RESTORING HOPE WITHIN AN INVISIBLE POPULATION:
HUMANIZING PEDAGOGY THROUGH CRITICAL MENTORSHIP

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By

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Tlazohcamati
DEDICATION

During the course of writing this thesis I have come in contact with hundreds of people who have crossed my path for one reason or another providing me with the good and bad experiences that eventually constitute my life. There was one particular person, however, who has impacted me in such a way that I made the decision to dedicate this thesis to him.

His name is Jose Mendoza. He is what this research would refer to as an “at-risk” youth. Jose, an active gang member, epitomizes what it truly is to be a “vato loco” or crazy dude. Fresh out of juvenile hall and enrolled in a continuation high school; statistics ensured that Jose would soon be a high school drop-out or a career inmate. Despite the numerous odds that were constantly pushing against him, Jose managed to become an extraordinarily successful student. Not only did Jose defeat the odds by graduating from high school, but he did so at the top of his entire class establishing a record for “high-point winner” on the honor roll system.

After only five months of receiving his high school diploma, Jose was gunned down and killed by police during an altercation on the street. While Jose demonstrated an exemplary model for what it takes to create meaningful change, we will never get to witness the extent of just how far he would go in life. He was taken from us prematurely. It hurts my heart to know that a vibrant star has shown us the magnitude of brilliance he could emanate, but will never again have the capacity to shine and bring joy to those around him. A star has fallen and died.

Jose and other kids like Jose have assisted me in finding my calling. I have learned throughout my experiences in life that hope and aspiration are often found in the darkest and most challenging of places. I find inspiration and an eagerness to become an agent of change in those youth who are finding themselves in rough situations and at times in situations that require some extra support, and still manage to thrive. Jose has helped me to reinforce the true reasons why I continue to work with youth at-risk, and for that, I dedicate this thesis to him.

Dedicated to Jose Psycho Mendoza

October 31, 1995 – November 22, 2013

Rest In Peace
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ABSTRACT

RESTORING HOPE WITHIN AN INVISIBLE POPULATION:
HUMANIZING PEDAGOGY THROUGH CRITICAL MENTORSHIP

By
Alex Ojeda
Master of Arts
in Chicana and Chicano Studies

This thesis project will describe how I became part of Mentoring to Overcome Struggles And Inspire Courage, or MOSAIC, a youth mentoring program based out of California State University Northridge, as well as the effect mentors have on continuation high school students, both at an academic level and on a personal level. I have worked with the program for seven years. I began as a mentor during my undergraduate studies and am currently the program director. I made the decision to work with MOSAIC due to my own experiences as an at-risk “Latino” youth. By means of an auto-ethnography, I will provide a testament to the personal transformations I have witnessed as a result of a critical humanistic approach to mentorship, which is a form of mentoring I have developed throughout the years I have been involved in the program. I will describe the changes in (a) university students, (b) (including the researcher) and (c) “at-risk” continuation high school students. My sociological observations and findings will be discussed in relation to my own personal growth as an “at-risk” youth, student, MOSAIC mentor, university instructor/educator, MOSAIC program director and sociologist. I will concurrently discuss the unique mentoring approach MOSAIC mentors utilize as tools for academic engagement, such as art, poetry, Hip Hop, and other trends in popular culture. Through this auto-ethnography, I hope to clarify my own pedagogy and possible things that need to change within the public educational system. Ultimately, I hope to provide an alternative mentoring approach so others can model this form of mentorship to those working with struggling students, so that they can meet the developmental needs of “invisible” youth populations.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“The problem is not simply that some students are doing poorly in school. The problem relates to all youth who are in danger of not just failing and dropping out of school, but of entering adulthood illiterate, dependent upon drugs and alcohol, unemployed or underemployed, as a teenage parent, dependent on public support, or adjudicated by the criminal justice system.”

- Robert D. Barr & William H. Parrett

(Barr & Parrett, 2001, p. 3)

Statement of the Problem

When at-risk students are struggling with obstacles in life and trying to stay in school, knowing that someone is compassionate and authentically concerned about their personal situations enables the act of learning to become more humanistic and authentic. It allows room for personal growth and a healthy development of confidence and self-efficacy, which are factors that are all too uncommon at the continuation high school level. During my first year as a mentor in the MOSAIC program, I realized that providing mentorship to continuation high school students during the hours in which they are attending classes is an opportune time to prepare them with the tools and skills necessary for a smoother transition into adulthood with emphasis on their present circumstances. Many times mentors act as a supplement to what continuation high school students are already learning in their classes, and often hold group discussions with students on topics
that require more attention or critical thinking. Because mentors are present during school hours within a classroom setting, students are often looking to seek meaningful connections with their mentors in relation to both, their academic lives and their personal lives. Moreover, students enrolled in continuation high schools are less likely to seek out mentoring or tutoring services during after-school hours, so having such mentoring services available to them during school makes it much more practical and effective.

Being that continuation high school students at some point or another were considered “unfit” for a traditional high school experience, they are commonly recommended by counselors and/or principals to enroll into an alternative school to take advantage of the flexible rules and hours. Continuation high schools function primarily to fill specific voids that are unmet in traditional high schools where one-on-one attention is scarce, so smaller schools where students receive more attention seem like a better match with students who are struggling in slipping through the institutional cracks (Barr & Parrett, 2001). Because many students have not acquired the tools needed to excel throughout their educational careers, I have learned that a supplemental support system is required for them to be able to develop and embrace positive thoughts relating to a successful future despite negative academic setbacks. As a result, continuation high schools allow students to be hopeful and optimistic of their future.

One component of mentoring in which the MOSAIC program has adopted over the years is the unique approach to critical mentoring. I include the term *critical* because it goes far beyond the typical “tutor” complex that mentoring is often mistaken for. Before attempting to assist students in improving their schoolwork habits, it is important to address existing issues in a manner that speaks *directly* to the youth and incorporates
their present realities directly into their academic curriculum so as to avoid the feeling of alienation and marginalization during the process of human development (Darder, 1991). In exercising such tactics as a MOSAIC mentor, I have learned that the result of a strong mentor/mentee relationship increases the chances of post high school educational attainment and possible long-term success, and further, allows students to realize the significance of education and their civic contribution to their communities. I have come to strongly believe in such notion because I have personally experienced it myself.

The Research

I have been a part of the MOSAIC mentoring program for seven years (during my undergraduate and graduate studies). I first encountered MOSAIC during my first year as an undergraduate student at California State University Northridge (CSUN) and remained a mentor until I graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in Liberal Studies two years later. The following semester I began a graduate program in Chicano/a Studies at CSUN and I wanted to continue working as a mentor, but the MOSAIC program was only offered to undergraduate students so as an alternative, I was given the position of Peer Mentor where I would essentially mentor the mentors, and I was still be able to mentor youth attending continuation high schools. The following semester, the MOSAIC Program Director resigned her position and as a result I was offered her position soon after and gladly accepted. I have served as program director during all of my graduate work and have grown a significant attachment to MOSAIC.

Throughout my journey mentoring “at-risk” youth I have observed a significant shift in attitude not only toward students’ education and the value of it, but in their
personal lives as well. Being that I was once considered an at-risk youth, my own personal experiences dealing with gangs, drugs and other criminal activity in my past often correlated with what I was observing and feeling during my years serving as a MOSAIC mentor. I opted to utilize an auto-ethnographic approach in documenting my research because I saw myself in the youth I was working with. As soon as I felt that there existed several similarities between the students and me, I eagerly dove into mentoring with the intention of acquiring a deeper understanding of the reasons why continuation high school students are failing academically and help reframe their attitudes toward education, which was a critical component in my own transformation as an adolescent and young adult.

The goal of my thesis project is to determine the extent to which university student mentors trained in humanizing critical pedagogy impact the educational outlook and the personal lives of continuation high school students within a short period of time; approximately four months or an academic semester. This study also poses the question of whether or not it is worth investing in more programs like MOSAIC within public schools; specifically continuation high schools where students are mostly minorities (i.e., Latino/a and African American) and low-income. While many feel that investing in such populations reaps little to no return, I believe it is crucial to conduct research that deepens our understanding of how programs like MOSAIC impact the personal growth and academic success of continuation high school students who are considerably at risk of disconnecting, in various forms, from a positive and enriching high school education. Such research can help us develop an ideal mentoring model for this population, and help decrease the chances of negative behaviors that often place young people in situations
that can jeopardize the quality of their adult lives, such as incarceration, unemployment, and/or dead-end jobs.

**Thesis Overview**

This Master’s Thesis will focus on several factors which are related to the continuation high school experience (for both high school and university students and the researcher), and the role of compassionate mentoring within an academic environment. Through the inclusion of an auto-narrative, I will provide personal insight relating to the literature and findings of my research. My study is compiled into four separate chapters. The remaining sections of this chapter will include a segment on defining certain terminology which will be used throughout this thesis that may not be clear to the reader. For the sake of avoiding speculation and confusion, I will highlight the definitions of terms specifically utilized within the context of this work and discuss the theoretical framework. I will also describe the population of continuation high school students I have been working with in the MOSAIC program as well as the need for supplemental pedagogical strategies aimed toward vulnerable populations. Chapter two will address prior research conducted on mentoring practices for Latino/a at-risk youth attending alternative schools and the application of critical pedagogy in American public schools. Chapter three will outline the methods used in this thesis to determine the effectiveness of having MOSAIC mentors present in continuation high schools. In chapter four I will engage in reflection on how the program’s successful results evolved the philosophy and dynamics of the MOSAIC mentoring program when applied to continuation high schools and students attending them. Finally, the remaining portion of chapter four will discuss
implications of the findings within the context of restorative justice and practices with continuation high school students and students at-risk in general.

**Defining Terminology**

Certain terms are used throughout this thesis that must be defined in order for the reader to understand how and why they are being used. First, I differentiate between the terms *Chicano, Hispanic, and Latino* which are often used in literature. I decided to use the generalized term *Latino/a* to refer to students from Mexican, Central and South American, and Caribbean descent. Students who were born in the U.S. but still identify with their parents’ cultural background are also referred to as *Latino/a* in this particular work. Although I personally feel like the term Chicano/a holds a greater sense of critical analysis and a consciousness of specific intersections relating to racial/ethnic, gender, sexual, and political identities, I chose to use Latino/a in this research. Because many of the students I work with do not identify as Chicano/a, I have decided to generalize the population so as to avoid any confusion or ambiguity. Furthermore, the term *mentor, mentee* and *mentorship* are used as they are defined in *MentorScout.com*: “A mentor is a coach, guide, tutor, facilitator, counselor and trusted advisor. A mentor is someone willing to spend his or her time and expertise to guide the development of another person. A mentee is a student, protégé, apprentice and eager learner. A mentee is someone who wants to learn from someone who knows and seeks their valuable advice in order to grow personally and/or professionally. A mentorship is a relationship formed between a mentor and mentee with the goal of sharing knowledge and expertise between the mentor and the mentee. It can be a formal relationship with written goals and scheduled meeting times or it can be as informal as an occasional chat or email exchange” (2013). I also want to
define the term *at-risk*. This is especially important because it refers to specific risk factors that affect the students who serve as the premise of this research. At-risk refers to a heightened probability of academic failure, gang involvement/affiliation, alcohol/drug use, incarceration, teenage parenthood, and/or abusive/unhealthy relationships due to their environmental realities. Next, I would like to clarify the use of the terms *critical, humanizing* and *compassionate* in reference to mentoring approaches (i.e., critical mentoring and compassionate mentoring). These terms refer to the sensitivity and compassion mentors adopt and apply when working with at-risk youth. It deals with having to cater to the specific emotional, psychological, and sociological needs with a higher level of consideration regarding the individual circumstances of each mentee. These types of approaches allow mentors to customize an individualized plan that speaks to the current situations of each student with emphasis on producing optimum results. The use of *urban* youth, and *urban* schools refers to the low socio-economic status pertaining to students and learning institutions in which they attend; also referred to in this study as *others*, or individuals who have been marginalized from mainstream society, thus contributing to the notion of their invisibility. Lastly, I clarify the use of my auto-ethnography, or testimonies, throughout this thesis. They are essential and politically tactical components towards generating an alternative paradigm for understanding the effectiveness of critical mentorship within continuation high schools. “Testimonial writing may be defined as an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g., war, oppression, revolution, etc.). Emphasizing popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the
cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history” (Yudice, 1991, p.17).

Continuation High Schools and the Students Who Attend Them

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has zero tolerance policies for behaviors such as drug possession, substance use, gang affiliation, and fighting. This, in turn, puts in place policies that expel students who act out, rather than those that institute prevention, intervention, tutoring, mentoring, or counseling programs for them. The overcrowded school district is also among the worst in the nation in terms of high school dropout rates. High schools that are located in low-income communities in the San Fernando Valley have dropout rates as high as 60%. Furthermore, they have test scores that place them in the lowest third on California’s statewide Academic Performance Index (API) (www.lausd.net, 2012). The LAUSD reports that 34% percent of the youth in the San Fernando Valley in areas such as Pacoima, Sylmar, Van Nuys and Panorama City (as compared to 14.2% in the state of California) live below the poverty line for a family of four; 59% of the families are Limited English Proficient; and 93.7% are eligible for the Federal Lunch Program (www.lausd.net, 2012). While such statistics are not anything new when discussing at-risk students and populations, it is important to mention it in order to provide context in regard to my study.

The majority of the students that MOSAIC works with was expelled from traditional high schools or are trying to make it through what is their last chance in attaining a high school degree by attending continuation high schools. Students are all too often coping with family stress and violence at home, in their personal relationships, and
in their communities, which, according to my own personal observations, causes a negative disconnection from their learning and personal development. According to LAUSD statistics, the San Fernando Valley, part of the city of Los Angeles, has a population of 1.8 million that is 42% Latino/a and is comprised of affluent areas in close proximity to pockets of significant poverty (2012). The Los Angeles City Attorney’s office currently has four anti-gang injunctions in place in San Fernando Valley high schools. Continuation high schools in particular, often lack the funds and tools to train and nurture teachers and parents to meet the psychological and social needs of adolescents who are under stress as a result of a myriad of challenging social issues. Local social service agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) fill this void to the best of their ability, but they too are often overwhelmed and lack basic resources such as qualified teachers, school supplies, tutors/mentors, textbooks, enrichment materials, and recreation equipment resulting in significant contribution to students’ academic failure.

Continuation high schools are specifically designed for students who are not able to make it through the traditional high school process due to several reasons including:

- drug-use and sales (including alcohol)
- behavioral issues (e.g., disrespecting teachers and/or classmates)
- gang affiliation/activity
- fighting and/or disturbances on campus
- poor attendance
- little to no credit attainment
- low State Test (CST) scores
- familial stressors/hardships

The continuation high schools used in this research are typically smaller in size than most high schools and consist of three to four teachers per school and a student body of less than one hundred fifty students (approximately 95% Hispanic or Latina/o), which makes them relatively small campuses in comparison to traditional high schools within the district. Most continuation high schools are nestled somewhere near the back of high school campuses and are generally located out of plain sight. Further, students attending continuation high schools often work at their own pace, therefore a percentage of students complete their work at a consistent level while others do not complete much work at all. For most continuation high school students, establishing effective work habits is not their strongest skill, so providing them with a university student mentor who can guide them through the process of effective learning allows them to alleviate some of the stress of building a consistent work routine and sticking to it. I will expand on the “work at your own pace” model further in this study after clarifying some key methodological concepts.

The Need for Deconstructing the Norm

The term “normal,” we might all agree, is anything and everything that falls under the umbrella of the mainstream or popular culture, generally referring to anything that has been accepted and validated by greater society (Smith, 1999). Although a small percentage of the population, including myself, may make an attempt to create an alternative to “normal,” the greater majority does not possess (whether voluntarily or
involuntarily) an understanding as to why anyone would want to create an alternative to begin with. Most of us are socialized to know the difference between right and wrong based on social values and norms. However, what many have come to consider “normal,” continues to uphold a system that maintains and perpetuates racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, misogyny, hate, greed, and countless other social problems. From the radio and the newsstands, to the television and movie screens, the everyday messages we ingest on a regular basis all contribute to our understanding of what is considered acceptable by society. These messages are powerful socializing agents for our youth (Pulido, 2009). In order for us to begin to imagine an alternative, we must first understand what it is we are attempting to modify.

As trivial as the aforementioned may sound, over the years in working with continuation high school students I have come to understand that it is important to steer away from traditional formal academic methods and interaction. A significant amount of students who attend continuation high schools consider themselves far from normal and agree that they benefit from a learning experience that speaks to their immediate realities, which are often themes that cannot be found in their textbooks at school. Indigenous scholar and author Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes research through the vantage point of a colonized individual; contrary to the norm. Smith argues that “the word itself ’research’ is one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (Smith, 1999). Taken from a Western European standpoint, research conducted on individuals considered “exotic” or “others” tends to make subjects feel used and sometimes exploited at the expense of their self-respect and dignity, which creates the possibility of collecting generic and inauthentic data. During my time working with continuation high school
students I realized, after several discussions on culture and identity, it was essential to adopt Smith’s approach and categorize them as a colonized and oppressed population. In chapter four, I will expand further on continuation high school students within the context of colonialism.

**Theoretical Framework**

*Self-Efficacy and Mentoring as Protective Factors*

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her ability to produce a specific outcome as a result of his or her actions (Bandura, 1986; 1997). In general, it reflects our confidence in our ability to control a specific environment or outcome. Self-efficacy is a cognitive self-evaluation which influences all manner of human experience, including the goals for which individuals strive, the amount of energy we are willing to expend toward goal achievement, and the extent to which we achieve the goal (American Psychological Association [APA], 2006). The *Theory of Self-Efficacy* suggests that a person’s belief in his or her ability to perform an action and impact the environment (efficacy belief) will ultimately shape his or her behaviors.

There is a growing body of evidence that self-efficacy beliefs are an important predictor of academic success (Graham & Harris, 1989; Zimmerman, 1999), life satisfaction (Suldo and Shaffer, 2007), and success in fields as diverse as life-course development, education, health, athletics, business, and international affairs (Bandura, 1997). Furthermore, high levels of self-efficacy lead people to work hard and persist in the face of setbacks (Heslin, 1999). Howell (2003) suggests that while more research needs to be done on what factors serve to protect youth from gangs, drugs, school failure,
and other adolescent problems, there is some evidence that one of the most important individual protective factors may be self-efficacy. According to Brown and Benedict (2004), research indicates that a high level of self-efficacy reduces youth involvement with delinquency. Self-efficacy may be important in protecting youth against delinquency, including gang involvement, because high levels of efficacy will give youth confidence in their ability to set and achieve goals that offer a path to a successful future. If youth do not believe their actions can produce the outcome they desire, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties (Parajás, 2002), making the gang lifestyle and drug-use all the more attractive. However, if through their own actions and the help of a mentor, they come to believe their actions will lead to success, they are more likely to make positive, pro-social choices.

Helping youth to define their goals and then consistently working with them on their progress puts a mentor in the position of increasing self-efficacy and thereby becoming a protective factor in their lives. While achieving the goal(s) set out for the youth is important, so too is the attention, praise, and confidence in them a mentor displays. This, in turn, will create a particular reality for the youth, one in which they are able to see themselves as capable of making positive life choices and achieving self-identified goals. Bandura (1997) argues that what shapes our motivation, feelings, and behavior is a subjective belief, not an objective reality. It is what we believe to be true that is important. This highlights the importance of the mentor as a “creator of reality” for the youth. Santos and Reigadas (2002) found that close ties to an informal mentor promoted a positive sense of identity, emotional security, an increase in self-efficacy and academic goal definition in students.
There are four main sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986).

- **Mastery Experience**

- **Vicarious Experience**

- **Social Persuasion**

- **Physiological/Emotional State**

The first is one’s own performance or *mastery experience*. In general when one’s own outcomes are interpreted as a success, this raises self-efficacy and will increase the likelihood of future success (Pajares, 2002). The important point here is the interpretation of the outcome, not necessarily the outcome itself. Again, mentors are in the position to help the youth interpret outcomes in ways that frame them in positive terms, which allows youth to develop positive aspirations. The second source of efficacy is *vicarious experience*. This is the observation of others and their performance of a task. Here, the effects of modeling are important. The importance of role-models for shaping attitudes, interests, and aspirations is generally acknowledged (Gottlieb, 1981). Mentors perform the task of role-model and can talk to youth about their own personal challenges and how they overcame them to attain their goals. Vicarious experience is particularly powerful when the youth recognize similarities (to themselves) in the mentor and assume that those similarities suggest that if they can do it, so can I! (Parajas, 2002). With this in mind, mentors stress similarities as much as possible as people tend to seek out models that possess qualities they admire and capabilities to which they aspire (Parajas, 2002). The third source of efficacy stems from *social persuasion*. Mentors act as persuaders; people who express verbal judgments that help cultivate the youths’ confidence in their
ability to make appropriate choices and to ultimately reach their goals. In other words, MOSAIC mentors act as “cheerleaders” encouraging youth that success is attainable.

Finally, the fourth source of self-efficacy stems from physiological or emotional states. If the youth are under particular stress, suffering from anxiety, or experiencing any strong emotional state, this may significantly impact confidence in their ability to achieve a goal or make appropriate choices. One way to raise self-efficacy beliefs is to improve the emotional well-being of the youth (Parajas, 2002). Of course, this is not always within the control of a mentor. While mentors cannot control the stress itself, what they may be able to do is help youth to understand that they have some control over their own emotional response and can choose to alter the way they react to situations. Again, sharing about the way the mentor has handled emotional stress and discussing choices and their consequences may help the youth to reframe the situation in such a way as to increase the likelihood that they feel they have some control over the situation.

Along with individual protective factors, Howell (2003) identifies positive peer modeling as an important peer group protective factor. This makes intuitive sense as many researchers have identified associating with deviant peers as a significant risk factor (Howell, 2000; Dance, 2003); therefore, high attachment to conventional peers may decrease the probability of joining gangs and engaging in other self-destructive behavior. The role of the university student mentor becomes important here as college students, while adults, are still considered “peers” and as stated above can still be identified as having similarities and sharing struggles and challenges with the youth they serve.
Dance (2002) argues that a frequent complaint of “tough kids” is that teachers don’t believe in their student’s ability to excel nor do they “understand the streets.” Students are more likely to trust mentors who talk openly about street culture and give viable advice about avoiding the illicit activities that take place on urban streets. Along with practical “street advice,” mentors can provide important social and cultural capital to at-risk youth; replacing the gang leader as the “new head.” Throughout the six years I have invested in helping reclaim success and restore hope in continuation high schools; I have come to learn that a culturally relevant education, and engaging in a trusted mentor-mentee relationship, could have a dramatically positive impact on the academic and personal lives of the youth attending continuation high schools without jeopardizing or interfering with the institutional academic standards of public education.

The MOSAIC Model

Mentoring to Overcome Struggles And Inspire Courage or MOSAIC, is an organization that is based out of Cal State Northridge which has been serving local continuation high schools since 2003. As a segment of the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, MOSAIC offers an upper division sociology course designed to educate university students, or mentors, on various topics directly related to the youth they will be working with at the continuation high schools. Such topics include, but are not limited to gang culture, drugs, addiction, safe sex, unhealthy/healthy relationships, Hip-Hop culture, and the juvenile justice system. This course essentially provides mentors with a bag of tools to help them understand the youth and what they are going through in their personal lives so as to make their mentoring experience more effective and meaningful.
Every class of university students is broken down into small teams which are designated to each site where every mentor will work consistently with at least three to four mentees. However, high school students could work informally with as many mentors as possible. With the help and support from the principals and faculty at the high schools, MOSAIC has designed a curriculum that speaks directly to the realities of the youth in which are being served. I have found this type of approach impactful in relation to the academic success and personal growth of continuation high school students. After working consistently with a group of students over the course of a semester, roughly four months, I noticed through interaction that they were very much capable of completing assigned schoolwork, and in actuality they were extremely intelligent. A significant percentage of students were not completing their schoolwork effectively and were living up to the notion that continuation high school students were very unlikely to succeed academically. After critically observing the need for scholastic success within the student body, I began to understand what the missing piece of the puzzle was.

MOSAIC emphasizes students’ sociological realities, as well as emotional well-being, when employing methods in which parents, teachers, and the community all play a role in the lives of the youth being served. Through educational workshops, open discussion forums, art shows, communal events, open houses, and other forms of organization, all parties could come together and network for the benefit of the youth. Building a trustworthy relationship with a mentor acts as a healing process for those students struggling with gaining the drive and confidence they need to acquire in order to get through their challenging high school years. It is important to reiterate the fact that
young people need to be at peace with who they are and what they stand for before they could actually begin to recognize their potential for improvement and self-worth.

**Significance of the Research**

Expanding our knowledge of effective programs that support at-risk youth will only contribute to a more holistic and balanced society. The significance of working with continuation high school students is very apparent once you get to know the youth who attend the schools. They are similar to your typical high school students only that they carry a load filled with a series of social ills that need to be addressed before expecting them to get any schoolwork completed. Moreover, the MOSAIC program is committed to treating students as human beings and not criminals, while providing the support, encouragement and sensitivity that they need in order to get through the high school process with confidence and dignity.

By understanding the importance of servicing students attending continuation high schools, parents, administrators, teachers, community members, and I, as an educator and researcher, could collaborate more effectively to seek resources that help support our youth. Allowing ourselves to step out of our comfort zone to understand the population of youth being served is a part of the challenge that goes along with making progressive change. The time I spent in continuation high schools attempting to change young lives for the sake of their future, has placed me in the trenches of a battle. I have witnessed first-hand the impact negative social factors have on adolescents’ academic success and their personal lives. To raise any conclusions would be unjust to our youth. Everyone needs a fair chance to thrive, so we must cater to our youth and provide them
with what they need to succeed. In doing so, we seek to improve and better identify with our relationships, raise social consciousness and promote cultural change, and ultimately, provide invisible populations a voice that they may not have felt they had. Through academic research entangled with personal critical testimony, I hope to project an understanding of the MOSAIC mentoring program’s ideals and its effectiveness in working with at-risk youth attending continuation high schools.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

“There is hope, however timid, on the street corners, a hope in each and every one of us.... Hope is an ontological need.”

- Paulo Freire (1992)

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 1)

Restoring Hope for the Hopeless

Realistically, when most at-risk students reach the high school level, they are not fundamentally ready (Barr & Parrett, 2001). In other words, they did not learn what they were supposed to learn during their elementary and middle school years, so, consequently, when they reach high school, the final frontier before arriving to the “real world,” they are discouraged and turned off by the idea that they will one day go to college. Such a mentality is commonly adopted by students who have been pushed through the school system without necessarily meeting the state-mandated standards required by students in order to be promoted to the next grade level. These types of students are the ones who are often advised by school counselors to attend alternative high schools, because they are a “better fit.” Authors Robert D. Barr and William H. Parrett blatantly describe the aforementioned issue in their work entitled Hope Fulfilled for At-Risk and Violent Youth (2001): “For the at-risk high school student, it is obvious that most schools have compounded the problems of poverty, dysfunctional families, and low self-esteem with a decade-long barrage of humiliation, despair, and defeat. It is no wonder why so many at-risk youth become pregnant during middle and high school; why
so many turn to drugs and alcohol; why so many carry guns to school and make violence, vandalism and school disruption an everyday occurrence; why so many violence-prone city youth see life as valueless and why so many at-risk kids wage daily war against teachers and the school. Most remarkable is the fact that so many of these students still come to school and continue to hang on to the diminishing dream of high-school graduation” (Barr & Parrett, 2001, p.165). On many unfortunate occasions, students feel that this desire to “hang on” is a sense of false hope. Because the value of life for those students has decreased due to the hardships they are facing in their personal lives, the thought of giving up seems a lot more realistic and as a result they give up and eventually lose hope.

High school is clearly the last chance at acquiring a sense of success for many of our at-risk youth. If they leave school or even graduate lacking the basic skills necessary for the workplace, there is little to no hope for a self-supporting, productive life (Barr & Parrett, 2001). The encouraging news is that we now know that it is not too late for at-risk youth at this stage in their development; to change their attitudes towards their education and well-being. At times, it often takes for youngsters to look at life from a different perspective, and on many levels, alternative high schools offer students a last chance at taking on a new attitude towards their education by working with mentors; and ultimately provide at-risk youth with the ability to dream. “Alternative high schools may be the most important at-risk programs at the high school level. Some see these programs as educational ‘intensive care’ units…It provides a place to insulate and protect these fragile, often abused and angry youth. It provides a highly individualized program designed to meet the needs of at-risk youth and it provides the at-risk student with strong
positive advocates.” (Barr & Parrett, 2001, p. 170). Barr and Parrett suggest that with the proper modifications to their academic curriculum and an effective application of psychological and emotional support, many at-risk youth attending alternative high schools could very well engage in a positive transition into adulthood in a meaningful way. I write this with much confidence because I could personally testify to the struggles at-risk students experience on a daily basis while having no aspirations for a successful future in college or in the workforce. I contemplated the thought of giving up on many occasions in my own life, because I knew the odds were certainly against me as a Mexican juvenile delinquent. Now, as I sit here writing my master’s thesis, I could only imagine how much more complicated my adult life would be if I would have lost hope and given up. Although incorporating my personal narrative into this work is very difficult and extremely challenging, I find it to be not only a very important aspect of its authenticity, but a necessary one as well.

The remaining portion of this section will examine literature that is focused on finding solutions to the problems faced by at-risk youth and their relationship with scholastic failure and the criminal lifestyle. More specifically, the following section will review literature which directs its attention to the effectiveness of mentorship in and out of the academic arena. Given that there is hardly any literature on mentoring programs like MOSAIC, which focuses on mentoring at-risk youth in continuation high schools, I will review works written by individuals who believe mentoring serves as a protective factor against educational failure and delinquent behavior. I find this specific section of my thesis extremely crucial to the development of programs for youth that work, because of the fact that I have personally experienced the positive effectiveness of having a
trusted mentor during turbulent times within the dreaded unanticipated phases of adolescence. One of the most important elements of mentoring is the potential to restore hope in the students who have otherwise lost it, and inspire the drive and aspiration to accomplish something greater than what society ultimately expects of them.

**Mentoring to Overcome Struggles**

Does mentoring really work? More concisely, does mentoring work when applied to a population of at-risk youth, in which most people in society have already given up on? These questions cannot be answered in a simple way, of course. An important and essential way to initiate the discussion on the effectiveness of mentoring is to examine what others are doing in relation to mentorship within at-risk populations of youth and attempts to fill in the gaps that exist in other programs. After reading several books, articles, and blogs written with the purpose of determining whether or not mentoring is a beneficial factor in the lives of at-risk Latino youth, I have come to understand that mentorship works in a variety of ways. Bernadette Sánchez, Patricia Esparza, and Yarí Colón, in their article entitled, *Natural mentoring under the microscope: an investigation of mentoring relationships and Latino adolescents’ academic performance*, examine the role of natural mentoring relationships in the academic performance of urban, diverse, Latino high school students. Participants who engaged in mentorship reported up to three mentors in their lives, and they were asked about their mentors’ demographic characteristics and the characteristics of their mentoring relationships. The presence of a mentor was associated with fewer absences, higher educational expectations, and greater expectancies for success and sense of school belonging. Further, the number of reported mentors predicted fewer absences, higher educational expectations and a greater sense of
school belonging. Mentors' educational level, frequency of contact, relationship duration, and total form of support provided by mentors were related to participants' academic outcomes. The presence of mentors also made a difference in youth's academic outcomes (Sánchez, Esparza & Colón, 2008). Although the study involved several determining factors, it is difficult to gauge the particular forms of “contact” and “relationships” that were most effective in the positive educational outcomes of youth determined to be at-risk.

In another work entitled, The Study of Mentoring in the Learning Environment (SMILE): A Randomized Evaluation of the Effectiveness of School-based Mentoring by Michael J. Karcher, discusses the effect of providing at-risk youth school-based mentoring (SBM), in addition to other school-based support services, such as academic tutoring. The study examined a sample of 516 predominately Latino/a students across 19 schools. Participants in a multi-component, school-based intervention program run by a youth development agency were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: (1) supportive services alone or (2) supportive services plus SBM. Compared to community-based mentoring, the duration of the SBM was brief (averaging eight meetings), partly because the agency experienced barriers to retaining mentors. “Intent-to-treat (ITT), main effects of SBM were tested using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) and revealed small, positive main effects of mentoring on self-reported connectedness to peers, self-esteem, and social support from friends, but not on several other measures, including grades and social skills” (Karcher, 2008, p.106). Three-way cross-level interactions of sex and school level (elementary, middle, and high school) revealed that elementary school boys and high school girls benefited the most from mentoring. Among elementary school boys,
those in the mentoring condition reported higher social skills, such as empathy and cooperation, hopefulness, and connectedness both to school and to culturally different peers. Among high school girls, those mentored reported greater connectedness to culturally different peers, self-esteem, and support from friends. Therefore, practitioners coordinating and implementing multi-component programs that include school-based mentoring would be prudent to provide mentors to the youth most likely to benefit from SBM and strengthen program practices that help to support and retain mentors. Certainly, the SMILE mentoring program has exemplified positive effects in students involved in their study. However, it is not very clear as to why there was difficulty in retaining their participating mentors. My study will examine potential factors that may contribute to such issues related to mentor retention.

Further research supports the implementation of mentoring programs as potentially successful approaches to meeting the needs of at-risk students within a classroom setting (Lampley & Johnson, 2010). Lampley and Johnson’s study surveys a mentoring program entitled, LISTEN or Linking Individual Students To Educational Needs (2010). The LISTEN mentoring program was a district-sponsored, school-based program in which at-risk, middle school students were identified by the school system using socio-economic status, and mentors were recruited specifically to assist these students with school performance or related issues. Mentors, in this study, were classroom teachers, school counselors, administrators, custodians, librarians, teaching assistants, retired teachers, and cafeteria employees. Archival data from the 2003–04 and 2004–05 academic years were analyzed in this study. A statistically significant difference was found for all three of the study’s criterion variables (GPAs, discipline referrals, and
attendance records) between those measured in the 2003–04 academic year (pre-intervention) and those measured in the 2004–05 academic year (post-intervention). Forty-nine of the fifty-four LISTEN participants experienced academic achievement gains in all three areas of the study (GPAs, discipline referrals, and attendance records).

LISTEN was created in 2003 by one of the researchers for her own middle school students. The program was designed to partner an adult with a student to provide additional support outside the regular classroom setting. Approximately 35 mentors were recruited for the LISTEN program from district classroom teachers, school counselors, administrators, custodians, librarians, teaching assistants, retired teachers, and cafeteria employees (Lampley & Johnson, 2010). Training sessions for participating mentors were conducted by the LISTEN program director. Mentors met with students an average of twice each week during the school year, and the LISTEN mentoring program was patterned after other successful programs that served at-risk youth. When the program was initiated, the primary goal was to establish relationships between identified at-risk students and caring adults. By placing an emphasis on study habits, interpersonal relationships, problem solving techniques, communication skills, and by encouraging positive behaviors, mentors provided the support and guidance to encourage student success.

Mentoring, as a method of sharing real-life experiences and knowledge, has been shown to be an effective intervention strategy for at-risk middle school students (Lampley & Johnson, 2010). The most common characteristic of the LISTEN mentoring program was the one-on-one relationship between an adult and a younger person. The purpose of this type of relationship is to provide guidance, pass on knowledge, share
experience, provide a background for more sound judgment, and establish friendship. Based on the findings of this study, it was determined that a mentoring relationship with a caring adult, specifically within the LISTEN mentoring program, seems to positively impact the academic success of at-risk students, at least in the short term. While the LISTEN approach demonstrated an increase in academic performance in middle school students who worked with neutral caring adults, it did not exhibit data based on the effects it could potentially have on at-risk high school students. The fact that mentors were formally associated with the school students attended, it is worth analyzing the potential benefits of providing youth with mentors who are not employed by the schools in which the mentees attend. My study will also reflect upon the process of selecting and training mentors, which is seemingly absent from other research on mentoring at-risk youth.

A smaller body of literature examines issues of equity in the mentoring relationships. It develops the term “engaged mentoring” which involves inclusion and addresses the issue of gender equity. In an article entitled, *Engagement Mentoring for 'Disaffected' Youth: A new model of mentoring for social inclusion* (2010), author Helen Colley presents a critical analysis of mentoring for social inclusion. Colley traces its dramatic expansion as a tool of education policies in the 1990s, and identifies a new model, *engagement mentoring*, which seeks to re-engage “disaffected” young people with the formal labor market, and to engage their commitment to dominant interests through shaping their dispositions in line with “employability” (Colley, 2010). Mentors are treated as vehicles for these objectives, their dispositions also subject to transformation according to gendered stereotypes. The model is illustrated by a case study of
engagement mentoring, and feminist readings of Bourdieu and Marx are used to relocate it within the socio-economic context from which it is usually “disembedded”. The article concludes that engagement mentoring constructs the habitus of both mentor and mentee as a raw material subjected to an emotional labor process. This study is especially important because of the intensified fear within populations of at-risk youth who are afraid of being rejected by the workforce due to their perceived lack of qualifications.

Mentoring programs focusing on areas ranging from academic achievement to social skills development have become increasingly popular with community service agencies in recent years (Knoche & Zamboanga, 2006). Some mentoring programs focus on youth development or prevention of risky behaviors whereas others target career shadowing or personal development activities. Mentoring programs can operate independently or function in collaboration with other service efforts; can involve mentors of different ages, and may be based in the community or at specific on-school sites. Current literature on youth mentoring programs focuses primarily on programmatic specifics and mentee outcomes rather than the specific experiences of individual mentors (Freedman, 1992; National Mentoring Working Group, 1991; Rhodes, 1994).

Outcome research has considered the potential impact on mentees involved in mentoring programs, but there is limited research that investigates the perspectives of mentors. Some (DuBois & Neville, 1997) have examined the characteristics of mentor-mentee relationships in community-based youth mentoring programs and considered perceived mentee benefits, but not the specific experiences of mentors involved in the programs. Others (de Anda, 2001) have examined mentors’ perspectives, though within a limited capacity. The examinations have been very brief and have been tied specifically
to the mentor (e.g., benefits of mentoring, the impact mentors believe they have on mentees) and less to the mentoring relationship.

Program operation specifics are helpful and necessary for program duplication, but understanding the experiences of mentors and others involved in the mentoring process is of additional value. While the mentoring relationship has been examined in organizational mentoring programs, it has been less often considered in youth mentoring programs (Kram, 1983, 1986). Initial findings from a meta-analysis of mentoring program evaluations identified features of the mentoring relationship, such as emotional closeness and frequency of contact, as important contributors to mentee success (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). According to DuBois, characteristics of the mentoring relationship have been understudied; thus, studies are needed that address these important characteristics. Hence, the meaning of the youth mentoring relationship from the mentors’ perspectives was the focus of the study.

Some of the successful outcomes may be attributed to the way mentors are recruited, although further research is needed to document these relationships. The following study is unique due to its focus on a group of college student mentors involved in a mentoring program for Latino/a youth and their families known as the Latino Achievement Mentoring Program or LAMP (2001). LAMP is a culture-specific program that was developed, and continues to be implemented, by a group of faculty and students from a Midwestern university, and staff from a community center that serves the local Latino/a population. The aim of LAMP is to match Latino college students (or students identified to be culturally-sensitive) with disadvantaged Latino/a youth from the
community (see Zamboanga, Roy, Knoche, & Snyder, 2001 for additional program information).

College students involved in the LAMP mentoring program apply to serve as youth mentors in the program and school personnel identify community youth that could benefit from additional scholastic and social support (Zamboanga, Roy, Knoche, & Snyder, 2001). Students are eligible to receive university field work credits for their participation in the program. Mentor-mentee matches are based on a variety of factors including personality characteristics, shared interests, and other demographic variables consistent with recommended mentoring program practices (National Mentoring Working Group, 1991; Rhodes, 1994). Mentor-mentee pairs meet for two hours per week for at least one academic year, and engage in a variety of educational and social activities. Additionally, mentors are also involved in weekly trainings and debriefing sessions to support their work with mentees such as academic, interpersonal, and social resources. The debriefing sessions involve an update of activities and issues that occur during the previous week. Sometimes debriefs are celebratory and other times they are a time for problem solving. According to the authors, this aspect of mentoring, which could be considered as “training” so to speak, is crucial to reaching a deeper understanding of the population being served with the intention of filling voids that would otherwise be unfulfilled in a traditional academic setting. In addition to supporting academic success among youth participants, the LAMP program hopes to facilitate the development of leadership skills in college student mentors involved in the program.

Through their own words, mentors described their relationship with youth as well as their own feelings about being a mentor. Listening to the voices of individual
participants could help us further understand research that has been conducted on youth mentoring programs. The meaning of the mentoring relationship will contextualize previous findings on successful or unsuccessful mentoring outcomes. Gaining a more complete understanding of the meaning of the relationship might interpret the mentors’ personal and professional experiences in the program that contribute to mentee well-being (Zamboanga, Roy, Knoche, & Snyder, 2001).

LAMP focuses on mentor development in addition to youth academic success and thereby provides an appropriate framework to examine the mentors’ perspectives of the mentoring relationship. In addition, LAMP has a unique focus on family involvement which sets it apart from other youth mentoring programs. LAMP involves family members in the mentoring program from the onset. Families that are involved in the mentoring process are invited to attend family events and can participate in a parent group. Mentors are expected to make connections and support the entire family on behalf of their mentees.

The information gathered from mentors in this study is specifically useful for understanding LAMP, but findings will also be beneficial to community agency staff from various locations interested in developing similar programs as well as those currently involved in mentor recruitment and retention. Understanding the meaning of the experience for mentors can help shape future programmatic efforts and enable us to develop programs that encompass a wider range of mentoring practices, in which students enable themselves to grow not only in their academic life but in their personal life as well (Zamboanga & Knoche, 2003).
The Importance of Critical Pedagogy

Considering that the research reviewed focused on providing mentorship to minority students failing in urban public schools and the reasons why they are not succeeding, the following body of literature concentrates on the need for implementing a critical approach to educating marginalized populations of at-risk youth. In their work, authors Nakanishi and Rittner (1992) combine traditional socio-cultural theories, such as Multicultural Pedagogy, with classroom components, which successfully allow students to recognize their own cultural realities as fruitful experiences while recognizing and respecting the cultural systems of others. Such form of education, as indicated by research, enables students to accept diverse cultures as valid, which as a result produces self-empowered students who embrace and regard their own culture as well as others. The study elaborates on the importance of creating multiethnic settings in classrooms to promote a balanced inclusion of students. Furthermore, limiting students to a specific form of learning material foreign to them creates an unequal distribution of social capital within a multiethnic population of students (Nakanishi & Rittner, 1992). Imposing this type of learning method within a diverse sample of youth, according to the authors, ensures a significant imbalance in success rates, especially within minority student bodies.

Allman (1988) discusses Antonio Gramsci’s ideas on education and describes the social character of traditional schools as determined by the fact that each social group throughout society had its own type of school "intended to perpetuate a specific traditional function, [whether] ruling or subordinate." The answer to the question of modernizing education was not to create a whole system of different types of vocational
schools but rather "to create a single type of formative school (primary-secondary) which would take the child up to the threshold of his choice of job, forming him during this time as a person capable of thinking, studying and ruling - or controlling those who rule" (Allman, 1988). Gramsci maintained that this type of school could only achieve success with the active participation of students and, in order for this to happen, the school must relate to everyday life. This did not mean that education should not include abstract ideas but that philosophical concepts, formal logic, rules of grammar etc. needed to be acquired in school "through work and reflection." Gramsci was clear that learning was not something that came easily for the majority of young people. "The individual consciousness of the overwhelming majority of children reflects social and cultural relations which are different from and antagonistic to those which are represented in the school curricula" (Gramsci, 1971). A learner had to be active and critical, and not, according to Gramsci, "a passive and mechanical recipient." The relationship between the student’s psychology and the educational forms must always be "active and creative, just as the relation of the worker to his tools is active and creative" (Allman, 1988).

Additionally, a quality educational experience should originate from learning about life through one’s own perspective and embracing it as their own, while at the same time acknowledging and respecting other cultural systems and regarding them as equally valid (Darder, 1991). This form of multicultural harmony allows for a healthy well-being at a communal level, which does not involve a dominant culture (Darder, 1991). If educational institutions could provide appropriate facilities where Latino/a students could achieve a quality education, then we are one step closer to balancing the educational achievement gap between Anglo-American students and students of color. Educator Jean
Anyon writes on the matter stating, “The low social status and perceived lack of clout often ascribed to those who are poor and Black or Latino[a] may prevent staff in institutions like schools, government agencies, and hospitals from offering respect and proper treatment. It often leads to lack of accountability on the part of the public institutions themselves—a situation that is rarely, if ever, allowed to occur in affluent suburbs” (Anyon, 2005, p. 61). Historical paradigms within education assure us that American hegemony was a key factor in producing the harsh realities Latina/os are facing in education today, such as high dropout rates and low academic success rates, among others (Anyon, 2005). Studying this area further could help us grasp the progressive power of a multicultural social context when sorting out the reasons why many Latino/a youth fail to acknowledge and embrace their own cultural outlook within the realm of education.

In working with low-income, at-risk Latino/a youth, one can observe the impact their education, or lack of education, has had on them. Because of the unequal distribution of resources allocated to public schools in low socio-economic areas, students suffer from receiving a substandard educational experience that lacks a connection with their personal histories. As a result, students begin to disconnect themselves from their foreign curriculum and seek other forms of social acceptance which usually hold negative consequences, such as gang affiliation and drug abuse, as defined in Erikson’s theory of Negative Identity (1968).

Considering that Latino/a populations have historically been looked upon by modern-day expansionists as racially, culturally and linguistically inferior, it justifies the actions behind the racial stratification of youth in schools (Darder, 1991). In the last two
decades the prison industrial complex has herded minority youth into a system that places them in a lose-lose situation, which has become normative within a society that does not expect them to achieve otherwise (Anyon, 2005). If minority youth are lucky to enough to stay out of prison, they are often forced to deal with the physically and emotionally strenuous work-force which provides just enough resources to live paycheck by paycheck; if they’re lucky. The only thing left for us to do to counterattack this assault on social justice, is to educate ourselves critically and take control of our destinies by attempting to change a system that has failed us as a community, so that we could, through critical mentorship, provide our youth with the tools and facilities necessary for them to grow to their fullest potential (Anyon, 2005).

**Where to go from Here**

Overall, studies on mentoring and Latino/as in public learning institutions are consistent in showing positive effects within the implementation of mentoring at-risk youth. However, studies do not examine certain aspects of mentoring that could possibly intensify the success of students involved in the mentor-mentee partnership. My thesis will attempt to fill these gaps by analyzing and evaluating the unique approach utilized by the MOSAIC mentoring program. Through an intersectional analysis of different areas of existing literature intertwined with my personal narrative, I have attempted to provide a context of how mentoring is being discussed in a world of ever-changing ideologies and policies particularly within the discourse of an educational system powered and driven by American hegemony.

Nevertheless, I am overwhelmingly pleased that I took the chance of going to college and educating myself, despite the countless barriers that statistics continuously
proved were against me. Particularly, I am glad I stumbled upon the opportunity to be involved in mentoring at-risk youth, and having the opportunity to express my insight in this thesis. Although I was reluctant to act as a mentor to students facing personal, academic and societal hardships, I am proud of myself for taking the chance and challenging myself to take on the responsibility of being an agent of change. When I find myself in a state of frustration, I constantly remind myself that meaningful change is a slow process, but the outcome is equally rewarding as it is fulfilling. From the outlooks and perspectives presented in this thesis, I became aware of the possibility of an alternative framework for examining and comprehending the power of mentorship in continuation high schools. In general terms, mentorship has an extreme capacity to empower individuals regardless of race, social class or creed, as demonstrated by previous research. I have learned that we are inheritors of social procedures that minimize what is acceptable perpetuated by multiple institutions that normalize their dominance while simultaneously pushing minority groups towards the dark shadows of marginalization. “Every effort has been made to throw us off our original balance and to get us to conform to ‘norms’ that were never ours and do not fit us. Our journey is filled with obstacles, resistance, pressure, force, and, at times, appropriation of our cultures” (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008).

The critical lens I developed while in Chicano/a Studies at CSUN materialized with every reading I engaged myself in concurrently making connections with every discipline linking my own personal experiences with the literature. My experiences as a Latino at-risk youth, mentor and educator often fill voids that are existent in the literature I submerged myself in. This only solidified my notions relating to the disproportion of
social and cultural capital within education and other components of the society we all live in. The lack of representation for at-risk Latino/a youth in academia brings me significant pain, for I know that it contributes to the invisibility of populations of youth attending continuation high schools. Educator Stuart Grauer states, “The great teachers through the ages have often emphasized that the purpose of life is to awaken happiness for oneself and others. If you set out in search of joy in education, where would you go?” (Grauer, 2013, p. xvii). Investing in my future through mentorship was the first step in restoring hope to awaken happiness in those youth who at some point in their young lives have given up. Being an instrumental part of the MOSAIC mentoring program and having the privilege of working with the youth who attend the alternative high schools it serves, I have undoubtedly discovered where I need to go in order for me to find that sense of joy in education.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

“Ako: Literally meaning to teach and to learn, this term metaphorically emphasizes reciprocal learning, which means that the teacher does not have to be the fountain of all knowledge but rather should be able to create contexts for learning where the students can enter the learning conversation.”

- Russell Bishop

(Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008, p.439)

Transforming Trauma: Supporting Healing Processes through Mentorship

Overall, the programs discussed in the previous chapter that focus on Latino/a populations in education work from a deficit model. A growing body of research is beginning to document programs that are rooted in critical pedagogy. While there are many programs on mentoring at-risk youth, few programs focus specifically on continuation school students. Many believe that it is not worth spending time and resources on students who, according to statistics will not offer a positive contribution to society (Barr & Parrett, 2001). As research suggests, alternative programs that meet the specific needs of students dealing with the effects of their negative environmental circumstances serves as a protective factor against academic failure and juvenile delinquency. As a mentor in the MOSAIC program I was able to witness and be part of the transformation and processes of healing that many continuation high students experienced during their time engaged in a mentor-mentee relationship. According to what I have observed, the abuse and trauma that is often carried around by students on a
daily basis is gradually alleviated by their relationship with their mentor who often joins in the process. Surely, the scars that are left behind are profound and difficult reminders of their reality, but when there is a trusted neutral adult demonstrating that there is hope within an otherwise hopeless situation, the process of healing becomes much more probable. Walking together with youth during their painful experiences fosters a feeling of authenticity relating to the unique positionality of a trusted mentor. By juxtaposing common themes within literature on at-risk Latino/a youth along with my own personal testimonies, I have enabled the personal to be the central figure in this thesis project. With seven years’ worth of experiences and interactions with both high school and university students involved with MOSAIC, this thesis aims to capture a critical auto-narrative overlapped with the broad impact of the program within at-risk continuation high school students and its benefits. In addition, I will examine the Action Plans of four mentees who participated with MOSAIC mentors in the fall 2012 academic semester.

**Auto-Ethnography as Methodology**

According to author and ethnographer Carolyn Ellis, an auto-ethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand the cultural dynamics of a specific group (Ellis, 2011). Such an approach challenges traditional ways of doing research and representing others, and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. Ellis argues that scholars across a wide spectrum of disciplines began to consider what social sciences would become if they were closer to literature than to physics, if they offered stories rather than theories, and if they were self-consciously value-centered rather than pretending to be value free. In particular, ethnographers wanted to concentrate
on ways of producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience; research that would sensitize readers to issues ranging from identity to politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of cultural representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us and apart from our own immediate realities.

Ellis also notes that auto-ethnographers should recognize the innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process. For instance, a researcher decides who, what, when, where, and how to research, decisions that are necessarily tied to institutional requirements (e.g., Institutional Review Boards), resources (e.g., funding), and personal circumstance (e.g., a researcher studying child abuse because of personal experience with child abuse). Even though some researchers still assume that research can be done from a neutral, impersonal, and objective stance, a growing number of others now recognize that such an assumption is not rational (Ellis, 2011). Consequently, auto-ethnography is one of the academic approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they do not exist.

As noted in chapter one, the goal of my thesis project is to determine the extent to which the presence of MOSAIC mentors (including myself, the researcher) has an impact on the academic and personal lives of at-risk students attending continuation high schools. The methods utilized in this research include participant-observation conducted throughout the seven years I have been involved with mentorship in continuation high schools. I also analyze data collected from four Action Plans which were facilitated by mentors in the MOSAIC program. Additionally, I have analyzed Mentor Notes, or field
notes, written by mentors with the purpose of documenting growth in students, and to provide personal reflection as a mentor to at-risk students. With the combination of my experience as a mentor, and now program director, I will discuss the way the Action Plans and Mentor Notes are utilized as tools for collecting data. The purpose of this analysis is to determine whether or not continuation high school students benefit from having a mentor during school hours (from approximately 8am to 2:30pm), and if so, to what extent does it impact their academic life as well as their personal life.

My Positionality

Why me? What makes me qualified to testify to the effectiveness of the MOSAIC mentoring program in its efforts to improve the academic and personal lives of at-risk youth? One of the reasons why I feel I am competent in conducting this research through a personal narrative is because I was considered an at-risk youth when I was growing up, so I hold a personal attachment to providing a voice for the voiceless. I experienced a lot of the hardships most of these students are currently experiencing and I lost a sense of hope on numerous occasions throughout my adolescence and oftentimes turned to drugs and the criminal lifestyle to temporarily free myself from the pain of my reality. Apart from being a former at-risk youth and juvenile delinquent, I have been serving as a mentor to youth who most adults in their lives have given up on them for one reason or another. After three years of serving as a MOSAIC mentor, I was offered the position of MOSAIC program director, which broadened my understanding of the effectiveness of the program in terms of helping at-risk youth find their voice. Because I shifted the focus to analyze and support the high school students rather than university students alone, the training/mentoring approach was reconceptualized to meet the immediate needs of the
youth attending the continuation high schools in which MOSAIC serves. Although I realize the importance of other programs that deal with at-risk students during after-school hours, such as L.A.’s Best and the LAPD’s Jeopardy program, I felt it was necessary for MOSAIC to direct all of its attention and resources on the (lack of) success rates of the student bodies within local continuation high schools.

**Setting and Participants**

The continuation high schools used in this research are typically smaller in size than most high schools and consist of three to four teachers per school and a student body of less than one hundred fifty students (approximately 95% Hispanic or Latina/o), which makes them relatively small campuses in comparison to traditional high schools within the district. Students attend school year-around from 8am to 2pm; Monday through Friday. Each student ranges from the 9th to the 12th grade level and are all working at his or her own pace. While every school day consists of six periods, students may all be sitting in the same classroom but working on different assignments required for graduation. University student mentors involved in the MOSAIC program visit the participating schools, or field sites, a total of six hours per week for the duration of thirteen weeks of an academic semester. While in the schools, mentors are free to work in class with their mentees, work in groups or if the classroom setting gets too distracting, mentors are allowed to pull students out of class to engage in one-on-one mentoring sessions. During this time alone with their mentees, mentors take the time to develop a customized Action Plan that consists of both short-term and long-term personal goals, which students, along with the support of their mentor, attempt to accomplish during the specified time they are working together.
MOSAIC Mentor Selection Process

Before MOSAIC lost its federal funding in 2009, students at CSUN were able to apply to the MOSAIC program as paid employees through the Federal Work-Study program, which allows students to work on campus while taking classes. Because this opportunity was available to all students, MOSAIC was receiving applicants from various departments such as biology, psychology, child development, liberal studies, mathematics, etcetera; making the mentor pool very diverse. Following the loss of our grant due to a change in presidential administrations, we were no longer able to offer MOSAIC to students as a paid position. As mentioned previously, MOSAIC is part of the sociology department which falls under the umbrella of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. After brainstorming the few options that were left, MOSAIC decided to continue offering mentoring positions to CSUN students but were no longer paid positions. As an alternative, MOSAIC was offered as an internship to sociology majors who are required by their department to join an internship program as part of the prerequisites for graduation.

This transition in acquiring potential candidates demonstrated a significant change. While paid university students from different departments offered diversification to MOSAIC, they were not as effective in helping mentees achieve the personal goals on their Action Plans. By solely recruiting sociology majors, I began to notice a shift in the connections university students were developing with the high school students. Since they were not being compensated monetarily, mentors joined MOSAIC not only because it was a graduation requirement, but because they cared; it wasn’t just a job anymore. Sociology students seemed like a good fit because a significant percentage of the mentors
who go through the MOSAIC program often go into careers that relate to working with at-risk youth to some degree, such as probation, social work, foster care, and law enforcement, to name a few. However, being a sociology major alone will not guarantee you an opportunity to be part of the MOSAIC mentoring experience.

First, university students must complete a four page application which helps the program director get to know the student interested in becoming a mentor. Once the application is reviewed and the applicant meets the initial criteria, he or she is invited into the MOSAIC office for an interview which is conducted by the program director. During the interview, the applicant is asked a series of questions pertaining to the tasks and responsibilities of being a MOSAIC mentor. Considering that potential candidates will be working with minors within a classroom setting, it is essential for us to get a good understanding of whether or not applicants are a good fit for the program. If applicants at any time during the interview express that they are joining simply for the credit or internship requirement, they are immediately considered unfit for the program. Lastly, the program director makes the decision of “hiring” students based on the interview process. The last part of the recruitment selection process ends with the distribution of permission numbers to add the upper-division course, Sociology 420, attached to the MOSAIC program, which consequently serves as a training and discussion forum for mentors and MOSAIC staff.

**Sociology 420**

Every fall and spring semester, mentors enroll in an upper-division sociology course entitled *Sociology 420: Mentoring to Overcome Struggles And Inspire Courage* or MOSAIC. Mentors are trained to write Mentor Notes after each session they spend with a
mentee (usually meeting twice a week for three hours), and are also trained in developing Action Plans for mentees (These will be discussed in detail further in this chapter).

Mentors submit their responses to me/program director through our online Moodle course. This online forum serves as an academic tool for me to assure that mentors are creating Action Plans that consist of short and long-term goals that are 1) Specific, 2) Attainable and 3) Measurable. Considering these three factors, the probability of mentees accomplishing their goals increases significantly, thus increasing their self-efficacy.

Through Moodle, I, as well as the mentors, could monitor their Mentor Notes and Action Plans and could easily determine by their own reflections and mentee goal-attainment if their presence is making a difference in the lives of the youth. Mentor notes are commonly known as a journal of sort; keeping tab on the moments that indicate to mentors that they are making an impact on the lives of their mentees. Mentors are trained to look for signals or indicators that they are increasing their mentees’ self-efficacy through goal achievement. Not only do Mentor Notes capture a detailed description of their experiences on the field, but they also allow mentors to make connections between sociological theories discussed in class and significant interactions shared with their mentees.

The MOSAIC course is also an essential tool during the mentor training process and the development of compassionate mentoring approaches. During class time we discuss the theory of self-efficacy and its relationship with the Action Plan. Within this theoretical framework, the class discusses specific critical topics that are relevant to youth culture, such as gangs, depression/suicide, Hip Hop culture, media, body image, gender scripts, Mesoamerican history, alcohol and other drugs, healthy and unhealthy relationships, the
Dream Act, and several other topics that differ from semester to semester depending on the current needs of the youth. Along with formal lectures, guest speakers and peer educators are also invited to the MOSAIC class to supplement class discussions. The accumulation of all of these critical factors contribute to the approach MOSAIC mentors utilize in order to collect data determining the effectiveness of their presence in the lives of continuation high school students.

**Action Plans**

The Action Plan was developed in consultation with community partners and the youth with whom MOSAIC works with. The measurement of the effectiveness of the Action Plan reflects students’ understanding of what it means to be “successful.” However, it is argued that the best measure of success will come directly from the youths’ life experience and personal understanding of their world. Because of this, MOSAIC has developed a measurement based on the youths’ subjective understanding of the particular area in their life that they think needs most improvement. If the outcome is directly applicable to their world view then they are that much more likely to characterize the experience as positive and define it as successful. To the extent that they come to understand themselves as successful, they will have the confidence in their ability to emulate the positive behavior of their mentors and incorporate appropriate decision making and self-confidence into their self-identity.

The Action Plan is based on Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy (1993). Successful goal attainment functions to increase self-efficacy. While the mentor plays a crucial role in the design of the Action Plan, the plan originates with the youth. Together mentor and youth identify a primary goal that the youth wishes to attain; then they work together to
identify several intermediate or secondary goals that will increase the chances of reaching the primary goal. Many of the primary goals tend to be academic and focus on raising grades or test scores in the long-term; the secondary goals deal with short-term day to day issues that the youth perceive as barriers both in their personal lives at home and at school. The mentors are taught in the classroom the theoretical support for the Action Plan as previously mentioned, and how to create one using role-playing activities and fictitious scenarios. During class time the mentors also come to understand their role in using this tool; how it will increase youth self-efficacy and sense of control, improve youth confidence in their abilities and empower them to make safe, healthy and appropriate decisions. Research suggests that goal setting and attainment enhances self-efficacy and both goal setting and efficacy are powerful influences on academic attainment (Bandura, 1993). Goals that are specific, short-term, and viewed as challenging but attainable enhance students’ self-efficacy better than do goals that are general, long-term, or viewed as unattainable. MOSAIC mentors help youth to begin with relatively simple goals to attain and progress to more difficult goals.

The Action Plan as a tool has proved useful by promoting the bonds between the mentor and the youth. This mentor-mentee relationship acts as a protective factor in two primary ways: first, by increasing self-efficacy and second, through positive peer role-modeling. However, the Action Plan, by improving efficacy, has had a secondary outcome: increasing the academic success of the youth. This outcome was unexpected and not a primary goal of the Action Plan. MOSAIC did not purposefully set out to address the academic failure of the youth. We began with Howell’s (2003) research identifying one of the most effective individual protective factors as self-efficacy. Thus
our primary objective was to develop a method, with the input of the youth, for the mentors to improve efficacy. We accomplished this in the development of the Action Plan.

**Mentor Notes**

Mentor Notes are based on mentors’ personal experiences as participant observers. The notes serve as a log which chronologically measures the progress of mentors’ interactions with their mentees. This form of note-taking offers an accurate record of what mentors experience as they reflect back on the challenges and triumphs of the previous week. While mentors are instructed in class to write an average of 500 words, or one page, per Mentor Note, mentors often write several pages containing not only a detailed description of their interactions and experiences, but also containing a personal reflection of what they felt about the significant instances that occurred at their field site. Although mentors describe their notable discoveries through a subjective point of view when writing Mentor Notes, it illustrates the empathy and the emotional transitions mentors encounter when investing their time on mentees using the MOSAIC approach. This aspect of the Mentor Notes is important to emphasis during class time because of its relationship to active listening and observation. Mentors are instructed to withhold from writing their mentors at their sites so as to not take time away from interacting with their youth, which means that mentors must exercise strong listening and observation skills during their time on the field. After their session with their mentees, mentors are advised to jot down anything significant or memorable that they may have witnessed or experienced during the previous week; referencing mentee quotations are strongly recommended. Mentors are advised to take note of situations that indicate
growth or change in their mentees. Some examples include: When students excitingly share with their mentor that they made honor roll; mentees sharing their appreciation for having a mentor; mentees expressing pain or distress because of a personal issue; and/or mentees verbalizing their aspirations for their future. Mentor Notes are submitted once a week by mentors online through the course Moodle system.

**Measures & Data Analysis**

This thesis is based on seven years of data (during my years as a mentor and program director). The MOSAIC program measures its effectiveness in several ways. First, student success is measured through Action Plan goal attainment, honor roll status and Mentor Notes from the moment they begin to work with their mentor up until the end of the academic semester (approximately four months). Towards the end of the semester, students are also interviewed informally through casual dialogue by their mentors who ask them questions in relation to the evaluation of their success in working with a mentor. Lastly, an informal investigation is also conducted by the MOSAIC program director to determine whether faculty and administration at the continuation high schools felt that the mentoring program positively impacted the academic success and personal growth of participating students.

For the purpose of this thesis, I will examine four individual case studies. The four participants, while they share many similarities, were selected based on minor demographic differences (i.e., age, gender, etc.). To provide context for their experience, I will also discuss statistical evidence that MOSAIC has collected on the program in terms of success rates using Action Plans and Mentor Notes. In addition, I will engage in critical reflection by weaving in my own narrative to counterbalance the data presented in
this research. Although the mentors and mentees used in the four studies are real people within real circumstances, their names and personal information have been modified to protect their identities.

The Four Mentees

Action Plans and Mentor Notes have been kept on file for four months for each mentee. For this thesis, I will select four cases from the fall 2012 academic semester based on common “types of situations” within continuation schools. I selected a student who is 1) gang-affiliated and on probation 2) quiet and considered a “loner” 3) popular, talkative and hyper-social, and 4) female teen-age parent. The purpose of selecting these students is to evaluate which aspects of the mentoring relationship and MOSAIC program are most helpful/effective given various situations of individual students. I will take notes for each student (e.g., typically 10-12 notes for one student) and discuss key themes and areas of concern. In terms of the mentors’ reflections on the quality of their sessions, I will take note on themes related to (a) communication skills (e.g., strengths-based perspective) and aspects of Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy (e.g., mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, physiological/emotional state).

The following chart, Table 1: Mentee Descriptions illustrates a general overview of the four mentees (Steven, Sam, Jose and Breana) in reference to the Action Plans and Mentor Notes analyzed in this section:
**Table 1: Mentee Descriptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Personal Characteristics</th>
<th>Goals noted in Action Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td><strong>Analysis of their sense of hope</strong></td>
<td><strong>Analysis of their academic standings</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Steven, 17</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>- just got out of jail&lt;br&gt;- facial tattoos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td><strong>Active Gang Member</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Sam, 17</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>- heavy optimism&lt;br&gt;- male role model to his 3 little brothers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td><strong>Super quiet&lt;br&gt;Secluded</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Jose, 18</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>-ambitious&lt;br&gt;- rarely follows through with goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td><strong>Very social and talkative</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Breana, 17</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-resilient&lt;br&gt;- teenage parent&lt;br&gt;- enrolled herself into community college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td><strong>Focused and driven</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

“If you think in terms of a year, plant a seed; if in terms of ten years, plant trees; if in terms of one hundred years, teach the people.”

- Confucius

(Grauer, 2013)

Overview

This chapter addresses the questions posed earlier in this work through an analysis of Action Plans and Mentor Notes; along with my testimonies as a participant observer within the MOSAIC mentoring program. Four case studies were selected to determine the extent to which the Action Plans contribute to increasing students’ self-efficacy through goal attainment. I will examine the data that speaks to the following questions:

1. Are mentees accomplishing goals listed on their Action Plans?

2. If so, what aspects of the mentoring process are beneficial for goal attainment?

The major themes that emerged were: (a) the role of the mentor in establishing their “voice”; (b) the attainability of their set goals using mentoring approaches specific to the circumstances to the youth; and (c) students’ sense of hope/optimism in accomplishing their goals. In this section the results of the research questions are presented.

Case Studies

Case 1: Steven, 18
Steven, along with the other three cases in this section are all students in continuation high schools who have been expelled from their traditional high schools for one reason or another. Steven is 18 years old and is a relatively new student to the school. He was recently released from juvenile hall and claims to be an active gang member with visible tattoos on his arms, hands and upper cheek bones below the corner of his eyes. Although Steven is more than willing to work with a mentor, as demonstrated in his Action Plan, he struggles with his status as a gang member which is noted in his goal attainment. Below is an Action Plan designed for Steven by his university student mentor, Jorge.

**Case 1:**

*Mentee: Steven P., 18*

*Mentor: Jorge S.*

*Site: Everest High School*

**Primary Goal: Graduate from high school by September.**

Steven was well on his way to completing his primary goal of graduating from high school, but unfortunately, he was involved in a fight on the main campus and was considered a threat to the area because of his gang affiliation. As a result, Steven was expelled and was no longer allowed to be on campus, which is bad news because he was doing so well in completing his assigned coursework and his goals.

*Date Completed: Not Completed*

It is important to note that MOSAIC mentors are instructed in class to provide an opportunity for mentees to create one *primary goal* on their Action Plan, which typically consists of a long-term goal, as opposed to the short-term goals in their *secondary goals*. Steven’s primary goal is to graduate from high school by September. However, as a result of his participation in a fight on campus, Steven was expelled from the continuation
school he was attending. Once a student, like Steven is expelled, there is no further way to measure his goal attainment. Steven’s mentor, Jorge expresses a sense of disappointment when describing the progress they have made in Steven’s Action Plan. While the completion of the primary goal was left unmet, it is common for mentees to not meet their primary goal.

Secondary Goals:

1. Attend school every day for one week.

Attending school on a daily basis was not an apparent problem for Steven because his probation restrictions mandated him to go to school every day. Although he was required to attend school as a form of punishment, he recognized the importance of being present at school and the advantage he had when attempting to acquire points. He found it easier to go to school once he set up a consistent routine that allowed him to complete his work at a steady rate. Steven was able to complete this goal without any trouble.

Date Completed: February 29th

Because Steven was mandated to attend school every day due to his court mandate, this goal focused on attending school every day for an entire week; Monday through Friday. As stated by the mentor, Steven has a problem with attendance. It is possible that Steven discovered the benefits of attending school on a regular basis due the results of accomplishing this particular goal. Jorge states that Steven found it “easier” to attain points, and evidently Steven was able to accomplish this goal without any specific difficulty.

2. Complete work in every class for one week.

Steven and I both recognized the advantage of turning work in on a regular basis. Not only does it assist in the accumulation of points, but it also assists in maintaining a steady pace when working on school assignments. By breaking it up into weeks as opposed to months or semesters, it eliminated the feeling of being overwhelmed with all the work that needed to be done. As a result, Steven
was able to concentrate on each class without thinking about his other coursework. He was able to complete work in all classes but did not do it for the whole week; however, I still considered it an accomplished goal because of the drastic contrast in comparison to his prior work habits. I could detect Steven’s confidence increasing as he successfully completes more schoolwork. While I want Steven to work more consistently, I am aware that he is progressing at a rate that is comfortable for him. I am proud of the progress he has made, nonetheless, and I make sure I communicate that to Steven every chance I get.

Date Completed: March 7th

Secondary goal #2 exhibits a connection to the previous goal in that it takes advantage of the fact that Steven will be present at school throughout the whole week, so his mentor guided him towards completing a specified amount of work in every class for one week. In doing this, Steven approaches his work load with much more comfort knowing that he does not have to complete all of his assignments at once, which evidently alleviates the sense of being “overwhelmed” in his school work as a whole. It is important to note the way Steven’s mentor reframes the objective of the goal. Although the initial goal was not completely met, it allows the mentor to recognize the capacity of the student’s work habits and modify the goal so that the mentee recognizes his growth and shift in completed coursework.

3. Spend more time at home during school nights.

Steven tends to get anxious when he is at home. The urge to go out with his friends or with girls often over powers the need to stay home and do school work. He also mentioned that when he does go out on school nights, he gets harassed by the police, which does not help his present situation. By staying home on school nights Steven had the opportunity to kill two birds with one stone: complete homework and stay out of jail. Prior to his expulsion, however, Steven stated that he was having trouble staying home because he claimed he would get “bored.” This particular goal was not completed.

Date Completed: Not Completed
It is evident that Steven is committed to spending his free time on the street. Although he agreed that staying home from school would help him catch up on his coursework, he was not able to complete this goal, which was one of the two non-academic goals in Steven’s Action Plan.

4. Fill out online application for Costco by the end of this week.

*Steven is eighteen years old and was older than most of the students at school. He felt like he was too old to be in high school and was eager to graduate in a hurry. By getting a job, Steven felt that he could get a little closer to becoming more self-reliant, which would have helped him create a boost of confidence that he very much needed. He chose Costco as a place of employment because according to Steven, they pay well and provide good benefits. When Steven was still attending the site, he had not applied at Costco yet and appeared frustrated toward the whole idea of getting hired, because he feared they would criticize him about his visible tattoos and not consider him a potential employee. I encouraged him to move forward with it, but that is all I could really do. Steven never got around to completing this goal.*

*Date Completed: Not Completed*

Secondary Goal #4 was the last non-academic goal on Steven’s Action Plan and was not accomplished. Given the nature of Steven’s appearance, it was clear that he displayed a lack of confidence in acquiring employment. Steven did not take the initial steps to working at Costco, however, in a later Mentor Note, Steven’s mentor discusses the job he received at a fabric store. While he did not achieve his initial goal of working at Costco, he did acquire a position at another location.

5. Talk to mentor once a week to discuss progress or any other issues.

*This was a great way to find out how Steven’s progress was going in regard to his action plan and his life in general. Steven has experienced a rough childhood and takes advantage of an opportunity to ask for advice whenever he could. He has discovered the benefits of talking about his issues and was open to new ideas when approaching a problem he may or may not have had. I felt that getting together on a weekly basis would allow Steven to stay focused on his short and*
long-term goals. This goal was very beneficial for both Steven and me, because we were both able to lay a comfortable foundation for the relationship we shared. Steven was very cooperative and felt confident when expressing himself and the things he had on his mind. He completed this goal week after week and I found it very helpful when working with Steven. I strongly feel that I made a positive connection with Steven because of the similarities we share as at-risk youth. I’m hoping that my presence in his life serves as an example of the possibilities that exist around him despite the struggles and setbacks we have faced in our lives. I am optimistic about Steven detaching himself from crime and the gang culture because I know that he has what it takes to succeed; I have witnessed it first-hand.

Date Completed: March 7

Because of the broad nature of Goal #5, Steven is able to use this opportunity to talk to his mentor about anything that may be consuming his thoughts. Sharing his personal background with his mentor demonstrates a level of trust that enables Steven to express his desired goals and seek out advice without feeling the sense of discomfort or judgment. Steven’s mentor provides evidence that these particular one-on-one talks assist in establishing a strong mentor-mentee connection based on shared experiences increasing his self-efficacy through vicarious experience as a result.

Case 2: Sam, 17

Sam is a student who checked in to the continuation high school system after being expelled from his traditional high school. Like Steven, Sam is an active gang member but does not visibly display any tattoos. When I first met Sam he seemed very distant and quiet, commonly keeping to himself throughout the day usually sketching on paper and not really driven to complete work. When I first spoke with Sam he explained to me the dynamics at home and how he saw himself as a father figure to his three younger brothers. When asked about his father, Sam stated that he traveled to Mexico some years back and never returned. As soon as he finished his sentence he began to cry
and fought diligently to fight off the tears that were starting to fall from his face. What I found compelling was when Sam apologized for crying in front of me. I assured him that he didn’t have to apologize for crying, and that contrary to popular belief, it was okay for men to cry. According to Sam’s mentor, Tracy, he often lacks success in completing schoolwork, but once he finds a steady routine, he thrives. In this particular Action Plan, Sam manages to achieve all of his goals, which are all academically-related.

Case 2:

Mentee: Sam T., 17
Mentor: Tracy M.
Site: Lowlands High School

Primary Goal: Make the honor roll before next grading period ends.

Sam is an extremely smart student but tends to lose focus rather quickly. He is familiar with the taste of success and knows how to get to where he wants to go. I feel that making honor roll status a primary goal will give Sam that extra motivation he needs in order to strive for better grade point average. I think Sam’s desire to be on the honor roll list enabled him to focus more clearly on the importance of completing his work in a timely manner. Since we put together Sam’s action plan, he was able to achieve this goal rather quickly. He now knows what he has to do if he wants to remain on the honor roll list. This goal was completed with no apparent problems.

Date Completed: March 7th

Sam’s primary goal to make the honor roll was accomplished once he had his Action Plan in place. Prior to having a mentor, Sam had never been on the school’s honor roll list, but when given the specific structure and consistency of his Action Plan, Sam was able to achieve his goals with little to no effort. Honor roll status ensures the completion of required classes in a timely manner. With this accomplishment, Sam is increasing his self-efficacy through mastery experience. If he did it once, he could probably do it again.
Secondary Goals:

1. Attend school every day for one week.

Sam is already a student who attends school on a regular basis but claims that he gets lazy every once in a while which causes him to stay home or leave school early. If a student is not present in school, it obviously makes it that much more difficult to make honor roll, so attendance is emphasized to highlight the importance of being in school and doing work on a daily basis. The goal was broken down to increments of two weeks so that it does not seem too overwhelming. Sam has been able to complete this goal on a consistent basis. Sam understands the importance of attending school and has done a very good job in committing himself to being a better student.

Goal #2 is evidence suggesting that steady school attendance contributes to better work habits. By understanding the importance of attending school every day, Sam has enabled himself to be open to different methods in attaining positive academic results.

*Date Completed: February 29th*

2. Complete work and turn it in for every class for one week.

Sam is already familiar with the advantage of completing work on a regular basis. He knows that turning in work regularly helps drastically when attempting to earn the necessary points to make honor roll (50). Sam knew that this goal was attainable because last semester he was a regular on the honor roll list. Once Sam gets in his rhythm of completing work, there is no stopping him. He accomplished this goal the following week. His behavior drastically changes when he is in “work mode” as opposed to when he is in “chill mode.” It makes me sad to think that he often wastes his potential away when he is in a non-working mode. If Sam applied himself regularly on a consistent basis, he could finish high school in no time at all.

*Date Completed: February 29th*

This goal demonstrates the effectiveness of maintaining a consistent work routine based on specific short-term goals. Sam was able to achieve this goal due to his commitment to the Action Plan. As stated by his mentor, Sam tends to fall into to a lazy phase which keeps him from completing more work. His mentor also expresses a sense of
disappointment while acknowledging Sam’s potential and witnessing him “waste” it away. Although, he might have fallen into slumps, Sam still managed to achieve this goal.

3. Get to Jack’s Pack on time every day for one week.

Attending and participating in Jack’s Pack is a quick and easy way to earn points, but since it is right after nutrition, most students are slow to get to class and as a result miss out on possible points. By attending the lectures, students can earn as much as fifteen points per week, which is a great deal considering that students just have to take notes and turn them in. Sam understands this and attends it he feels he needs to. Jack’s Pack is optional for some students, so when Sam is all caught up with the assignments he is currently working on, he attends the lectures and takes advantage of the extra points. Sam has been doing a great job in participating in Jack’s Pack. Although his attendance in Jack’s Pack varies depending on his prior commitments, I still feel like Sam has demonstrated enough determination to consider this goal as an accomplished one.

Date Completed: March 10th

One of the characteristics of the continuation high school system is that most students are working at their own pace completing work as they feel they are capable. In goal #3, Sam’s mentor explains the benefits of attending an optional program designed for students to earn extra “easy” points. While most students do not take advantage of this opportunity, Sam realized the benefit of attending whenever he had a chance, which evidently contributed to the completion of this goal.

4. Take notes in Jack’s Pack and turn them in everyday for two weeks.

Like mentioned in the previous goal, Jack’s Pack is a quick and easy way to earn points. Students who are interested in making the honor roll make sure that they turn in their notes because they know how fast the points add up. Sam is one of those students who is familiar with making enough points to put him over the top and acknowledges the importance of gaining a large amount of points, as opposed to making a small amount. Since Jack’s Pack is optional for some students, Sam attends a few times a week. When Jack’s Pack was mandatory for all students, Sam was completing his required lecture notes and made sure he was there on time. When he is not in Jack’s Pack, he is working on other subjects that
are equally as important. Although Sam has not been attending Jack’s Pack every
day, he has still managed to accumulate enough points to make the honor roll list.
Sam completed this goal early in the semester but is still encouraged to attend
Jack’s Pack whenever he feels he needs the extra points. I am happy to see Sam
attend Jack’s Pack even when he knows he is all caught up in points. It is a clear
example that he is building his self-efficacy through mastery experience.

Date Completed: February 29th

As mentioned in Sam’s previous goal analysis, he knows when to take advantage
of acquiring easy points. One thing is to attend Jack’s Pack to earn points, but another
thing is to do the actual work that is required to receive full points. Although Sam does
not always need the extra points, he is well of aware of the opportunity and takes it every
chance he gets. His mentor correlates this form of behavior with an increase in self-
efficacy through mastery experience.

5. Talk to mentor about progress or any other issues every Friday.

It is extremely important to discuss anything that might come up during the
process of accomplishing a goal. By meeting on a weekly basis, it gives me a
better idea of the progress being made by the youth. If any problems or issues
arise, it allows for modifications or changes in the action plan. It’s also a good
time to bring up questions or concerns that the mentee or mentor may or may not
have. I have had lots of progress with Sam in regard to communication factors.
He does not have any problems approaching me about anything that is on his
mind. Over the course of the semester, Sam has demonstrated a high level of
maturation since I first started working with him. Although he is still a member of
a street gang, Sam has recognized the negative elements produced by his
affiliation. He has made it a personal goal of his to spend more time working on
his own development to ensure the safety of his future and the parental role he
often plays for his three younger brothers. As a result of completing an action
plan, Sam has equipped himself with many of the tools that are necessary in the
adult world. With more work and determination, he has the potential to overcome
any obstacle that life has to offer. I am confident that Sam will one day be a
productive member of society who has learned from his mistakes and deals with
life’s circumstances accordingly.

Date Completed: Continuous
Goal #5 demonstrates several factors which indicate that the mentee is growing and learning through positive role modeling. This goal suggests that one-on-one conversations are effective in stabilizing a trusted mentor-mentee bond. Over the course of the semester, Sam has exemplified to his mentor that the Action Plan is effective if given specific short-term goals relevant to his present circumstances.

Case 3: Jose, 17

Jose is a student who made the choice of leaving his traditional high school and enrolled himself into a continuation high school to make an attempt at catching up on credits. Unlike the other two students mentioned above, Jose was not expelled from his traditional high school. According to Jose, he has trouble focusing in school because he gets easily distracted by other students. Because of his talkative nature, Jose rarely gets any work done in school causing him to fall behind almost three years. At 17 years old, Jose should be at a 12th grade level, but is currently struggling to move out of the 9th grade.

Case 3:

Mentee: Jose S., 17
Mentor: Max A.
Site: Ambiguous High School

Primary Goal: Complete History 9A by next grading period (Mar. 28).

Jose is a relatively new student who checked out of his traditional high school because of his low credits. He is seventeen years old and is supposed to be a senior, but he is doing work at a ninth grade level. He has some type of progress in most areas of the graduation requirements except for history. Jose has not completed any courses in history, so he is eager to complete his first history class. Since I have been working with Jose, his motivation level has seemingly been in a stagnant mode. He develops determination for short periods of time then gradually falls back to his lay-back-attitude. Jose has not completed his first history class yet but informs me that he is still eager to complete his work.
Hopefully, his determination lasts long enough to attain his goal, because once Jose tastes the sweetness of success, I know he will strive to reach further.

Date Completed: Not Completed

Because of his struggle with history class, Jose thought it was a good idea to focus on passing his 9th grade history class. While his intentions were set on accomplishing this goal, his attention was seemingly not focused enough on achieving this particular goal.

Secondary Goals:

1. Come to school every day for a week.

This particular goal was accomplished rather quickly because he is a new student and was somewhat mandated by his mother to attend school on a regular basis. When at school, Jose is a good student but gets distracted easily and often falls into lazy phases, which commonly keeps him home and turned off to schoolwork. After being at school for a couple of weeks, Jose began to miss school more frequently and fell behind in his acquired point average. I am glad, however, that Jose at least made the effort of coming to school every day for a whole week. With time, this goal will help him develop a steady routine.

Date Completed: March 21st

Given that Jose displays hyper-social behavior, he does not seem to mind coming to school. Although his mom “makes” him attend school on a daily basis, Jose does not seem to get enough work done to be successful in other areas of his Action Plan. Jose enjoys the one-on-one sessions and could talk about his personal life for hours, but regardless, he has difficulty adjusting to a steady consistent work routine.

2. Complete at least two packets of History work per week.

Keeping a steady rate when completing work makes it a lot easier to turn in work packets in a timely manner. Jose and I decided to concentrate on finishing at least two history packets per week so that by the next grading period he would be close to finishing, or finished, with his first history class. Since he often falls into slumps, Jose has had lots of trouble doing his work. It is difficult to determine why he suddenly stops doing his work during the moment when he is doing so
well. He gets discouraged very easily and feels that it is too much work at times. He has been close to completing two packets per week but has not been able to finish two. Although he did not reach this particular goal, I assured Jose that he was able to finish one packet per week successfully, while prior to setting it as a goal, he was not able to complete one packet per week. I was relieved that his progress was not left unnoticed, which showed me that he was growing as a student through my social persuasion and cheerleading.

Date Completed: Not Completed

Jose was having trouble in completing his coursework because he spends too much time socializing with other students at school rather than dedicating himself to improving his poor work habits. Although he didn’t achieve the initial goal of completing two history packets per week, he was able to finish one packet a week which is a big improvement from not turning in any work packets. It is evident that the Action Plans’ versatility allows for mentees to experience a sense of accomplishment after re-framing initial goals to meet the pace of the student.

3. Work at home for one hour per day every day for a week.

Again, Jose reaches a point where he feels confident in completing his work at home and at school and suddenly feels like he is overwhelmed. I have tried to help him break his work up so as to prevent a sense of being overwhelmed, but it seems like he is having a hard time adapting to the concept of doing homework. Jose has expressed to me that he is a very social person and enjoys spending time with his friends outside of school, which is often the reason why he never has time to complete work at home. We both agreed that it is important to reserve a special time when he could sit down and get some homework done but according to Jose, he has not been able to find the time. It is common for students to find schoolwork difficult especially when school has been a turn-off throughout middle school and high school. At this rate, it is going to take a lot of work for Jose to catch up and graduate on time. Situations like this help me understand why so many high school students give up and drop out of high school.

Date Completed: Not Completed
This goal proved to be a challenge for Jose. Considering that he rarely gets any work done at school, he felt that he could give it a shot at home. Through one-on-one conversations, Jose’s mentor discovered that Jose is not only hyper-social at school, but out of school as well, which kept him from completing this goal. Being that he is part of a car club and a bike club, his time outside of school is consumed by his social obligations. Jose’s mentor expresses frustration in knowing that Jose can’t find the time to complete work at home.

4. Talk to mentor once a week about progress or any other issues or questions.

I was impressed with Jose’s ability to pinpoint the problems he feels he has, which keep him from succeeding in school. His communication skills are excellent, and the sincerity he expresses through our conversations in regard to his desire to graduate is a positive indicator of his eagerness to graduate. Although he has trouble with completing his assignments, he has displayed verbally what he feels he has to do and what he needs to do to get there. Jose has done a great job in putting his thoughts into words, which in return has given me the ability to create alternatives when attempting to set up a work regime. I feel our weekly meetings have helped in many other aspects of Jose’s life apart from his academics and with consistency, I also feel that he can accomplish any goal he sets his mind to and if he sticks with it, which is a weakness for Jose but once he learns to overcome his fear of failing, he will be able to accomplish great things in and out of school.

Date Completed: This goal is ongoing

This particular goal is evidently helpful for Jose in pinpointing the things that he has to do in order to accomplish the goals on his Action Plan. He hardly has an issue in communicating what he thinks and feels, but has much difficulty in implementing his plan to execute his goals. His verbalized interest in graduating high school seemingly has an effect on Jose’s attitude towards school; however, his Action Plan goal attainment does not correspond with his intentions to graduate.
Case 4: Breana, 17

Breana is the only female in this analysis, and happens to be a teenage mother. She is 17 years old and seems to have a plan for her future as a mother. Because she has experienced a series of hardships and a teenage pregnancy, Breana was forced to mature in order to meet her duties as a mother. Although most of her goals are academically-related, a percentage of them are related to her life after high school indicating her drive to move forward and strive for success through post high school education. It is important to note that Breana’s goals are very specific and have short-term deadlines which at this rate, generates successful results in terms of goal attainment.

Case 4:

Mentee: Breana M.
Mentor: Janet J.
Site: Mountain View High School

Primary Goal: Psychologist-work with children.

Breana is 17 years old and she wants to attend Mission College and later transfer to Cal State Northridge University. She wants to work with children because she wants to help children live in a world of love and peacefulness. Her 9 month old baby, Elijah motivates her to continue on with her life.

Breana’s primary goal is a considerable example of the aspirations she has for her future. Through the Action Plan, she is able to communicate her goals and later see them listed in a way that helps her maintain a consistent pace towards achievement. Although her mentor will not be around to witness Breana complete her primary goal, her mentor decided to list it on her Action Plan anyway. This suggests that Breana’s mentor has some form of expectation and possesses the belief that one day she may achieve her goals.
Secondary Goals:

1. English 12A: Literature book-Read 6 pages by Monday March 28th. **Complete**

   This goal is important to Breana because she wants to complete Mrs. B class as soon as possible. This is the only class she needs to complete in order for her to obtain her GED. In order for her to complete this goal, Breana will read in class and ask questions if she doesn't understand something. She will take the Literature book home and read for 15 minutes. Breana successfully completed this goal March 28th.

   Again, because Breana’s goals are listed very specifically, she interprets them as attainable and not as overwhelming as if she were thinking of her entire workload. By breaking her work up into several short-term goals, Breana does not seem to have any difficulties in achieving her goals, especially secondary goal #1 which corresponds to the last class she needs to pass in order for her to obtain her GED.

2. English 12A: Complete Section 1 (3 pages) from the Latino Literature book by April 6th. **Complete**

   Complete section 1 (read and complete the book work 3 pages) of the Latino Book. This goal is vital to my mentee because she wants to complete this Mrs. B's class as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the first due date for this goal was March 31st and she did not complete it. Her challenge with this book is the fact that she is tired of reading and doing paper work. She feels like she is never going to complete this class. There are times when she becomes discouraged to continue on because time passes by very slow. She also mentioned that it is very difficult for her to do class work at home because she has the baby with her all the time. Therefore, this goal is still in progress.

   Breana’s consistency continues to demonstrate her ability to achieve set goals in a timely manner. While she did not complete this particular goal, her mentor decided to consider it a completed goal due to Breana’s priorities as a mother. Because of this she is unable to get any schoolwork completed at home, which often causes her to be discouraged about finishing her 12th grade English class.
3. Get the DMV booklet (driving booklet) by Monday April 4th. Complete

My mentee can’t wait to obtain her driver’s license because her dad promised her that he would buy her a vehicle. She also wants to obtain her driver’s license because she doesn’t have a reliable transportation to move around. She has trouble taking the bus all the time or asking her mom or dad for a ride. Her boyfriend has a car, but he is always working, therefore he is never around. As soon as I get the DMV booklet, she will start studying it. This goal is still in progress.

This is the only goal on Breana’s Action Plan that is not academically-related. Although it is not oriented towards her studies at school, her mentor felt it was important to include it in her list of goals to provide Breana with a sense of responsibility due to the fact that she is well on her way to graduating high school and starting college. Her instincts as a mother have helped Breana sort out her priorities with motherhood in mind.

4. Call advisor from Mission College Monday March 28th. Complete

My mentee successfully completed this goal March 28th. Breana will start the semester this fall. She called an advisor and she oriented her on how, when and where to take the placement test for the English and Math class. However, the other day my mentee confessed to me that she was very nervous and afraid to start college. She is afraid because it looks hard and because she has to socialize with a lot of people. Breana is now finally taking risks for her child and herself. She is finally maturing.

This particular goal is focused on post high school education which is rare for Action Plans within continuation high school students. This indicates that Breana is benefitting from the Action Plan goal attainment. By breaking her goals down to smaller increments, Breana is able to take on multiple tasks without the feeling of being consumed by all of her schoolwork. Such results exemplify the effectiveness of a customized Action Plan that relates to the immediate realities of the youth involved.

5. Make it to the Honor Roll. Incomplete
I need to speak to the principal about the honor roll list because he doesn’t implement the list at the site. The principal did not set a schedule or date for this specific goal. However, I mentioned to my mentee’s that the last day of our mentoring sessions we were going to have a pizza party for everyone. That was our Honor Roll day. Honor roll doesn’t necessarily mean that the students have to be recognized by the principal, but also by their mentors. Honor Roll pizza party is a celebration for their accomplishments and valuable potential. This party was also a thank you celebration because my mentee’s allowed me to be part of their lives. I learned from them and they learned from me.

Goal #5 is another goal which was reframed by the mentor to provide her mentee with the confidence to continue moving forward. Although there is not a set honor roll system at this particular continuation high school, Breana’s mentor made sure that her efforts were not left unrecognized. By celebrating their achievements with a pizza party, both mentor and mentee were able to express their gratitude towards each other throughout the time they worked together.

Action Plan Goals

While some of the goals listed above may seem like a minor accomplishments to many, for these youth, who have been kicked out of other programs, who are in “last-chance” continuation schools, who have been “given up on” by most adults in the community; this represents quite an accomplishment. As noted in the results chapter, one mentor writes in a Mentor Note:

The Action Plan goal was to get a part-time job to stay out of trouble with his probation officer. This was Steven’s biggest challenge. Since he had been in trouble with the law before, it was difficult for him to get hired. He has now been working at a fabric store for almost a month and the manager already wants to make him a supervisor! I was really proud of him when I told him we could cross
[this] off his Action Plan and he gave me a look of such satisfaction and thanked me for helping him sort out his priorities and believing in him!

Given that this study set out to analyze whether mentee’s attained their goals, I analyzed the Action Plans on file for each mentee. To date 82% (181/221) of MOSAIC youth completed at least 50% of the steps needed to obtain their primary Action Plan goal. Of the goals the youth set for themselves the most commonly identified are academic goals. During the course of the school year, over 75% of MOSAIC youth have successfully achieved an academic goal after identifying it on their Action Plan.

**Mentor Analysis of Goal Attainment**

The chart below, *Table 2: Mentee Goal Attainment* illustrates the success measures of the Action Plan in relation to goal attainment and the effective approach utilized by mentors that contributed to the outcome. The first column provides a brief description of the students (e.g., name, age, “type” of student); the second column under “Proof/Attainment” refers to the goals achieved in mentees’ Action Plans and gives brief insight on mentor reflections extracted from Mentor Notes. This form of reflection gives us a better idea of how to measure their individual success in relation to goal attainment. The third column states whether or not mentees achieved their goals and includes a percentage of mentees’ Action Plan success rate. The next two columns to the right under “Effective Approach” and “Theme” refers to the approach in which the mentor utilized that produced the most effective results (e.g., One-on-one mentoring, short-term, specific work routines):
### Table 2: Mentee Goal Attainment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Proof/Attainment (success measures)</th>
<th>Effective Approach</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Attainment of goals Mentor Notes (reflections on progress)</td>
<td>Attainment of goals Action plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Steven, 17</td>
<td>Achieved more than many expected him to.</td>
<td>Attained 3 out of 5 goals on his Action Plan 60% Success Rate</td>
<td>Steven required a lot of one-on-one. He had a lot to say about the things happening in his life. Schoolwork often got in the way of his time with his mentor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Active Gang Member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sam, 17</td>
<td>Was efficient in keeping work routine consistent</td>
<td>Attained 5 out of 5 goals on his Action Plan 100% Success Rate</td>
<td>The Action Plan significantly helped Sam get his assignments in order and completed in a timely manner which allowed him to continuously achieve honor roll.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Super quiet Secluded</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Jose, 18</td>
<td>Made lots of improvements and was open to working with a mentor</td>
<td>Attained 2 out of 5 goals on his Action Plan 40% Success Rate</td>
<td>Very intelligent student who is easily distracted with the presence of other students. In turn, Jose had trouble completing assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Very social and talkative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Breana, 17</td>
<td>Realized the benefits of preparing for adulthood by graduating high school and attending college.</td>
<td>Attained 4 out of 5 goals on her Action Plan 80% Success Rate</td>
<td>Breana was very successful in completing her goals. Having weekly work deadlines helped her break her workload down into sections so as not to feel too overwhelmed with it as a whole.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mentoring Experience

Towards the beginning of the semester, several themes emerged as I analyzed the Action Plans including group sessions, specific short-term goals, and structured work routines. Towards the end of the semester all four mentors mentioned evidence of the same themes relating to strengths and weaknesses, however, there were some interesting unique findings, as well. Although each mentee engaged in mentorship during the beginning of the semester, they did not begin to achieve their goals until students felt comfortable in working with their mentors. Once the trust is established, students begin to demonstrate a need to want to improve their relationship with their trusted mentor. Goal attainment as a result, demonstrated to be a contributing factor to the mentor-mentee relationship.

Another theme that emerged related to aspects of self-efficacy is described by the mentors who facilitated the four Action Plans utilized in this research. Some mentors discuss the application of mastery experience as a mentee attempts to raise his grade in Economics and the application of social persuasion to encourage the mentee to continue progressing in studying for the SAT’s. The mentors’ voice is seemingly instrumental according to the mentor who has felt the impact of working with continuation high school students.

The mentor’s qualitative data included below confirms both an increase in youth efficacy and the fact that the youth established meaningful bonds with their mentors. One mentor writes:
I am grateful for the opportunity of guiding my mentee through taking small steps toward his goal of getting accepted to college after graduating from high school. By keeping a steady pace in our studying for his Economic class, he achieved raising his failing grade to a D and then his persistence in studying hard for an upcoming test and receiving 87% raised his grade to C. This helped increase his self-efficacy first through social persuasion...I kept telling him he could do it...then through mastery experience...he did it! This helped him believe in his ability to prepare for the SAT test. He needed an extra push to get ready for taking the SAT’s and I got him a prep book that he carried wherever he went; he even read it while riding the bus. My mentee also made the goal to take online tests as well as putting extra hours of studying. I can tell that he is living up to his promise because his scores on the SAT practice tests continue to rise.

As shown above, the aspect of mastery experience within the theory of self-efficacy is shown in addition to social persuasion. By constantly providing positive reinforcement, this mentor was acting as a cheerleader ensuring the youth that he possessed the ability to pass the SAT’s. The “smaller steps” initially described by the mentor develops a sense of mastery in the student by allowing him to feel confident about his next step because he has already experienced it before. This mentoring approach, with self-efficacy in mind, continues to produce the most effective results in relation to mentees’ goal attainment.

Throughout this section, the mentor-mentee relationship established clear patterns of developing trusted bonds between one another. This demonstrates a common theme
across all four mentees who were included in this study. Max the mentor writes about the importance of social persuasion and the mentor/mentee bond:

_A positive moment that I recall is when Jose thanked me for being there, He said “Only when you come can I focus and do my work because you make me want to do work and do good in school. I do my work because I don’t want to disappoint you.” When he told me this it made me feel really good because the fact that he was allowing me to persuade him in a positive way. I was being an effective “cheerleader” to him. By me being there and working with him he had the confidence to reach his goals. His self-efficacy was evidently increasing through my social persuasion._

Another mentor suggests that the most important aspect of mentoring is the “voice” of the mentor in the relationship:

_We set goals with the youth that they choose to work on and then we help them along the way. The most important part is the consistent “you can do it” voice of the mentor. The work we do as mentors goes beyond the youth simply raising one of their grades or bringing in their homework. It is about them improving their self-efficacy and watching the goals that they set for themselves become real accomplishments. I have seen D’s go to B’s and I have formed relationships with youth, some whom I will never forget. The main concepts we use at MOSAIC involve self-efficacy and our goal driven Action Plans. I have learned many things about myself and about our youth in this past year._
Finally, a mentor discusses the importance of being similar to the youth in building self-efficacy. Schunk and Parajas (2001) argue that one way to influence the efficacy of youth is through model similarity. When youth observe others succeed, individuals who they feel share similarities with them, they are more likely to believe that they too will be successful. Furthermore, when students realize that they share similar experiences and ties with their mentor, they are much more likely to feel a sense of trust and remove barriers which allow them to be helped in areas they know they need assistance in. Only then can mentors take advantage of the opportunity their mentees provide them with, and set the stage to work toward a successful plan.

The fact that most mentors are similar in age to some students really helped them visualize a positive future regardless of the hardships they have encountered in the past. When working together with someone who has already gone through what the youth are going through really helps in the process of making positive changes, especially when the youth feel they could trust you.

While mentees initially set an equal amount of social/personal goals as academic goals, mentors soon realized that a lot of social/personal goals are much more difficult to measure within the context of the mentoring relationship which only takes place at school during school hours. Because mentors were not present to determine whether or not mentees were accomplishing their personal goals at home, they were not given the opportunity to praise their mentees with the positive reinforcement that is commonly discussed in Mentor Notes. With the absence of social persuasion from their mentor, mentees gradually minimize personal goals on their Action Plans and opt to concentrate on academically-related goals that can be monitored by their mentor at school, which if
accomplished, results in a positive compensation from their mentor, thus increasing future goal attainment.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

“I am not a teacher, but an awakener.”
- Robert Frost
(Grauer, 2013)

Mentoring continuation high school students is challenging work but the MOSAIC mentors put more than just hard work into the program; they put their heart, their commitment, and their passion. Because of this, the MOSAIC mentors are committed to seeing MOSAIC youth succeed. MOSAIC mentors are uniquely qualified to perform these tasks since they are readily accepted as role-models. They are often close in age to the youth, usually look like them, talk like them and have experienced many of the same life challenges. They often come from the same neighborhoods as the youth, and have usually chosen to participate in MOSAIC because they want to “give back” the kind of care and support they received from a mentor who once made a difference in their lives. MOSAIC mentors protect youth from gangs, academic failure and delinquent behavior through their role-modeling by using social persuasion, vicarious experiences and improving the emotional well-being of the youth.

Interpretation of Results

This study found that continuation high school students who were involved with a MOSAIC mentor were more than willing to create an Action Plan to identify academic and personal goals which they wanted to accomplish throughout the duration of an academic semester; roughly three to four months. Most of the mentees studied in this thesis attained over 50% of their goals. The reasons for goal attainment were due to the
unique mentoring approach exercised by the mentors with direct emphasis on the current realities of each youth. It is essential to note that every student who attends a continuation school carries an excessive amount of emotional and psychological loads as they attend school, so it is necessary to create an Action Plan that speaks directly to youths’ current needs.

For all four cases, close monitoring from their mentor was important in helping them attain goals listed on their Action Plans. All students included in this research, it was necessary to form a meaningful bond in order to break down any barriers based on mistrust. While every mentee was willing to work with a mentor during the Action Plan process, it is made clear in the MOSAIC course that it is essential to build a relationship with mentees before attempting to negotiate a work routine. I find this approach to be instrumental in the attitude mentees adopt in relation to their goals and the possibility of accomplishing them. As demonstrated in the results section, mentees required various form of mentoring approaches before realizing what works for each particular mentee. I should note that mentors did not play a major role in mentees’ goal attainment when other factors came into play (e.g., court mandates, students already had sufficient levels of efficacy). For some mentees, the mentors simply filled the role of "cheerleaders" or reminded mentees to keep up their work routine assuring them of the positive consequences resulting from goal attainment.

While data suggests that the male students in the study required more one-on-one time from their mentor and ongoing monitoring, future research can explore whether there are unique protective factors for females attending continuation high schools. In the case study of the female (Case 4), a unique protective factor seemed to be effective in
terms of reaching her goals. Because she is a teen parent, she constantly needed positive reinforcement and encouragement at school, especially when her situation at home was increasing her stress levels. Given that each student is an individual and possess their own needs and learning styles, it is imperative that mentors are well versed in the various approaches that determine which suits each mentee best. In summary, it appears that identifying attainable goals was critical to building mentees’ self-efficacy. This study is unique in that it examines the quality of mentor-mentee relationships.

**The Development Compassionate Mentoring**

While many enrichment programs focus their interaction with at-risk youth using conventional methods such as tutoring, sports, and recreation, MOSAIC utilizes an approach in which I have come to recognize as “compassionate mentoring.” Generally, compassionate mentoring refers to the acknowledgement of the youths’ current circumstances at school and at home. Continuation high schools are an ideal place to practice such a mentoring approach due to the need of supplemental academic and sociological needs within the student populations. According to Barr & Parrett, “The vast majority of alternative schools in the United States are designed to address the unique needs of a particular type of student. While many of these schools also integrate career themes, their primary distinction grows out of an effort to meet the needs of the students they serve. Some schools serve teen parents and pregnant students; others serve students who are far behind academically, have already dropped out of school, or who are already incarcerated. Some schools address the needs of highly motivated and talented students; others are designed for students skilled in the arts. These schools provide school programs and services that ensure the success of all students” (2001, p. 174). Because of
this phenomenon existent in alternative high schools, I made the decision to mold the MOSAIC program around the specific dynamics of every continuation high school we serve. Due to the diversity of students who attend the schools and their varied needs, it was necessary to develop an approach that every student can benefit from; ultimately developing a program that speaks directly to the youth in a language they could understand. During the course of time that I spent working with students who attended the continuation high schools, I made an effort to get to know their likes and dislikes and eventually, they began to overwhelm me with all of the problems they are facing at home and in their personal lives, such as abusive households, drug use, gang affiliation, absent parents, among several other things. That was the moment when I realized that their personal lives at home and on the street was directly related to their lack of progress at school, which in turn made me recall my experiences as an at-risk youth dealing with danger on the streets, the pressures of being a high school student, and trying to succeed academically at the same time. I often wonder if having a MOSAIC mentor during those crucial moments in my life would have steered me in a different direction.

**Theory into Praxis**

Every day, mentors offer structured, goal-driven activities that focus on education, enrichment, recreation and personal development. Upon the first hour of arrival, mentors are encouraged to act as a “study buddy,” which includes homework help and tutoring. Study buddy functions to bring academic achievement to grade level, to develop good study skills and habits, and to help with test preparation. It is important to note that many of the students who attend continuation high schools read, write, and
comprehend mathematics at an elementary to middle school level, which offers mentors no choice but to begin at a remedial stage.

As I approach the closing of my seventh year working as a member of MOSAIC, I continue to empathize with adolescents who are herded through the conveyor belts of the public school system without first being prepared with the fundamental skills and tools needed for healthy development. Understanding the politics of educating oppressed populations, mentors develop sensitivity toward the circumstances of each youth and are able to design a plan corresponding to their current needs. Mentors also emphasize college as a possible option by arranging field trips to CSUN for tours, academic conferences (i.e., MeCha’s Raza Youth Conference, Emeralds for Education) entertainment, and recreational activities.

MOSAIC’s mentoring philosophy has evolved into a form of critically compassionate mentoring, which shifts critical discourse in the classroom to praxis on the field. We utilize youth culture, especially current trends in art and music, as powerful tools of engagement to get the youth interested and involved. Each team of mentors is responsible for creating and implementing creative activities that revolve around specific topics discussed in class; gender scripts, life skills, drugs and alcohol, tagging culture, and STDs, for example. Each team is assigned specific topics and must create activities that will engage and educate the youth about these topics. The activities that mentors create often reflect their own experiences as at-risk youth. Mentors also engage youth in daily enrichment and recreational activities including painting, drum circles, guitar lessons, computer instruction, yoga, nutrition, filmmaking, broadcast journalism, entrepreneurship, and an unending variety of choices that varies each semester.
Depending on the time allocated at each site, group activities are conducted once to twice a week for up to an hour each session while one-on-ones are conducted throughout the whole day with participating students and their respective mentors. Recreation activities are conducted every day during their lunch period and during the hours designated for physical education classes.

Additionally, each semester the group of mentors is engaged in a wide variety of civic events. For example, tagging and tagging crews are viewed as a significant problem in our area because of the damage inflicted to public and private property. While most taggers are not gang members, they are treated as such by law enforcement. Most schools and youth programs that catch youth tagging expel them immediately; however, MOSAIC mentors view taggers as artists and challenge them to develop their talent in positive ways. Mentors use the positive roots of Hip-Hop and graffiti art as a teaching tool to facilitate artistic development. MOSAIC mentors along with teachers and staff, host a youth-driven art show; a yearly event that gives youth an opportunity to display their art pieces to raise awareness of the violence that affects our community and to instill peace within the student body and surrounding communities. Mentors also attend or plan events each year on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. day and Cesar Chavez day, and participate in several community murals, academic conferences, and organic gardens each year.

**Youth Culture as Pedagogy**

Students who attend the continuation schools MOSAIC teams up with have been labeled as “at-risk” and have been kicked out of their traditional high schools for reasons
ranging from fighting and drug-use to poor attendance and graffiti. Most of the students who attend these schools are either Latina/o (i.e., Mexico, Central and South America) or African American. Although they all have distinct backgrounds and cultural values, there are several aspects of their lives that allow them to share similarities.

Because the continuation high school system permits students to work at their own pace, it is often that some students fall behind academically by considering their time at school as an opportunity to socialize rather than getting their work done. By having supplemental learning tools that speak to their present realities, students have had a deeper understanding of the importance of completing their work in a timely manner, so as to wrap up their high school experience and make a successful transition into adulthood. The use of youth culture in their school curriculum has been essential in “convincing” students that education can be fun and worth their time and efforts. The use of graffiti art and other elements of Hip-Hop (i.e. DJing, MCing, and Breakdance) have been crucial in engaging students in their state-mandated coursework.

As an incentive, MOSAIC mentors offer the opportunity to participate in various events and activities if students agree to complete a pre-determined amount of work; usually based on making the schools’ Honor Roll list, which constitutes 50 points or more of completed coursework in any of their many mandated classes. The utilization of youth culture, especially Hip-Hop has served as an essential tool towards not only bringing them up to academic par, but also to bring awareness to critical social issues relevant to their own realities.
Implications

Restorative Justice Policies: Towards an Epistemology of Healing and Compassion

“Why don’t they teach us this in school?” This was a tough question to answer. After introducing the Mexihca or “Aztec” calendar to a group of continuation high school students, they were shocked that they did not already know about it, considering that they were mostly Mexican or Central American. It was tough to answer this young man’s question because I knew I could not provide a clear response without bashing the American public education system; however, I was glad he asked. I often find myself in a crossroads when determining whether public school institutions are helping our youth or hurting them, specifically youth of color. Being a product of the LAUSD, I could personally testify to the lack of cultural sensitivity I experienced during my educational experiences. After attending three different public high schools due to behavioral and academic issues, I finally graduated and began to attend a local community college. It was not until then that I began to learn about Meso-American cultures in an introductory Chicana/o Studies course. I remember the vicarious sense of accomplishment and pride I felt knowing that my ancestors were not just immigrant workers or gangsters. My ancestors were scientists in every sense of the term. Knowing such information, which I strongly felt was kept from me for all of these years, ignited a special feeling inside of me and I knew that I could not ignore it. That was the beginning of my healing process.

I use myself as an example to illustrate the importance of knowing one’s history because it saved my life. Prior to attending college I had no direction in my life because I lacked an identity; a perspective; a point of view. I grew up in a neighborhood that was
heavily saturated with gangs, drugs and criminal activity, so it was a matter of time before I involved myself in such a lifestyle primarily because that is what I witnessed on a regular basis. It was normal to me. I remember thinking about my future and being excited about having flashy cars, women and respect, like the older guys who I looked up to that hung around my neighborhood.

**Future Directions**

Several new questions raised by this study need to be explored in further research in order to better understand the effect university student mentors have on continuation high school students, namely: To what extent do MOSAIC mentors impact the lives of at-risk youth given an extended period of time? What themes would emerge if knowledge of ancestral cultures was included in the mentoring process? To what degree do MOSAIC mentors influence continuation high school students’ decision to enroll into a college or university?

Along with exploring such questions, large-scale and longitudinal studies using similar and distinct methodologies are needed. Given that the scope of the study was limited to four mentees, the results are only applicable to the students used in this thesis. However, the description of the setting, participants, and the themes that emerged, together with other researchers' findings on related topics, provide a basis for readers and other researchers to consider the transferability or credibility of the findings. These can then be compared to other mentoring programs like MOSAIC and help establish a stronger conceptual understanding of critical mentorship within continuation high schools.
Conclusion

Overall, the research presented in this work has indicated that the presence of mentorship in the lives of at-risk youth is indeed effective. By allowing neutral adults to come in to the lives of students who are struggling in school, it provides protective factors against the negative elements in their environment. MOSAIC has dedicated its time and resources to dig deeper within the realm of mentorship to discover just how powerful the role of a compassionate mentor is. Through the acquisition of self-efficacy, students have the ability to reframe their realities and strive to reach their dreams. While many of our at-risk youth are often caught up within a world of hopelessness, I hope to provide an opportunity to dream of a brighter future to those who have otherwise lost hope. With this in mind, I hope to continue working as the director of the MOSAIC mentoring program with a clear vision of what my responsibility is to society: to bring light to at-risk youth who have convinced themselves that they are destined to be encapsulated by vast darkness.


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