Transitioning from Alternative to Traditional Public Schools: Understanding Latino Middle School Student Experiences

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For the Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership

by

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Dedications

“The Lord says, ‘I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.’” Psalm 32:8

This dissertation is dedicated

To our Lord, Jesus Christ - who placed me on this path and has guided me every step of the way,

To my husband – who has encouraged me and stood by my side through the most challenging moments of this journey,

To my children – who tiptoed and played quietly so that mom could work,

and

To my parents – who have encouraged me to reach all of my goals, and who have helped me every step of the way with their loving support.

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ABSTRACT

Transitioning from Alternative to Traditional Public Schools: Understanding Latino Middle School Student Experiences

By
Adrienne M. Peralta

As the population of Latino students increases across the United States and especially in California, a growing need to understand their academic experiences is developing. The Latino student population is the ethnic group with the highest number of high school drop outs. In fact, research has demonstrated that Latino students begin disengaging from school as early as fifth and sixth grade (Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1992). Research has also shown that high school students are entering alternative school settings for at-risk students in greater numbers (Hill, 2007). Given these alarming statistics, there is a need to learn more about the academic experiences that Latino students have. There is a wide body of research regarding Latino students, yet there is still a need to look at Latino middle school students who transition between a traditional school and an alternative school. Using social capital as a framework, this ethnographic study examined the experiences that Latino middle school students have as they transition from an alternative school to a traditional school. The findings from the data analysis revealed three themes: 1) influences of the family; 2) effects of peer and teacher connections; and 3) school structures and academic opportunities. The findings also demonstrate a need to continue further study in this area.
Chapter I

Introduction

The U.S. Latino population has increased over the past 10 years and a continued growth rate is predicted to persist over the next several decades, increasing the number of Latino students in our school systems (U.S Census, 2010). As of April 2010 the U.S Census reported approximately 50.5 million Latino or Hispanics living in the United States. While the U.S. Census uses the term Hispanic and Latino interchangeably, this study will use the term Latino to designate a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race, which is the same definition used in the U.S Census. Within the context of education, 20% of the children in elementary and high schools throughout the United States are of Latino origin. California is one of a few states with exceedingly high percentages of Latinos. California’s Latino population is approximately 37.6% or 14 million, of the total state population. According to the California Department of Education, nearly 52% of the students who were enrolled during state testing were of Latino origin.

As the population of Latino students continues to increase in California, academic patterns have surfaced. These patterns reveal that Latino students do not find success in their academic trajectory when compared to other ethnic groups. For example, in a Zero Dropouts for California (2007) report, 57% of California Latino students graduated and approximately 43% left high school without a diploma in 2004. Although there has been a decline in the Latino student dropout rate over time, the percentage of students dropping out of school or leaving without a diploma remains excessively high. There are emotional, social, and economic impacts for individuals who do not earn a diploma (U.S
Department of Education, 2007). Furthermore, individuals without a diploma also impact the nation’s social and economic environments, as nearly half of the prison population are dropouts, one-third of dropouts have full-time employment, half of the heads of households on welfare are dropouts, and dropouts are less likely to have adequate medical coverage making them dependent on the public system. The limited social capital that many of these students possess tends to influence their limited academic and social success. Consequently, it is important to understand the nature of social capital and its impact on Latino student’s experiences.

The path to not completing high school begins earlier in a students’ educational trajectory. Middle school is a transitional period for children (Adams, Kuhn, & Rhodes, 2006; Alspaugh, 1998; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Espinoza & Juvonen, 2011; Juvonen, 2007), and research has shown an association between transitions and a decline in self-esteem, involvement in activities, and grade point averages, (Cantin & Boivin, 2004). Baer (1999), points out that this stage of development is characterized by a confluence of change across the psychological, social, biological, and cognitive areas. In addition, junior high school structures seldom match up with these major changes that adolescents undergo. Alspaugh (1998) not only revealed a correlation between transitions from elementary school to middle school and achievement declines but also found that multiple transitions accounted for greater achievement declines. The transition period is particularly difficult for Latino students.

Akos and Galassi (2004) reported that Latino students showed steep declines in GPA the first year of middle school but had slight rebounds the subsequent years. Indeed, Espinoza and Juvonen’s (2011) study demonstrates that Latino students are more
susceptible to school climate, which in turn leads to the behaviors that they will adopt or manifest as they transition into and through middle school. In their study, school climate focused on student’s perception of belongingness, safety, and fair treatment. Brewster and Bowen (2004) found that teacher support significantly affected problem behavior and student perception of school meaningfulness. Further, their study demonstrated that an increase in perceived teacher support resulted in an increase in the level of school meaningfulness for Latino students. Taken together, these studies reveal that school climate is important for the success of Latino students and suggest school transitions affect Latino students.

Although we understand that transitions are challenging for students, the effects of transitions are magnified for minority students (Salazar, 1997 in Somers, Owens & Piliawsky, 2009). As the U.S. population of Latinos in U.S. schools increases, the need to examine the educational experiences and academic success of Latino students increases. Further, as the academic success rates decline for Latinos there is an increased need to look at all segments of this student population. Therefore, this ethnographic study will focus on Latino middle school students who have transitioned from an alternative school setting to the traditional school setting. More specifically, given that school transitions tend to affect Latino children more than other ethnic groups, this study focuses on the experiences of Latino students who transition from alternative school settings to traditional settings and Latino student academic experiences after the transition.
Chapter Organization

In preparing this study Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the focus of the study and how the study will be conducted. Chapter 1 introduces a brief explanation on the effects transitions have on middle school children. Following this section I explain how the Latino population continues to expand. A section will demonstrate that although many improvements have been made to the education of Latino student’s, statistics continue to show that many Latinos are still not finding success in school. This will lead to the research purpose, significance, and research questions. The final section of Chapter 1 will focus on the intended methods to be used to carry out the study, and the potential limitation and delimitations of the study.

Research Problem

The problem that this ethnographic case study addresses is the need to understand the effects that transitions have for middle school students who have attended an alternative setting and then return to a traditional setting.

While many students successfully negotiate the academic process, some students who navigate between two different school systems, the alternative school and the traditional school, struggle. Consequently, this study focuses on understanding how these transitional experiences that Latino students encounter affect them and how they begin to understand academic success after the transitions. Akos and Galassi (2004) noted that many researchers have suggested that transitions play an important role in the developmental trajectory of students. Furthermore, their research noted that race and gender influence perceptions and outcomes of school transitions. Most research literature focuses on transitions from traditional school settings to the alternative school setting.
Further, ethnographic studies based on transitions from the alternative school to the traditional school are difficult to come about. In additional, while there are numerous studies that focus on alternative schools, both qualitative and quantitative, the focus is primarily on high school students and their transition experiences to the alternative school. This study focuses on Latino middle school students that transition back from the alternative school to the traditional school— an area of study that seems relatively unmapped.

Given that alternative school settings are designed as a temporary arrangement for students who need to be redirected academically or socially, it is safe to conclude that a large percentage of the students enrolled in alternative settings return to their traditional schools. There is a large body of research that focuses on the high school students and the alternative school transitions, but very little in the area of how these transitions play out within the middle school context. In fact, research informs us that early adolescence is a period of enormous opportunity for intellectual and emotional growth (Jackson and Davis, 2000), therefore the middle school years are formative years, impactful. While research on Latino middle school students exists, what seems to be missing is a focus on Latino middle school students who transition from alternative school settings to the traditional school.

**Research Purpose and Significance**

The purpose of this study is to examine the academic experiences of Latino middle school students who transition from an alternative school setting to a traditional school setting and how these experiences shape their meaning of academic success. This area of study is important because alternative schools were designed to provide
temporary intervention that will result in successfully reconnecting the student to their educational trajectory within the traditional school context. Understanding how these transitions affect the students’ perception of academic success will aid us in developing support systems that help students navigate through these changes and allow them to be successful academically and socially. This study will fill a gap in the body of research already existing on Latino students and transitions. This study will explore a facet of transitions that seems to have been neglected.

Research Questions

Given the study’s research problem and purpose, this ethnographic case study seeks to answer the following questions: 1) What are the academic experiences of Latino middle school students who transition from alternative settings to traditional school settings? and 2) How do the experiences of transitioning from alternative settings to traditional school settings shape the meaning of academic success for Latino middle school students?

Theoretical Framework

In recent years, the theory of social capital has been used to understand educational attainment, social networks, and the socialization of minority youth (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). This study will use a social capital framework to understand the experiences that Latino middle school students encounter while transitioning from an alternative school setting to a traditional school. In order to better understand social capital, I have looked to the principles set forth by Pierre Bourdieu, Robert Putnam, James Coleman, and other researchers who have used social capital to explain social phenomenon.
Green and Preston (2001) argue that social capital is a flexible tool that can be used to explain a wide array of social problems including those found in education. Given the flexibility of social capital theory, it is appropriate to use this theory for this study. Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) put forth different interpretations yet underlying their interpretations is the premise that social capital is the understanding of social structures and the ability of a person or entity to move within those structures. Putnam (2000) explains that the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value and that social contacts affect the productivity of individuals or groups. Further, he distinguishes social capital from human capital (properties of individuals) and physical capital (physical objects), as the connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. These networks may serve several purposes and while they may be positive for those within the network, they may have less positive effects on those outside the network (Putnam, 2000). Bourdieu (1998) explains one such negative aspect is the act of scholastic classification. He explains that the school system tends to perpetuate the social order by separating those with higher levels of cultural capital from those that have less, thereby instituting social borders (p. 20-21). In addition, he informs the reader that because of our familiarity with the school system frequently these social borders go unnoticed by those of us who believe we know the system.

Social structures are an important facet to look at in this study because the structures – peer networks, academic opportunities, and relationships with significant adults--are structures that play an important part in the transition experience of Latino students. Understanding how these structures become a positive or negative force in the
academic experience of transitioning Latino students may help us understand which structures are necessary in order to provide this group of students a greater opportunity for success.

**Overview of Methodology**

This study is an ethnographic case study that examines the experiences of Latino middle school students who have transitioned from alternative settings back to traditional school settings. I chose ethnography for this study because the study seeks to gain a deep understanding of the experiences of these student’s, it seeks to find patterns in their experiences, and to understand the culture that is shared among this group.

The setting for this study will be a middle school, Park View (pseudonym). This school is part of a small district in an urban city in California that was founded in the late 1800s. The school district operated a CDS (Community Day School), but due to budget cuts the district was closed. The students who attended this school site were returned to a traditional school setting. Park View Middle School is located in a new housing development, and the school itself was built six years ago. The school received students from their district run CDS but has also enrolled students from other alternative programs including community schools, court mandated placement, behavior correction schools, and juvenile court schools.

Data sources for this study will include both criterion sampling and extreme case sampling strategies. Participants for this study will have to have the following criteria, 1: students must be Latino, 2: they must have within the past two years attended an alternative school setting and 3: students must currently attend a traditional middle school setting. Using an ethnographic tradition, students will be interviewed and
observed. Interviews will be audio recorded and field notes will be taken during observations. I will transcribe the data verbatim and use thematic analysis to find themes and patterns among the different data sources. In addition to the interviews and observations, I also conducted document analysis using the student’s cumulative and behavior files. Throughout the data collection process, I will use observer comments and journal reflections to mitigate my assumptions and subjectivities. My underlying assumption is that students who find themselves in this transition process do not feel successful. Furthermore, I am assuming that the support systems that are in place for these students at the traditional school are not apparent to the student or insufficient in redirecting them toward academic success.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

**Limitations**

Limitations as defined by Bryant (2004) are those restrictions created by the methods used in the study (p.58). In this study, limiting factors- the individual experiences, the school site, people that the students will encounter, and the social capital that each participant possess- lie in the methods themselves. This ethnographic study relies on the experiences Latino middle-school students have when transitioning from an alternative school site to a traditional school site. The factors that impact these experiences can vary extensively and be exhibited differently, ranging from their upbringing to the experiences they have had in school to external social factors. The traditional school sites may have special structures, such as counseling, differentiated classroom structures, trained teacher, etc., in place to assist in the transition phase, whereas the site that the participants in this site will be entering has more limited
resources. In addition, school sites may differ in culture and acceptance levels from both peers and teachers. Further, the participants themselves have different upbringings, different life experiences that impact the manner in which they view and understand their world. Finally, due to time constraints, this study will be conducted as a mini-ethnography, so with less time to conduct observations and interviews in the field could potentially yield different results.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are those factors that may impede the study from fully being replicated due to the inaccessibility of using the same methods or factors that limit the researcher from stating that the findings are true for all people in all times and places (Bryant, 2004, p. 57). The primary delimitations of this study include the study’s focus on the experiences of Latino middle school students who have transitioned from an alternative school setting to the traditional school setting, the district in which the study takes place formerly had an alternative school from which some of the participants for this study will be selected, and the study is conducted in a small district in Southern California. This study focuses on Latino middle school students. Focusing on this age and ethnic group may prevent the findings from being generalized to other groups of students. In addition, since the school had its own alternative school and some of the participants from the study attended this site, the experiences that the students encounter may differ from those students who attended alternative settings outside of their home district. Finally, this district services about 4,000 students and is located in a suburban city Southern California. The experiences of these students may differ substantially from
those who attend middle schools in urban areas. These limitations may prevent generalization of the finding and recommendations.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is composed of Chapter I – the introduction, Chapter II – the literature review, and Chapter III – the methodology. Each chapter will serve to help the reader understand the basis and purpose of this study. Chapter I will establish the purpose for this study and an overview of how the study will be approached. Further, chapter I will define the research questions and the methods that will be used to gather information that will lead to the understanding of the experiences that Latino middle-school students have during transitions between alternative schools and traditional schools. In order to establish an understanding of the general experiences of middle school and alternative school culture, Chapter II will discuss the research that has already been done. In addition to middle-school and alternative school culture, Chapter II will also look closer at the study’s framework – social capital. Chapter III will discuss the methods that will be used to approach the study. The methodology chapter will outline the setting, participants, and methodological approach. Further, Chapter III will also discuss possible subjectivities and how I will account for them. These three chapters together will form the foundation for carrying out this study. Chapter IV will present the themes that surfaced during data analysis, and it will provide the reader with brief descriptions of the experiences that the two participants in this study faced as they transitioned from the alternative school to the traditional school setting. Finally, Chapter V will discuss findings and recommendations.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

Alternative schools were initiated in 1975 as the result of Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Owens and Konkol, 2004). The passage of this federal statute mandated schools to create alternative settings that would serve this special population of students. Since 1975, the emergence of zero-tolerance policies came to exist and in the late 1990s alternative schools took on a different form. Currently, alternative schools have expanded the populations they serve. Alternative school settings such as community day schools and continuation schools or juvenile detention center schools are part of this change and serve a population that is considered at-risk of school failure.

The California Department of Education (CDE) reports that in 2010 there were 75 Community Day Schools, which together reported an enrollment of 18,382 students, although alternative sources estimate this figure to be closer to 43,000. Specifically, juvenile detention centers enrolled about 9,010 and served about 42,000 throughout the year, and opportunity education sites enrolled about 2,709 and serviced about 6,500. Students do not usually stay in an alternative school setting for extended periods of time and typically are returned to a traditional school setting. Depending on the reasons for their expulsion, it is possible that the student may return to a school that is not their home school, sometimes they are sent to schools outside of their district.

Scholarly work on the topic of middle-school transitions can readily be found, although much of the research has addressed aspects that deal with general transitions and/or the effects that gender and race may have on the transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004;
Akos & Galassi, 2004; Alspaugh, 1998; Espinoza & Juvonen, 2011). Further, previous research has investigated the environments of traditional middle school settings and alternative school settings separately with few comparisons being made between the two distinct environments (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011; Kennedy, 2011; Kim, 2011).

Little research can be found related to at-risk students who transition between the two types of school settings. Moreover, since research is limited it is difficult to know how these transitions impact these students’ academic trajectories and social connections. This study seeks to understand the experiences that Latino middle school students have as they transition from an alternative school setting to the traditional school setting. In this study, alternative school settings are those that take students who have been incarcerated or temporarily or permanently expelled from their home schools. While there are different types of alternative schools that target different student needs, this study will focus on the alternative setting that serves students who are at-risk for academic failure and who were sent to the alternative school because they were expelled, referred by a School Attendance Review Board, on probation and/or considered high-risk youth (California Department of Education, 2011).

**Chapter Organization**

This chapter will focus on the following areas in order to better understand the experiences that Latino middle school students have when transitioning from an alternative school to the traditional school: 1) the transition to middle school and student transition experiences, 2) the social context in middle school and 3) alternative school culture. Moreover, this chapter will discuss the research that has focused on the middle
school transitions in general, and will include research regarding the effects of transitions on Latino middle school students.

The first section will focus on the transitions to middle schools, as the focus of this study lies in the transition experience, particularly as it relates to Latino students who appear to be more affected by the transition (Espinoza and Juvonen, 2011). Further, the importance of understanding the impact a normal middle school transition has on Latino students relates to learning how an added transition, alternative to traditional school, will influence their perceptions of their academic and social trajectory.

There are a limited number of studies that focus on alternative to traditional school transitions. To guide this study, I will draw from studies that discuss students’ perceptions while attending an alternative setting. These studies will include research on student perceptions of alternative settings and comparisons that may or may not exist between the alternative and traditional school setting. In addition, the section will discuss some of the conditions that other researchers have concluded affect the students’ potential for success. In doing so, this study hope to understand the effects that transitions from alternative schools to traditional schools have on the perceptions that Latino middle school students have about their academic and social trajectory.

To better understand student experiences, the chapter will end with a discussion on the theory of social capital, which will be used as the conceptual framework in this study. Specifically, the principles of Pierre Bourdieu, Robert Putnam, and James Coleman will be used. As I begin this study, I tend to draw on Bourdieau’s theory of habitus introduced in Practial Reason in 1994. As defined by Bourdieu, habitus includes the dispositions that are produced by social conditioning. In other words habitus are
those uniting practices that are shared by a group of people. Over time the practices
define or distinguish a person or a group from others. Although habitus can serve to
classify people, it also serves to explain why people do the things they do. For this study
habitus will play a role on how students in transition understand the academic system.
By using this model, I can begin to comprehend how an educational system that
facilitates transitions from an alternative to a tradition school setting impacts the habitus
of Latino students, particularly those that find themselves at risk for academic failure.

Robert D. Putnam on the other hand explains that social capital is the networks
and associations that are constructed between members of a group, community, etc… and
the level of reciprocity that exists among them (2000). These networks can be positive or
negative and learning to bridge the networks that are made is important in getting ahead.
Therefore, understanding the social networks that students in transition have, and form, is
an important facet to understand for this study. Both of these principles will be used to
understand the experiences Latino students have when transitioning between school
settings.

**The Transition to Middle School and Student Transition Experiences**

Middle school is in and of itself a transition in the academic trajectory of students.
Middle school is characterized by leaving the elementary structure of a self-contained
classroom that mostly serves neighborhood children to a structure that requires the
student to move from class to class and that serves a wider range of children in the
community. In addition, students at this age are experiencing transitions of their own as
they undergo puberty. Anecdotally, it is often mentioned that this young group of kids
presents many challenges, but research demonstrates that it is the child that is undergoing
a tremendous amount of change and navigating through many transitions both in and out of school, academically and socially (Alspaugh, 1998; Juvonen, 2007; Espinoza & Juvonen, 2011 Wampler, Munsch, & Adams, 2002). Akos and Galassi (2004) add that the individual or personal transformations that middle school children go through are extensive and often times disruptive. Furthermore, Akos and Galassi (2004) point out that transitions often times disrupt social networks making it difficult to find support. Middle grade schools –junior high, intermediate, or middle schools - are potentially society’s most powerful force to recapture millions of youth adrift. Yet all too often they exacerbate the problems that youth face (Juvonen, 2007).

Akos and Galassi (2004) found that transitions into middle school are overall positive. Their study found that students felt positive about the middle school because it provided them with more friends, a greater amount of freedom, the ability to change classes, and choose elective classes. However, their study found that not all middle school transitions were positive. In fact, the negative aspects of the transition that the study found were the classes, grades, and teachers. Akos and Galassi, point out that the schools in which their studies were conducted may have had a transition program in place easing the transition process. More importantly, they state that the ease of the transition will be undoubtedly determined by the school climate. In fact, they point out that transitions into middle school can be divided into three groups: academic, social, and procedural. Moreover, the researchers perceive the transition as a temporal phenomenon that poses both challenges and opportunities to students in those three areas (p. 219).

In contrast, an earlier study by Alspaugh (1998) found that there were achievement losses when transitions occurred from 5th grade into middle school. He
found that when students came from several elementary schools into one middle school losses were greater. In addition, the research showed that when students transitioned into a middle school and then into a high school, the achievement losses were greater, and the researcher attributes this to the double-transition. The findings, on double-transitions or multiple-transitions, have important implications for my study, given that the student experiences include transitions between the traditional and alternative school settings.

Juvonen et. al. (2007) analyzed a report from the World Health Organization which surveyed 11, 13, and 15 year olds in the United States, parts of Europe, and Israel. The data - most current from 1997-1998 – demonstrated that in the United States middle grade students did not feel school was a place they belonged. Further, their study revealed that students in the United States felt more socially isolated than in the other countries surveyed. In fact, the U.S ranked close to the middle when rating the support they received from teachers, but were near the bottom when asked about peers and school climate. This finding indicates the need for further research in areas that deal with school climate and peer relations. As with Akos and Galassi’s (2004) study, mentioned earlier, school climate seems to be a condition that will affect the ease of transition into middle school and the student’s engagement in school.

McDougall and Hymel’s (1998) quantitative study of transitioning middle school students also found that over all the transition from 6th to 7th grade was relatively easy, but they noted that there were students who reported having difficulty. Further analyses demonstrated that those students who reported poor social adjustment at the end of 6th grade also reported discontent in the first few months of the transition into 7th grade. The findings were the same for boys and girls, and ethnicity was not an accounted variable.
The researchers noted that the sample of students used came from a small middle school of about 350 students that housed only 7th and 8th graders, indicating that the results may differ for students entering larger schools. In addition, the students were grouped into cohorts, so that each group traveled together from class to class.

As with the study done by Akos and Galassi (2004) when the middle school has in place structures to ease the transition students have reported less stress and difficulty. Juvonen’s (2007) analysis, mentioned above, found that middle school students in the U.S sometimes find themselves isolated, which is consistent with the findings in McDougall and Hymel (1998) that students who felt they had difficulty with social adjustment and had poor self-concept also had a more stressful transition into middle school. In response to their findings, Akos, Masina, and Creamer (2004) recommend that schools should provide structure for transitioning middle school students. Further, they remind us that while some students have the characteristics to thrive in the transition others may not. These studies indicate the importance of considering school structures, environmental factors, and the student’s self-concept, school attitudes, and behavior when attempting to understand their experiences into and during middle school. Other studies have indicated that ethnic background and gender may also play a role in how students transition into middle school.

The Social Context in Middle Schools

Adapting to social climate and effects on behavior

Understanding the role that a school’s social climate has on middle school students is important in order to make sense of their experiences. In this study it is equally important to understand how social climate affects Latino students specifically.
In a study by Espinoza and Juvonen (2011) in which they measured the perceptions of White and Latino students toward school social context, academic compliance, and rule-breaking, found that those students who were in transition or post-transition had an increased negative perception of the middle school social context and academic compliance. In their study the researchers allowed students to self-report their ethnicity and the students were not given a definition of White or Latino. Instead, the researchers presented students with a choice among White, Latino, African-American, Asian, and other (personal communication, October 22, 2012). The study found that Latino students in general did not have a negative perception about the transition into middle school. Interestingly, they found that Latino students perceived their peers to be more academically engaged before, during, and after the transition into middle school, a finding not expected by the researchers. In this study, peers, refers to classmates as supported by the question on a Likert scale used by the researchers that asks participants questions that relate to the “kids in your grade.” Further, they found that perceptions of school climate matter more to Latino students than to White students. Consequently, findings demonstrated that for White students, perceived school climate was not predictive of self-reported academic compliance, whereas for Latino students’ positive perceptions of school climate predicted academic compliance. These finding are important for the current study because they raise two important points: 1) that generally Latino students perceive their peers to be academically engaged, and 2) that school climate tends to affect the perceptions of Latino students about school.

In the same study by Espinoza and Juvonen (2011), the researchers found strong correlations between perceived positive school climate and rule-breaking among Latino
students, indicating that a positive school climate seemed to deter Latino students from rule-breaking behavior. That is, perceptions of behavioral norms seemed to impact Latino students’ perceptions of social climate, academic compliance, and rule-breaking more than for White students. These findings imply that for Latino students, the climate of the school tends to foster norms that relate to Latino students’ rule-breaking behavior. Ultimately, the study shows that Latino students may be more sensitive to school social climate than students from other ethnicities.

Taking these findings into account, the question arises, do students who transition between the traditional and alternative school setting share the same perceptions about peers and school or does the added transition serve to change these perceptions. Research has demonstrated that transitions into middle school are generally perceived as positive by Latino students, but a transition into an alternative setting is generally a result of negative behavior. Will this added transition heighten the sensitivity to school climate and how will it further affect the academic trajectory for this group of students? Studies have shown that Latino students will generally dip academically when entering middle school.

**Academic responses to transitions**

As mentioned earlier, social climate appears to influence Latino student’s perceptions and responses to middle school. A student’s response to social climate can potentially have adverse effects on their academic trajectory. Research has found that Latino students tend to enter middle school with lower grades and persist to have lower grades as compared to their White and African American counterparts (Donato and de Onis, 1994; Wampler, 2002). Wampler, Munsch, and Adams (2002) conducted a
quantitative study to measure the differences on GPA by gender and ethnicity, Wampler et al. found that grades differed by ethnicity but not by gender. Espinoza and Juvonen’s (2011) study also found that gender did not seem to influence how students perceived school climate, rule-breaking, or academic compliance. In Wampler et. al. (2002) Latino students showed steep declines but rebounded before the end of the school year. It is interesting to note that although the Latino group rebounded, it was not to the original level. In their discussion, the researchers bring to light the fact that in all the sites studied, Latino students became ethnic minority student groups this may have attributed to their school disengagement.

Several studies discuss the disruption of social networks when transitioning into middle school and that for Latino student’s transitions may be increasingly more disruptive because of their cultural value system. Latinos tend to endorse more collectivistic goals than other ethnicities (Espinoza and Juvonen, 2011). Wampler et al. (2002) believe that, in their study, cultural attitudes attributed to the steep declines in Latino students and that those students who kept higher grades were seen as exceptions and labeled “school boy” or “coconuts”- a term that describes a Latino as “White” on the inside but “brown” on the outside. These findings are consistent with those found by Akos and Galassi (2004) in which Latinos perceived the transition into middle school as more difficult.

Donato and de Onis (1994) believe that the educational system is to blame for the complacency that Latino students have about their academic trajectory. The Children’s Defense Fund reports that re-segregation is becoming prevalent among minority groups. In a report from 2010 they report an alarming trend in re-segregation in many areas, in
1968 23% of the schools that Latino students attended were considered highly segregated, by 2006 the figure had increased to 40%. A school is considered highly segregated when the minority population accounts for 90-100% of the total school population. Donato and de Onsi (1994) warned that this was a dangerous trend that has persisted since the early 20th century. Their research demonstrated that middle schools and junior highs have not been successful with Latino students (Mexican-American students) and that school failure continues to be persistent, pervasive, and disproportionate (p. 179). A study by Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi (1992) found that by “fourth and fifth grade, many Mexican-Americans become psychological dropouts, appearing to withdraw mentally from school.” (p. 115). This trend, as research has shown, is carried into the middle school. Given that Latino adolescents are already at risk for school failure (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009), the middle school years become even more important among this population in terms of school climate and structures.

Latino students are more sensitive to school climate than other ethnic groups. In fact, research has shown that Latino students want to be engaged in school, but peer and school structures may become obstacles. Niehause, Rudasil, and Adelson (2012) found that when middle school Latino students felt self-efficacy and had high intrinsic motivation their school attendance improved, they were able to improve GPA’s, and improve math scores on state assessments. They concluded that Latino students’ self-beliefs are an important construct when examining academic outcomes. In addition, they concluded that it is also as important to explore what variables at home and in school help to construct those self-beliefs. School connectedness, school climate, and a student’s
self-perception all play a role in the degree of ease or difficulty a transition into middle school will have for a Latino student.

**Alternative School Culture**

In response to parent dissatisfaction with traditional schooling, alternative schools emerged in the mid-1970s in order to provide parents with choices (Kim, 2011; Owens & Konkol, 2004). Between 1965 and 1975, the free school movement had taken root in response to the political and social turmoil of the times (Miller, 2002). Kim’s (2011) study points to a gradual change in alternative schools that has created three distinct images: “ideal haven,” “warehouse” or “dumping grounds,” and “school/prison continuum.” The “ideal haven” alternative schools are those that are designed to address the differentiated needs of students (Conley, 2002; Miller, 2002). The “warehouse” or “dumping ground” alternative schools are those that are used to place students that are deemed disruptive, deviant, and dysfunctional (Mcgee, 2001). Finally, the “school/prison continuum”, a term used by Nolan and Anyon (2004), are alternative schools which have rigid policies, students are subjected to surprise searches, have chain link fences around them. In short, they look and act more like a prison than a school.

Policies such as “zero tolerance” have helped to shape the structures of alternative schools. In addition, zero tolerance policies from the 1990s also increased the number of students who were referred to law enforcement for issues that would have previously been handled by the school administration (Aull, 2012; Hatt, 2011). Further, Aull (2012) states that this began a trend of criminalizing student misbehavior. Since the 1980’s federal funding has shifted to funding K-12 education less and corrections more (Hatt, 2011). Moreover, Hatt (2011) points out that the United States has one of the worst
funded educational systems and the most populated prison systems in the world. Wald and Losen (2003) found that many minority students will be taught by unqualified teachers, tested on material they never reviewed, held back in grade, placed in restrictive special education programs, repeatedly suspended, and banished to alternative outplacements before dropping or getting pushed out of school altogether. These restrictive zero tolerance policies have created a path for many minority students that leads from school to prison (Aull, 2012; Boyd, 2009; Hatt, 2011; Swain, 2011). Feierman, Levick, and Mody (2009) state that students who have been sent to a juvenile detention facility will often find many obstacles when attempting to re-enter their home school. While this study focuses on a transition from an alternative setting to a traditional setting, it is important to understand that this pipeline or pathway exists. It is important to understand that our traditional school policies have changed since the 1990s and that although crime among youth has gone down, the number of referrals to alternative school systems continues to rise among minority students (Hatt, 2011).

The reauthorization in 1997 of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandated that school districts provide an alternative placement for students with disabilities that violated policies such as drug or weapon offenses. Alternative schools began to see an increase in referrals and students labels emotionally/behaviorally disabled. Alternative school structures are designed to address the needs of students who have difficulty in the traditional setting. In this study, the alternative schools that I will refer to are those that are designed to help students who are at risk for educational failure. These students typically are considered at risk for failure because of poor grades, disruptive behavior, and/or truancy (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010).
Much of the research that deals with at-risk students and alternative schools has focused on the experiences or perceptions students have while attending an alternative school. In fact, there are few studies that have focused on the transition from alternative schools to traditional schools, creating a need for this current study. A study by Owens and Konkol (2004) is one of the few studies that focused on this particular type of transition. Unlike the present study, Owens and Konkol focused their research on high school students that were labeled “Emotionally/Behaviorally Disabled” (EB/D) who transitioned back to the traditional school after attending an alternative school. There were several participants who at the time of the interview had chosen to return to the alternative setting. As a qualitative study that asked participants what obstacles were perceived in transitioning from the alternative school to the traditional school, the researcher attempted to determine what the students thought would help them to be successful at the traditional school. They found that the students preferred to remain at the alternative setting due to 1) smaller classes, 2) personal connections with teachers, 3) self-contained classroom as opposed to moving from class to class, 4) familiarity with classmates, 5) ability to work at their own pace, and 6) feeling included. Those students who had transitioned into the traditional school but were not successful cited the following reasons: 1) feeling ill prepared to deal with anger, 2) having no positive working relationships with teachers, 3) having too many students in a class, 4) having no one to go to when a situation arose, and 5) having no clear rules or consequences. The commonalities within the two groups were that both appreciated smaller classes, one-to-one contact with the teacher, as well as respectful relationships with the teachers.
In a study by Lagana-Riordan et al. (2011), similar findings to those found in Owens and Konkol (2004) occurred. In their quantitative study, the researchers sought to explore the perspectives of high school alternative school students’ about the traditional school setting. Students pointed out that poor teacher relationships contributed to their failure in the traditional school. Some students considered the teachers well-meaning, but cited that there was little time in a teachers schedule for individual attention. Other students felt that they were labeled and judged by their teachers. Furthermore, the students stated that they felt unsafe at the traditional school site, they felt demeaned by school rules and regulations and they felt judged and alienated by their peers. As in the Owens and Konkol (2004) study, the participants had a much more positive outlook on the alternative school. They pointed out that the alternative school improved their maturity, helped them accomplish their goals, teachers are their advocates, and peer relationships were supportive. Both these studies demonstrate that the alternative school site may result in an environment that is supportive of the social and academic success for at-risk students. While these two studies are important steps in understanding the experiences of students who transition from alternative to tradition school settings, there are studies that paint the alternative schools as dumping grounds that foment the failure of at-risk students. Further, there are few studies that examine these student experiences at the middle school level and that examine the unique experiences of Latino students who transition from alternative to traditional school settings.

Alternative schools and programs are designed to address the needs of students that typically cannot be met in regular schools (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010). There are occasions that the alternative school falls short of that goal. Kim’s (2011) qualitative
study presents one such case. Using a narrative inquiry approach, Kim was able to learn about the experiences a high school junior had while attending the alternative school. The student, through interviews and journal writing, described the alternative school as a place in which students that no one understands are sent to. He describes the feelings of isolation, despair, and loneliness that he feels. In one of his journals he writes “my school doesn’t teach me how to become a poet or a musician. No teacher is interested in the world of my poetry or music. To them, I’m just a trouble maker” (Kim, 2011, p.86). Moreover, he felt that every student there was suspected as a possible “soon-to-be-criminal.” Alternative schools can make the difference for many students, but in some cases it is simply not enough.

**Social Capital Framework for the Understanding of School Transitions**

The conceptual framework used in this study is social capital. Social capital is the internal, social, and cultural coherence of society; the norms and values that govern interactions among people; and the institutions in which they are embedded” (World Bank Social Capital Initiative, 1998,p.3). Many researchers have found that social capital has been used to explain many of the phenomenon that occurs within society. Dika and Singh (2002) view leaders in education as using social capital as a solution to social problems. Green and Preston (2001) stated, social capital has thus come to be seen as a flexible conceptual tool that can be used to explain a wide array of social problems including education.

This study will use social capital as a conceptual lens from which to understand the experiences that Latino students encounter while transitioning from an alternative school setting –Community Day Schools (CDS), Juvenile Court School, etc.,-- to a
traditional school setting. In order to better understand the concepts of social capital, I have had to look at the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Robert Putnam, James Coleman and how other researchers have used their work to understand issues in education. We know that social capital theory is subject to interpretation given its application to social situations. In this study understanding how social capital benefits students will aid educational leaders in developing new approaches that will lead to greater success for these students.

Pierre Bourdieu brought the idea of social capital to the forefront in the mid-1980’s. Grounded in theories of social reproduction and symbolic power, this lead to social capital being referred to in two principal manners: 1) in terms of norms and 2) in terms of access to institutional resources (Dika and Singh, 2002). Furthermore, Dika and Singh (2002) state that based on Bourdieu’s theory, social capital relies on the social relationships of a person and the quality and access to institutional resources at their disposal. In terms of this study, this means that whom the students create relationships with and the ability of these relationships to give them access to resources, will be a predictor to the amount of social capital they will acquire within this institution. These principals are at the center of Bourdieu’s interpretation, but there are other components to his theory.

In addition, Bourdieu’s theory focuses on cultural capital, habitus, and field. Under Bourdieu’s theory the field is the social space in which the person exists and in this field there are forces and struggles among those sharing the field (Bourdieu, 1998 in Dika and Singh, 2002). Acar (2011) posits that Bourdieu’s approach has been abandoned as newer developments of economic and sociological thought are pursued. In the case of
this study, there is merit in using this frame of thought to interpret the experiences of the students. Knowing with whom Latino students form relationships with and to what extent these relationships are providing access or obstacles to needed resources is important in understanding their experiences. If social capital is gained from the networks that are constructed, then a look at these networks will be necessary in the course of this study. As there are merits in Bourdieu’s work, James Coleman is also considered a principal developer of social capital.

Coleman’s interpretation of social capital came out in 1988 and there are three main components to his interpretation: 1) level of trust, as evidenced by obligations and expectations, 2) information channels, and 3) norms and sanctions that promote the common good over self-interest (Dika and Singh, 2002). Acar (2011) notes that Coleman’s investigations can be narrowed to two perspectives, family and environment, with a strong emphasis in the role the family plays in producing social capital. Coleman views family as an important provider of social capital, but also adds that the environment follows closely behind encompassing associational and relational networks (Coleman, 1988 in Acar, 2011). Robert Putnam (2000) shares in this associational perspective.

Putnam (2000) defines social capital as the connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (p.19). Further, he states that it is through these ties that lives are made more productive. Central to his theory is the notion that social life is enhanced by trustworthiness. This trustworthiness creates bonding among individuals and/or groups. Equally as important is the notion of bridging. Putnam (2000) states that although bonding occurs, learning to
bridge these social networks will determine how the person will get ahead. The notion of bonding and bridging appear to make social capital a positive asset for children, but Putnman (2000) notes that although there is a correlation with good outcomes for kids it does not mean that social capital causes those outcomes, it also does not mean that a deficit of social capital will cause kids to have poor outcomes (p.297).

**Differences in Theory and Application**

There are some major differences between the approaches to social capital and these distinction and applications of the theory make a clear definition of social capital difficult to articulate. Coleman’s perspective is that it is the family’s responsibility to adopt certain norms to advance children’s life chances. The question this study may bring up is if the family structure is not there, does the school take the place in forming these norms in order to advance the child? Bourdieu (1986) implies that the objectification of cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications is one way of neutralizing some of the properties it derives from the fact that, being embodied, it has the same biological limits as its bearer. Coleman (1988) states that like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible. Furthermore, he states that social capital comes about through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action. Putnam (2000) adds that although the level of positive social capital a person may enhance their likelihood for success it may not necessarily be a predictor. Further, he views social capital as a thread that entwines our communities together and as a result enriches our lives and associations. Given these theories on how to augment social capital, it is likely
that constructing positive social structures for these transitioning students may increase the social capital they possess and increase the potential for success in school.

**Summary of Literature and Gaps**

Researchers have found that middle-school is a stage in the academic trajectory of students that comes at a time when they are undergoing a great deal of change (Alspaugh, 1998; Jackson & Davis, 2000). Latino students appear to be more affected than other ethnic groups during the transition to middle-school demonstrated by the decreases in academic performance. Interestingly, the research shows that Latino students are not necessarily affected by the transition into middle-school but rather by the social context of the school site. Further, Latino students who have had the experience of attending an alternative school site for at-risk students have reported mixed experiences. Some students have reported a positive experience at the alternative setting, while others feel that the alternative school serves to further stereotype them. Most of the research that has been done on these transitions has focused on high school Latino students and primarily on the experiences at the alternative school site. If we are to understand and develop structures that will help at-risk Latino students, further studies need to look at the effects that transitioning from an alternative to traditional setting has on this group of students. Through the lens of social capital this study will look to see which structures at the school site can positively affect the experiences of Latino middle-school students by learning from Latino students themselves about their academic experiences.
Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this ethnographic case study was to understand the academic experiences of middle school Latino students who transition from alternative school settings to traditional school settings. This study sought to better understand the academic experiences of Latino students who have gone through the transition between an alternative school setting and a traditional school setting and their perception of academic success. This study provides a better understanding on how these students perceive academic success and how these transitions have affected their school experience. Gaining this insight benefits the educational community by providing a greater understanding of the circumstances and perceptions of these students. This in turn has the potential of creating training programs that will allow school staff to better serve this community of students.

My intent is to describe areas in which schools may have room for improvement and the areas in which a culture that is supportive and accepting can be created. In order to gain in depth understanding of the school culture, I observed teacher-student and peer-peer relations and made connections on how these relationships have impacted their experiences. The research questions that I evaluated in this study are: 1) What are the academic experiences of Latino middle school students who transition from alternative settings to traditional school settings? and 2) How do the experiences of transitioning from alternative settings to traditional school settings shape the meaning of academic success for Latino middle school students?
Chapter Organization

This chapter begins by articulating a research design and tradition. In this section I provide information on the design of the study and explain how the tradition frames and connects to the study. Following this section, I present the setting and selection strategies that were used in choosing the setting. Following these descriptions, I expand on the research sample and data sources and the strategies used for their selection. This section also includes an explanation on researcher access and roles. The instruments and procedures for data collection are explained and details are provided on the interview protocol, the guidelines for site observations and the Human Protocol procedures and instruments. The final section addresses ethical issues and researcher subjectivities. As an advocate for these children, my biases and assumptions color the study and have a significant impact on the analysis and conclusions presented, these issues will be discussed in the section titled Role of the Researcher.

Research Design and Tradition

Given that the purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the academic experiences of middle-school Latino students who have transitioned from alternative settings back to the traditional school setting, I used an ethnographic case study design. A case study is an exploration of a “bounded system”, or a case, or multiple cases over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context (Creswell, 1996, p.62). As a bounded case study, this study was limited to a specific group of participants, sample, and sites which met the criteria necessary to carry out this research study. In addition, a case study is also heuristic in that the case study seeks to illuminate the reader’s understanding of the
phenomenon under study (Merriam, 2009, p.44). Through this study I sought to understand the academic experiences of Latino middle school students and how these experiences have molded their perceptions of academic success and in order to develop a deep understanding of these experiences, it was necessary to develop a close relationship with the participants and learn from them through interviews and observations.

**Ethnographic Research Tradition**

In order to understand the experiences that Latino students have had as they have transitioned between two distinct settings, principles of ethnography were used. Ethnography refers to the description of a people or cultural group (Glesne, 2011). Glesne continues to explain that part of ethnographic research is to develop thick descriptions that are needed in order to understand how people within cultural groups construct and share meaning (p.17). Harris (1968) states that through ethnography the researcher seeks to find patterns of behaviors, customs, and ways of life (in Creswell, 1996, p.58). Schram (2006), notes that the defining characteristic of ethnography is that it is oriented toward the description and interpretation of cultural behaviors (p.67). For this study, patterns of behavior and the construction of meaning became an important basis for understanding students’ experience toward their academic trajectory and social interactions when transitioning from an alternative setting back to the traditional setting.

Given that this is an ethnographic case study, a holistic view of each student was taken. Creswell (1996) states that the researchers goal is to study the meanings of behavior, language, and interaction within a culture-sharing group (p.58), in this study the shared culture is assumed to have developed among students who have experienced a transition between the alternative school setting and the traditional school setting. An
ethnographic approach was the most relevant and effective manner for obtaining a deeper understanding of students’ experiences while transitioning between the two settings and how navigating within two distinct cultures has affected their understanding of academic success.

**Connections between a Case Study Design and an Ethnographic Tradition**

In this study, I focused on the academic experiences of Latino middle-school students transitioning back to the traditional school setting after attending an alternative setting and how these experiences have colored the meaning of academic success for them. An ethnographic approach allowed me to provide an in-depth and rich description of the students’ academic experiences, behaviors, and the cultural knowledge that has developed among students who have experienced similar circumstances. Through the students’ stories, I sought to better understand how transitions between alternative school settings and traditional school settings have affected their attitude toward school and their perceptions of academic success. The study strove to bring to light information that may be critical in developing programs for these students which will help them in their academic and social trajectory, making this study heuristic.

**Research Setting and Context**

The data collection for this study was gathered at Park View Middle School (pseudonym). The site is located in the unincorporated city of South Mountain in Southern California. South Mountain was established in the 1800’s and the first one-room school house was opened at the turn of the century. The 2010 United States Census showed that the population of South Mountain was just over 7,000 people. Thirty-percent of the population is under 18 years of age.
Park View Middle School is in its 5th year of operation and is situated in a new housing development. It is a state of the art school, with technology in every classroom, a complete library, music room, basketball gym, and softball/baseball fields. In 2010-2011 the school had just over 700 students, of which 82% are of Latino origin. The ELL (English Language Learner) population at this school is approximately 44% of the total population. The schools API fell from 2010 to 2011, from the mid-700’s to the low 700’s. In the school year 2011 to 2012 the API slightly increased.

As new housing developments engulfed the surrounding area there was a need to add a second middle school to the district. Park View is situated in the center of one of these new developments. This brought in new home buyers from different areas into the neighborhood. The Park View area caters to families that have a middle to high socioeconomic status. In addition, kids from a similar but older neighborhood are bused into Park View. The mix of students at Park View is very diverse. There are students that come from generational families in the area of South Mountain to students who have a very comfortable socioeconomic status to students who are homeless. There is also a high population of immigrants and newcomers (students newly entering the school system in the U.S).

Site Selection Strategy

I used an extreme case sampling strategy to select the site for this study. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) define extreme case sampling strategies as selecting individuals because they represent the extremes and criterion sampling as selecting participants because they meet one or more criteria as predetermined by the researcher (p.191). Miles and Huberman (1994) cite Yin (1984) and that cases are the stuff of much qualitative research and can be
very illuminating if they are chosen to be critical, extreme or unique (p.26). Extreme case sampling is appropriate because the students that will be selected for this study represent less than 1% of the middle-school population in the district. I chose this site because the district used to run a Community Day School (CDS) and closed the site in the 2011-2012 school year. The closing of the district CDS resulted in the return of the students to the traditional school setting. This unforeseen condition was expected to facilitate my recruitment of participants, but instead the participants for this study came from alternative schools outside of the scope of the district. In addition to extreme case sampling, a convenience strategy was used in selecting the site.

Since I work within the district in which the school site belongs, it was convenient for me to choose this site to carry out the study. I had intended to use participants from both middle schools within the district, but students that were willing to participate came from only one of the school sites. In addition, while many school sites in the city may have students transitioning from alternative school settings into the traditional junior high/middle school setting, this setting was a middle school and provided a range of grades from 6th to 8th rather than just 7th and 8th. This did not have an impact on the study as the participants for the study were both 8th graders.

Prior to the start of the study, the district operated a CDS, which subsequently closed and resulted in the district sending students at the CDS into the traditional school setting an unexpected outcome of the closure. The district had the option of sending some of these students directly to other alternative school sites, but instead, they chose to re-enter them into their traditional school sites. In addition, one of the sites, Lake View, was being considered as a possible location to have a self-contained classroom that would house the
students who were returned from the alternative school site. The district decided against this and the students were placed into general education classes. At the time of the data collection, several of the students that had been at CDS and returned to the traditional school site had either transitioned to high school or back to the alternative school site. The initial intent in choosing these sites was to facilitate recruitment through accessing students who had attended the district run CDS. Since many of the former students from CDS had either moved on to high school or returned to alternative settings I had to expand my search.

I emailed or phoned four local districts and I was either told that they had no students that fit the studies requirements or I did not receive a response altogether. The principals at both middle schools where the study was initiated, quickly helped me connect with their site counselors so that participants could be found. Initially three participants were found, but only two became part of the study. I extended the study to include artifacts and conversations with parents, to provide a much richer, more holistic picture of the transitions consistent with an ethnographic approach.

Access and Permissions

I gained access to the sites primarily because I worked in this school district as a teacher and currently as an assistant principal. I have also mentored many of the students at Park View. Through the years at Park View, I have helped students academically, and I have advocated for them when they have found themselves in challenging social situations. These relationships helped me develop a positive rapport with the administrators at the school sites and with the parents of these students. These relationships were developed because I have maintained a policy of honesty, trustworthiness and openness about what I am doing. I continued to share my research
with the site administrators and school officials, and I frequently asked my informants if I am interpreting the data they are giving me correctly. This insured that all parties involved felt that I appreciated their participation and that I respected their positions.

Ethnography means learning from people, therefore, informants are an essential part of an ethnographic study (Spradley, 1979, p.3).

Spradley (1979) identifies informants as a source of information, and the information that they share with the ethnographer is given in their native language (p.25). Informants differ from participants in that the informant becomes a teacher, a holder of information, about a particular culture that the ethnographer is interested to learn about. Subsequently, informants will share information about their culture that they believe the researcher should know about or should pursue (p.29). Given the ethnographic tradition of this study I used the term “informants” to identify those persons who aided me in understanding this transitional Latino student culture. Initially, I asked those students directly affected by the transitions to work with me as informants. I expected, that with the collection of data and the conversations I had with my initial informants, that others may also take on this role. Aside from the students themselves, administrators, teachers, and parents also became informants in this study.

Data Source and Research Sample

Given that this study was designed to better understand the academic experiences of Latino students who have transitioned from an alternative school setting back into the traditional school setting, the main sources of data were Latino middle school students. In addition, acts, events and processes also comprised data sources, as ethnography requires interviews and observations for gathering information regarding the experiences
these particular students have had and how these experiences are forming their perceptions of academic success. In addition, documentation such as student files, behavioral files, and documented school records were used.

**Participant Selection Strategy**

I used a mixed sampling strategy to select participants. The primary sampling strategies that I used in this study were that of extreme case sampling, criterion sampling, and multiple case sampling. Extreme case sampling is defined as learning from highly unusual manifestations of the phenomenon of interest (Kuzel, 1992 & Patton, 1990 in Miles, 1994). This strategy was the most appropriate for the study because I sought to understand the experiences of a very specific group of students, who had to meet very specific criteria. Participants for this study had to be Latino middle school students who had returned from an alternative setting to the general school setting. This criteria, made the participants’ experiences highly unusual. In the district where the sites are located, there were fewer than 5 students who fit the criteria. Extreme case sampling was appropriate for this study because the study sought to understand the experiences of these very specific students.

Criterion sampling requires the researcher to set norms or criteria for choosing participants and/or settings. The students that I interviewed had to meet specific criteria such as 1) students had to have been placed in an alternative setting for a period of time and then returned back to their traditional school setting; 2) they had to be of Latino origin and 3) they had to be current middle-school students. The settings were chosen because they had students registered who had re-entered the traditional school setting after attending the alternative setting for a period of time. Finally, a convenience strategy was
employed because I had access to the site through my relationship with district and site personnel. I have also been a teacher, and I am currently an administrator at one of the sites.

To further provide credibility to the study I used multiple-case sampling. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that by using multiple-case sampling we can strengthen the precision, validity, and stability of the findings (p.29). To strengthen the credibility of the study, I interviewed two students. I interviewed the students multiple times, observed them in and out of the classroom multipa times, informally interviewed their parents, and used their academic and behavioral records as artifacts. While a sample size of two students constitutes an extremely small number of participants, they largely comprised the cultural group in this research setting. With only two participants in the sample, I was able to find themes and patterns among their experiences. Through this study I searched for common experiences and interpretations as well as differences the students have had when transitioning between school settings. Accordingly, I studied more than one case in order to have a deeper understanding of these experiences and how they have, and continue to have an effect on the students’ academic trajectory. Studying more than one case allowed me to find commonalities or stark differences that informed the research and ultimately allowed me to make interpretations and recommendations. In addition, this study used conceptually-driven sequential sampling (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.27). This is somewhat of the snowball effect. Because of the nature of ethnographic studies, as the fieldwork began I was able to observe people and areas that were not initially discussed in the study. I expected that one informant would possibly lead me to another. As indicated earlier, informants are not only those who have lived the
experience of transition but also those who helped me understand the culture that has developed for these students. In the case of this study, administrators, teachers, and parents became informants as well. Miles and Huberman (1994) state, that understanding one key relationship in the setting reveals facets to be studied in others (p.27).

**Ethical Issues**

In order to execute this study, it was important to contact the district and identify the students who had, within the past two years, transitioned back to the traditional school setting from an alternative school setting. The school administrators were contacted and I shared my research study with them in order to gain their approval and entry into their school sites. The students who met the criteria were identified and a written invitation to the participants was given to their guardians. Upon contact with their guardians I set up a time to meet with the participant and their guardians in order to explain the purpose of the research study to them. The study required that the participants and their families fully trust me. Therefore, it was very important that I demonstrate the greatest respect for them, their stories and opinions. It was important that I preserve confidentiality in all aspects of the research, and that I assured the participants and their families that the information they shared with me would be protected by using pseudonyms and other devises to protect their identity and by allowing them to preview my transcripts to insure that I had transcribed and interpreted correctly. The participants in this study were children, and all appropriate consents and assents were obtained prior to speaking with the students.
Data Collection Instruments

Given that this study examined the experiences of Latino students and how their transitions between alternative school settings and general school settings has affected their meaning of academic success, I used ethnographic interviews and participant observations to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences. Ethnography is based on studying the interactions and shared beliefs and activities among a group and how they give meaning to the world around them, this is the study of culture.

As described by Wolcott (1987) in Creswell (1996), culture is an amorphous term, something that the researcher attributes to a group as he or she looks for patterns of daily living (p.59). Spradley (1980) explains that ethnography’s central aim is to understand another way of life from the native point of view (p.3). In order to learn about facets of the students’ culture, it was necessary to use observations as a data collection instrument. Observations allowed me to witness explicit and tacit behaviors that students engage in and use to make sense of the events that occur around them. This qualitative case study was informed by an ethnographic framework, and as such, required personal interactions with the participants. Therefore, ethnographic interviews were used in addition to participant observations. Informal and formal ethnographic interview strategies were used to expand and deepen my understanding of the relationship among events recorded during observations. Using observations and interviews I looked for patterns and for commonalities among student culture. Using these ethnographic techniques helped me better understand the experiences students have had as they have transitioned from one type of institution to another.
The instruments that I used were the invitation to participate in the research study, the parental consent form, the child assent form, the adolescent assent form and the interview protocol. After receiving approval from the human subjects protocol committee and the school district IRB, the documents were presented and reviewed with the participants and their guardians. In order to recruit participants, the first document that they received was the invitation to participate in the study.

**Invitation to Participate**

An invitation to participate in the research study was distributed at the school sites with the permission and help of the site administrators. I asked the administrators to recommend students who they knew fit the criteria that my study required. I then asked the administrators or counselor to present those students with an invitation flyer and invite them and their guardians to meet with me so that I could explain my study. If the student and guardian was interested, I set an appointment to discuss the study and what role the informants will play in the study. In one case, I met face to face with the student and parent to explain the study and answer questions. In the other case I spoke to the guardian over the phone and explained the study. Once the informants were selected, I provided them with the child/adolescent assent form, and the parents with the parental consent form. As the study moved forward, I found that the original consent forms did not specifically address the use of student academic and behavioral files. As a result, I submitted my inquiry to the CSUN’s human subjects office and subsequently re-submitted new consent forms that participants and parents approved and signed.
Ethnographic Interview Guide

Informants were interviewed using an ethnographic interview protocol. The questions on the interview protocol supported the research questions. An informal interview format was used so that further questions may be asked that would help me clarify and expound on the informants responses and on participant observations. Ethnography is the process of learning about a culture and uncovering a set of beliefs. It was necessary to be able to ask questions of informants throughout the study. Although I used an ethnographic interview format, I also used semi-formal interviews that focused on certain cultural domains which surfaced and needed further investigation. The interview protocol within this document was adhered to and followed, but in order to expand on an informant’s response, unstructured questions were also asked.

The interview protocol focused on questions related to the research questions: 1) what are the experiences of Latino middle school students who transition from an alternative setting to a traditional setting and 2) How do the experiences of transitioning from alternative settings to traditional school settings shape the meaning of academic success for Latino middle school students? The interview questions were guided by the literature review and the theoretical framework of the study. Spradley (1980) defines ethnographic interviews as a special kind that employs questions designed to discover the cultural meanings people have learned (p.123). Glesne (2011), states that questions in a cultural interview ask people about their memories, experiences, and understanding of events in their lives (p.103), therefore the interview protocol will target these areas in order to gain the in-depth understanding that is necessary for this study. In order to gain this understanding, more than one interview was required. I held informal follow-up
interviews to deepen my understanding or to clarify information that had been acquired through the semi-informal interviews or during observations.

**Ethnographic Observations Guide**

Observations are an important tool for understanding the daily interactions of people and for understanding the nuances that make up their culture. Glesne (2011) states that the main outcome of participant observation is to better understand the research setting, its participants, and their behavior. In order to maintain a focus during the observations I followed the recommendations Spradley (1980) set forth for participant observations and outlined in the Developmental Research Sequence or D.R.S. My observations focused on those aspects that are directly related to this ethnographic study, a focus on what people do, what people know, and the things people make and use (Spradley, 1980). I initially used descriptive observations and based on the analysis of these observations I further investigated, I then used a focused observation approach to gain a more in-depth understanding.

Observations took place at the school sites. They included a network of social situations, actors and activities. My role in the observations was that of a passive participant. As defined by Spradley (1980) a passive participant is present at the scene of action but does not participate or interact with other people to any great extent, they take the role of “spectator”, “bystander”, or “loiterer” (p.59). As field notes were collected and analyzed, questions that surface, and/or as areas of missing information became evident, further observations were needed and made with a more focused approach. The observation matrix developed by Spradley (1980) to question the data collected, and to discover areas of further research, was a necessary tool. A series of observations took
place. Initially, the observations were of a descriptive nature and then progressed toward a more narrow and focused purpose.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Given that an ethnographic research tradition framed this study, I used interviews and observations to collect data. Rossman and Rallis (2003) state that data-gathering techniques used in ethnographic studies are multiple and flexible and usually rely on observations, formal and informal interviews, interpretation of artifacts, and the researcher’s own experience of events and processes (p.95). Glesne (2011) cites Geertz, (1973) and states that by collecting data primarily through participant observation and interviews, the researcher develops the “thick description” needed for getting at how people within a cultural group construct and share meaning (p.17). As I began this study my initial step was to identify those persons who served as informants for my study. With the help of the school personnel I was able to accomplish this. Once these persons were identified I invited them to be a part of my study. Initially, administrators and school personnel served as informants, and once I identified and invited students who fit the criteria for this study, the students assumed this role. Through the information the students provided, I was able to identify further informants that helped in the development of a holistic picture of their culture.

**Observations**

The primary data collection procedure used for this study was participant observations. I used Spradley’s (1980) Developmental Research Sequence and began with informal observations and moved into more focused observations. Observations took place at the school site and include all activities with which my participants
engaged. By observing these specific areas I was able to describe the student’s day-to-day experiences. Working at the school site facilitated the observation process. I will thanked the school administrators and teachers for allowing me the opportunity to share in their space. I looked upon them as informants that aided and guided portions of my study. Glesne (2011) states that ethnographers often develop a close working relationship with one or more members of the researched group or local facilitator (p.95), it was important for me to develop these relationships in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the students’ experiences and the school culture within which they navigate. I did not want to interfere with the classroom environment and chose a seat that was at the rear of the classroom, but that allowed me a full perspective of the student participants. When observing in public sites I choose a place from where I could observe my participant, but from which I was not be obtrusive.

In addition, as I took field notes I worked on detailing events that I saw, conversations that I heard and interactions that were taking place. As I took jottings I also made notes of my reactions and thoughts, I did this in order to be able to analyze and reflect upon my written thoughts and to insure that I was accounting for my subjectivities. At the end of the observation I thanked the host teacher and the participant as is appropriate. At the conclusion of my observations I expanded on my notes by rewriting them in a narrative form and elaborating where necessary in order to depict an accurate picture of what was observed. Spradley (1980) explains that field notes develop in two forms 1) condensed accounts and 2) expanded accounts (p.69). The condensed notes formed the initial field notes taken when observing and the expanded notes are those same field notes but they were expanded to include information and details that I
recalled after I had left the setting. Field notes included both the descriptive observations that I made and the introspective reflections that I developed based on my observations and thoughts. Interpreting my notes soon after the observation was essential in order to capture the nuances that were present as they were fresh in my mind this allowed me not to lose them. My goal was to have the transcriptions done within 24 hours of the observation.

**Interviews**

I selected interviewees using the criterion sampling and extreme case sampling methods. I asked teachers and site administrators to aid me in identifying the students who had recently transitioned back to the general school setting from an alternative setting and who met the specific criteria discussed earlier in the methods participant selection section. Once identified, I provided the students with an invitation flyer and ask the school administrators if it would be possible to arrange a meeting with the student(s) and their parents. In this meeting I explained my research needs and the criteria for participation. I met with the participants parents/guardians to discuss the research study and answered questions related to the study, securing personal information, and the destruction of any information obtained through the study. In addition to speaking to the students and parents/guardians about the study, I prepared the interview guide and child and adolescent assent forms and the parent consent form, I had the participants and parent/guardian sign all participant consent forms and I provided them with a copy of the interview guide. I did not immediately set appointments to interview the participants, but met with each participant informally until the semi-formal interview was set.
In order to better understand the experiences that my participants had in middle school, I included conversations and informal interviews - ethnographic interviews that occurred in the field - that I had with their parents. I did not use a formal script or set times to meet with them, but rather I was able to document – with their permission –, conversations that took place across the data collection process. The information and background that they provided, became an important contribution of this study. Since I included my conversations with the parents, I returned to the CSUN human subjects protocol committee and requested approval of the consent form to access data collected from these more informal interviews. Upon their approval I requested the parents and guardian to approve the use of their statements via the consent form.

Participants and parent/guardians were allowed to choose the interview locations, but I suggested that we meet at the school site and use the conference room to which they agreed. Prior to conducting the interviews I gave a copy of the interview protocol to the participants and their parents/guardians for review. When the interview was initiated I asked the participants if they had had a chance to review the interview protocol and if they had any questions or objection to any of the questions. The interviews averaged about 50 minutes. I used an audio recorder in order to capture participant responses. I took notes on items that caught my attention or that triggered my subjectivities. This helped me to reflect on what was said and to analyze my reactions to the statement(s). At the conclusion of the interview I asked the student participants if they wanted to add anything further to the interview, to which they answered no. In addition, I asked for permission to contact them should I need to clarify anything regarding the interview or to schedule a possible follow-up interview. I thanked the participants for their time and
candidness and provided them my phone number should they want to add or omit something. Once transcriptions of the interview were completed, I reviewed them and asked the participants to clarify or expand on particular questions or responses.

In order to gain a rich understanding of the students and their cultural knowledge, I used a combination of formal and informal ethnographic interviews. Given the ethnographic tradition of the study, informal conversational interviews occurred with frequency throughout my study. Spradley (1980) describes informal interviews as occurring whenever a question is asked of someone (p.123). Furthermore, he states that informal conversational interviews should be viewed as friendly conversations (1979, p. 58). In contrast, he describes formal interviews as occurring at an appointment time and consisting of questions that are meant to tap the informants knowledge (1980, p.124). Informal conversations allowed me to learn about facets of the culture that I needed to look at in more depth. I expected that through my observations and surface investigations further areas of interest would arise and that the need for a more focused interview approach would also arise. These more focused interviews consisted of descriptive, structural and contrasting questions and were further developed as the analysis of field notes took place.

Data Analysis

Interview and observation data was collected from student participants. As mentioned previously, I used Spradley’s (1980) Developmental Research Sequence processes throughout data collection and the data analysis. The analysis phase is defined as the systematic examination of something to determine its parts, the relationship among parts, and their relationship to the whole (Spradley, 1980, p.85). I outsourced the transcription of interviews verbatim by an outside firm and through the lens of
ethnography I began to identify cultural domains from the interviews, observations, and artifacts collected. As I describe in detail below cultural domains are categories that hold cultural meaning (p.86). Rossman and Rallis (2003) state that it is important to read and reread through the data to become familiar and intimate with it (p. 281). I searched for cultural domains within my field notes, document review, and interview transcriptions. Domain analysis was the first step in the analysis process. Structured questions resulting from the domain analysis led me to create a taxonomic list that further broke down the cultural parts into smaller parts, developing an analysis of the relationships that existed within the student’s culture.

**Domain Analysis**

Given that this was an ethnographic case study, the data analysis process was centered on describing the explicit and tacit knowledge that exists within a culture. These cultural patterns and experiences were tied to the literature review and guided by the research questions. Spradley (1980) explains that analysis refers to the systematic examination of something to determine its parts, the relationship among parts, and their relationship to the whole (p.85). Further, he states, it is the search for patterns. Cultural domains are units of cultural meaning. A term called the “cover term”, is defined and included as terms that become the events or actions which fall under that category (p.89). Developing cultural domains is a process that comes from becoming familiar and intimate with the information gathered and learned. The domains were listed using ATLAS.ti in order to better organize them and begin to see patterns and connections among the different categories. Domain analysis can be done as a surface investigation, but it encourages further in-depth analysis. Given the time restraints on this study, I was
only able to look at 3 domains in-depth. As I engaged in an in-depth investigations of particular domains it became salient to me, the research, that it was necessary to do a taxonomic analysis.

Taxonomic analysis helped me uncover further relationships among the cultural behavior and practices that I found. It was through taxonomic analysis that I developed a greater understanding of the tacit culture that is present among this group of students. Spradley (1980) states that taxonomy will only approximate the cultural knowledge (p.121), in other words even through this process I would only be able to present a small picture of the culture that has developed among Latino middle school students that have experienced transitions from alternative school settings to traditional school settings. Taxonomic analysis aided me in understanding the connections and relationships within specific cultural domains. In-depth analysis of the three domains that were tied to the research questions allowed me to make recommendations as to how schools can better serve and support these students.

Themes

According to Spradley (1980), developing themes should be one of the last steps prior to writing the ethnography. As I proceeded through the steps highlighted in the previous sections, I found three recurring themes. Through the process of reviewing the cultural domains that were developed and the relationship among the domains the three themes surfaced. This outcome required a process of determining what similarities existed among the themes, but also how they differed. Spradley (1980) identifies six universal themes and these are what I used to focus my analysis: 1) social conflict, 2) cultural contradictions, 3) informal techniques of social control, 4) managing impersonal
social relationships, 5) acquiring and maintaining status, and 6) solving problems. As Spradley suggested, I began by writing a summary of the cultural scene so that I could begin to develop a sense of how the parts were connected to the whole and in doing so I was able to present a holistic and in-depth description of the culture under study (p.154).

The three themes that surfaced were: 1) influences of the family; 2) effects of peer and teacher connections; and 3) school structures and academic opportunities. As can be seen, the themes that surfaced in my study, easily fall in the categories referenced by Spradley.

**Analytical Tools**

I used ATLAS.ti to facilitate the domain and thematic data analysis process. Through the transcription process I discovered some preliminary domains. As I read through the transcriptions I expanded some of domains and collapsed others. Although I entered the analytical process with some structure, I expected that new domains would emerge as I read and interacted with the data. ATLAS.ti helped me in tracking the domains and keeping them organized. I read through the first set of transcripts several times and was critical in developing the initial set of domains. As I read the subsequent transcripts for the other interviews and observations, I looked for information that tied into the domains already developed. I used structured questions, such as “what are kinds of relationships?” and “what are kinds of motivations?”- to find possible new domains and reread the interview transcripts to see if the data supported the newly found categories. After reading the transcripts several times and developing an initial set of categories or domains, I reviewed them and collapsed them as necessary. As the
researcher and interpreter of the data I ascribed meaning and insight that was shaped not only by the literature, but by the purpose of the study.

**Timeline**

I was expecting to collect data in the Fall of 2012, but the human subjects approval took longer than expected and data collection did not begin until the Spring of 2013. The interviews and observations process was completed by late May of 2013. During the transcription process, I came back to my participants for clarification and approval of the interview transcripts. In fact, in August 2013 I engaged in an informal interview with the mother of one of my participants. I also spoke to Rex, who informed me of his current schooling status. Throughout the data collection process, I engaged in the analytical process, which allowed me to develop the initial domains and themes that I used in this study.

**Roles of the Researcher**

I assumed many roles as I conducted this study. My principle role was that of researcher and learner. In addition to these roles, I also had to balance the role of teacher advocate for students who find themselves challenged by the structures of our school systems and cultures. Just before the data collection process began, I was promoted to assistant principal, in which my main duty was discipline. The new position allowed me greater access to the participants in the study, but I had to be careful to meet my responsibilities as an assistant principal and a researcher. Given that this is an ethnographic study, I entered this study not solely as a researcher, but also as a learner. The main purpose of an ethnographic study is to define how a group of people understand the world around them (Spradley, 1980,p.4). In order for me to understand this
interpretation, I needed to allow my participants and informants to be the teachers, and I in turn would take on the role of learner. This role was central to learning about the middle school culture and to gain the trust and respect of those I encountered along the way.

As I entered the field to collect data for this study, I transitioned to a doctoral candidate, and at the conclusion of this study I became a researcher. The motivation to complete this journey stems from the interest I have in learning about this community of students. These students, are subjected to move between institutions and have statistically have shown that they face challenges. There is little in the way of research that informs us about how to help students navigate through these transitions or what effect there is emotionally, socially and academically for these students. I wanted to do this research and learn from the perspectives of these students so that I could contribute to the body of literature that will inform and promote further research on institutional structures that deal with student transitions from alternative schools to traditional schools.

I entered into the doctoral program with the goal of acquiring the knowledge that would help me further my education and through this, learn improved methods to further the learning of the students I serve. As a teacher advocate, I wish to help all students succeed not only academically, but also in their social and familial lives. I often mentor students who have been flagged as being at-risk due to low academic performance or because they have displayed challenging behavior. Many times I have advocated on their behalf when facing disciplinary action by either teachers or administrators. I am very committed to all my students, but there is something very special about working with students/children who seem to be having a more difficult time working their way through
school. Having been a middle-school teacher and now an administrator, I have seen firsthand the challenges that many of these students face. What is more, through this study I was able to better understand how their experiences at school affect their perceptions of academic success and more broadly their perceptions of their personal success.

**Subjectivities**

Over the years, as a teacher, I have found myself advocating for students who have demonstrated challenging behavior and who have shown the possibility for academic failure. I have mentored students who have been sent to CDS (Community Day School) and subsequently who have returned to the traditional school setting. This experience has led me to make some assumptions about the experiences that the students have while attending alternative schools as well as the traditional school setting. It would not be honest to say that I am not judgmental toward the treatment and policies that I perceive these students to receive. In addition, my advocacy and empathy for these students, has the potential of heightening my emotions. I tend to take the success of these students quite personally. Even if they are not my students I find the way to help them with homework or of encouraging them when I see them down the hall. If they are sent to alternative school settings, I remain in touch with them and whenever possible and with parental approval I will visit them. Through this study I was able to monitor my subjectivities and focus on the purpose of this study, which was to learn from their experienced. I kept myself focused in order to not interrupt the learning that was taking place as I met and explored their experiences and their school culture.
As a Latina student, I faced many stereotypes and thankfully I had a supportive and encouraging family, but I look back on my educational journey and quite easily I could have made other choices that may not have led me down the path I ultimately chose. My positionality as a Latina who has successfully made it through the educational system, was not a factor in how I perceived the students and their stories. I know that being a Latina who made it through college was the catalyst for me becoming a teacher, and I want to see all kids succeed, but I want to ensure that all Latino children have a fair opportunity to make positive life-long choices. This is a very strong bias and as such I needed to monitor it closely; fortunately, I became engrossed in the stories of my participants, and my biases did not seem to affect the interpretation of the data.

**Effects of the Researcher on the Case**

If apparent, my subjectivities may be misinterpreted by my participant students and they may feel they need to provide a “right answer” depending on how I am affecting the setting or interview. To control for this, I made certain that the interview questions did not lead the participant in any direction and that they were as objective as possible. I steered away from questions that reflected my values in order to allow participants to provide authentic responses. I asked peers to read my interview questions and they provided their feedback as part of an investigator triangulation process. I reflected upon my subjectivities as I collected data and as I interpreted and analyzed it. I reflected on how I may have impacted my participants, and possibly the setting for my observations, and how I myself may have been impacted by my own subjectiveness and position.
Effects of the Case on the Researcher

The nature of this case study and the close interactions it required with the participants amplified my instinct to want to advocate, nurture and mentor. It was necessary for me to frequently reflect and account for my thoughts, interpretations, and how these may have been affecting the study. My need to improve or positively impact a student’s life is central to whom I am and interviews with these students heightened my emotions. Still I maintained a focus on the purpose of the study and ensured that my emotions were not transmitted into my conversations with the participants or the interpretation of the data. Glesne (2011) states that “part of being attuned to your personal views and perspectives is being attuned to your emotions” (p.154), furthermore she states that it is important to explore those feelings and how they relate to the study. I reflected on these emotions and thoughts through reflective journaling, anecdotal notes and observer comment. This process helped me clarify how my subjectivities, positionality, and emotions were affecting my study, especially during the data collection process and during the analysis of data.

I triangulated my data by interviewing students and parents, observing the interactions of students and staff, and student document review which included academic and behavioral records. As I analyze for themes and commonalities in the data, I reached out to peers and asked that they read excerpts of my data and compare their interpretations and themes with those that I had found. This allowed me to ensure that the data was being interpreted and presented as accurately as possible and that it was not my subjectivities that had taken over the interpretation process. I asked the participants to for their suggestions and clarifications as I moved through the data collection process. I
did this in order to paint a picture of their culture that was as precise as possible, and so that my interpretations would not change the meaning they had given or intended to give.
Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the results of the data analysis. I collected and analyzed the data in response to the research questions posed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Using ethnographic data collection methods, the data used in this study were comprised of interviews, observations, and document review. Using social capital as a framework, I sought to answer the following research questions: 1) What are the academic experiences of Latino middle school students who transition from alternative settings to traditional school settings? and 2) How do the experiences of transitioning from alternative settings to traditional school settings shape the meaning of academic success for Latino middle school students?

In order to analyze the data efficiently, I used ATLAS.ti to code interview transcripts and field notes from observations. Once I had formed a list of codes, I networked the codes to find recurring themes. Three themes arose from my analysis: 1) influence of the family; 2) effects of peer and teacher connections; and 3) school structures and academic opportunities. Below I describe how each of these themes directly connects to the effects that school transitions have had on the students. Across the themes that emerged, social capital networks appear to be central to how the students navigate through the transitions and in the manner in which they view the relationships that they have formed with family, friends, and school staff.

In order to present the cases of the two participants, I will first introduce the participants and provide contextual and background information about both students. Further, I will explain my early fieldwork process that I followed in order to identify the
participants and describe my fieldwork experiences via observations and interviews – both semi-structured and ethnographic. Then, I will arrange the findings by theme and expound on them and their relevance to the study as well as explicate the role social capital plays in the student’s experiences. I can note that when I began this research study I was employed as a sixth grade teacher at Park View. During the data collection time frame, I had been promoted and I was acting as the assistant principal. I present this information because as assistant principal my primary duty is to manage school discipline. There were numerous times throughout this study that the students were referred to me for behavioral concerns and school rule infractions. Invariably, my new professional role offered me opportunities to serve in a participant-observer capacity and learn more about the students’ experiences.

Field Relations

Early Experiences: Entering the Field

As I embarked on this research study, my expectation was to have five to ten participants. I searched within the district I work in, and outside in other surrounding districts, and I found the pool of participants was very limited. In fact, in my initial recruitment efforts, I had only identified one possible participant for the study. I spoke to an assistant superintendent of one of the largest elementary districts in the area, and she informed me that they had not one student that fit the criteria out of over 3,000. She explained that they had a with-in district alternative school and that most students promote from within that school. This statement seemed to validate the purpose for my study and the concerns that arise when students are entering the alternative school setting. As my quest moved on, one of our district counselors helped me identify an additional
two participants. Out of the pool of three participants, two agreed to be a part of the study. Both students attend Park View Middle School, the school in which I am an assistant principal.

Initially, I thought that finding participants was going to be a simple task. With the number of students that are entering the alternative school system per year, I was certain that there would be students who would be exited out of the alternative setting and returned to their traditional school. In 2010 the California Department of Education (CDE) stated that 75 counties throughout California reported enrollment of approximately 18,382 in a community day school (CDS), but CDE reports estimate that up to 43,000 students (less than 1% of the total student population) may have been serviced by these alternative school settings. This figure averages out to approximately 42 students per district throughout California. The local community day school servicing the district in this study enrolls approximately 30 middle school students. There were no statistics available for the Juvenile Court School.

Despite my initial thoughts, I experienced difficulty finding participants who had transitioned back to the traditional school. This may indicate that many students remain in the alternative school setting or drop out entirely from the system during or after transitioning back to a traditional school setting. In addition, as was the case with one of my participants, trust and safety is very important to the minor’s family. Parents and/or guardians strive to protect their children, especially when faced with the potential of negative outcomes. The father of one of my participants was apprehensive about the need to use school records for my study. He wanted absolute assurance that his child’s records would be destroyed after the time frame mentioned in the consent. He also
wanted to make sure that anything that I learned through the interviews or observations would not prejudice him at school. In summary, I was faced with two major obstacles 1) the pool from which I could find participants was exceptionally low, and 2) parents/guardians were reluctant to allow their minor child to participate in the study.

**Participants’ Backgrounds**

The first participant Robert, a pseudonym, is an eighth grade student attending Park View. I knew Robert from his previous attendance at Park View. I met with him and discussed my study to him. He was quite willing to be a participant, I sent an invitation home to his grandmother and followed up with a phone call. Robert’s grandmother has had custody of him since he was an infant. I asked him if he remembers when or the reason why he went to live with his grandmother, and he responded “Well, no, I was a baby, like eight months.” I tried to phone his grandmother several times. When I was finally able to make contact with her, she was very interested in my study and gave me verbal approval. I provided Robert paperwork - that included the invitation and the consent forms – on three different occasions and each time he lost them. After several attempts to send the documents and calling Robert’s grandmother to explain that I was resending the documents, I was finally able to obtain consent from all parties. I phoned his grandmother to reconfirm her approval. I called her to follow up because she had been very sick, so she seldom left the house, and it was difficult for her to stay vigilant of Robert. I wanted to ensure that she was well aware of the purpose of my study and that she understood the consent forms clearly.

Robert has attended Park View since sixth grade. From kindergarten to fifth grade he attended a neighboring district. Review of his report cards and state exams
revealed that over the course of his academic experience he has struggled academically and has needed to improve social skills. From kindergarten through eighth grade it was noted that he was capable of higher academic attainment, but grades and state testing show that his skill level was far below basic to basic. In six years of state exams he was unable to obtain proficiency in any academic area. In addition, behavior appears to have been a challenge as there is vast documentation that demonstrates that he was often distracted in class and often distracted others. In addition, his attendance records show that over the course of the school year his absences had increased.

Commentaries on his academic and behavior records make evident that Robert has had a need for developing social skills. As a young boy, he was distracted in class and was inconsistent in completing school assignments. Based on the document review this behavior has increased over the years. During the middle school years his behavior amplified and what used to be mere distractions has increased to suspensions for things such as fighting, damage to school property, stealing, and causing major disruptions in the classroom. Furthermore, his attendance began to decline in school and the school had begun a legal process in order to halt the increasing absences. The decision to send Robert to an alternative school was a mutual decision made by his grandmother, guardian, and the school assistant principal. Five months into his seventh grade year, Robert was sent to an alternative school. He returned to the traditional school at the beginning of this eighth grade.

Rex was the second participant in my study. I was able to identify Rex with the help of the school principal. She informed me that a student had just registered and that he seemed to meet the criteria to participate in the study. I met Rex and his father one
day at Park View when they had participated in a teacher conference. As the assistant principal I was asked by my principal to assist in the conference. This was my first experience in observing Rex’ father and the manner in which he defended his son’s interest. On this day the teachers were discussing Rex’ academic progress, - behavior was not an issue, but the numerous absences were. Rex’ father explained that he was still working out of state and that he would not leave his son alone so he was taking him with him. Rex’ father was requesting that his son not be removed from his music elective, and he explained that music was a motivation for his son. He agreed to inform the teachers in advance with the days Rex might miss so that he could be given his homework.

At the end of this conference I was able to explain my study to both of them and handed them the consent forms as well as the interview guide. A few days later I met with Rex’ father and he asked me many questions regarding the study and he wanted reassurance that records would be held confidential. I clearly understood that Rex’ father was highly involved and protective of his child. Unlike my process with Robert, I was able to obtain consent from Rex and his father relatively quick. There was a stark difference between the two experiences. I had a more difficult time communicating with Robert’s grandmother. In addition, Robert lost the paperwork numerous times. Robert’s grandmother also asked few questions and was more concerned about the imposition the research study may have on her. Rex’ father on the other hand, read through the consents and had specific questions related to the study and the procedures. He met with me personally and returned the signed consents within a few days of having received them.

Rex came to Park View from out of state. I was able to review his previous academic school records and letters that explained the many transitions that Rex had
experienced in the past year. I was especially interested in the behavioral accounts on record and the letters exchanged between the school, the district, and the parents. These documents give a detailed account about the activities that led to the transition into the alternative school. Before coming to Park View he had been enrolled in a traditional school out of state, and prior to this school he had been in the alternative school for two to three months, also out of state. In summary, Rex had had three transitions in the last year.

Like Robert, he had spent his seventh grade year partly in the traditional school and the alternative school. Unlike Robert, Rex was expelled from his school and sent to a behavioral school in the state he lived in at the time. The following is the definition of a behavioral school:

Five geographically zoned behavior schools serve as short term intervention programs (usually 4-9 weeks) for secondary students who have committed disciplinary infractions at comprehensive schools. These students are expected to return to a comprehensive school upon completion of the program. A behavior school program provides required academic courses to students in a structured environment with emphasis on assisting the student in improving self-control, social interaction, and instilling life-skills (citation redacted).

Behavioral records, specifically, notes typed in by the school dean, indicate that Rex was in a number of fights and expressed aggressive behavior. Consequently he was sent to a behavioral school in April of 2012. Rex stated, “I was there for about two, three months.” In June 2012 he was given “conditional enrollment” to a junior high school that
was not the same one that he had been expelled from. Rex described conditional enrollment as follows:

Over there in [redacted] there was a thing called conditional enrollment and that’s basically like probation, like if you got arrested and then they put you on probation, it’s basically the same thing. I had a whole year to stay out of trouble at the regular school. I had the whole 8\textsuperscript{th} grade here to finish off in the State of [redacted] or [redacted] school district, but I moved over here.

A few months later his father would move them out of state and he would begin yet another transition, this time into a traditional school in a new state. Rex explained that they had decided to come live with his mom’s brother. No further explanation was given.

In addition, to the behavioral challenges that Rex encountered, there were academic and attendance concerns as well. Records indicate that Rex was frequently absent and this pattern continued at Park View. Before enrolling in Park View records show that the student was not enrolled in school for a period of a month. From November to January of 2012, he had accumulated 11 absences and by May he was in excess of 35 absences. I was unable to find record of his attendance history prior to 7\textsuperscript{th} grade. His grades in primary grades 2\textsuperscript{nd} thru 5\textsuperscript{th} were average ranging from As to Cs. A sharp decline can be noticed when he entered middle school, which is consistent with the research of Alspaugh (1998), in which students demonstrated a decline in academic proficiency in middle school. Rex’ grades dramatically decreased in his first year of middle school. In addition, his behavioral records during this transition indicate that he was having difficulty adapting to the social climate. This is consistent with Espinoza and
Juvonen’s (2011) study which indicates that Latino students have a more challenging time adapting to new school social climates.

Interestingly, as different as Robert and Rex are from one another, there were underlying similarities between them. Both students manifested a need for their parents and family for support. Although they had an interest in education they were both challenged to engage fully in their learning. Finally, both students had experienced a series of transitions in their school experience. These transitions have not been limited to moving from one school to another, but also include movement between alternative educational programs. Some of the noted differences between the two students were the structure of their family unit, their school social affiliations, and the perspectives they have toward their teachers.

**Family Ties and Influence**

As I moved through data collection the family structures of both students caught my attention. The make-up of their families differed: one participant lived with both his parents, while the other had been living with his grandmother since he was an infant. In both cases their parents or guardian and extended family plays an important role in their upbringing. Given the difference in family dynamics, there were few similarities in their experiences, but there was one important similarity – the family advocated for their student fervently. Both Robert and Rex have significantly different family backgrounds, but regardless of this difference, I could not overlook the important role that family plays in both of their lives. For each of these students their families influenced their thoughts toward education, their future, and represented an advocating voice in their times of need.
In addition, these students demonstrated a great need for love, understanding, and support that they could only find in their parents or parental figures.

Coleman (1988) stresses the importance that the family represents in the acquisition of social capital. Moreover, Putnam (2000) stresses the strong correlation between high social capital and positive child development, but warns that there are also other factors that may result in good outcomes for the child. While literature related the family impact on Latino transitioning students initially seemed peripheral to this study, what I observed in my participants spoke to the importance that the family bears in the lives of these transitioning kids. It is necessary to understand that even though the family structure may differ – i.e., being raised by two parents or by a single grandmother –, there remains a level of support, advocacy, and transmission of values that comes from the family core.

**Robert**

I have known Robert’s grandmother for three years. When Robert came to Park View as a sixth grader I met him and his grandmother. I recalled that at that time she had had some health challenges and she seemed to always be faced with the challenge of Robert’s behavioral choices and academic progress.

During our initial interview Robert stated to me that he had been living with his grandmother for a very long time. When I asked him if he remembered the reason why he went to live with her he stated, “Well, no, I was a baby, like eight months.” I was curious to know about his relationship with his grandmother, Ms. Romo (pseudonym), as I had observed that she often seemed upset with Robert and that the relationship appeared strained. She voiced her concerns over being ill and not being able to control Robert’s
behavior on numerous occasions over the years, and this school year was no exception. When I asked Robert if he could describe a typical day at home he said I would hear “arguing”. I asked him why, and he stated “I am mostly on my phone,” and “because she doesn’t like the way that I dress, or the way I act.” I asked him what was wrong with the way he dressed, and at first he said he did not know, but further in the conversation he stated “because I look like a hoodlum.” I asked him once again about his relationship with his grandmother and he simply said it was “good.” I wondered about Robert’s parents. I had met with his mother a few months back, and wanted to know what role they were playing in his life. I asked him if I could ask questions about his parents, and he responded “yeah.”

Although, Mrs. Romo has full custodial right for Robert, his parents are still present in his life and he has a growing relationship with them. When asked about his relationship with his parents, with a smile, he simply said it was “good.” He did not provide further detail even though I attempted to prompt him to do so. During our interview I asked if he had seen his parents and he told me, “Yeah, I was with her last, on Saturday or Sunday.” I then asked when he had seen his father and he stated “last week.” Robert shared that he had several siblings, “I have three sisters, and four brothers.” I asked where they were and he said, “well, two sisters are with my mom, and two brothers are with my mom, and then my other one sister with their mom. One of my brothers is he’s really by himself and the other brother lives with his dad.”

I had encountered an uncle and aunt a few months back, so I asked him about them. On the occasion that I met his uncle he had come to the office to recover Robert’s iPod that had been confiscated. He was accompanied by Ms. Romo. I asked Robert about
his relationship with his uncle and he stated, “nah, I don’t like him.” I asked him why
and he explained “he tries to act like he’s my father or something and I don’t like that.”
Robert was very clear about the role his parents play in his life even though he does not
live with them, it was apparent that his uncle’s interest in him was not welcomed. I asked
Robert, as I wondered how difficult this family arrangement might be to a child, if he
could tell me about a difficult situation that he has faced, Robert stated: “Not living with
my parents.” He continued, “When I was smaller, it didn’t really matter to me, but now
that I’m grown up I feel like I need them.” I stated to him, “You need them, your
grandmother is not a good replacement for them?” and stoically he responded, “No.”

Given the challenges that Robert’s family structure presents to him, academic and
social achievement is encouraged as evidenced by his comments in the interview and
conversations with Mrs. Romo. Robert had shared what he thought his grandmother felt
about him, but my conversations with her told me different. Embedded in her constant
complaints about Robert’s poor academic performance and behavioral choices, there was
the hope that someone would help her motivate her grandson and help him find success.
My last conversation with Mrs. Romo took place the second to the last week of school.
Robert had consistently been late to school. During state testing, he purposely would
arrive at school after testing had begun. When I asked him why, he said he just did not
care to do well.

One day, upon his late arrival to school, he was asked by office personnel to tell
his grandmother to drop him out of Park View, since he was late and absent most of the
time anyway and he was already registered at the high school and there were only two
weeks of school left. I overheard the conversation and asked him what he thought about
the request, “Well, it was, it sounded good.” A few days later Mrs. Romo had filed a formal complaint with the district office. I received the request to investigate and called her to see if I could address the complaint. She explained to me that someone had told her grandson that he could drop out of school because he was going to go to high school. She continued to say that he was told that he was late or missing school days anyway, so in this way he could just stay home like he wanted. She told me that she tries so hard to get him to come to school and that a request like this makes it hard for her to show Robert the importance of being in school. She did not pursue the complaint and Robert came to school every day for the rest of the school year. Mrs. Romo had made it very clear that their priority was to keep Robert in school and that she expected the school to support her efforts.

I was interested to know how his parents influenced his thoughts about education. When asked what his mother thought about how he was doing in school, Robert stated “That I’m dumb for not going to school and my dad says I’m stupid.” Robert did not add more to this response, but he did share that he has goals. He wants to be a police officer and ultimately a member of SWAT when he grows up. Robert does not have a traditional home setting, but within the complications that he has faced, he does have a family that looks after him and hopes that he reaches his potential.

Rex

Rex was new to Park View and started a few months into the school year. Rex moved to South Mountain from out of state, when he and his parents came to live with his mother’s brother. His school records showed that he had not been in school for the month prior to enrolling at Park View. Further examination of his school enrollment
documentation disclosed that during the end of 7th grade he was sent to a behavioral school and given conditional enrollment to a traditional school. I was introduced to Rex and his father by my principal during a parent – teacher conference. I had already been promoted to assistant principal and I was assigned to lead this conference. The documentation for this conference shows that at Park View behavior was not an issue for this student, but academic progress and frequent absences were. During the meeting Mr. Harrison (pseudonym), Rex’ father, explained that he was still working out of state and that he was not going to leave his son alone in South Mountain, so he was taking Rex with him. Further in this meeting he advocated for allowing his son to continue to participate in his music elective. He stated that this was a class that he fully enjoyed and could be used as leverage to help him improve in the other core classes. Mr. Harrison seemed to be well versed in how the school system worked and was not afraid to advocate for his son. During the meeting Rex remained quiet and to himself, this was generally his demeanor.

During the months of my fieldwork, there were many conversations with his father but very few with his mother. According to Rex his mother was his advocate and source of support and his father more of a friend. He explained to me “well, my mom, we have a close relationship. I’m real close with my mom instead of my dad. Basically, my mom, she helps me through everything. My dad kind of doesn’t really know anything. I don’t know why, but I’m more comfortable with my mom instead of my dad.” He continued, “because she understands, but with him, it’s like more of just playing around, just having fun, that kind of stuff. He added, “my mom, basically she pushes me to do everything. She always has faith in me.”
During my interview with Rex I asked him how his family felt about his education and he explained, “they feel like I need to go to college, be the one in my family that actually goes to college. Be the first one.” He explained to me that receiving good grades, paying attention, and ultimately earning a college degree is what his parents encourage him to do. I asked him if he had come to value his parent’s expectations, and he said “not yet.” This could be why he found it difficult to engage in school fully.

Documentation related to discipline demonstrates that Mr. Harrison was frequently the one to handle school affairs. This was the case at Park View too. In fact, school documentation stated that the student only lived with his father. I did not see any documents provided by Mr. Harrison that explained that Rex was only living with him. During the time that I worked with Rex I was aware that he lived with both his parents. The few occasions when there was contact with Rex’ mother seemed to be when he had come in to the nurse’s office and she was called by the office personnel to come and pick him up. Attendance records show that on one occasion Rex wanted to go home ill and his mother was called, in the middle of their conversation he gave the phone to the attendance clerk and walked out the door. The attendant explained to mom that her son had just walked off campus. The campus supervisor and counselor went after him, but it was his father who arrived on scene and picked him up.

In nearly every document that relates to Rex’ academic or behavioral record, reference is given to his father, but not his mother. There are numerous examples in which Rex’ father attends school meetings and his advocacy for Rex is well documented. There was a situation in school, prior to his being sent to the behavioral school, in which Rex was given a four day suspension for throwing a carrot at another student. Mr.
Harrison came to the school to speak to the dean about this punishment. He was told that the dean was not available and he refused to leave until someone spoke to him. Finally, he spoke to the principal and Mr. Harrison explained that no one was hurt and that he felt this was an excessive punishment. Rex was allowed to come to school the next day.

At Park View, examples of Mr. Harrison’s advocacy abound, in speaking to him on one occasion he explained to me, that he knew his son well. He knew and understood his explosive personality, but that he was going to do whatever it took to keep him in school and help him succeed. He instructed me to call him immediately upon any situation because he knew how to reach his son. This conversation came about when the principal suspended Rex for an aggressive reaction that he had in one of his classes. Rex threw chairs, cursed at the teacher, and punched a dent into the white board of the classroom before storming out of the room. I caught up to him behind my office door and brought him into my office. By the time I spoke to him there was no aggression or anger present, but he would not share what happened with me until the next day. Both the principal and I met with Rex and his father. The principal suggested that Rex meet regularly with the counselor and Mr. Harrison adamantly refused. I explained to him that we were suggesting the school counselor and only for the sake of Rex having someone with whom he would be able to talk and vent his emotions. After hearing my explanation, Mr. Harrison agreed to allow the counselor to speak to Rex, but only if Rex sought him out. In addition, it was agreed to at this meeting that when Rex felt upset or not feeling himself, he could come to me and stay in my office. From this point on Mr. Harrison would only direct his conversation to me.
Mr. Harrison called me the day after this incident to explain that he had spoken to Rex and that he had told him some boys were making fun of him during physical education. They called him names and made fun of his athletic abilities. His father explained that this situation needed to be handled because it would cause his son’s anger to increase and he would potentially not be able to hold himself back. I spoke with Rex and he confirmed what his father had stated. Throughout my study it was apparent that both of Rex’ parents played an important role and that he relied on them to help him figure out the business of school.

The results of data analysis support the idea that family affects the academic experience of transitioning Latino students. Although it may not seem that there is support for these students, when a closer look is taken it is evident, that, to the extent they can, family members will advocate, support, and encourage students in order to improve their child’s academic experience. The parents and guardian in these two cases encouraged the students to do well in school; they advocated with school personnel to partner with them to improve their student’s academic outcomes, and when necessary they would protest against what they viewed to be unfair practices.

**Social Networks: Effects of Peer and Teacher Connections**

Robert Putnam (2000) points out that child development is powerfully shaped by social capital, which is the connections among individuals. Moreover, he states that research has demonstrated that trust, networks, and norms of reciprocity within a child’s family, school, peer groups, and larger community have wide-ranging effects on the child’s opportunities and choices and hence, on his behavior and development (p. 298). Research has shown that relationships are important and for Latino students they can
heavily impact how they feel about school (Espinoza & Juvonen, 2011; Wampler et al., 2002). The data in this study demonstrates the importance of these networks.

Documentation review regarding behavior, for both students, shows that many of the issues the students had was in the area of relationships with either classmates or teachers. The interviews further substantiate that relationships had an effect on the student’s mood or reaction to certain situations.

In the previous section I pointed out the importance the role of the family has for the two participants. In this section, I will describe some of the other relationships that develop and play a direct or indirect role in the participant’s lives. Bourdieau (1998) explains that the proximity in the social space predisposes people to closer relations, even though differences may still be present among the groups sharing the space. Both participants had a limited number of peers whom they considered friends and even fewer adults within the school setting whom they would consider trustworthy or connected to.

**Peer relations**

Interestingly, as I began my observations of the participants in class, I found that throughout the day they shared some of the same classes. They did not sit near each other, nor did I ever notice that they were friendly with one another. Rex was usually sitting with a group of students or near students, whereas Robert was generally isolated from other students. On many occasions, I witnessed Robert making conversations with other students during class time. Rex on the other hand was usually quiet and to himself even when he was assigned to work in a group.

During lunch I would see Rex with an eclectic group of kids. His friends were eighth graders like him and he may have been one of two males in a group of about seven
or eight kids. The girls colored their hair and they changed the color every few days. The boys wore jeans and t-shirts and beanies. I knew many of the students whom, Rex hung out with, and many of them were very good students and did not have behavioral records. He explained to me that he chooses friends that are similar to him. During our interview Rex explained that he had friends in his former neighborhood whom he still kept in touch with, but he had also made friends in South Mountain. I asked him how he chose his friends and he explained, “well, I choose how they act and by their personality.” He further explained, “friends in [redacted], I’ve known them since elementary school. So we kind of just trust each other and over here, not really because I barely know them.” Trust was a virtue that Rex valued. Rex felt more comfortable with adults and he trusted his mother above any other person, but at school he had found someone to trust as well. I asked him how this relationship came about and he explained, “Well, she trusted me with things. She tells me things and once someone tells me things, I know they’re comfortable with me. I can feel comfortable with them.”

One day Rex’ teacher called me and said that she was sending him to my office because he was visibly upset. When he came in he explained that he had not heard from his best friend back home. He asked me why people were so untrustworthy. We spoke for a while, but he insisted that he did not want to be with his friends anymore, that he preferred to be with adults because it was easier to trust them. I asked him how he came to feel that he did not trust his friends, he responded:

“Well, not really. Just kind of over here in California, I just want to stay to myself. Can’t really describe it. I kind of just stopped talking to everyone, but I would
say it’s pretty good. We joke around most of the time. Lunch, I do sit by them, but I’m kind of from a distance or I just hang out with my cousin.”

Following this event, I continued to see him with his friends, but he also began to spend more time with his cousin. His cousin had lived with him up to a few months ago but had moved out of the house under unpleasant circumstances. This move affected him greatly. His behavior in class mirrored his decision to keep his distance. During group work I noticed that he wanted to be a part of the group, but he would keep his conversations limited. I was able to see him enjoy the company of his classmates during English. He was telling jokes and making his classmates laugh.

Rex shared that in his former schools, both the traditional and alternative, he had friends. Good friends that he keeps in contact until now. Certainly Rex has friends and has built positive relationships, although they may seem strained at times, but he has also had his share of difficult encounters with classmates. His behavioral records show that he had a limited amount of tolerance for students who were critical of him or whom he viewed as mean. Several of the fights that he engaged in prior to being sent to the alternative school stemmed from other students making critical comments about him. He confirmed in our interview that he had been in two fights in one year. The behavioral report for one of the fights states that Rex was caught on camera hitting the other boy. After further investigation it was found that the other boy had been pushing him in the hallways and calling him derogatory names. The boy had hit him first and broken his glasses. He explained that he experienced some of the teasing and bullying at the alternative school with a particular student. I asked him how he dealt with it and he said, “It did upset me. I didn’t really handle it. I would just ignore him.” Similar
circumstances occurred at Park View. The day in which he had his outburst in class, it had been as a result of boys in his P.E class teasing him over an extended period of time. Unfortunately, this peer-peer behavior – teasing and harassment of students, appears to be a part of the middle school culture and it seemed to affect Rex deeply. Robert also had similar experiences both in the traditional school and the alternative school.

Robert had a mixed group of friends. Many of the students with whom he hung out were boys. The few close friends who he had were not kids who were usually in trouble. During the interview, we spoke about his relationship with friends. I asked him which criteria he used to choose his friends, and he responded: “If they’re relaxed; if they’re not into a lot of trouble and stuff. Well, we’ve been friends for a while. When we’re together, we just hang out in the backyard and stuff.” Robert felt he had about five good friends, and he called them “my real friends.” I found his choice of friends interesting because he was clear about choosing friends that were not into a lot of trouble, yet he often times found himself in trouble. Like Rex, his circle of friends was limited to whom he felt comfortable around, when I asked him about his classmates and other kids in school he said: “They’re not my friends.” I understood this, but I wanted to get a feeling for how he felt about the kids in general and after probing he stated, “They’re good.” Later in the interview Robert explained the difference between the kids at his traditional school and those he had encountered in alternative school. Within the scope of the traditional school he did not consider many students his friends, and he did see them as good kids. By contrast, he saw the students as a threat at the alternative school.

During classroom observations I had noticed that Robert, nearly every time, was in conversation with other students or attempting to initiate a conversation. This usually
resulted in him being in trouble for distracting the class or being off task. We talked further about his friends and he explained that, “they’re not troublemakers; they don’t try, they don’t look for trouble. If I tell them I want to fight somebody, they’ll tell me not to, because they’ll just say, “‘Why are you getting mad they don’t want to fight you.’”’ In May of 2011, Robert hit another student several times which resulted in a suspension. By September of the same year, Robert was on the receiving end, and he was placed on a no contact contract – a contract that stipulates that the students will have no verbal or physical contact. Under the conditions of the contract, if students violate contract stipulations, the site resources officer is called in to enforce the contract with a citation. However, according to Robert it had not worked in the past, so he did not expect it to work again. He expressed some concern about the other student, but when asked by the assistant principal if he was worried about something happening at school he said: “a little bit, but not that much.” During the data collection part of this study and the 2012-2013 school year, Robert did not have a record of any physical altercations with other classmates.

I asked Robert if he had made any friends at the alternative school setting and he explained that he had been there a short time - about two weeks - and then he went on independent study. He explained that he had asked the teacher if the teacher knew his brother. According to Robert, his brother was a member of a local gang who had attended the same alternative school. Robert explained:

“It’s because of what I told the teacher. I told him, because I asked, ‘Did you know my brother?’ and he said, ‘Yes,’ and then I was like, ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘Yes, he was a [redacted] Boy and stuff! And then he told all those kids and all those kids were from
[redacted] and they started messing with me. I just didn’t, because I used to sit at the tables where they sit, but I didn’t know. Then they started telling me stuff, so I moved to this other table. That’s where the [redacted] people were, and then I was cool with them because my brother was from there. Then after that they started messing with me and stuff. They started calling me names. They started like putting me in a circle, but I didn’t mess with them. They just tried to pick on me because I was smaller than them, and there’s more of them than me.”

Robert explained to me that many of the kids at the alternative school were in his words: “all into gangs.” He further explained that he did not like that or them. Robert said that after this incident the boys that claimed the same gang as his brother gave him respect because his brother was known. I asked him if he considered any of them his friends and he responded with an affirmative “no.” It is important to note that within a period of two weeks, Robert was faced with situations that threatened him. Further, he explained that “I couldn’t look like I was scared to do stuff there, or else they pick on you worse.” This attitude, to prove himself, led him to open the electrical box at the school where he turned off the power to the school. He was then placed on independent study – an alternative to the alternative.

Teacher-Student Relations

Similarly, teacher- student relations are a part of the student’s social networks. Through the analysis of the data, it became apparent that teacher-student relations are an important aspect of the student’s social network and impacts their academic experience. The manner in which the participants interacted with their teachers during this study gives the impression that these relationships are complex. Both Rex and Robert are
different from one another in many ways, and so, the manner in which they approach their relationships with teachers is different. Rex views his experience with teachers as generally positive, whereas when asked how he thought his teachers felt about him Robert stated, “I don’t think they like me.” Consequently, the data also reflected this dynamic, which seemed to be centered on the levels of trust, understanding, and acceptance that the participants and the teachers had for one another.

Robert’s experiences point to a more difficult path in creating positive connections with teachers. Rex’ experience, although challenging for him at times, does not seem to have created a barrier toward building relationships with teachers. It is important to note that Rex’ behavioral history does not show that he was often in trouble in the classroom. He had few referrals from teachers and they were generally as a result of him making poor decisions. For example, on one occasion during an assembly, he was writing vulgarities on his paper rather than taking notes on what the speaker was presenting.

Robert, on the other hand, had numerous referrals, and many of them stemmed from being disrespectful to the teachers and interrupting the teacher and/or class. When I asked Robert if there was a teacher at the traditional school that he could trust or turn to, he responded “I don’t trust the teachers here. I don’t like the teachers here.” He further clarified, “Well, my teachers.” I asked him if there was a teacher at the alternative school that he trusted and he said, “No, because I told – confided in a teacher and he told all kinds of kids, and that just got me mad.” He was referring to the conversation he had with the teacher, at the alternative school, regarding the teacher knowing or remembering his brother. Robert felt that the teacher had indirectly put him
in a difficult situation with the other students and this resulted in him being stabbed with a pencil. As a result of this incident he was placed on a one to one contract, in which he would come to the alternative school to meet with a teacher for a limited amount of time, he would pick up his homework, and return home. As the assistant principal of the school at the time, I quickly learned that I could expect a behavioral referral for Robert at least three times per week.

Although relationships with teachers were difficult for him, Robert had made some positive connections. Robert explained that he liked his physical education teacher and another core content teacher. I asked him what he liked about his P.E teacher and he stated, “because of the activities and he’s not grouchy and stuff.” As for the other teacher that he appreciated he explained, “Because she’s mean and stuff but she actually works with me. She just wants for me to do better.” There were two particular teachers that sent referrals for Robert frequently, and both teachers were new to our school and new to the profession. The referrals were usually for - student talking in class, refusing to follow directions, laughing in class, wearing a hood in class, being disruptive in class, being uncooperative. He explained that some of the other teachers frustrated him or he felt they did not like him. He explained that on one occasion he felt taunted by one of his teachers, so I asked him to give me an example, and he said:

“He took away my pencil, my pen yesterday, it was a Sharpie pen, and then I said, I told him it was just a pen, and then he said, “No, it’s a permanent marker,” but it was just a pen. He said, “You can’t have Sharpie’s at school.” And he started telling me to get a pencil, and I told him I didn’t want to and he just stayed there and kept looking at me, and that just gets me really, frustrated.”
I explained to him that he was arguing with the teacher and he agreed, so I asked him why, and he said, “Because he took away my pencil.” When I asked Robert why he did not follow the directions of the new teachers that frequently sent him out of the class or to the office with a referral, he explained:

“Because I don’t know, she always puts me out of place. She makes me feel out of place. If I raise my hand, and I keep on waiting, she won’t answer me. If I shout, and I tell her something then she’ll send me outside. And for little things, she’ll give me referrals and stuff.”

As for the other new teacher, Robert felt that he could not learn in her class, he stated, “well, it’s not her, it’s I can’t learn in her class. It’s disruptive.” When I asked him if this would be a class he would pay attention in otherwise he said, “Yes. I like science.” Most of what Robert shared regarding his teachers came from his experience at the traditional school. This was probably due to the fact that he was only at the alternative school a short time. Rex’ was at the alternative school a while longer and was able to make, while limited, some connections with the staff. He had also had various moves in the past year and a half. Consequently, Rex’ experience was different than Robert’s.

In the past year and a half, Rex had been to three traditional schools and one alternative school, as verified by school transfer records. During one of our informal meetings Rex shared that he felt more comfortable with adults and this response led me to believe that he then may have been more successful making connections with teachers. We began speaking about the teachers he had had at the alternative school, and he described them as “strict.” He continued: “well, at moments they were really strict, but some of the teachers there were actually nice if you were a good kid and you listened and
you weren’t making noise like the other kids. Then you would be fine with them.” I asked him how many teachers he had at the alternative school and he said, “Six.” I asked if he had made any connections with those teachers he said, “No, not really.” Further, I asked, if he had wanted to make connections with the teachers and assuredly he stated, “No.” I continued to ask and he shared that he had made a connections with the principal. He explained that he would see the principal often, he would stop and speak with her, and she would always have something nice to say. Similarly, he felt teachers were nice at Park View, the traditional school. When I asked him to describe Park View, he explained, “I see it as a nice school. It’s very nice. The teachers are cool and the staff, they’re nice and everything.”

His observable behavior in class demonstrated that he had respect for his teachers and classmates. He was often quiet and seemed to be following directions. Throughout the months following the incident he had in the classroom, he would come and spend time with me in my office. This was an agreement that we had made between him, his father, and myself. This provided him a space to collect himself when he was feeling angry or upset. He was genuinely polite and could carry a well-articulated conversation. Although this study is not about how teachers respond to students, I feel it is important to note that when Rex exploded in the classroom, the teacher’s response was to ask me to remove him from her classroom. The behavior he had exhibited in her classroom was not in any way directed toward her, and she understood this aspect of the event, but she felt that leaving him in her classroom would set a bad example, as she taught an elective class. Rex explained that he attempted to apologize to her on two occasions, as he felt badly that this had occurred.
In summary, as with peer-to-peer relationships, teacher-student relationships affect the academic experience that transitioning Latino students have. From the participant’s statements and experiences, it is apparent they are susceptible to their perceptions of how the teachers treat them and how the teachers feel about them. Both participants expect to have teachers whom they can trust, and who have a sense of humor, acceptance, patience, and an openness to work with them.

**School Structures and Academic Opportunities**

Thus far, two important aspects that surfaced during data analysis have been discussed - family and social networks. A third aspect, school structures and academic opportunities, also appeared as a theme throughout data collection and analysis. What I gleaned from the informal and semi-formal interviews conducted with both participants provided information regarding structures and opportunities present for the student at both traditional and alternative school settings. Specifically, these structures and opportunities refer to the circumstances that are created at the school site that may result in certain outcomes for the students – be they positive or negative. These school structures and opportunities do not necessarily have to be programs that are set in place as part of the school system; rather, what I found was that the informal structures affected participants the most. These informal structures included academic expectations, school or classroom rules, and school climate. In turn, these structures created opportunities for the students to engage with classmates and the school.

**Teacher Discipline**

One time in May 2013, I went to observe Robert in his third period class, and I found that 15 minutes into the class he was not present. His teacher informed me that he
was told by Robert’s second period teacher that Robert was being kept for a few minutes due to discipline issues. I proceeded to find him upstairs near his previous class scraping gum off of the floor in the hallway. It had been at least 15 minutes into the class period and I wondered how long he would be kept from classroom instruction. The teacher came out and explained to me that he had not done any work during class and that he was warned numerous times about chewing gum. She also informed me that she had sat him with a group of students who she felt were and should be a good influence on him. Regardless of her efforts, he was still disruptive in class and she had decided to discipline by having him scrape gum.

I approached Robert and asked him why he was scraping gum and he informed me that he was in trouble for chewing gum in class. I decided to stop and talk to him, and I asked him about his current grades; I was met with silence. He responded: "I don't know what's going on." I left, but returned to attempt to observe him in his class once again, where I found that he was still scraping gum - twenty-five minutes into the period. I also noticed that he had a plastic scraper, one plastic glove, and he had nothing to put the gum into, so he was collecting them on his glove. In his third period class, the other students were learning to work on fractions and decimals; Robert had missed most of the lesson. This is one example of a school rule - no gum chewing, and the manner in which the teacher used the breaking of this rule to also discipline him for not having met the teacher’s expectations while in class.

Rex did not usually cause disruptions in class nor did he display disrespectful behavior toward the teacher. However, on one occasion when he had been teased by other students in his P.E class, he exploded in class – throwing chairs, punching the white
board, and swearing on his way out the door. The teacher was frightened and requested that he be moved out of her class. Rex has a passion for music and enjoyed this class a great deal, but the teacher insisted that it would not set a good example to keep Rex enrolled in her class and he was moved into a study skills class. During a parent conference, consensus was achieved on a plan that if Rex did not improve in his grades that he would be transferred into a study skills class. Since Rex had not improved his grades, this agreement was used to move him out of his music class. His father had asked – implored– several times to leave him in the music class as it might serve as a motivation for him, but given the seriousness of the situation, Rex was transferred out. While these experiences resulted in less than favorable outcomes for the students, they both expressed an understanding about the consequences that were imposed on them. When I explained to Rex that he was going to be transferred out of the class, he told me that he understood. He had tried to apologize to the teacher, but he stated she would not meet with him. For his part, Robert expressed that this particular teacher cared about him and, that she only wanted to help him reach his potential.

**Academic Rigor**

Transitioning from the alternative school to the traditional school presented challenges to both participants because the academic expectations between the two schools differed substantially. Both students expressed that the academic expectations at the alternative school were considerably lower, making the work there easy, but the transition into the traditional school more difficult. Robert stated, "It was nice at first, because it was easy; the classes are easier, because you only have three classes; they just show you all videos and stuff. Yeah, we did group posters and stuff.”
Further, he said, “Because the work’s really, easy and then when I got over here – the traditional school - it is more complicated because I didn’t learn a lot of stuff that they learned in their seventh grade year here, because it’s different, and it was just like kind of more of a struggle.”

Rex explained that he felt the education that he received at the alternative school was, “Good. It was lower, actually. It was easier work.” In fact, he stated that he was doing well and receiving good grades. I asked him how he had done at the traditional school that he was attending prior to going to the alternative school and he said: “Not good, because I had friends in every class, so I’d mess around in class and wouldn’t do my work.” Moreover, he stated that at the alternative school he did not have the opportunity to mess around so he focused more in class. I asked him how he would compare the education at the alternative with the education at the traditional school, and he explained: “The grade level here seems like it’s higher than it’s supposed to be and over there it seems easier.” Robert shared this sentiment.

Progress reports for Robert reflected that he was failing all of his classes. When I asked him why school was challenging to him, he explained: “Because the work was really easy at the alternative school and then when I got over here it is more complicated. I didn’t learn a lot of stuff that they (the rest of his classmates) learned in their seventh grade year here, it’s different, and it is just like kind of more of a struggle.” Both Robert and Rex found the academic rigor a challenge, but neither one of them referenced knowing of any support that they might be able to access within the school. As I stated previously, Robert felt that most of his teachers did not like him, and while Rex liked his teachers he did not advocate for himself. When describing the school in general though,
Robert stated: “It’s more; it’s a better learning structure, because at [redacted] it was just pretty, wild in there, and I don’t, the classrooms, the kids could do practically whatever they want.” Furthermore, he added, “There’s not those kids, and there’s not like a lot of trouble here.”

Robert has made clear that the alternative school was a negative experience for him and although he was having a tough time academically and socially at the traditional school, he preferred traditional over the alternative school. On the other hand, Rex did not seem to have a difficult time adjusting to the alternative school, but has had a rough time adjusting to the traditional school mainly because of the hostile climate that he perceives among his classmates. Many times he expressed that he just wanted to hit the kids that were teasing him, but he thought about his mother and held back. On one occasion, I asked him what would happen if he returned to the alternative school, and Rex explained that if he would not have moved and remained in the traditional school in the other state where he would have a year of what he called probation. He explained: “Over there in [redacted] there was a thing called conditional enrollment and that’s basically like probation, like if you got arrested, and then they put you on probation, it’s basically the same thing. I had a whole year to stay out of trouble at the regular school. I had the whole 8\textsuperscript{th} grade here to finish off in the State of [redacted] or [redacted] school district, but I moved over here.” Rex’ response to my question made me curious, and I asked him to tell me about a day in the alternative school, which he described as follows:

“A regular day, we’d start out, there’s gates around it and there’s two sides – one for girls to line up and another side for the boys to line up. They would make you take off your belt at first and you would go through a metal detector and they would pat you down
after that. Then you go to your classes and that’s basically it.” Moreover, he said that the school reminded him of jail, and that he felt like he was in jail. I asked him if there were any activities and he said, “No, not really. It’s just basically regular school. It’s just behavior school for kids that got expelled from that school that they were at. We had p.e and stuff, but we didn’t have basketball teams or anything like that.”

Meanwhile, Robert described being afraid when he first went to the alternative school because the “the kids there, they’re really big and then I got kind of scared.” He described a typical day like this:

“First, you wake up in the morning, and you go to the bus stop by the local library. Then when you get to school you all get off and then you get your breakfast, if you want to, and then you line up with your teacher, because there’s only three, and then it’s you, they just show you all videos and stuff.”

I asked him if they used textbooks and he said, “no.” I asked what sort of work they did he said, “some worksheets or posters.” I asked him if he liked working in groups and he said “no.” I asked him why, and he explained that the he did not like the people he was with. Again, I asked him why, and he said: “They were all into gangs.” This perception that the kids around him were bigger and into gangs made Robert feel fear. He only felt better about the alternative school when he was placed on independent study and received instruction one-to-one. As I indicated at the beginning of this section, school structures may not necessarily be programs that the school has in place, but rather policies, rules, and cultures that affect the student’s perception of the school seem to play an important role, whether it be the alternative or traditional school.
Summary

Both participants have had a difficult time navigating through middle school, but they continue to have hope for their future academic trajectory. Robert sees education as a means for improving himself and his future. He is hoping to be a police officer and eventually be a part of a SWAT team. By contrast, Robert feels that when he is in high school his motivation will increase and that he will have an improved chance of success, as for middle school, he stated, “To me, I really don’t care about the eighth grade year, but high school I actually want to try.” When asked why he felt this would be the case, he responded: “Because I’ve heard, many people tell me, because if you don’t get as many credits you will just fail.” In other words, although he was not doing well in middle school, it did not mean that he did not want to do well overall. He was hopeful that in high school he would find people who would help him reach his academic goals.

On the other hand, Rex is hopeful to become a musician, but wants to finish high school and will then decide if he will further his education. He was unsure about high school. I asked him if he was excited about high school, he said, “no, not really.” I asked why and he stated, “same reason I guess.” I said, “the people?” He said, “yeah.” I went on to tell him that high school is so much bigger and there were lots of people to choose from to be friends with. I asked where he would be going to high school, and he informed me that he would be attending South Mountain High School. He asked how big it was, I told him about 2,500 students. He asked who goes there, I said most of the kids from our school.

By the end of the school year, Rex had decided that he would rather be home schooled, and when I last spoke to his mother, she explained that they had moved out of South Mountain and that Rex was being home schooled and was doing very well. She
told me that she hoped that I would be able to look at her son’s experience and find a way to improve the school culture. Here, she seemed to refer to how her son had a very difficult time dealing with the mean kids who he had encountered. She felt that many kids go through this and as a result they decide that they do not like school. This is the reason that she decided to home school him, so that he would not lose interest and continue to work toward a high school diploma.

The structural differences between the traditional and alternative school appear evident, from participant responses - from the academic rigor to the social environment. The results revealed three major themes: 1) influence of the family; 2) effects of peer and teacher connections; and 3) school structures and academic opportunities. Through the interviews, observations, and document review I was able to gain an understanding of how their experiences in middle school and through the transitions are affected in each of these three themes. The results also points out that both participants had differing experiences both at the alternative school and the traditional school. In fact, their social networks, including family structure, differed one from the other, but the effects that they had on the students are evident in aspects of their school experiences. In the next and final chapter, I will discuss how the themes connect to the literature and the social capital framework.
Chapter V: Findings and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to examine the academic experiences of Latino middle school students who transition from an alternative school setting to a traditional school setting and how these experiences shape their meaning of academic success. Accordingly, the following two research questions guided data collection, analysis, and interpretation in the study: 1) What are the academic experiences of Latino middle school students who transition from alternative settings to traditional school settings? 2) How do the experiences of transitioning from alternative settings to traditional school settings shape the meaning of academic success for Latino middle school students? Using social capital as a framework and previous research to inform my study, I embarked on a series of observations, interviews, and document analysis. Consistent with the research by Akos and Galassi (2004), who point out that transitions into middle school can be divided into three groups: academic, social, and procedural, this study found that middle school students tend to experience transitions through: 1) influences of the family; 2) effects of peer and teacher connections; and 3) school structures and academic opportunities.

This chapter will discuss these three themes in light of previous research discussed in chapter three and, social capital to frame the findings. The literature discussed in chapter three informs us that students in middle school undergo a tremendous amount of change and experience multiple transitions both in and out of school, academically and socially (Alspaugh, 1998; Juvonen, 2007; Espinoza & Juvonen, 2011 Wampler, Munsch, & Adams, 2002). In chapter four I presented some of the
experiences that Robert and Rex have had over the course of their middle school trajectory. Their stories inform us that many aspects of their personal and school lives affect their experience through school. Unlike other students, the participants in this study have also had to experience the transition between different types of school settings – traditional to alternative to independent study. This chapter will connect the results of this study with previous research, and present important discoveries through the research process that appear to affect the students as they learn to navigate through the many changes that they experience in these middle school years and through their transitions. Furthermore, I will evaluate where further research is needed and discuss the implications that these findings may have on schools.

**Academic Experiences of Latino Middle School Students Who Transition**

The first research question that I considered in this study was - what are the academic experiences of Latino middle school students who transition from alternative settings to traditional school settings? The most noticeable effect of the transition on the student’s academic experience tended to be the academic rigor that they experienced in the alternative school compared to the traditional school. Accordingly, both participants shared that they had experienced challenges at the alternative school in regards to their learning. They felt that the traditional school’s academic rigor far exceeded that of their alternative school. In addition, social climate and teacher relationships served as school structures that seemed to impact the experiences that both participants had while they transitioned into middle school. The collective relationships with peers and teachers challenged their notion of acceptance into the traditional school culture and learning process.
School Transitioning: Effects on Academics Experiences

Both Robert and Rex have had distinct experiences as they transition through middle school, but academically, they both were achieving below their grade level. My findings were consistent with the research which has found that Latino students tend to enter middle school with lower grades, and while in middle school, persist and achieve lower grades compared to their White and African American counterparts (Donato and de Onis, 1994; Wampler, 2002). Robert and Rex both had lower grades in elementary school and continued to have them during middle school. They had a difficult time achieving academic success in the traditional school setting. In the interviews that I conducted with the students, both explained that in the alternative school, academic work was much easier, which made the transition difficult for them when they returned to the traditional school. Robert shared that he felt that he had missed out on his 7th grade because he was at the alternative school and on independent study, because of this transition he had a difficult time understanding what was being taught to him in 8th grade. He explained: “I cared more about school at the beginning, but then it’s just getting so hard, too hard right.” Robert expounds on this notion and continues to explain: “Because the work was really easy and then when I got over here it is more complicated because I didn’t learn a lot of stuff that they learned in their seventh grade year here, because it’s different, and it is just like kind more of a struggle.”

Rex shared with me, that while he was in the alternative school he did well, but now that he was at the traditional school his academic records indicated he was having a difficult time achieving academic success. He stated: “The grade level here seems like it’s higher than it’s supposed to be and over there it seems easier.” The research done by
Wampler et.al. (2002) found that Latino middle school students in their study rebounded academically the year following their transition into middle school, but this was not the case with the students in my study. It is possible that the disruption in their academic trajectory caused by the transition altered the possibility for them to obtain higher academic achievement, but more evidence is needed to draw tentative conclusions related to this question.

Given the academic difficulties that these students experienced, both still seemed hopeful to obtain their high school diplomas and have clear goals for their futures. Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi (1992) found that by fourth and fifth grade, many Mexican-Americans become psychological dropouts, but this pattern did not appear to be the case for the two participants in my study. It would behoove us to continue to seek reasons for the possible failure that many Latino students are experiencing. This is an area that well deserves further exploration as Latino student failure continues its steady path even through the diversions of program implementation that are meant to alter it.

**Social Climate and Teacher Relationships as School Structures**

As I thought about the experiences that both of the participants in this study have had, I came to understand that both social climate and school structures have an effect on how the students perceive middle school. In their study, Espinoza and Juvonen, (2011), explained that Latinos tend to endorse more collectivistic goals than other ethnicities, and Wampler et al. (2002) add that cultural attitudes attributed to the steep declines in Latino students. The findings from my study demonstrate conflicting evidence about cultural attitudes. Neither of the two participants were swayed by their peers in any clear direction. In fact, Rex had a difficult time building relationships that he felt were
trustworthy, and while Robert had many friends he was not necessarily influenced by them. I would actually dare to conclude that both Rex and Robert had unique cultural experiences, not necessarily shared by others. Their family structure and experiences influence their decision making more so than the influence of their classmates. In my interviews and observations, it was not apparent that they shared goals with other students or that they acted in a particular manner because of the friendships that they had. In fact, when asked, Robert told me that when his friends encourage him to stay out of trouble he does not listen to them.

While individual relationship with peers seemed to have a limited influence on both students, the broader social climate undoubtedly affected Rex in a direct manner. He endured teasing by other students while attending the traditional school. He did not experience this while in the alternative school. Rex’ mother would explain to me that she wished kids would not be so cruel. She explained that their attitudes toward her son made it difficult for him to want to go to school. The times that Rex became angry and violent at school were preceded by him being taunted or teased by other students. He explained that he did not experience these types of behaviors at the alternative school. He explained that the structure of the school – rules, uniforms, separation from other students, did not allow for it to happen. Ultimately, Rex ended up on independent study and based on our last conversation, seems quite happy with his decision.

Interestingly, Robert, unlike Rex had a difficult time while in the alternative school. I had expected both participants to have had similar experiences, but this was not the case. Robert was only on the campus of the alternative school for two weeks and his experience there, for that short time, was unpleasant. Robert explained to me that on the
day that he went for his interview at the alternative school he was afraid of the kids. He explained: “the kids there, they’re really big and then I got kind of scared.” The social climate of the alternative school proved to be challenging for Robert. Although, he was pleased by the ease of the academic work, he was worried about the students there not accepting him and feared that he would be hurt, which eventually he was.

We know that student relationships are not the only relationships that exist, in middle school. Accordingly, in understanding the middle school culture, it is necessary to understand the relationship that exists between student and teacher. What we know is that there is a direct link between social capital and the educational system. Bourdieau (1998) explains that the educational structures will perpetuate social order, he calls this scholastic classification. While my study did not delve into the psyche of teachers or administrators, I was able to see from the student’s perspective how dynamic these relationships are. I cannot say that teachers knowingly participate in the social stratification of students, but I do believe that it is possible that they subconsciously have a fear of students who have attended an alternative school. In the study by Owens and Konkol, (2004), students associated with alternative school settings pointed out that poor teacher relationships contributed to their failure in the traditional school.

Clearly, Robert stated that he felt that the majority of his teachers did not like him. Surprising to me was the fact that Robert felt that the one teacher that had his well-being at heart was also the most demanding and strictest teacher whom he had. The numerous behavioral referrals that Robert had might attest to why he felt his teachers did not like him. He felt taunted by one teacher and simply not liked by the others. The teacher Robert appreciated was an experienced teacher, coincidentally, the teachers he
felt did not like him were new to the school site and one new to the profession. My study
did not look into the teacher relationships that might exist between experience and Latino
students who transition between alternative and traditional schools, but this may be an
area of further study.

Rex did not have the same experience as Robert in regards to his teachers. He
appreciated his teachers in both the traditional and alternative schools. Unlike Robert,
Rex was mostly quiet and introverted. Robert spoke his mind and often times needed
redirection. Although Rex did not cause trouble in class and it would appear that he had
cordial relationships with his teachers, on the occasion of his classroom outburst, his
teacher was quite unforgiving of his behavior. This indicated to me a lack of
understanding as a result of being unprepared to manage students who have behavioral
concerns.

Students who are moving between alternative to traditional schools also tend to
experience structural differences that sometimes go unnoticed. Relationships with
teachers are a structure that can help students transition more easily. In this area, Lagana-
Riordan et al. (2011), explained that students who transition from alternative to
traditional schools point out that they feel their teachers at the traditional school are well-
meaning, but are too busy to give them individual attention. Furthermore, they found that
students transitioning students felt judged and alienated. The findings in my study would
support this sentiment. Both Robert and Rex felt judged and alienated. The adults whom
they felt they could trust on campus were few, if any.
The Meaning of Academic Success for Latino Middle School Students

The second research question that I considered in this study was - how do the experiences of transitioning from alternative settings to traditional school settings shape the meaning of academic success for Latino middle school students? Through the interviews and document reviews, I became aware that the social networks that the students developed played an important part in helping the students construct a unique meaning of academic success. In order to better understand this dynamic, I turned to Coleman’s (1988) explanations of social capital, in which he states that it is not necessarily ‘owned’ by the individual but instead arises as a resource that is available to them. Furthermore, Coleman explains social capital is a resource based on trust and shared values, and develops from the weaving-together of people in communities. Coleman further adds, that if the human capital possessed by parents is not complemented by social capital embodied in family relations, it is irrelevant to the child’s educational growth that the parent has a great deal, or a small amount, of human capital. In other words, social capital is not only a network that facilitates the acquisition of other capitals - namely economic-, but rather it is the supportive actions that people engage in because they believe it is the right thing to do.

Throughout the data collection process, I found that relationships within the school were challenging, for both Robert and Rex. At times, even the relationships with their families were complex, but these school and family relationships directly affected how the students perceived education. When I asked Robert how his mother felt about him not doing well in school and about being absent frequently, - he stated: “That I’m dumb for not going to school.” When I asked Rex how he viewed academic success, he
stated: “College degree. Good grades, paying attention.” I asked him if this was the same or different from what his family’s view were and he said, “It’s the same.” I further asked him if he had learned to value what they value as far as education is concerned and he responded, “Not yet.” When Robert was asked how he viewed academic success he answered, “I haven’t had any.” I continued to ask him what he thought academic success looked like, and he stated, “Good grades, having, getting your parents happy.” He added, “I want to make something of myself, but I don’t know, it’s kind of hard.” As can be noted by their comments, they have acquired a sense of value for education, but they have not had an opportunity to experience success. Through these transitions, their parents continued to instil in them, a value for education, and this can been seen in the fervent manner in which they advocated for their children.

The findings in this study indicate that the parents of the participants, to the extent that their school and academic capital allowed them, advocated for their child’s academic and social development. Clearly, document reviews showed that there were frequent visits and phone calls to the school by the parents in order to address varied situations that arose throughout the school year. The phone calls and visits to the school facilitated their advocacy for their children—and their attempts to build academic capital in their children. Below, I discuss the social capital that the participants possess as a function of their families, and how through their support the students have been able to develop a value for education. Although it may not be outwardly apparent because of their low achievement in school, the conversations I had with the participants clearly demonstrate that they have acquired a value for education and for the role it may play in their future. Their personal experiences within their home life – economic, family, and health-, may
lead to a deficit in social capital; which in turn affects their ability to use social capital as a means to obtain other forms of capital.

**Social Capital Framework for the Understanding of School Transitions**

Bourdieu (1998) ties the family unit to the need to sustain or improve social capital and economic capital. Moreover, he explains that there is a clear connection between increasing the level of education in order to preserve or improve the family’s economic condition. In both of the cases in this study the family plays an important role not only in the transition process, but especially in education overall. There are three recognizable areas in which the family’s influence can be seen: 1) advocacy, 2) support, and 3) expectations.

In distinct manners, both Robert’s grandmother and Rex’ parents advocate for their children in the areas of education and discipline. Both students had a sense that education was important and would benefit them in the long run, a value inspired by their parents and families. At first glance one might think that Robert’s grandmother is often focused on the negative aspects about her grandson, but the reality is that she wanted him to succeed and she was often vigilant and outspoken when she sought help from the school. Likewise, Rex’ father often defended his son and makes attempts to partner with the school in order to provide his son with an education and seeks the help of the school to find opportunities to motivate his son. Theorist of social capital agree that there are varying degrees of social capital and that the family plays an important role in its acquisition (Bourdieu, 1998; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000).

Both participants turned to their families for support. In Rex’ case, he turned to his mother for moral support and his father for friendship. Both his parents would
advocate for him by contacting the school to handle attendance, academic, and behavioral concerns. The parent meetings that Rex’ father attended generally offered him an opportunity to request that the school officials overlook his sons absences and rather to team with him to find a way to motivate him to do well in school. Robert’s case is a bit more complicated as his parents continued to be a part of his life, but he lived with his grandmother. Due to his grandmother’s health issues she often times asked his uncles to step in to help her with school concerns, but if the matter was serious enough she would personally handle it. The decision to have Robert go to an alternative school, for example, was decided between his grandmother and the assistant principal. In the situation in which Robert was asked to tell his grandmother to drop him from school, she took the initiative to advocate for him and by passed the school and went directly to the district office with her concerns. Clearly, the findings from this study demonstrate that the parents and family have a great deal of interest in the educational experience of their children. Unfortunately, as Putnam (2000) explains, while the family may be providing social capital, there may be a deficit as a result of problems – economic, family, health etc. - that the family is facing.

Social capital, in the form of formal and informal social networks, helps shield children from their parent’s worst moments (Putnam, 2000). For both Rex and Robert there have been experiences in their personal lives that have potentially affected their outlook on education and in the relationships that they develop. In reviewing both Rex’ and Robert’s behavioral history it was apparent that social relationships within the school setting were not easy. Both had documented bouts of aggression with other students and
on some occasions with school staff. I personally did not experience this with either student, but I wanted to know more about why this had become part of their culture.

In the case of both of the participants the middle school culture affected them, but in distinct ways. Rex had a difficult time adjusting to what he perceived as an uninviting and critical culture. He was angered by the lack of acceptance from some of his peers. While he kept his feelings to himself, his history of explosive behavior indicated that there were moments when he reached his tolerance level. Working as an assistant principal within the school, I found that many kids had similar experiences. The middle school culture seems to be less tolerant of differences. Rex was new to the school and to the city, and it is not known if this transition made it more difficult for Rex to feel accepted in the school. His feelings about the unfriendliness of students did not extend to the teachers. Rex shared that he liked the teachers. He said that they were funny and that he perceived them as helpful and interested in his success.

Robert, on the other hand, grew up in the area and had an ability to make friends. He felt accepted by his peers, but found the teachers to be difficult. Robert perceived that many of his teachers did not like him. He did not correlate that it could be his behavior or apathy about school that caused his teachers to discipline him. Rather, he strongly felt that they did not like him. Robert’s experience in the alternative school may have affected his assimilation into the middle school. The culture within the alternative school that Robert attended was quite different than the traditional school where he was now. In fact, he reported that the alternative school was much smaller and the academic expectations seemed much easier. Robert explained that this environment impacted his motivation and willingness to try at the traditional school. Having given up academically
early on in the school year made it difficult for him to meet the expectations set by his teachers. In Robert’s case, it was the academic culture at the middle school that made his transitioning difficult.

Conclusions

For both Robert and Rex, the transition to a traditional middle school, after attending an alternative school, posed challenges. Akos, Masina, and Creamer (2004) recommend that schools should provide structure for transitioning middle school students. Students who return to traditional schools after attending an alternative school for an extended amount of time need support systems to aid them with the transition. Based on the findings from this study, transitioning between alternative to the traditional school poses two challenges: 1) significant difference in academic rigor between the two schools and 2) a cultural shift between the types of peer and teacher relationships that exist in the two settings.

As we have seen, there is a meaningful difference between the academic rigor in the alternative school and the traditional school. Both students stated that they found it challenging to keep up with the demands in the traditional school. Based on the observations and the school records, it would appear that the school did not have structures in place to help identify gaps in the student’s learning or a system to aid them in minimizing those gaps as they transitioned back to the traditional school. In a sense, both participants’ families advocated to address gaps in school structures as they attempted to support student learning and academic success of their children as they transitioned to the traditional school setting. Specifically, the families tended to advocate in two manners: 1) seeking support from the school to help their child academically, and
2) trying to help the school understand the needs that their family had. In both instances, the family plays an important role in attempting to help the student develop relationships that will help them succeed in school. Yet, it appeared that the attempts by the family were insufficient to achieve the outcomes necessary to ultimately promote the academic success of their children.

Beyond structural gaps in traditional school settings, cultural differences between alternative and traditions schools seemed to shaped student transitions. Specifically, the alternative school cultural characteristics influenced decisions that participants made and experiences that they had as they transitioned to the traditional school setting. Given that this study focused on students who have transitioned between alternative school settings and traditional school settings, there is a need to review the culture that the alternative schools have and how this affects the transition. Mcgee (2001) explains that there are several types of perceptions of the alternative school, and the two types that relate to this study are - the “warehouse” or “dumping ground” and the “school/prison continuum”.

The warehouse or dumping ground model of alternative schools are those that are used to place students that are deemed disruptive, deviant, and dysfunctional, while the “school/prison continuum”, is a term used by Nolan and Anyon (2004) to describe alternative schools that have rigid policies where, students are subjected to surprise searches, and corralled behind chain link fences. Aull (2012) states that this use of alternative schools began a trend of criminalizing student misbehavior. The findings in this study support what previous research has uncovered.

Both Robert and Rex provide us an insight into how they perceived the alternative school culture. Robert’s experiences speak to the social culture that exists in the
alternative school. For him, there were certain social structures that made it difficult to assimilate, or fit in, to the new environment. Moreover, he perceived the culture to be dangerous and gang like. As for the teachers, he felt that he could not trust them. He went as far as to state that he felt it was as a result of a teacher’s indiscretion, that he had been stabbed with a pencil. Rex, on the other hand provides an insight of the school culture that seemed to criminalize his experiences. He stated that the school had very strict rules that reminded him of jail. They were subjected to random searches and upon return to the traditional school, they were placed on a “conditional enrollment” status. Rex explained that:

Over there in [redacted] there was a thing called conditional enrollment and that’s basically like probation, like if you got arrested and then they put you on probation, it’s basically the same thing. I had a whole year to stay out of trouble at the regular school. I had the whole 8th grade here to finish off in the State of [redacted] or [redacted] school district, but I moved over here. So it’s still on my record, but if I do move back to [redacted] I have to finish my conditional enrollment. It will clear off my record over there if I do finish it.

When asked if he thought this system was acceptable he stated: “Feels like it was a good thing because it changed me.” I asked him how, and he stated that being at the alternative school helped him with his “behavior.” When asked if they received any services while attending the alternative school such as academic help, counseling, or peer support groups he said, “No, just people talking about drugs and how they were addicted to it and how they got in trouble from doing it and stuff like that, gang related stuff.”
When we consider the cultural characteristics of both the alternative and traditional school settings, we begin to see a picture emerge that helps us understand the peer- and teacher-relationships of students who transition between the two school environments. Robert had an easier time with the students at Park View. He is a social young man that likes to make friends, but his relationships, with teachers and peers, could also be difficult for him to manage. He tended not to conform to the classroom rules making it difficult to build positive relationships with his teachers and classmates. By contrast, Rex was able to work within the classroom and develop positive relationships with his teachers, but had a difficult time adjusting to the student culture. Yet, underlying these observations, in listening to the comments made by teachers during conferences or their written remarks on referrals, it was clear that the teachers were not sure how to approach the students in order to redirect them to a more successful outcome.

**Recommendations for Research and Practice**

Given the continued struggles that Latino students face academically, as evident by the nearly 50% graduation failure rate, it is imperative that we continue to look into this area of education to explore and implement changes that will reverse this trend. According to the California Department of Education nearly 91,000 students in 2010 transitioned between alternative schools and traditional school sites. Many of the children that transition between the two settings are Latino middle school students. As Baer (1999) points out, children of middle school age are in a stage of psychological, social, biological, and cognitive development. Furthermore, research on the transition to middle school has shown that Latinos have a more difficult time adjusting, both academically and socially (Salazar, 1997 in Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2009).
Moreover, Aull’s (2012) found that zero tolerance policies for student behavior have served to criminalize student misbehavior. It is important to understand that our traditional school policies have changed since the 1990s and that although crime among youth has gone down, the number of referrals to alternative school systems continues to rise among minority students (Hatt, 2011). The findings in this study support many of the conclusion that other researchers have found.

The accounts that participants in this study provided indicate that transitioning Latino students do not feel accepted or understood in the middle school environment. As researchers, we must look into the many areas that affect transitioning students, but especially into the areas that affect the students the most, which are peer and teacher relationships. Wald and Losen (2003) found that many minority students will be taught by unqualified teachers, tested on material they never reviewed, held back in grade, placed in restrictive special education programs, repeatedly suspended, and banished to alternative out- placements before dropping or getting pushed out of school altogether. The findings in this study suggest that teachers may not have the proper skills to address the academic or social needs of students who transition between the two types of school settings.

In larger school context, findings by Feierman, Levick, and Mody (2009) demonstrate that students who have been sent to a juvenile detention facility will often find many obstacles when attempting to re-enter their home school. Similarly, the students who transition from other less repressive alternative schools find obstacles that make it difficult for them to integrate themselves into the traditional school setting. Simply, we need to continue to better understand how school structures and social
networks affect transitioning Latino middle school students in order to create a school system that supports these students and offers them opportunities for success. In what follows, I have made some recommendations for further research and practice.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Research has shown that students in middle school undergo a wide range of changes, both physically and socially. These changes tend to impact how they perceive the culture of the school. In order to make recommendations related to improving the understanding of the cultural aspects of the transition, further research would be necessary. It is evident that the family network impacts the student’s ability to navigate within a new school culture, but in order to understand effective strategies that would ease this transition, more work needs to be done in this area. As noted in the findings, the family becomes a source of support and advocacy for the transitioning student. They play a critical role for the transitioning student, and while this study uncovered the importance of this role, further study of this dynamic is critical and missing from the literature.

Like family members this population of students would benefit if for researchers examined the perceptions and possible limitations traditional school teachers have when it comes to educating transitioning students. Research may look into areas that explore the teacher training programs as they relate to this population of students and how they can be improved to provide teachers with a more reflective practice and increase their resilience when under pressure. In addition, it would be wise to look into the ethical and psychological domains of teachers and their perceptions of these students and how they use school and educational policies to justify their behaviors or approaches toward
students who have attended an alternative school. Furthermore, research in the area of how school policies, structures, and teacher classroom management approaches criminalize student behavior would certainly contribute to a greater understanding on how to improve our schools and the academic experience of transitioning students.

In order to address the academic successes or lack thereof, for transitioning students, it is important to look at the disparities or differences between the rigor provided at the alternative school and that of the traditional school. This study touched upon the surface of this, further studies such as the one presented here need to be pursued and extended to other geographical areas and student populations.

**Recommendation for Practice**

Based on the findings from this study, my first recommendation would be to implement a system to aid transitioning students in obtaining the basic skills that will be necessary for them to appropriately meet the grade level standards. This system can be set through tutoring or intervention courses throughout the day or in a zero period before the start of the school day. Both students struggled academically even before the transition occurred, but the challenges that they faced grew greater after they returned to the traditional school from the alternative school. The fact that the students were not achieving academically is not something that occurred as they transitioned from one setting to the other. Rather, academic deficiencies and social concerns were seen early on in elementary school – as noted from document review. Indeed, the findings demonstrates that traditional schools tend to deal in a more punitive manner with students who have these concerns. However, what would be in the best interest of the schools and the students to implement an approach that addressed the remedial academic needs of
students and exhibited a more constructivist, rather than punitive tone. Bringing in social services for the students and providing them opportunities to learn in a different setting may prove more successful. A self-contained classroom with a limited number of students and teachers who are more resilient to pressures from student behavior, may result in better engagement academically and socially. Robert appreciated the one-to-one learning that he received at the alternative school, a similar model may be adopted at the traditional school, especially in the first year of transition. Technology may be considered to provide students with a vehicle with which they may have greater access to the teacher via email or programs such as Edmodo. Technology may also be a means by which students can receive additional help in acquiring skills that may have been missed in prior academic years or during the phases of transition.

Addressing the relationships with students and teachers is a much more complex endeavor. Teachers with less experience appeared to have the most difficulty with the transitioning students. For example, they tended to punish the students more often for minor offenses. As a result of these patterns, I would recommend appropriate training and professional development that specifically targets the needs of transitioning students, provided to both new and tenured teachers. New teachers should have training as a part of their academic preparation and continued through the school sites that employ them. Many teachers use punitive systems in order to manage their classrooms, students and teachers would both benefit from a system that focuses more on reflective and intentional approaches. Providing teachers with the resources that they need and the support from administration to manage students in a more positive and progressive manner may result in a better transition experience. I would suggest that as a school is informed that a
student will be entering the traditional school from an alternative school, a meeting should be held with his or her teachers in order to provide them background on the child and to assess what approach and services will be needed in order to support the child. In addition, parents, administration, and the school counselors should meet to address specific concerns that both the parents and the school may have and to develop a plan to address these concerns and to establish expectations that the school, family, and student have. Finally, steps should be taken to address the social needs of students, like Rex, who enter a school culture with which they are unfamiliar. Counseling for the student may be provided in order to help the student address stress that the transition may be causing. In addition, a buddy student may be assigned to help the transitioning student learn how to navigate through the school – lunch, passing periods, tutoring, location of places within the school, and assist the student in developing new relationships with other students and teachers. Lastly, the administration should make a concerted effort to welcome the student and their family, and provide for them access to the resources that the student and their family may need as they transition into this new setting.

In summary, my recommendation to administrators who receive into their schools students who are transitioning back from an alternative schools are as follows: 1) prepare in advance by placing the student in classrooms with teachers who are better able to address the needs of this particular group of students, 2) meet with the parents and student and address the needs the family and their expectations, 3) make clear the expectations that the school will have of the student and family, and 4) continuously provide opportunities to validate and empower the student.
References


California Department of Education. (2007). *Zero dropouts for California.* Retrieved April 15, 2012 from [edoptions@cde.ca.gov](mailto:edoptions@cde.ca.gov).


Appendix A

Invitation to Participate in Research Study

Students of Park View Middle School and Lake View Middle School are invited to participate in a confidential study about the experiences of Latino/a middle school students who have previously attended an alternative school setting (Juvenile Justice Center, Community Day School) and are now back in the regular school setting. The study is being done by a doctoral student from California State University Northridge. Participation will include being observed in their classroom setting and interviewing with the student researcher. All information will be confidential and identities will be kept anonymous. Those who participate will receive a $10 Visa gift card. If you are interested please contact Adrienne Peralta at Adrienne.peralta.790@my.csun.edu.

Thank you!
Appendix B

California State University, Northridge
PARENTAL CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Transitioning from Alternative Schools back to Traditional Schools, Understanding Latino/a Middle School Students Experiences

You are being asked to consent for your child to participate in a research study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to allow your child to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM*

Researcher:
Adrienne Peralta
Educational Leadership, doctoral program
(805) 797-4507

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Nathan Durdella, Assistant Professor
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
California State University, Northridge
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330

PURPOSE OF STUDY
The purpose of this research study is to understand the experiences of Latino middle school students have when as they transition from an alternative school setting to a traditional school setting.

SUBJECTS
Inclusion Requirements
Your child is eligible to participate in this study if he/she…

- is currently a middle school student
- has in the past two years attended an alternative school setting and is now transitioned to a traditional school
- was sent to the alternative school setting because they were at risk of academic failure or because of behavioral concerns
- considers themselves Latino/a
Exclusion Requirements
You are not eligible to participate in this study if you are not a middle school Latino student who has attended an alternative school setting and who has in the past two years transitioned back to the traditional school setting.

Time Commitment
This study will involve approximately 2 hours of your child’s time and potentially follow-up interviews.

PROCEDURES
The following procedures will occur:

1. Semi-structured interview, 30-60 minutes
2. 60-minute Observations
3. At least one member check of transcribed data from interviews

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life. The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include: minimal emotional risk.

BENEFITS
Subject Benefits
Your child will not directly benefit from participation in this study.

Benefits to Others or Society
Increased understanding of the experiences that Latino students have when transitioning from alternative to traditional school setting and how these experiences mold their understanding of academic success.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION
The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT
Compensation for Participation
Your child will receive a $20.00 gift card.

Costs
There is no cost to you for your child’s participation in this study.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES
You are free to withdraw your child from this study at any time. **If you decide to withdraw your child from this study you should notify the research team immediately.** The research team may also end your child’s participation in this study if he/she does not follow instructions, misses scheduled visits, or if his/her safety and welfare are at risk.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

**Subject Identifiable Data**

All identifiable information that will be collected about your child will be removed and replaced with a code. A list linking the code and your child’s identifiable information will be kept separate from the research data.

**Data Storage**

- All research data will be stored electronically on a secure computer with password protection.
- The audio will also be stored in a secure location; then transcribed and erased at the end of the study.

**Data Access**

The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your child’s study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies your child will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about your child.

**Data Retention**

- The researchers intend to keep the research data for approximately 2 years and then it will be destroyed.

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you are unable to reach a member of the research team listed on the first page of the form and have general questions, or you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your child’s rights as a research subject, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep.

**Participation in this study is voluntary.** Your child may refuse to answer any question or discontinue his/her involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you and your child might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the
information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

If your child is 9 years of age or older he/she will be provided with an assent form that explains the study in language understandable to a child. A member of the research team will also read the form to your child and answer any questions your child may have. Your child will be asked to sign the form only if he/she agrees to be in the study. If your child does not wish to be in the study he/she will not be asked to sign the form. In addition, if after signing the assent form your child changes his/her mind your child is free to discontinue his/her participation at any time. If your child is younger than 9 years then an assent form will not be provided, but a member of the research team will explain the study to your child and ask your child whether or not he/she wishes to participate. If your child declines to participate then your child will not be included in the study. Additionally, if your child says yes and declines later your child will be withdrawn from the study at his/her request.

I agree to allow my child to participate in the study.

Subject Signature ____________________ Date ________________

Printed Name of Subject ____________________________________________

Researcher Signature ____________________ Date ________________

Printed Name of Researcher __________________________________________
California State University, Northridge
PARENTAL CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Transitioning from Alternative to Traditional Schools: Understanding Latino Middle School Student Experiences

You are being asked to consent for your child to participate in a research study. Transitioning from Alternative to Traditional Schools: Understanding Latino Middle School Student Experiences, is a study conducted by, Adrienne Peralta, as part of the requirements for the Ed.D. degree in Educational Leadership in the Department of Education. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to allow your child to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM

Researcher:
Adrienne Peralta
Educational Leadership, doctoral program
Adrienne.peralta.790@my.csun.edu
(805) 797-4507

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Nathan Durdella, Assistant Professor
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
California State University, Northridge
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330
(818) 677-3316
Nathan.durdella@csun.edu

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to understand the experiences that Latino middle school students have when they transition from an alternative school setting to a traditional school setting. An alternative school is a school that students are sent to when expelled from their regular school due to behavior, attendance, and/or academic failure. The traditional school is defined, in this study, as the school in which your child would be registered when entering junior high or middle-school after leaving their elementary school. The traditional school would follow the normal progression of elementary school, junior high school/middle-school, and high school.
I would like to ask that you allow me permission to review and use your child’s academic and behavioral records. These records will be used in addition to the interviews and observations you have already participated in and will be a part of my research study.

SUBJECTS
Inclusion Requirements
Your child is eligible to participate in this study if he/she…
- is currently a middle school student
- has in the past two years attended an alternative school setting and is now transitioned to a traditional school
- was sent to the alternative school setting because they were at risk of academic failure or because of behavioral concerns
- considers themselves Latino/a

Exclusion Requirements
Your child may not be eligible to participate in this study if they are not a middle school Latino student who has attended an alternative school setting and who has in the past two years transitioned back to the traditional school setting.

Time Commitment

This is only a request to use your child’s academic and behavioral records. Your child has already participated in the interview and observation portion of the study.

PROCEDURES

These things will happen if you want to be in the study:
1. Documentation from your child’s academic and behavioral files will be used.
2. The documents that may be used:
   a. Academic Records
      i. report cards
      ii. course enrollment
      iii. schools attended
      iv. academic work completed
      v. attendance records
      vi. test scores
      vii. eligibility for special education programs
      viii. eligibility for special programs or services
   b. Behavioral Records
      i. behavioral referrals
      ii. suspension forms
      iii. documentation related to behavioral incidents
      iv. documentation related to the referral to an alternative school
v. documentation from the alternative school
vi. disciplinary actions

3. All names will be removed and pseudonyms will be used where needed.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Possible risks and/or discomforts: minimal emotional risk, possible embarrassment. Care and consideration will be taken to preserve your child’s anonymity. As a teacher I am legally bound to report to child protective services any claims of abuse. I will have this same responsibility as a researcher. They will have access to the school site counselor if they are feeling emotional distress due to any of the interview questions or observation process.

BENEFITS

Subject Benefits
Your child will not directly benefit from participation in this study.

Benefits to Others or Society
Increased understanding of the experiences that Latino students have when transitioning from alternative to traditional school settings and how these experiences mold their understanding of academic success can benefit the school sites by improving support programs for transitioning students.

ALTERNATIVES TO ALLOWING DOCUMENT ACCESS

The only alternative to allowing document access is to deny access.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Compensation for Participation
No compensation.

Costs
There is no cost to you for your child’s participation in this study.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES

You are free to withdraw your child from this study at any time. If you decide to withdraw your child from this study you should notify the research team immediately. The research team may also end your child’s participation in this study if he/she does not follow instructions, misses scheduled visits, or if his/her safety and welfare are at risk.
CONFIDENTIALITY

Subject Identifiable Data
All identifiable information that will be collected about your child will be removed and replaced with a code. A list linking the code and your child’s identifiable information will be kept separate from the research data. The computer that will hold the information regarding your child has a fingerprint reader. In order to access the computer my fingerprint needs to be recognized by the reader. The computer is also located in my home and is not used in any other location.

Data Storage
- All research data will be stored electronically on a secure computer with password protection.
- The audio will also be stored in a secure and locked filing cabinet at the researcher’s home; then transcribed and erased at the end of one year from dissertation publication.
- Data will be saved for one year in the event that it must be revisited and will only be used for this study. Further use of the data will require parental and participant approval.

Data Access
The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your child’s study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies your child will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about your child this includes their name, staff or peer names, school site names.

Data Retention
- The researchers intend to keep the research data for approximately 1 year and then it will be destroyed. Audio tapes will be erased and field notes and transcriptions will be shredded.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS
If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you are unable to reach a member of the research team listed on the first page of the form and have general questions, or you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your child’s rights as a research subject, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.
**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. **Participation in this study is voluntary.** Your child may refuse to answer any question or discontinue his/her involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you and your child might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

Your child will be provided with an assent form that explains the study in language understandable to a child. A member of the research team will also read the form to your child and answer any questions your child may have. Your child will be asked to sign the form only if he/she agrees to be in the study. If your child does not wish to be in the study he/she will not be asked to sign the form. In addition, if after signing the assent form your child changes his/her mind your child is free to discontinue his/her participation at any time.

*I agree to allow my child to participate in the study.*

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Appendix C

California State University, Northridge
CHILD ASSENT TO BE IN A HUMAN RESEARCH PROJECT

Transitioning from Alternative Schools back to Traditional Schools, Understanding Latino/a Middle School Students Experiences

This paper explains a research project. The people doing the research would like your help, but they want you to know exactly what this means. Participating in this project is your choice. Please read about the project below. Feel free to ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A person connected to the research will be around to answer your questions.

Informal Title of the study – (age appropriate) Why some students like to learn about math.
Formal Title: Variables Associated with Intrinsic Motivation in Math among 4th grade students

RESEARCH TEAM
Name and Title of Researcher: Adrienne Peralta
Department: Educational Leadership, doctoral program
Telephone Number: (805) 797-4507

Name and Title of Faculty Advisor: Dr. Nathan Durdella
Department: Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Telephone Number: 818-677-2591

Study Location(s): Park View Middle School and Lake View Middle School

YOU ARE HERE BECAUSE....
This is a project that looks to understand how middle school students experience the change between an alternative school back to the traditional school. They want to see if you would like to be in this project.

WHY ARE THEY DOING THIS PROJECT?
Dr./Mr./Ms. Peralta is doing this research project to learn more about the experiences that students have as they move from an alternative school back to their traditional school.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE PROJECT?
These things will happen if you want to be in the study:
1. Face to face interview
2. Observations at your school site
3. You will help me correct the notes I have taken of the interview
Risk: you may experience some emotions as we discuss experiences you have had, you may become bored.

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS**
You can ask questions any time. You can ask now or you can ask later. You can talk to the researchers, your family or someone else in charge. It is important that you know what is going on.

**DO YOU WANT TO BE IN THE PROJECT?**
No
You do not have to be in the study. No one will be upset with you if you don't want to do this. If you don't want to be in this study, or if you want to skip a question that is hard or confusing, that's fine. Just tell the researchers and they won't get upset.
Yes
If you want to be in the study sign your name below. You can say yes now and say no later. It is up to you to decide.

_________________________  Age  ___________________
Signature of Child  

_________________________  Date  ___________________
Signature of Researcher

_________________________  Date  ___________________
Signature of Individual Obtaining Assent
If different from researcher

Date
California State University, Northridge

CHILD ASSENT TO BE IN A HUMAN RESEARCH PROJECT

Transitioning from Alternative to Traditional Schools: Understanding Latino Middle School Student Experiences

We would like to invite you to participate in a research project. Participating in this project is your choice. Please read about the project below. Feel free to ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A person connected to the research will be around to answer your questions.

Informal Title of the study – What experiences do Latino students have when returning from the alternative school to the traditional school.

Formal Title: Transitioning from Alternative to Traditional Schools: Understanding Latino Middle School Student Experiences

RESEARCH TEAM

Name and Title of Researcher: Adrienne Peralta
Department: Educational Leadership, doctoral program
Telephone Number: (805) 797-4507

Name and Title of Faculty Advisor: Dr. Nathan Durdella
Department: Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Telephone Number: 818-677-2591

Study Location(s): Rio Vista Middle School and Rio Del Valle Middle School

WHY ARE THEY DOING THIS PROJECT?
I, Mrs. Peralta, am doing this research project to learn more about the experiences that students have as they move from an alternative school back to their traditional school. I want to learn about these experiences.

I would like to ask that you allow me permission to review your academic and behavioral records. These records will be used in addition to the interviews and observations you have already participated in and will be part of my research study.

BENEFITS
I am hoping that if I can better understand the experiences students have when they go from a juvenile court school or a community school back to the regular school, I will be able to help schools and teachers understand how these changes may affect students and how to improve the programs they have in place.

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How will your documents be used?

4. Documentation from the student’s academic and behavioral files will be used.
5. All names will be removed and pseudonyms will be used where needed.
6. The academic and behavioral records will be used in conjunction with the information obtained from interviews and observations in order to more accurately understand the student’s perspective.
7. The documents that may be used:
   a. Academic Records
      i. report cards
      ii. course enrollment
      iii. schools attended
      iv. academic work completed
      v. attendance records
      vi. test scores
      vii. eligibility for special education programs
      viii. eligibility for special programs or services
   b. Behavioral Records
      i. behavioral referrals
      ii. suspension forms
      iii. documentation related to behavioral incidents
      iv. documentation related to the referral to an alternative school
      v. documentation from the alternative school
      vi. disciplinary actions

Risk:
- You may feel uncomfortable sharing your academic and behavioral files with me. I will make sure that all information that may identify you will remain private. Your name, names of schools, identification numbers, names of teacher and family, names of cities will be omitted or replaced with pseudonyms.

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS
You can ask questions any time. You can ask now or you can ask later. You can talk to me - the researcher, your family or someone else in charge. It is important that you know what is going on.

WILL YOU ALLOW THE USE OF YOUR ACADEMIC AND BEHAVIORAL DOCUMENTS?

Your signature below will allow me permission to review, copy, and use the information found in your academic and behavioral records.

_____________________________  __________  __________
Signature of Child          Age          Date
Signature of Researcher

Date

Signature of Individual Obtaining Assent
If different from researcher

Date
Appendix D

California State University, Northridge
ADOLESCENT ASSENT TO BE IN A HUMAN RESEARCH PROJECT

Transitioning from Alternative Schools back to Traditional Schools, Understanding Latino/a Middle School Students Experiences

We would like to invite you to participate in a research project. Participating in this project is your choice. Please read about the project below. Feel free to ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A person connected to the research will be around to answer your questions.

Informal Title of the study – (age appropriate) Why some students like to learn about math.
Formal Title: Variables Associated with Intrinsic Motivation in Math among 10th grade students)

RESEARCH TEAM
Name and Title of Researcher: Adrienne Peralta
Department: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Doctoral Program
Telephone Number: 805-797-4507

Name and Title of Faculty Advisor: Dr. Nathan Durdella
Department: Education Leadership and Policy Studies
Telephone Number: 818-677-2591

Study Location(s): Park View Middle School and Lake View Middle School

WHAT IS THIS PROJECT ABOUT?
This is a project that looks to understand how middle school students experience the change between an alternative school back to the traditional school. They want to see if you would like to be in this project.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE PROJECT?
These things will happen if you want to be in the study:
1. Face to face interviews
2. Observations at your school site
3. You will help me correct the notes I have taken of the interview
Risk: you may experience some emotions as we discuss experiences you have had, you may become bored.

**BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT TO YOU AND OTHERS**
You will not benefit from this study.

**DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROJECT?**
You can ask questions any time. You can talk to the researchers, your family or someone else in charge, before you decide if you want to participate. If you do agree to participate, you can change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

If you are unable to reach a member of the research team listed on the first page of the form and have general questions, or you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

If you want to be in the study sign your name below.

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California State University, Northridge
ADOLESCENT ASSENT TO BE IN A HUMAN RESEARCH PROJECT

Transitioning from Alternative to Traditional Schools: Understanding Latino Middle School Student Experiences

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**Informal Title of the study** – What experiences do Latino students have when returning from the alternative school to the traditional school.

**Formal Title**: Transitioning from Alternative to Traditional Schools: Understanding Latino Middle School Student Experiences

**RESEARCH TEAM**

Name and Title of Researcher: Adrienne Peralta
Department: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Doctoral Program
Telephone Number: 805-797-4507

Name and Title of Faculty Advisor: Dr. Nathan Durdella
Department: Education Leadership and Policy Studies
Telephone Number: 818-677-2591

Study Location(s): Rio Vista Middle School and Rio Del Valle Middle School

**SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT:**

This is a project that looks to understand how middle school students experience moving from an alternative school back to the traditional school. I want to learn about these experiences. I would like to ask that you allow me permission to review your academic and behavioral records. These records will be used in addition to the interviews and observations you have already participated in and will be part of my research study.

**How will your documents be used?**

8. Documentation from the student’s academic and behavioral files will be used.
9. All names will be removed and pseudonyms will be used where needed.
10. The academic and behavioral records will be used in conjunction with the information obtained from interviews and observations in order to more accurately understand the student’s perspective.
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      i. report cards
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v. attendance records
vi. test scores
vii. eligibility for special education programs
viii. eligibility for special programs or services

b. Behavioral Records
i. behavioral referrals
ii. suspension forms
iii. documentation related to behavioral incidents
iv. documentation related to the referral to an alternative school
v. documentation from the alternative school
vi. disciplinary actions

Risk:

• You may feel uncomfortable sharing your academic and behavioral files with me. I will make sure that all information that may identify you will remain private. Your name, names of schools, identification numbers, names of teacher and family, names of cities will be omitted or replaced with pseudonyms.

BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT TO YOU AND OTHERS
I am hoping that if I can better understand the experiences students have when they go from a juvenile court school or a community school back to the regular school, I will be able to help schools and teachers understand how these changes may affect students and how to improve the programs they have in place.

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROJECT?
You can ask questions any time. You can talk to the researchers, your family or someone else in charge, before you decide if you want to participate. If you do agree to participate, you can change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

If you are unable to reach a member of the research team listed on the first page of the form and have general questions, or you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

If you want to be in the study sign your name below.

_____________________________    ____________________    ________________
Signature of Child     Age          Date

_____________________________
Signature of Researcher    Date

_____________________________
Signature of Individual Obtaining Assent    Date
Appendix E

California State University, Northridge

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

Transitioning from Alternative to Traditional Schools: Understanding Latino Middle School Student Experiences

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Transitioning from Alternative to Traditional Schools: Understanding Latino Middle School Student Experiences, a study conducted by Adrienne Peralta as part of the requirements for the Ed.D degree in Educational Leadership. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM

Researcher:
Adrienne Peralta
Department of Educational Leadership, doctoral program
(805) 797-4507
Adrienne.peralta.790@my.csun.edu

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Nathan Durdella, Assistant Professor
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
18111 Nordhoff St.
Northridge, CA 91330
(818) 677-3316
Nathan.durdella@csun.edu
PURPOSE OF STUDY
The purpose of this research study is to understand the experiences that Latino middle school students have when they transition from an alternative school setting to a traditional school setting. An alternative school is a school that students are sent to when expelled from their regular school due to behavior, attendance, and/or academic failure. The traditional school is defined, in this study, as the school in which your child would be registered when entering junior high or middle-school after leaving their elementary school. The traditional school would follow the normal progression of elementary school, junior high school/middle-school, and high school.

Inclusion Requirements
You are eligible to participate in this study if …
- Your child/student is currently a middle school student
- You are able to provide information to the research process that will enrich the understanding of the transition process the child has gone through and or to provide information regarding the middle school culture/environment.

Exclusion Requirements

Time Commitment
This study will involve approximately 1-3 hours of your time. This study does not require you to sit for a formal interview, but rather it will note any conversations or informal meetings that occur regarding the student participants for this study.

PROCEDURES
The following procedures will occur:
- Documentation of parent/teacher meetings regarding student participants for this study. This may include parent/student conferences, discipline meetings, IPT/SST meetings, etc…
- Use of school records that contain information provided by you. This may include documented phone calls or emails made to the school regarding the student and documents in the students file that have been provided by the parent/teacher.
- Information obtained through phone calls or personal conversations regarding the student participant will be documented and used to inform this study.
- In order to further clarify information gathered, the researcher may call or email you.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
Possible risks and/or discomforts: minimal emotional risk, possible embarrassment answering questions and/or being observed.

This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life.
BENEFITS

Subject Benefits

You will not directly benefit from participation in this study.

Benefits to Others or Society

Increased understanding of the experiences that Latino students have when transitioning from alternative to traditional school settings and how these experiences mold their understanding of academic success can benefit the school sites by improving support programs for transitioning students.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Compensation for Participation

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

Costs

There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

Reimbursement

You will not be reimbursed for any out of pocket expenses, such as parking or transportation fees.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the research team immediately. The research team may also end your participation in this study if he/she does not follow instructions, misses scheduled visits, or if his/her safety and welfare are at risk.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Subject Identifiable Data

All identifiable information that will be collected will be removed and replaced with a code. A list linking the code and the identifiable information will be kept separate from the research data. The computer that will hold the information has a fingerprint reader. In order to access the computer my fingerprint needs to be recognized by the reader. The computer is also located in my home and is not used in any other location.

Data Storage
• All research data will be stored electronically on a secure computer with password protection.
• All documents will have names redacted and then they will be uploaded to a secure computer.
• The audio will also be stored in a secure and locked filing cabinet at the researchers home; then transcribed and erased at the end of one year from dissertation publication.
• Data will be saved for one year in the event that it must be revisited and will only be used for this study. Further use of the data will require parental and participant approval.

Data Access
The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your child’s study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies your child will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about your child this includes their name, staff or peer names, school site names.

Data Retention
The researchers intend to keep the research data for approximately 1 year and then it will be destroyed. Audio tapes will be erased and field notes and transcriptions will be shredded.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS
If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.
If you are unable to reach a member of the research team listed on the first page of the form and have general questions, or you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your child’s rights as a research subject, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT
You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep.
 Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

I agree to participate in the study.

___________________________________  _____________________________
Participant Signature                  Date
Appendix F

Latino/a Alternative School Transitional Student Study

Interview Guide

Pre-Interview Session: Introduction and Background

Welcome

Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for spending this time with me and participating in this interview. Before we get started I would like for you to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research.

Purpose of the First Interview

This interview is part of a series of interviews and observation that will be used to learn about the experiences that Latino/a student’s have had as they have transitioned between an alternative school setting back to the traditional school setting. The interviews will focus on information regarding you and your family, your experiences at the alternative school setting and the experiences that you have had at the traditional school setting.

Confidentiality

Information that you provide to me through this interview will be used for the purposes of this research only. At the conclusion of this research study, information from all participants will be presented in a manner that will conceal the identities of the participants. Pseudonyms will be used in the place of all participant’s names and school settings, as well as for names of persons mentioned throughout the study. This interview will be audio-recorded and then transcribed so that the data may be analyzed. All information will be kept in a passcode secured laptop and upon completion of the study the audio recordings and notes will be destroyed. Only those persons specified on the Consent to Participate will have access to the field notes and data collected. All information will be analyzed in strict confidentiality.

Informed Consent

This consent notice summarizes some information from the Consent to Participate in Research and communicates the procedures, potential risks and discomforts for subjects, potential benefits to subjects, payment to subjects for participation, participation and withdrawal, and rights of research subjects. Procedures in this interview are limited to semi-structured personal interview sessions. Some interview questions may involve issues of a personal nature. You may feel uneasy about answering some of these interview questions. You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain as a participant in the study. You may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However, findings from this study may lead to improvements in school programs for students and may contribute to our knowledge on
the subject. Interview participants and/or research subjects will be paid for their participation in this interview. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You are not obligated whatsoever to answer or respond to any question or to discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss. You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way. You may ask that the audio recording be stopped at any time and/or may leave the interview at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind. You may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without interview. You can halt your participation in the interview at any time. You are not waiving legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this interview (Durdella, 2011).

Identification and contact information of principal investigator

If you have any questions about this research, being a participant in this research study or any other concerns please contact: Adrienne Peralta at Adrienne.peralta.790@my.csun.edu.

Timing

This interview will last between 60-90 minutes. Do you have any questions for me? Let’s begin.

Interview Guide

Warm up questions:

1. How old are you?

2. How long have you been at the traditional school?

3. Which alternative school did you attend prior to your current school?

   a. How long were you there?

Family and self:

1. Can you describe a typical day in your home?

2. How would you describe your relationship with your parents?

3. Is there anyone that you feel you can turn to when you have questions or when you are feeling upset? Why this person?
4. At one point or another, we all face difficult situations, can you describe the toughest experience you have faced while growing up?

5. Can you describe what role school/education plays in your family life?
   a. How would you describe academic success?
      i. Is this the same or different from how your family or guardian would see academic success?

6. Were you ever out of school for a long period of time, absent frequently, or tardy to school often? Can you describe the situation(s) that led to this?

Questions regarding alternative setting?

1. How long did you attend the alternative school?

2. Why were you sent to this school?
   a. How do you feel about having been sent there?
   b. How do you feel about the reasons you were given for being sent there?

3. Can you give me a description of a regular day at this school?
   a. What other activities took place at this school?
      i. Did you participate in any of these activities? If so, what do you think of the activities available to you?
      ii. Did you receive any non-academic services? If so, can you describe them?

4. Describe your relationships with teacher?
   a. Was there anyone at the school that you could turn to when you were upset or felt that you needed help either academically or socially?

5. Describe your relationships with peer at the alternative setting?
a. How well did you get along with peers before coming to the alternative school?

b. Was there an improvement with your relationships? If so, can you explain how? If not, can you describe why you think there was no improvement?

Traditional School Setting (working on these)

**Post-Interview Session: Debriefing and Closing**

*I would like to thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this interview. Again, any information that you have shared with me will be confidential and names and other identifying information will not be shared or used in any document. I would like to know if you have any questions for me? If you think of some at a later date please do not hesitate to call me.*