social Factors

Outside factors influence school cultures in ways that are not necessarily overt.

As we place the student's reasoning for dropping out into the context of social networks in schools and changing socioeconomic situations, it gives you a way to better understand the drop out phenomenon (Mehan, 1997). Taking into context the dropout phenomenon in this manner is of help because it shifts the attention away from the presumed deficiencies of each individual student and demonstrates that students' reasoning is not erroneous but instead reflects an analysis of the existing and evident institutional and socioeconomic circumstances. Students know these outside social factors exist and are aware of the impact they have on their lives, but it is an accepted way of life, a way that they do not believe that they can easily overcome.

Family structures. Students are surrounded by a social environment of linguistic and social patterns of family and community (Knapp & Woolverton, 2004). There are positive and negative family patterns within each participant that influenced their progress through school. Mexican American parents support their children's school success in different ways; Mexican American families deeply value education, except they usually perceive their responsibility in schooling as ensuring their children's attendance and instilling respect for the teacher (Hidalgo, Siu, & Epstein, 2004). For example, Keyla's mom would consistently remind Keyla that her attendance was important for her success. Keyla recalled:

> I would tell her, "I don't want to go to school anymore." She would be like, "you need to go to school; you need to go to school." She knew for a fact that, she knew for a fact that I wasn't going to class. I guess that's why she would tell me a lot.

> Johnny professed that his mother tried to promote positive school behavior by

giving him *consejos*, advice. Johnny explained, "Well, good. My mom really tries hard. She is a good mom and I guess it's hard with all of us getting into trouble." Tanya was getting into trouble at school and her mom was receiving daily phone calls about her misbehavior. As an alternative Tania told her mom:

> Get me into night school, whatever, but *ya* I want to go to school, and then *ya* I came right here. *Y ya* I wasn't gonna come *ya,* and my mom said, "if you drop out from the job corp, you're not gonna go to another school, you're gonna be working." Thus, Tanya's mom used fear of the unknown to try to motivate her daughter to complete her education or receive her GED.

On the other hand, there also exist examples of negative family structures that impede the support or limit motivation of some students interviewed. Research indicated that family context, such as familial stress, quarreling, divorce, and parents' attitudes toward

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schooling are also significant predictors of high school dropout (Alexander et al., 1997).

The family dynamics and social relationships that are abusive in nature are evident in

Ray's case. Ray explained:

> The time I was doing bad was because there were problems at the house…
> because I hated my dad for a while for leaving me. But, later I knew he had no
> choice, he had to do it because he was a truck driver and couldn't travel with us,
> me and my brother. I dropped out because I wanted to come back to Texas. I got
> in trouble with my mom. She just kept on saying: "You're just like your father,
> you're just like your father, you ain't ever going to change." The only reason I
> went over there was because my dad went to jail. I wish I was in a better
> household than what it is. When it comes to my family, my opinion doesn't mean
> anything. Since I am the youngest one in the family, I guess. I really think that
> they are jealous that I'm the only one that graduated from high school.

He used his negative perception of home to motivate him to finish school.

> My mom has the *sangre pesada* and starts to fight with my dad. My dad no
> longer lives with us cause they were always fighting and she took it too far one
> night. They were drinking at home then started to fight and my mom pulled out a
> knife on my dad. He tried to calm her down but she wouldn't listen; police were
> called y *toda onda* and they ended up taking my dad to jail because he had
> cocaine. She was just laughing yelling, '*ves caborn, ves, no chinges conmigo*'
> stuff like that. I was so angry at her! Later, she told me I was the man of the
> family so I knew I had to finish school so I can make something of myself. I
> don't blame her, she's my mom, and I love her.

> The Preacher on the other hand was involved in gangs since early in his schooling

(8th grade). For him the gang life was normal, just the way it was.

> It would help me feel good, powerful like they say. That got me into high school,
> got into gangs, and doing bad stuff. In 11th grade and uh I was getting more
> serious *porque alli es cuando estava agarando mas precion de mi familia*
> (because there is when I was getting more pressure from my family), of the M, La
> Mafia. We would fight other gangs, but that was part of life. And my family is
> also part of La M. My mom's brother and uncles are all members of La M, so it's
> part of my life.

Therefore for the Preacher, his family's constructs normalized gang life and organized

criminal activity.

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For example, Tanya came to the realization early that she had to graduate from high school or get a GED. Her siblings had all dropped out: "my oldest sister she dropped out in 8th grade. My other sister, she's 25, she dropped out in 9th grade, and my brother, he dropped out in 11th grade. And it's sad because no one was going to give them work because they are not from here. And it's true." Tanya used this to push herself into finishing "because I promised my mom I was going to graduate from school because none of my brothers (siblings) graduated."

Keyla had her baby when she was 17: "after that I guess my whole life changed." She would skip school with her friends at her and her boyfriend's place. "I think that the people I started hanging out with made me hit rock bottom because they didn't like school, so we would go (skip)." Keyla used her life experiences and stated, "I know for a fact that I don't want my daughter to drop out. I am going to do everything in my power to convince her. I am also going to take her to school every day to make sure she goes." In all, the participants interviewed were from single parent households due to incarceration for possession of illegal aliens smuggling, illegal substances, and illicit money collection. These households had apparent negative outside social factors due to their family structures.

Peer pressure. According to Mehan (1997), "these students opted out of academic pursuits and into oppositional pursuits, which meant they spent more time resisting authority and being confrontational and put much less time and effort in their school work" (p. 18) because of the valued peer acceptance. The students interviewed again knew the influences impacted their behavior and continued to function in that same

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manner. Their position on changing was hard due to those same pressures keeping them from moving forward, almost as if success was deemed failure by their peers.

According to Keyla,

> The people I started hanging out with were not good for me. They were my friends that used to live down the road. They started skipping school. It was my choice, you know. But my boyfriend and mom would be like, "don't be like that." But I started hanging out with them more and more, and I started skipping class more and more. My boyfriend would be like, "what is the point of you going to school if you are not going to class." But me and my boyfriend, well my ex, would fight a lot about that. After a while he just stopped telling me anything.

The Preacher used his job at church to talk to youths, "to talk to them about their problems or to explain how life is, the bad life, the right way you know and that is what I enjoy." He reflected on his life and how gangs pressured him to doing bad things. As a freshman, he was approached because they told him: "You are big, we could use you. We got your back, we're *camaradas* and all the things they tell you so you can feel they are your friends. I was intimidated, so I said 'yes.'" As he continued through school, "It was getting too hot for me because I was getting involved in bigger stuff and with two gangs….I said me gonna get out, not that I am calling myself a coward, cause I'm not dumb to be in something more dangerous."

Tanya had negative peer pressure starting in 9th grade "because of my friends I used to hang out with….like I started acting all "*chifflada*" and everything….They would just make me referrals or call my mom because I wasn't paying attention and I was just with my friend always talking and everything…cause every single day they used to call my mom from the principal's office."

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The students throughout the interviews responded that they repeatedly looked for a way out, the outside social factors, such as the family structures and the ever-present peer pressure, were the causes that pushed each into dropping out. Only through self-motivation and at times reaching exhaustion in bad situations that they found refuge in new programs such as Job Corps and Unique High Schools. These programs let their shortcomings become strengths in finding new ways to reach their goals of graduating or completing their GEDs. It was evident that each had something to prove, not to the ones around them, but to each individually labeling themselves 'survivors.'

Conclusion

Research shows that there are multitudes of factors that affect and influence a person's decision to make that final disengagement of school and drop out. The dropout phenomenon of Mexican American youths in special education may seem overwhelming; however, there is much work to be done to change societal factors, practices, and beliefs to influence our nation's educational system. The change starts with educators and school districts challenging and speaking out against educational inequities. As reiterated by Villegas and Lucas (2002), "change the inequities that are imbedded throughout society…there is much we can and must do, and the time to start is now" (p. 201). Thus, Chapter V provides a summary of the research, implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The rationale of this research was to use a case study approach to examine the perceptions of Mexican American students, labeled as learner disabled receiving special education services, and their decision to drop out of school in South Texas. The researcher's specific areas of concern were: (a) what are the perceptions of Mexican American dropouts who participated in a special education program regarding their educational experience and (b) what were the factors that influenced these students' decisions to drop out of school?

The conceptual framework for this study was Geneva Gay's culturally responsive teaching (CRT), which encompasses understanding student differences related to race, ethnicity, culture, language, and social norms and using those cultural referents to enhance learning. Part of CRT is developing caring relationships that help engage, motivate, and select effective instructional tools, resources, and strategies. Research supported that positive caring teacher-student relationships builds positive academic results because teachers set and expect high academic performance within a structure-disciplined classroom (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Noddings, 2002; Pang, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999).

The review of literature examined the political, social, and historical context of curriculum theory through multicultural and special education lenses to understand the insightfulness and complexity of the former students' educational experiences. It is vital for us to understand the tribulations and milestones educational equity for students of

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color and special needs. They have tolerated and continue to endure because their mindset has been stagnant. Delpit (1995) reaffirmed, "we all interpret behaviors, information, and situations through our own cultural lenses; these lenses operate involuntarily, below the level of conscious awareness, making it seem that our own view is simply 'the way it is'" (p. 151).

Through the historical journey of multicultural education and special education, one can understand that the viewpoint of "the way it is" has gradually progressed toward a viewpoint of respecting and valuing cultural, racial, linguistic, social, and intellectual diversity. Therefore, for this study, the review of literature focused on the following: (a) literature searches and this study, (b) context of multicultural education, (c) context of special education program, (d) culturally responsive teaching, (e) school culture, and (f) dropout factors.

The context for this study was in South Texas near the United States-Mexico border. This city had a population of 241,935 inhabitants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Of the people residing in this South Texas border city, 95.6 % were Mexican American, with 92.4% being bilingual. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), close to 30% of the population lives below poverty, with the preponderance of the schools receiving Title I funds because they are designated as low-income schools (TEA, 2012).

The participants in the study were five Mexican American dropouts who received special education services at local education agencies in South Texas. They were receiving special education services because they were labeled or classified as learner disabled. Three were Mexican American males and two were Mexican American

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females, all between the ages of 18-20 years old. All of the participants met the criteria to receive free lunch when they were enrolled in school, came from a single-family house hold, and struggled with absenteeism and disciplinary issues.

The researcher used multiple sources of data, such as one-to-one interviews, focus-group interviews, observations, and educational artifacts, to increase the reliability and validity. The case studies followed a corroborating mode using interview protocols, semi-structured questions, audio-taped interviews with the students, and a member-checking process.

Using these data sources, the researcher provided thick and rich descriptions. The semi-structured interview questions allowed the former students to freely express their perceptions about their school experiences and the factors that they perceived attributed to their decision to drop out of school. The settings for the interviews were at mutually agreed locations, such as Unique High School, their homes, Love Job Corps, and Water County Jail.

A review of their educational artifacts included report cards, transcripts, student work; Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) process; and their Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Those educational artifacts generated data in the form of field notes. The former students provided the researcher with the educational artifacts during the interview process. All educational artifacts were returned to the students after the researcher took thorough notes. The researcher analyzed the following from their educational artifacts: (a) level of academic achievement and/or functional performance, (b) applicable accommodations/modifications, (c) summary of full individual evaluation,

(d) state-mandated assessments, (e) transition plan, (f) behavior, (g) linguistic needs to determine if the Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) Process and Committee were meeting the individualized needs of each participant in this study.

The foundation of qualitative data analysis is the uncovering of themes or categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The themes or categories emerge from the data of the phenomena being studied, in this case, the perceptions of Mexican American dropouts who received special education services. Through the constant-comparison method of categorizing data and coding process, three major themes emerged with several subthemes.

Thus, the researcher arrived at the point of *saturation* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The themes surfaced from patterns found in the participants' responses to the different questions in the interview. It is through their stories and the constant comparative data analysis that three main themes emerged: (a) unfavorable school culture, (b) lack of supportive environment, and (c) outside social factors. The subthemes that emerged from the data were as follows:

1. Unfavorable school culture: (a) low expectations, (b) non-caring for the student, (c) lack of relevant curriculum content and (d) social issues at school (Edmonds, 1979; Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000, 2010; Good & Brophy, 2003; Mehan, 1997; Peterson & Deal, 1998).

2. Lack of a supportive environment: (a) symptoms of the lack of a supportive environment, (b) non- positive learning environment and (c) culturally non-

congruent instruction (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2000, 2010; Mehan, 1997; Valencia, 1997).

3. Outside social factors: (a) family structures and (b) peer pressure (Gay, 2000, 2010; Mehan, 1997; Rumberger, 1987).

The five case studies provided the context as to why these Mexican American students labeled as learner disabled in special education left school, their perceptions about educational instruction, and the degree to which students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) represented the adequate accommodations, instructional goals, and research-based instructional strategies to aid in their educational success. Findings of the qualitative study affirmed the students' voices and what they believed to be factors influencing their decision to drop out of school.

The findings in this qualitative study are consistent with Gay's (2010) construct. Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) is a construct to combat the disproportionally low levels of achievement and disproportionally high levels of final disengagement from school for students of color, including students categorized as learner disabled. It promotes equity and excellence starting with the school culture, classroom environment, curriculum and instructional practices, which alters the Eurocentric viewpoint in blaming the victim. Gay (2010) explained, "Simply blaming students, their socioeconomic background, a lack of interest in and of motivation for learning, and poor parental participation in the educational process is not very helpful" (p. 17). In order to improve educational equality and excellence, we must investigate racial prejudices and stereotypes within the context of the school organization that filters into the classroom

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instruction. Mehan (1997) concurred that we must place in context existing institutional and socioeconomic circumstances that attribute to the dropout phenomenon and stop pointing the finger to the assumed deficits of individual students. Therefore, in the context of the study, the findings revealed school culture, lack of supportive environment, and outside social factors as the primary reason for dropping out of school.

All of the participants voiced their concern regarding school culture. Many researchers have studied the characteristic of effective and ineffective schools and indicated that the difference in the variation of student achievement is the school culture (Edmonds, 1979; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Lezotte, 2012; Marzano, 2003). The participants expressed that their school's culture was indifferent, dangerous, and deficit oriented. This is due to the fact, that educators do not view themselves as part of the problem; therefore, there is superficial willingness to reform and find solutions within the educational system itself (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2010; Valencia et al., 2001).

The school culture contributed to the low expectations of Mexican American students identified as learner disabled, lack of caring for students, and irrelevant curriculum content. Their stories are supported by research regarding low expectations. According to resent research, low expectations expose learner-disabled students to a watered-down curriculum and exemption from standardized assessments (Kochhar et al., 2000). Teachers who have been engrossed with students' 'learned helplessness' rather than their capabilities or funds of knowledge have created an even greater barrier for opportunities of excellence (Cook et al., 2007; Horne, 1985; Moll, 2005; Monaham et al., 1997). Implementing culturally responsive teaching involves caring for the students'

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academic and personal well-being, using strategies to bridge the gap between prior knowledge and experiences to the targeted knowledge and concepts (Gay, 2000, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The participants expressed that the curriculum content was irrelevant, boring, and disconnected. Research supported the participants' concerns regarding the relevance of the curriculum to their individual needs, cultures, customs, and beliefs (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2002, 2010; Howard, 2006; Pang, 2005).

In addition, revelations regarding a positive environment revealed that at the traditional high school setting personal caring for the student was superficial because teachers were not consistent in delivering relevant and differentiated instruction that matched their learning styles. In this particular study, teachers would rarely use group work or cooperative learning even though the participants preferred working cooperatively. Yet, research supports the efforts of teachers who purposely plan for an environment conducive to learning for all students ensuring differentiation by integrating diverse learning styles, cooperative learning, research-based strategies, multiple intelligences, and culturally responsive instructional strategies (Gay, 2002, 2010). However, the participants voiced their concerns regarding the lack of a supportive environment in their traditional school setting, which created symptoms of disengagement (Gay, 2000, 2010; Valencia et al., 2001).

In addition, outside social factors such as peer influences and family constructs were unveiled in the disconnectedness between the students and their school. Peer pressure, family, or other outside relationships can influence a student to drop out of school. The research supported the outside social factors because these participants were

student of color, English language learners, labeled as learner disabled, over-aged, from a single parent household, with a high mobility, and low economic status (Hammond et al., 2007; Hupfeld, 2007; Rumberger, 1987; Rumberger & Sun, 2008). Some of these outside social factors were tied to gang affiliation, drug use and distribution, pregnancy, and troublesome relationship. For example, both Johnny and the Preacher were members of a gang; Ray, Johnny, and the Preacher were recreational drug users and dealers; Keyla was a young single-mother; and all struggled with external relationships particularly with family and peers. Thus, researchers commonly blame discontinuity for the high percentage of school failure and dropouts among students of color and economically deprived families (Gay, 2000, 2010; Hammond et al., 2007; Hupfeld, 2007; Rumberger, 1987; Rumberger & Sun, 2008).

This research study also revealed that resiliency to overcome educational, instructional, and social obstacles were attributed to changing to a non-traditional school setting that was culturally responsive to their needs and commitment to hold onto their personal goal(s). The study revealed that these Mexican Americans who are labeled as demonstrating learning disabilities, reenrolled in non-traditional schools and met graduation requirements or are on track despite difficult circumstances. Resiliency researchers seek to understand what makes the difference for these students. Their findings point to the wisdom of dropout prevention strategies and culturally responsive teaching.

Building on this study, linking student outcomes with teacher caring for the students that encompasses having high expectations, relevant and effective curriculum

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content, culturally congruent instruction, and acknowledging the outside social factors that influence the school culture (Gay, 2010), dropout prevention strategies must, therefore, focus not only on programmatic approaches, but also on adults' relationships, beliefs, expectations, and willingness to listen (Hupfeld, 2007). In addition, positive early school transition is as crucial as students' "clean slate fills rapidly, students' performance patterns and habits of conduct are established, their ideas about self and school begin to solidify, and other persons form impressions of their competence and character" (Alexander et al., 1997, p. 98). All of the participants expressed the 180 degree turn during their transition into high school.

Recommendations Based on the Study

Educational stakeholders need to develop equitable polices, practices, and programs to prevent students from dropping out of school. Sleeter (2010) clearly stated:

> Progress[in] schooling is brought about mainly by individual thinkers involved in research, and at times by pressure groups who are able to use that research to advance the interests of the underdogs. Once alerted to problems, the American public tends to support their amelioration. The main beneficiaries of such progress are those whose needs are finally recognized and met. (p. 213)

I appeal that you recognize and meet those needs by recognizing hegemony policies, practices and procedures that oppress optimal opportunities to learn and progress. Thus, it first starts by analyzing data and complying with federal Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) mandates. However, it will not make a difference if educational reform does not begin with setting high expectations for all students, including Mexican American students labeled as learner disabled receiving special education services, and embracing culturally responsive teaching (CRT). Thus, through CRT, students' voices

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are heard and considered as part of the reform process of the district, school, and classroom. It was evident in this research study in what the participants had to share. Thus, implications for further study would be adequately training educators on implementing CRT. In addition, it is vital for administration to frequently and consistently monitor the implantation of CRT with the supports necessary for success.

As part of the CRT implementation, establishing an accountable Response to Intervention (RtI) committee at the high school level gives educators the tools and support needed to help all students succeed academically and socially (McCook, 2006). It is evident that school districts have a coding process in place concerning at-risk identification. However, some districts lack relevant intervention capabilities to adequately respond to students' needs.

Nevertheless, if an accountable and knowledgeable RtI committee is established on campuses, it limits the number of students who are at risk of failing their courses and reduces the chances of students dropping out (McCook, 2006). In addition, by responding to students' needs and providing research-based intervention, the disproportion of Mexican American students referred to the special education program would be reduced. Thus, RtI was established to avoid inappropriate diagnosis. Over the past 20 years, educational literature and research developed three major influences on the patterns of the disproportion in special education.

As discussed in the literature review and according to Gravois and Rosenfield (2006), the three major themes include: (a) Cultural variables that affect the initial referral process to special education, (b) Prejudicial or biased assessment used in

determining Special Education Eligibility, and (c) Quality of Instruction Strategies and Intervention in addressing the academic and behavioral needs prior to referring students to the special education program. Students can no longer be easily diagnosed as Learner Disabled.

According to the No Child Left Behind Act, it reiterated that the "lack of appropriate instruction in reading" cannot result in LD diagnosis. In addition, a student cannot meet LD eligibility requirements if the determinant factor is diversity in a student's racial, cultural, and language background (NCLB, 2001). This is of particular concern with the rapid growth of people of color and ELL populations in the United States and the overrepresentation of these students in special education. Even in schools with fewer students of color and English language learners (ELL), there is a disproportionate number identified for special education (Artiles et al., 2002; NCLB, 2001). The over identification of students of color in special education poses a challenge in appropriately referring, assessing, and providing services to students from non-English backgrounds.

In conclusion, change is never easy. We are moving forward in education getting everyone on board with believing and implementing systemic change for the betterment of all children. Education should be asking "what" and "how" can "I" contribute to the successful implementation of RtI. Successful implementation of response to intervention will decrease the number of students placed in special education and number of students dropping out of school as a result of poor instruction and teaching (McCook, 2006).

In addition, RtI will cause a paradigm-shift in educating all students into one united system of effective services for all students to curtail overrepresentation of students of color in special education from dropping out of school. The paradigm-shift begins with the understanding that teachers need to have the knowledge and awareness of how students learn and teach using the students' own learning style (Brunner, & Majewski, 1990) and culture (Gay, 2000, 2010). In addition, when teachers use different learning strategies, it empowers students; students are active participants in the teaching and learning process and are more successful in their academics (Hernandez, 2001). The momentum to this paradigm-shift is that with No Child Left Behind, federal funding is contingent on improving educational outcomes of special education. It is with great hope that this change occurs soon for the betterment of all students.

In addition to implementing a response to intervention (RtI) process and monitoring, high schools need to implement effective functional assessments for students in special education and positive behavior support also known as a behavioral intervention plan. Every defiant behavior can be considered as a student's resolution to a dilemma and a form of communication to an issue that may or may not be evident. For example, in this study, some of the students were disobedient, defiant, or drug users because they were seeing their behavior as a resolution to deal with "boring classes," "trouble reading, "and/or "teachers nagging." The participants did not attend class regularly because teachers "wouldn't give us help!" According to Johnny he did drugs because, "I did it not want to think of my situation, my problems. I guess a way to escape

reality." In addition, Ray wanted to feel accepted and thought "smoking weed on campus was stupid, but it made me more popular."

Thus, functional assessment (FA) and positive behavior support (PBS) are research-based strategies with culturally responsive pillars for understanding a student's behavior (Durand, 1990; Foster-Johnson & Dunlap, 1993). The strategies are used to figure out what is triggering the behavior and help students address their concerns or dilemmas in a more suitable way to fulfill those needs instead (Karsh et al., 1995). They mutually support the efforts to enable educators to look at the world through the student's eyes to understand the social, emotional, and physiological mindset (O'Neill et al., 1997).

Taxing behavior is not as haphazard and random as it seems. Educators can understand where and why the behavior exists by focusing on the student's environment (Durand, 1990; Foster-Johnson & Dunlap, 1993; O'Neill et al., 1997). By understanding the function, the positive behavior support plan is designed and implemented to help the student impede the challenging behavior of "irrelevant, ineffective, and inefficient" (O'Neill et al., 1997, p. 8). Both strategies along with culturally responsive teaching created an inclusive, caring learning environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, research confirmed that a dropout is not created through one unexpected act or any one at-risk individual characteristic (Rumberger & Sun, 2008). However, some people including some dropouts, perceive that the decision to drop out of school resides within the individual student. The reality is that many factors exist in the

long-term process of a student dropout (Alexander et al., 1997). The dropout phenomenon is a reflection of the failing school system's inability to address individual student needs based on their cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and intellectual differences (Gay, 2010; Good & Brophy, 2003; Hamovitch, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2001; Lezotte, 2012; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981; Nieto, 2009).

In addition, scholars (Gay, 2000; Brophy & Good, 1970; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999) have conveyed that the problem with student achievement lies mostly with the educational system instead of with students or other deficits. These researchers implied that public educators characteristically try to educate students of color from a deficit-thinking perspective. Therefore, educators who practice the deficit syndrome give students of color, especially students labeled as learner disabled receiving special education, less opportunities to progress though the educational system (Gay, 2002; Good & Brophy, 2003; Valencia, 1997). Thus, before a multicultural curriculum and culturally responsive teaching could be implemented successfully, teachers' negative perceptions and practices must be identified and eradicated. According to Gay (2002), "two of these critical obstacles to culturally responsive teaching are negative teacher attitudes and expectations for students of color, and confusing disability with diversity (p. 614). Despite the fact that most educators agree in principle that no child should be left behind, teachers have different expectations for students in special education (Gay, 2002). Thus, teachers' low expectations are leaving students in special education behind, perpetuating the achievement gap and dropout rates.

In order to ensure student success, teachers must be skilled in multicultural education. Multicultural education according to Banks (2004),

> is an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions so that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, language, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school. (p. 32)

It is evident that districts in this study need to change the structure of their educational institution to provide equal opportunity of academic success.

In order to improve their students' educational experience, educators must look within and change their biases. Educators should reflect on their own belief systems, particularly, in cases where diverse social environments and experiences differ from their students (Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The awareness of their biases will bring about conscious efforts when teaching and learning. Hence, through critical cultural consciousness, educators will be able to become familiar with different cultural elements in their students' performance and then apply these insights to improve or adjust their teaching practices (Gay, 2000, 2002). Teachers can also engage in critical reflections (Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The ongoing process of critical reflections will help them reflect about their actions and adjust them fittingly to the needs of students (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994). A starting point for teachers can be for them to critically reflect on class or student data. They may reflect on the following questions:

- Do I allow cultural and linguistic dissimilarities to form my perceptions about students' cognitive ability? (Gay, 2000, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Menchaca, 1997; Valencia, 1997)

- How do I differentiate instructional content, process, and product? (Moll, 2005; Tomlinson, 1999, 2003)

- In my differentiation, who are the students that match each learning style? (Brunner & Majewski, 1990; Gay, 2000, 2002, 2010; Marzano, 2003).

- What type of higher order thinking questions do I ask and to whom? (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Good & Brophy, 2003, Gall, 1984)

Through critical reflections, educators can move toward culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching promotes cultural differences, ethnic identities, high expectations, caring climate, and social change through culturally congruent instruction (Gay, 2000, 2002). There is substantial research that suggests that general education teachers feel deficient when students with special needs are included in a general curriculum (Cook et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Monaham et al., 1997). Therefore, it is imperative that educators receive training on culturally responsive teaching framework, response to interventions, formative assessments and positive behavior support system to bring about educational reform and student success.

Therefore, culturally responsive pedagogy emphasizes the use of teaching strategies that are compatible with different ethnicities (Gay, 2000, 2002, 2010). This is accomplished by matching teaching styles with learning styles. In order for students to be successful in school, teachers must construct lessons, activities, and assessment

conducive to their students' learning style. Research indicates that significantly higher achievement is seen in students if their learning style preference is accommodated in instruction (Brunner & Majewski, 1990; Gay, 2000, 2002, 2010).

Recommendations for Further Study

The recommendations for further study are grounded on the voices of Mexican American students who received special education services due to them being labeled as learner disabled. Their voices provided insight and recommendations that they perceive may prevent students from dropping out of school. The recommendations for future studies are as follows:

1. Further research is needed that aligns the former Mexican American students receiving special education services with their favorite teachers and examines attributes or characteristics as to why they are considered favorite teachers.

2. A study of the relationship between classroom climate and academic achievement has demonstrated to be crucial.

3. An ethnographic study needs to be made of Unique High School because 40% of the participants voiced foundational attributes of culturally responsive teaching.

4. A study is needed that examines Admission, Review, and Dismissal and Individual Education Plans of Mexican American students who have been retained and are truant.

5. A study that compares the responses of students and the responses of the faculty could be conducted utilizing a culturally responsive questionnaire and interviews.

6. A pilot study is needed of the implementation and monitoring of culturally responsive teaching and the effects on student achievement.

7. Explicitly examine the effect of House Bill 3 and STAAR on the exit status and school completion of Mexican American students with disabilities.

The numerous unfavorable consequences of dropping out of school are too significant to disregard. Unrelenting efforts regarding this phenomenon, particularly in relation to students with disabilities, are imperative.

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APPENDIX A

TEXAS PUBLIC EDUCATION DROPOUT RATES FOR GRADES 9-12,

BY ETHNICITY, ECONOMIC STATUS AND GENDER,

2005-2006 THROUGH 2009-2010

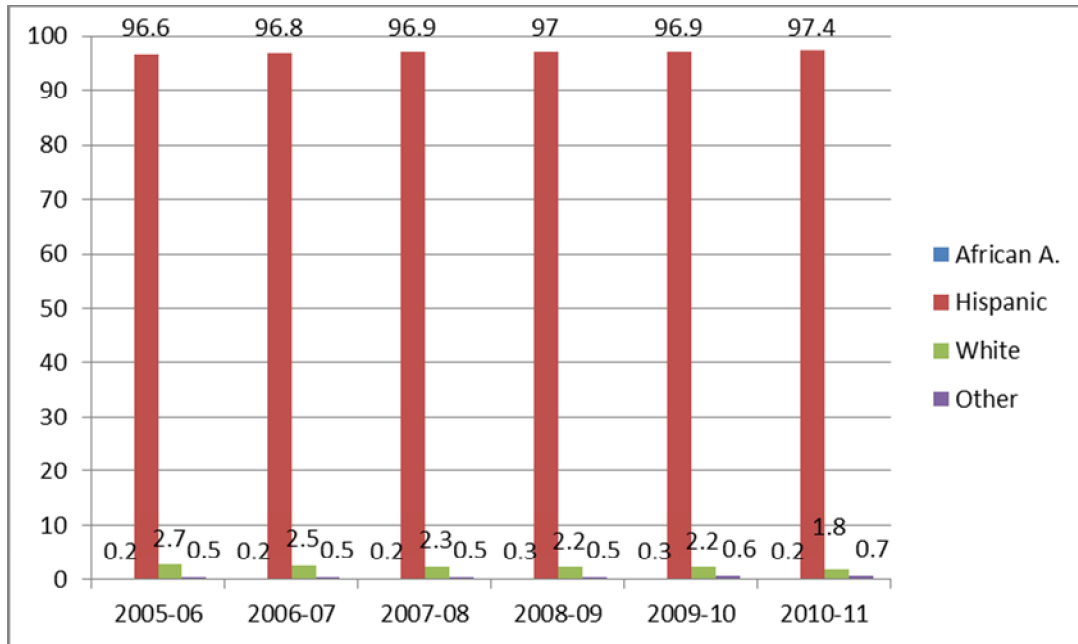| School year	% Enrollment	% Dropout pop	% Annual dropout rate
African American			
2005-06	15.3	22.3	5.4
2006-07	15.0	22.0	5.8
2007-08	14.9	22.9	5.0
2008-09	14.8	22.9	4.4
2009-2010	13.9	22.2	3.9
2010-2011			
Hispanic			
2005-06	40.6	56.6	5.2
2006-07	41.8	57.6	5.4
2007-08	42.9	57.8	4.4
2008-09	43.9	58.1	3.8
2009-2010	45.8	59.0	3.1
2010-2011			
White			
2005-06	40.5	19.7	1.8
2006-07	39.5	18.9	1.9
2007-08	38.4	17.9	1.5
2008-09	37.3	17.5	1.3
2009-2010	34.9	16.2	1.1
2010-2011			
Economically disadv.			
2005-06	51.8	54.8	0.5
2006-07	51.9	57.0	0.5
2007-08	51.6	53.0	0.3
2008-09	49.5	39.7	0.3
2009-2010	51.6	41.0	0.2
2010-2011			
Female			
2005-06	48.7	48.2	0.4
2006-07	48.6	46.3	0.4
2007-08	48.6	44.3	0.3
2008-09	48.6	45.2	0.3
2009-2010	48.7	44.0	0.2
2010-2011			
Male			
2005-06	51.3	51.8	0.4
2006-07	51.4	53.7	0.4
2007-08	51.4	55.7	0.3
2008-09	51.4	54.8	0.3
2009-2010	51.3	56.0	0.3
2010-2011			

APPENDIX B

TEXAS STUDENT ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION

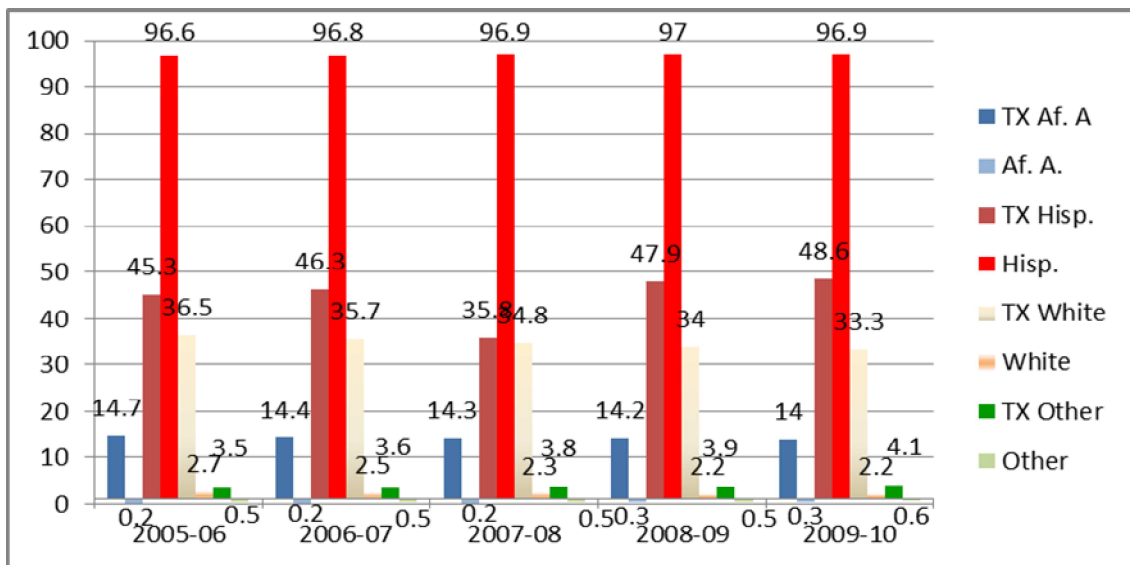| Texas Student Ethnic Distribution (Based on Texas Education Agency's Pocket Edition - 2010)				
Year	African A.	Hispanic	White	Other
2005-06	14.7	45.3	36.5	3.5
2006-07	14.4	46.3	35.7	3.6
2007-08	14.3	35.8	34.8	3.8
2008-09	14.2	47.9	34.0	3.9
2009-10	14.0	48.6	33.3	4.1
2010-11	12.9	50.3	31.2	5.6
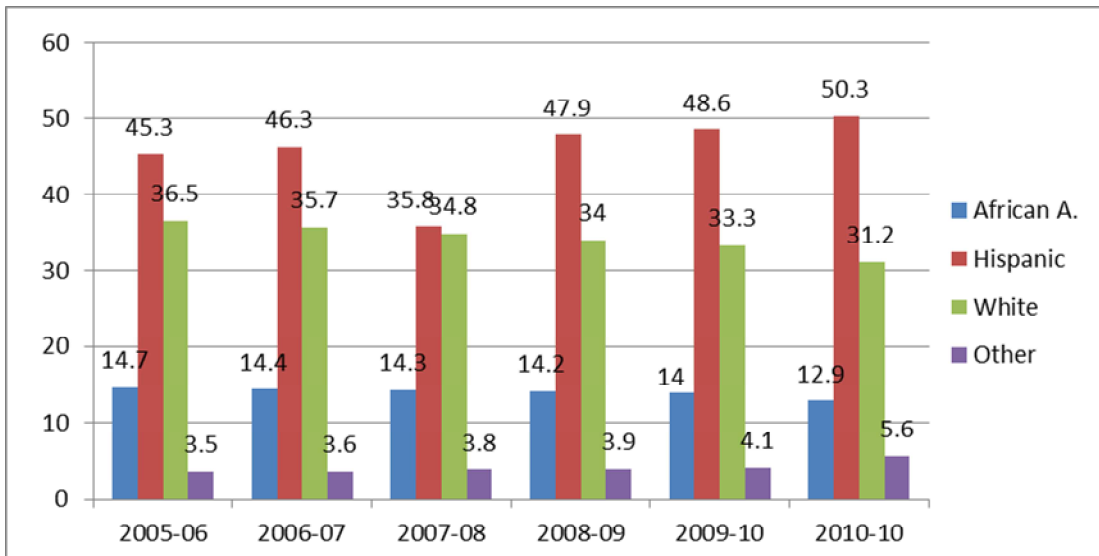
APPENDIX C

REGION ONE EDUCATION SERVICE CENTER

STUDENT ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION

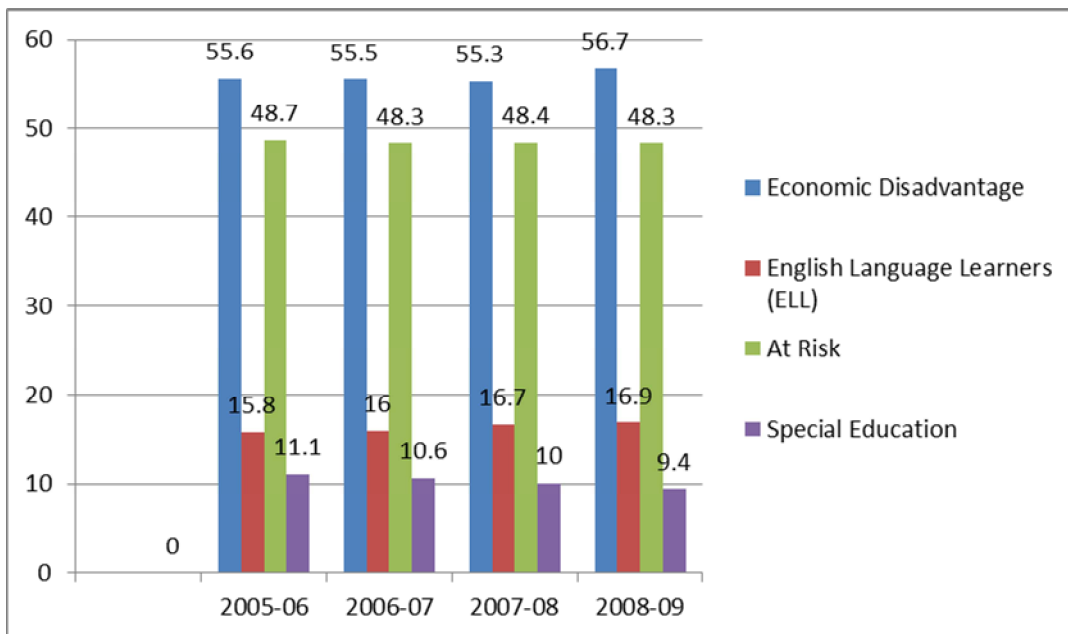| Region One ESC Student Ethnic Distribution (Based on Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System Reports) 2006 - 2011				
Year	African A.	Hispanic	White	Other
2005-06	0.2	96.6	2.7	0.5
2006-07	0.2	96.8	2.5	0.5
2007-08	0.2	96.9	2.3	0.5
2008-09	0.3	97	2.2	0.5
2009-10	0.3	96.9	2.2	0.6
2010-11	0.2	97.4	1.8	0.7

APPENDIX D

COMPARISON OF TEXAS AND REGION ONE EDUCATION

SERVICE CENTER STUDENT ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION

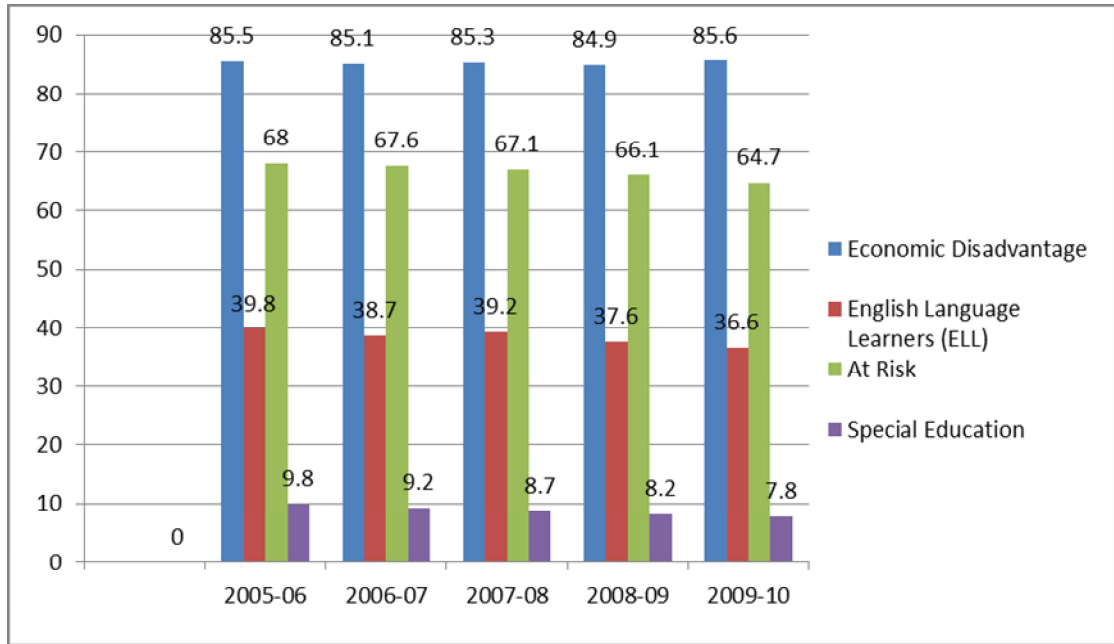| Comparison of Texas and Region One ESC Student Ethnic Distribution (Based on Texas Education Agency Academic Excellence Indicator System Reports) 2006 - 2011								
Years	TX Af. A	Af. A.	TX Hisp.	Hisp.	TX White	White	TX Other	Other
2005-06	14.7	0.2	45.3	96.6	36.5	2.7	3.5	0.5
2006-07	14.4	0.2	46.3	96.8	35.7	2.5	3.6	0.5
2007-08	14.3	0.2	35.8	96.9	34.8	2.3	3.8	0.5
2008-09	14.2	0.3	47.9	97	34.0	2.2	3.9	0.5
2009-10	14.0	0.3	48.6	96.9	33.3	2.2	4.1	0.6
2010-11	12.9	0.2	50.3	97.4	31.2	1.8	5.6	0.7

APPENDIX E

TEXAS STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS DISTRIBUTION

Texas Student Characteristics Distribution (Based on Texas Education AEIS Report 2006 - 2011)				
Year	Economic Disadvantage	English Language Learners (ELL)	At Risk	Special Education Program
2005-06	55.6	15.8	48.7	11.1
2006-07	55.5	16.0	48.3	10.6
2007-08	55.3	16.7	48.4	10.0
2008-09	56.7	16.9	48.3	9.4
2009-10	59.0	16.9	47.2	9.0
2010-11	59.2	16.9	46.3	8.8

APPENDIX F

REGION ONE EDUCATION SERVICE CENTER (ESC)

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS DISTRIBUTION

Region 1 ESC Student Characteristics Distribution (Based on Texas Education AEIS Report 2006 - 2011)				
Year	Economic Disadvantaged	English Language Learners (ELL)	At Risk	Special Education Program
2005-06	85.5	39.8	68.0	9.8
2006-07	85.1	38.7	67.6	9.2
2007-08	85.3	39.2	67.1	8.7
2008-09	84.9	37.6	66.1	8.2
2009-10	85.6	36.6	64.7	7.8
2010-11	85.2	36.1	63.4	7.6

APPENDIX G

COMPARISON OF TEXAS AND REGION ONE EDUCATION SERVICE

CENTER (ESC) STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS DISTRIBUTION

Region 1 ESC Student Characteristics Distribution (Based on Texas Education AEIS Report 2006 - 2011)								
Year	TX Eco Dis	ESC1 Eco Dis	TX English Language Learners	ESC1 English Language Learners	TX At Risk	ESC1 At Risk	TX SPED	ESC1 SPED
2005-06	55.6	85.5	15.8	39.8	48.7	68.0	11.1	9.8
2006-07	55.5	85.1	16.0	38.7	48.3	67.6	10.6	9.2
2007-08	55.3	85.3	16.7	39.2	48.4	67.1	10.0	8.7
2008-09	56.7	84.9	16.9	37.6	48.3	66.1	9.4	8.2
2009-10	59.0	85.6	16.9	36.6	47.2	64.7	9.0	7.8
2010-11	59.2	85.2	16.9	36.1	46.3	63.4	8.8	7.6
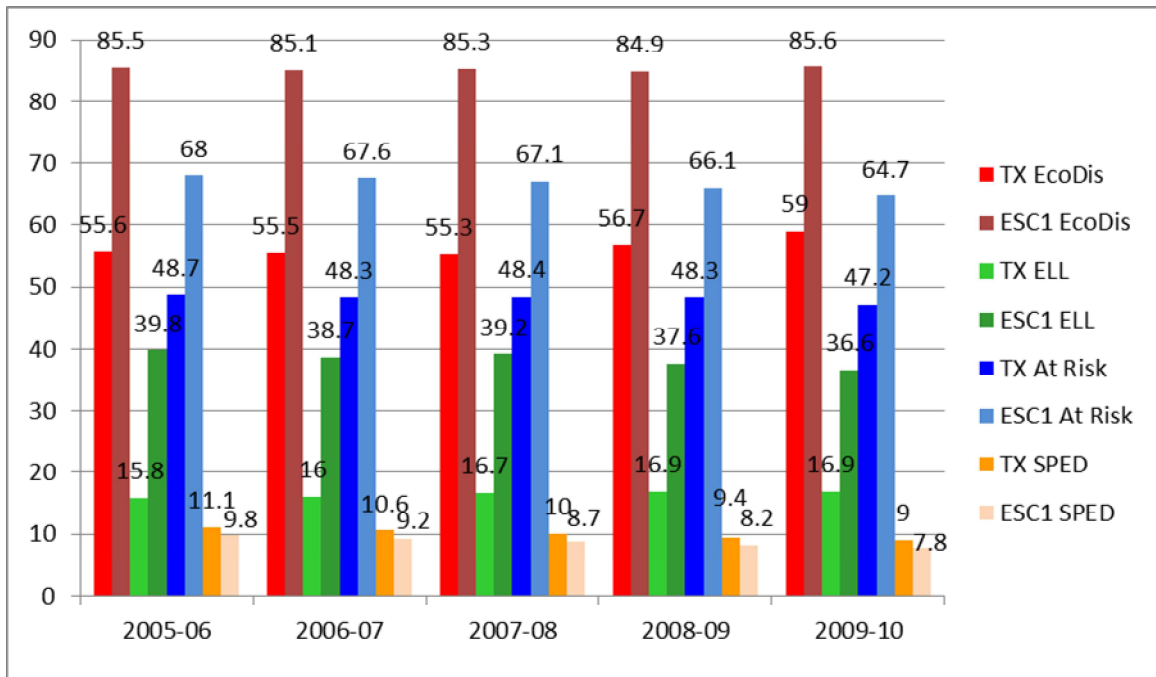
APPENDIX H

MAP OF GRADUATION RATES FOR THE STATE OF TEXAS FOR

THE CLASS OF 2010

Texas Education Agency 2011
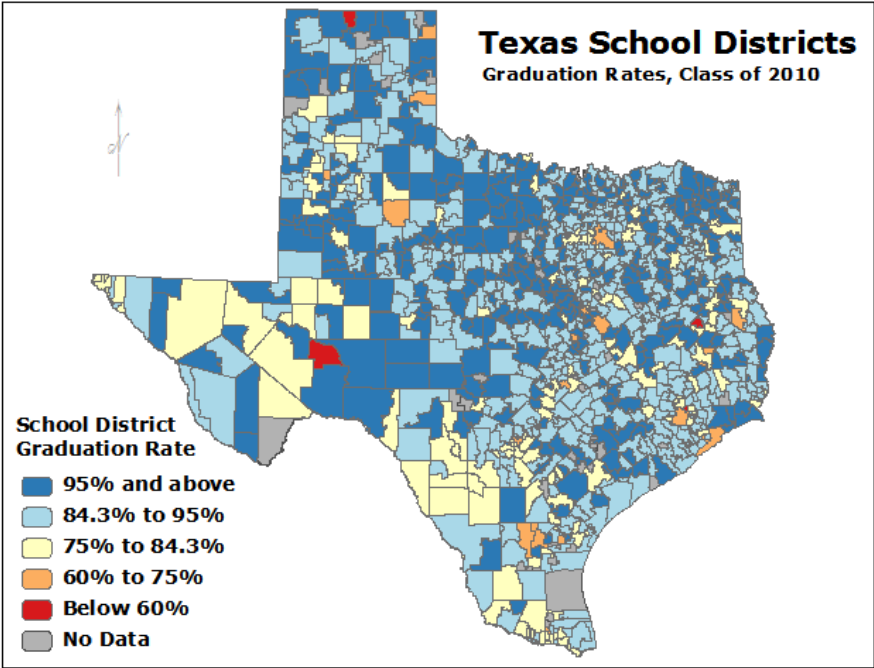
APPENDIX I

TEXAS A&M IRB PERMISSION AND ACCEPTED FORMS

Human Subjects Protection Program   Institutional Review Board

APPROVAL DATE: 09-Mar-2012

MEMORANDUM

TO: VILLAFRANCA, DARLENE MARIE
                   77843-4232

FROM: Office of Research Compliance
                   Institutional Review Board

SUBJECT: Request for Continuation

Protocol Number:	2011-0105
Title:	Stories of the Unheard: A Case Study of Five Mexican American Dropouts Labeled as Demonstrating Learning Disabilities
Review Category:	Expedited
Approval Period:	09-Mar-2012 **To** 27-Feb-2013

Approval determination was based on the following Code of Federal Regulations:

Eligible for Expedite Approval (45 CFR 46.110): Identification of the subjects or their responses (or the remaining procedures involving identification of subjects or their responses) will NOT reasonably place them at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the their financial standing, employability, insurability, reputation, or be stigmatizing, unless reasonable and appropriate protections will be implemented so that risks related to invasion of privacy and breach of confidentiality are no greater than minimal.

Criteria for Approval has been met (45 CFR 46.111) - The criteria for approval listed in 45 CFR 46.111 have been met (or if previously met, have not changed).
----
(5) Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected or will be collected solely for nonresearch purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).

(Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

----
(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

----
(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation or quality assurance methodologies.

(Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b) (3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Provisions:

Comments:

This research project has been approved. As principal investigator, you assume the following responsibilities

1. **Continuing Review:** The protocol must be renewed each year in order to continue with the research project. A Continuing Review along with required documents must be submitted 45 days before the end of the approval period. Failure to do so may result in processing delays and/or non-renewal.
2. **Completion Report:** Upon completion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a Completion Report must be submitted to the IRB Office.
3. **Adverse Events:** Adverse events must be reported to the IRB Office immediately.
4. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an Amendment to the IRB Office for review. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented.
5. **Informed Consent:** Information must be presented to enable persons to voluntarily decide whether or not to participate in the research project unless otherwise waived as noted above.

This electronic document provides notification of the review results by the Institutional Review Board.

<div align="center">**CONSENT FORM**</div>

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate in this study, a Consent Form with this information will be used to record your consent.

You have been asked to participate in a research study examining the perceptions of the educational experiences of students receiving special education who dropped out of high school. The purpose of this study is to find out:

1. What are the perceptions of Mexican American students who were labeled as demonstrating learning disabilities about their schooling experiences?
2. What were the factors that influenced the decision of Mexican American students who were labeled as demonstrating learning disabilities to drop out of school?

You were selected to be a possible participant because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about your educational experience regarding factors that may or may not have contributed to you not completing school.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to respond to 12 face-to-face semi-structured open-ended questions within 2 hour fame of time; a 2 hour focused group interview, provide any type of educational records such as their transcript, report card(s), Individual Education Plan(s), and/or student work, and member-check the transcript of the audio recorded responses for validity and reliability. This study will take approximately two hours for the interview and within seven days a second two hour meeting will be set up to review the transcripts. In addition, attend a 2 hour focused group interview with 4 other participants and member-check the transcript of the audio recorded responses for validity and reliability. I may need to meet with you for clarifications regarding your responses.

Your participation will be audio recorded with your permission.

What are the risks involved in this study?

The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life. However, if at any time I, principal investigator, notice emotional distress, I will ask whether or not you want to continue with the study and will stop the interview immediately. Also, you may stop participating in this research study at any time.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

You will be able to clarify the factor(s) that impact the decision to drop out of school. Your stories add to the body of knowledge regarding factors that you perceived to contribute to dropping out of school. In turn, educators learn from your stories and promote critical action to ensure equity for all students. Your story may help educators understand the phenomenon better and may help them take appropriate action for other students considering similar decisions to drop out of school.

Do I have to participate?

No, you do not have to participate. Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to continue participating in the study at any time and you may refuse to answer questions posed during the individual and focused group interviews. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University or Texas A&M International University being affected.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. This study is confidential and pseudonym (fake names) will be assigned. The researcher will have a journal with the pseudonym (fake names) matching the participants in a separate filing cabinet under lock and key.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only Darlene Villafranca and a PhD Candidate from Texas A&M University will have access to the recordings. Any recordings will be kept for 7 days and then erased.

Whom do I contact with questions about the research?
If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Darlene Marie Villafranca.

Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?
This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects' Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices.

Signature
Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:_____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name: <u>Darlene Marie Villafranca</u>

CONSENT PROTOCOL

A Consent Protocol outlining the consent process includes the following:

1. **Verbiage used by principal investigator is conversational, friendly, and straight forward in obtaining consent.** In addition, the principal investigator will have a telephone script for potential participants being contacted by phone, and an information sheet for potential participants being contacted by direct person-to person. Both the telephone script and information sheet will have a brief description of the research, activities in which participants will participate, the time commitment, and researcher's contact information. If potential participants agree to participate in the study, then an interview date, place, and time that are convenient to both the primary investigator and participant will be set.

2. **At what point in the process the consent form or information sheet will be distributed and the verbiage used in leading up to its presentation.** The information sheet will be distributed in the initial direct person-to person consent and the consent form will be read to potential participants in the initial telephone contact. All potential participants show their initial consent to participate in the study by willing setting up an interview. In addition, by voluntarily showing up to the interview(s), consent is shown. The primary investigator will explain the consent form and all participants will voluntarily sign the written consent form prior to participating in the study. All consent forms will be placed in an envelope in a filing cabinet under lock and key to maintain confidentiality of the participants.

3. **Amount of time allocated for the subject to review the consent documentation**. The participants will have two different occasions (initial contact and day of interview) to review the consent documentation. During the interview participants will be asked to sign the consent form. However, the primary investigator will reassure participants that participation in this study is completely voluntary and if they choose to leave at any point, they may without any consequences.

4. **The identification of other points within the protocol where consent will be reaffirmed and how this may be achieved. Depending on the length and nature of the study, the IRB may require consent to be formally reaffirmed. Lengthy studies involving children or the cognitive1y impaired are of particular concern.** Written consent will be affirmed during the face-to-face interview and within 7 days, verbal consent will be reaffirmed during the first member checking process, the face-to-face focus group interview, the second member checking process. In addition, the primary investigator will reassure participants that participation in this study is completely voluntary and if they choose to leave at any point, they may without any consequences.

APPENDIX J

WATER COUNTY JAIL VISIT-JOHNNY

Fred Trevino

Webb County Assistant Public Defender

1110 Washington Suite 102

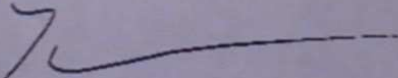Laredo , Texas 78041   4/4/2012

To Webb County Jail,

As per instructions from Captain Ponce Trevino, this letter is to inform the jail that I Fred Trevino am bringing a visitor to the Jail. Her name is Darlene Villafranca. She is going to conduct an interview with one of the prisoners. The prisoner's name is [REDACTED] DOB [REDACTED]. He is one of our clients. He has given permission to me and the Public Defender's Office to grant the interview.

Thank You for your cooperation,

Fred Trevino

APPENDIX K

LINGUISTIC NEEDS

ARD Document Review for Participants in the Study

AREA	DOCUMENTS NEEDED	INFORMATION WANTED FROM DOCUMENTS	FINDINGS STUDENT: Tania	FINDINGS STUDENT: The Preacher	FINDINGS STUDENT: Keyla	FINDINGS STUDENT: Johnny	FINDINGS STUDENT: Ray
Present Level of Academic Achievement and/or Functional Performance	Latest Annual ARD meeting	1. What are student's strengths and weaknesses? 2. Are student's weaknesses aligned with the learning goals? 3. Are the conditions under which the student learns best described for appropriate programming?	*Latest Annual ARD is missing; therefore, it is unknown what this student's academic strengths and weaknesses are.*	*Latest Annual ARD is missing; therefore, it is unknown what this student's academic strengths and weaknesses are.*	*Latest Annual ARD is missing; therefore, it is unknown what this student's academic strengths and weaknesses are.*	*Latest Annual ARD is missing; therefore, it is unknown what this student's academic strengths and weaknesses are.*	*Latest Annual ARD is missing; therefore, it is unknown what this student's academic strengths and weaknesses are.*
Applicable Accommodations/Modifications	Latest Annual ARD meeting	1. What are the applicable accommodations needed to support the learner? 2. What are the applicable modifications needed to support the learner?	*Latest Annual ARD is missing; therefore, it is unknown what this student's applicable accommodations/modifications might be, even though she struggled academically, repeating 1st and 9th grade.*	*Only accommodations and modifications page of the latest annual ARD are provided.*	*Only accommodations and modifications page of the latest annual ARD are provided.*	*Only accommodations and modifications page of the latest annual ARD are provided.*	*Only accommodations and modifications page of the latest annual ARD are provided.*
Summary of Full Individual Evaluation	Current Full Individual Evaluation	1. What is the student's disability? 2. In what areas does the student need assistance and what types of services are needed?	*Latest FIE is missing, including any form of functional behavior assessment to address consistent misbehavior.*	*Latest Full Individual Evaluation is missing including any form of functional behavior assessment to address bullying or*	*Latest Full Individual Evaluation is missing.*	*Latest Full Individual Evaluation is missing. No Psychological evaluation or functional behavior assessment is found, even*	*Latest Full Individual Evaluation is missing.*

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AREA	DOCUMENTS NEEDED	INFORMATION WANTED FROM DOCUMENTS	FINDINGS STUDENT: Tania	FINDINGS STUDENT: The Preacher	FINDINGS STUDENT: Keyla	FINDINGS STUDENT: Johnny	FINDINGS STUDENT: Ray
				fighting.		*though student is diagnosed as being bipolar.*	
State Mandated Assessment	Latest Annual ARD meeting	1. What test did the student take in the past? 2. Did the student pass the test? If not, why?	*Latest Annual which includes assessment information is missing.*	*Latest Annual which includes assessment information is missing.*	*Latest Annual which includes assessment information is missing.*	*Latest Annual which includes assessment information is missing.*	*Latest Annual which includes assessment information is missing.*
Transition Plan	Transition Plan Vocational Assessment	1. What is the student's transition plan?	*Transition plan is missing.*	*Transition plan is missing; however, student is taking transitional courses on self-sufficient living, employability skills, communication, and career training in health occupations.*	*Transition plan is missing.*	*Transition plan is missing; therefore, there is no documentation of his interest as an athletic boxer.*	*Transition plan is missing; therefore, there is no documentation of his interest in running, art, and writing lyrics.*
Behavior	ARD meeting Attendance Records	1. Does this student's behavior impede learning?	*Latest Annual ARD is missing. Attendance records not found. No documentation of a behavior intervention plan to address consistent misbehavior.*	*Latest Annual ARD which includes behavior information is missing. Attendance records not found.*	*Latest Annual ARD which includes behavior information is missing. This student has a history of excessive absences. No plan to address absenteeism. Attendance records not found.*	*Latest Annual ARD which includes behavior information to address depression, substance abuse, reported mischievous behavior, tardiness and absences. Attendance records not found.*	*Latest Annual ARD which includes behavior information is missing. Attendance records not found.*

AREA	DOCUMENTS NEEDED	INFORMATION WANTED FROM DOCUMENTS	FINDINGS STUDENT: Tania	FINDINGS STUDENT: The Preacher	FINDINGS STUDENT: Keyla	FINDINGS STUDENT: Johnny	FINDINGS STUDENT: Ray
Language Needs	Latest ARD meeting Telpas Scores Info from LPAC	1. Is this student an ELL? 2. If ELL, is the student receiving accommodations for language acquisition issues?	*Brief ARD dated 12/9/10 indicates committee met to discuss the criteria Daniela needs to meet to exit LEP status. That meeting does not document status findings, nor does it address student's language accommodations upon the review of the TELPAS scores.*	*Latest ARD or pertinent brief ARD information indicating linguistic needs is missing.*	*Latest ARD or pertinent brief ARD information indicating linguistic needs is missing.*	*Latest ARD or pertinent brief ARD information indicating linguistic needs is missing.*	*Latest ARD or pertinent brief ARD information indicating linguistic needs is missing.*
The receiving institution should ask for the latest Annual ARD, transition plan, and FIE in a good faith effort to best support this student's unique needs. The following summarizes the findings of the review of records for the participants in the study:			*The records are incomplete; therefore, inadequate for effective programming.*	*The records are incomplete; therefore, inadequate for effective programming.*	*The records are incomplete; therefore, inadequate for effective programming.*	*The records are incomplete; therefore, inadequate for effective programming.*	*The records are incomplete; therefore, inadequate for effective programming.*