

Unleashing Wild Tongues: The Latin@ Experience in Independent Schools

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Kalmanovitz School of Education

Saint Mary's College of California

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

By

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Fall, 2015

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UNLEASHING WILD TONGUES: THE LATIN@ EXPERIENCE  
IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

By

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December, 2015

APPROVED FOR THE

SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE OF CALIFORNIA  
KALMANOVITZ SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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## Abstract

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By

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Ed.D. in Educational Leadership

Saint Mary's College of California, 2015

Dr. Dean Elias, Chair

This dissertation explores the experiences of self-identified Latin@<sup>1</sup> youth in NAIS and POCIS Schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. Although all students involved in this study initially felt equipped to participate in the independent school environment, they experienced both common and unique challenges calling on the need to negotiate their ethnic identities. This research study assumed that all people and institutions, such as independent schools, are embedded in complex social, cultural and political systems historically defined by race, power and privilege.

Engaging student voice in on-going efforts to understand and improve the conditions for historically underrepresented students of color, particularly Latin@ youth, is imperative in acknowledging that students have deep wisdom and expertise. The partnership between students and adults can foster “critical consciousness” – an awareness of the historical and current conditions that perpetuate inequality in society and in their own life circumstances (Horton & Freire, 1990). Freire (1982) asserted, “the silenced are not just incidental to the curiosity of the researcher but are the masters of inquiry into the underlying causes of the events in their world. In this context research, becomes a means of moving them beyond silence into a quest to proclaim the world.”

*Keywords:* Latino, youth voice, underrepresented students, critical race theory, diversity, race

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<sup>1</sup> “Latin@” is spelled using the “at symbol” to replace the letter “a” or “o.” Pizarro, Montoya, Nañez, Chavez, & Bermudez (2002) are Latin@ educators who formed Maestr@s, a group contending that the Spanish language is a manifestation of male hegemony. Maestr@s coined the use of the term because it is a visual intervention and a re-coding of information to different linguistic, epistemological and ideological systems (Pizarro, et. al, 2002, p. 290).

## **Dedication**

A mi querida mamá, Lillian Ortega y a mi papá, Raul Alberto Ortega, Sr.

Without your love, support, and belief in the power of education,

I would not be where I am today.

And, to Matthew James Dolan.

No one has offered me such patience, compassion, consideration, kindness, and friendship.

No one else has been there to grip my hand and kiss my face  
during the most trying and most joyful moments in life.

No one else would have supported me through these past five years  
the way in which you have so selflessly.

No one else would have loved our children with such ferocity in my absence.

No one else would have loved me so purely  
despite the fact that I am often quite difficult to love.

No one else but you, Matt.

And for that, I am forever grateful and all yours.

For Lucas and Lillian...

may you find the same joy and fulfillment in the classroom as I have.

## Acknowledgments

This research study could not have been completed without the help of many family members, friends, colleagues, teachers, and mentors. First of all, thank you to Dr. Dean Elias, Committee Chair. You consistently held me to the highest of standards and expected nothing short of excellence. Thank you. I also want to appreciate Dr. Gloria Sosa and Dr. Juan Carlos Arauz for your insight, encouragement, and staunch belief in not only me, but in the purpose of the research. ¡Mil gracias! I am so proud that you all shared in this journey with me.

I also want to thank the many family and friends who watched our children so that I could attend class and work on this enormous endeavor: Mamá and Papá (Lilliam and Raul Ortega), Raul and Jennifer Ortega, Jason and Erika Ortega, Jesse and Elaine Ortega, Moms and Pops (Kerry and Pat Dolan), Tia Jenny and Curt (Jennifer Dolan and Curt Greeley), Clare Bisho, Marta Grajeda, Gabe Echeverria and Chandra Lynn, Darek and Jessica Cliff, Armando and Nieves Cordoba, Kristina Kramer, Kaylee Villa, Marelise Velasco, and Saskia Styles. There are not enough words to express my gratitude for having such a supportive and loving village.

I also want to thank my colleagues who inspire me to work for equity and justice and to be the best version of myself: Tarah Fleming, Matt Balano, Benji Howard, Wade Colwell-Sandoval, Orpheus Crutchfield, Dr. Eddie Moore, Jr., Sara Momii-Roberts, Alison Park, Celeste Tahamont, and Misa Terahira. Your wisdom and passion for the work are engrained in this research study. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Shelly Perdomo-Ahmed and Dr. Tekawitha Pernambuco-Wise for their sisterhood, mentorship, and guidance.

Thank you to Mia Gittlen, Jennifer Grant, and Sergio Mairena, Sr. for your close and careful technical and editing eye. Finally, with deep appreciation for the participants, especially the youth. SPEAK.

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## Preface

*Why am I compelled to write?...*

*Because the world I create in the writing compensates  
for what the real world does not give me.*

*By writing I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it.*

*I write because life does not appease my appetites and anger...*

*To become more intimate with myself and you.*

*To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy.*

*To dispel the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul.*

*To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit...*

*Finally I write because I'm scared of writing,*

*but I'm more scared of not writing (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 42).*

I am a middle-class, first-generation Latina who has primarily attended and worked in elite, independent schools. Having graduated from Saint Ignatius College Preparatory, a private Catholic school in San Francisco, the University of California at Berkeley, and Harvard Graduate School of Education, I understand what it means to navigate elite educational environments steeped in the culture and worldview of racial and economic privilege. Attending these predominantly white institutions provided me valuable academic and social opportunities; however, these opportunities came at a price: a distancing from my family, my community, my primary culture, and much of the rich literary, artistic, and scientific history of people of color. I am drawn to the challenges faced by young people of color today, as many are the same as those faced by students such as myself in the late 1980's and early 1990's.

I began my school career as an English Language Learner and was constantly “the only one” (person of color) as a student, teacher, and educational leader (Scruggs, 2010). I did not learn in a space where I regularly saw other Latin@s, Spanish-speakers, or students from working-class backgrounds. Teachers and staff attempted to reassure my anxieties by telling me that I “was just like everybody else”. I was denied the privilege of learning from educators of color or openly gay adults. The curricula and coursework were also largely Eurocentric. The

intentional inclusion of historically marginalized and systematically oppressed groups was virtually non-existent. I was taught to celebrate Columbus Day and extol the Pilgrims. My parents also rarely came to school events and often resented my relationships with the families of my affluent (mostly white) peers.

Although I received a private education at an exclusive prep school, my coursework at the University of California at Berkeley (specifically in Education, Ethnic Studies, History, and Anthropology) shed light on the deficiencies of my education at Saint Ignatius. I learned to write well, analyze texts from the traditional “American” canon, and pass multiple advanced placement exams, but I was not encouraged to think critically or question authority. Students who challenged the status quo or the institution were identified as “trouble-makers”. I often walked the line between “trouble-maker” (I did not hold my tongue in the face of injustices) and model student (I was at the top of my class academically and repeatedly elected into leadership roles). United States and world history were presented only through the European/Anglo lens as if it was the *only* lens. The populations with whom I identified (people from Latin America, people of color, Spanish speakers, immigrants, working class) were excluded from the curricula. If people from those populations were presented, it was because they needed to be helped or served.

The twelve (12) years of private schooling I experienced made me question whether I truly belonged or deserved what other students seemingly took for granted. I was adamant that I needed to be “twice as good to go half as far” and constantly battled the notion that my academic success meant that I was “acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). My white peers repeatedly questioned my cultural background when I spoke English without a trace of a Spanish accent and especially when I was consistently placed on the Dean’s list. My extended family and other

students of color I had relationships with outside of my high school accused me of trying to be white or of thinking I was better than them. I was further challenged because I did not have access to educators, curricula, or a peer group who both shared and diverged from my own ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and class background, who encouraged dialogue about how it felt to be “different”, “diverse”, “the only one”, “on aid”, “on the bus”, “ghetto”, “ethnic”, and “exotic”. Having spaces where I could deconstruct and process my experiences as a Catholic woman of color and Latina with other students and adults would have enriched my overall learning experience and provided the space for me to develop a healthy Latin-American ethnic identity.

During my time at Berkeley I came to know many academically successful students of color who did have high levels of racial consciousness, ethnic pride, and deep knowledge of their cultural history. I began to search for professors of all ethnic backgrounds who acknowledged me as a first-generation Latina with a specific point of view. I found course work embedded with information far beyond the white master narrative<sup>2</sup> (Morrison, 2012) and traditional white canon that pervaded my high school experience. My eyes were opened to the way the world actually was for many students like me who did not have the privilege of being an exception to the rule. I wrote my undergraduate honors thesis on the history and evolution of Latino youth gangs in San Francisco. I was moved by the stories the young men and boys shared with me on the streets, in juvenile hall, and in the Mission jail, and hoped to work with under-served students. By my junior year in college, I knew I wanted to make a difference in society and I also wanted to make an impact on the private school world.

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<sup>2</sup> The master narrative is “whatever ideological script that is being imposed by the people in authority on everybody else: The Master Fiction . . . history. It has a certain point of view” (Morrison, 2012, Bill Moyers).

I was determined to be academically successful (graduate with high marks, be accepted to and thrive at a highly competitive graduate program, and present a distinctive point of view at various national conferences) in order to reach my professional goal of becoming an independent school Head. Upon graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in History and Dance with a minor in Education, I was offered three jobs: teaching bilingual high school history in East LA, working at a school for pregnant teenagers in the San Francisco Mission District, or working at a prestigious K-12 independent school in McLean, Virginia. Though I was committed to contributing to an authentic social transformation and a cultural revolution, I chose the job at the elite and exclusive Potomac School. I was plagued by the notion that I was somehow betraying “my people” or true social justice efforts by working in a predominantly white and wealthy prep school. It was difficult for me to acknowledge that I had become more comfortable in the upper class milieu of private independent schools and realized that my four years at a private high school changed much of who I was.

As I look back on my fifteen year-old-self, I can now appreciate my experience as “the only one” as valuable, while acknowledging the difficulties that were a part of that important journey in the world of elite, independent schools. In my adolescent struggle to be accepted and be “just like everyone else,” I learned to ‘code-switch’ (Chatman, Eccles & Malanchuk, 2005). I learned to navigate the gap between what I brought to the learning and teaching spaces and the pre-existing culture to which I had been invited to participate. As Gloria Anzaldua (1987) wrote in her seminal book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, I unlearned my practice of “[taming] my wild tongue” (p. 54). By the third year of my undergraduate journey, I learned what I had not previously been taught and I saw what I could not see before. I identified myself as a political being with agency to be a part of a social transformation. I believed, as Anzaldua did, “*El Anglo*

*con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua.* (The Anglo comes with an innocent face to cut out our tongues.) Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out" (p. 54).

I chose my first teaching job in a predominantly white school knowing that I would be “the only” Latina in my department or division. I hoped to be the mentor and/or friend to students and their families that I never had myself. I anticipated that my presence might be the only opportunity students, their families, and the faculty may have to work with a formally educated Latina or person of color. I have since noted that my presence within these schools encouraged and facilitated conversations regarding diversity and racial justice efforts at every school in which I have worked, perhaps because I decided not to hold my “wild tongue” (Anzaldua, 1986, 54).

My experiences as both a student and a young teacher of color shaped my advocacy for racial equity in all aspects of life. Throughout my seventeen years as an educator and a student of pedagogy, one of my primary goals has been to improve the racial culture and climate of independent schools. This endeavor is fueled by Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum’s assertion that greater ethnic and racial diversity improves “racial understanding, reduction in stereotyping, more diverse perspectives in classroom discussions, and better preparation for life and leaders in an increasingly diverse society” (Tatum, 2007, p. 17).

I had the privilege of taking a graduate course with Dr. Cornell West and Dr. Eileen de los Reyes, Education for Democracy, at HGSE (Harvard Graduate School of Education). Dr. West said something that has always stayed with me: "Love one another as you do this work". Dr. West said that only love could spark and bring to light all of our potentialities. We all have stories that are long and deep. There are places in all of our hearts that are tender or have been made too tough. How can we overlook these parts of our students, our colleagues, or our

families that are at the root of who they are? Although this perspective is imperative in all professions, it is all the more pertinent in the world of education. We are growing future citizens.

I hope to serve schools in graduating students that emerge as compassionate, creative, resilient life-long learners, global citizens, and skilled change agents. In my time as an independent school educator, I have been blessed with colleagues from all backgrounds who inspire me to continue on this long political journey of love, the enterprise of education as the practice of freedom...not just for my own liberation, but so that we may all become more free (hooks, 1994). I am elated to have joined the Park Day School (PDS) staff as Middle School Head in August 2013. Park Day School is a progressive school with a clear commitment to social justice, equity, and education for social transformation. As a progressive school, PDS believes that the purpose of education is not the acquisition of facts and figures, but rather to realize a student's full potential and use those skills to create social change and reform.

Before this position, I had the pleasure of serving as Dean of Equity and Inclusion at Athenian School in Danville, CA for seven (7) years. I also served on the Board of Directors for Northern California People of Color in Independent Schools (POCIS) for five (5) years and was elected Co-Chair during my last two (2) years. Although I am no longer a voting member of the Board, I recently accepted the invitation to act as an Advisor to the Board of Directors for a third year. I also served on the faculty for the Youth Action Project (YAP) for the national White Privilege Conference (WPC). After one (1) year on the faculty, I was invited to serve as the Co-Chair of the youth conference. Though I am no longer on the faculty, I continue to act as an advisor to both the YAP and the WPC and I worked with a talented steering committee to bring the White Privilege Conference to the Bay Area in November, 2015.

Through my work as a teacher, artist, school administrator, and board member of Northern California People of Color in Independent School (POCIS), I have supported schools in a number of ways: increasing enrollment and hiring of people of color, developing the cultural proficiency of school personnel, and increasing student capacity to understand their schooling experiences through a systemic lens. These steps are critical precursors to improved retention, achievement, graduation and college placement for historically underrepresented students of color. In my years as an educator and social justice worker, students of all backgrounds have shared stories of neglect, harassment, discrimination and/or isolation. Students of color have told story after story describing instances when they have tried to stand up for themselves and were accused of “being too aggressive” by both peers and faculty. I have witnessed situations where students of color have been accused of “only being accepted to Stanford” because of their “race”. I have watched teachers complain about equity programming and multiculturalism being “too political,” “anti-white,” and “a waste of time in this post-racial society”. Racial and ethnic stereotyping and jokes continue to be commonplace among student bodies, particularly outside of the classroom where there is less adult supervision.

As a senior administrator and community activist, my ability to be effective hinges on my relationship to and with my colleagues, students, and their families. It takes an extreme amount of trust to expose vulnerabilities and areas of weakness in our lives, let alone our professional worlds. Students must trust that we, the educators, will listen to them at this critical juncture in educational reform. Accordingly, this research project is grounded in critical race theory (CRT) (Dovidio & Stefancic, 2001), so as to move away from a dominant discourse of “color-blindness,” “equal opportunity,” and the role of students as passive recipients of information necessary to be cogs in the global economy. The principles of CRT are rooted in dialogic

interactions so that the roles of those traditionally in positions of power (teacher) and disempowerment (learner) are shared and student voices are not only validated, but are also used as springboard for positive institutional change that align with schools' various mission statements.

I am a conscious being in that my own marginalized educational experience informs what I value, care about, and am committed to. I understand that teaching requires an acknowledgement of the power adults possess to maintain the status quo or change our society to a more equitable, just and loving world. I consistently revisit my assertions and analyze why I think some things and why I do not think others: assessing why I am, how I am, and why I am not how I would like to be more often than I would like; evaluating what I believe and what I do not believe; acknowledging what my life has been up until this point and what it has not been and why that is; exploring the things that make my heart swell or my eyes well up with tears and why others fill me with rage. Though I continue to have more questions than answers, acting on these questions quells my fear and anxiety that I am not working with my community (or other communities of color).

Teacher excellence is a life-long process. We are never done. There is always something new to learn. As Gloria Anzaldua (1986) writes, “I am playing with my Self, I am playing with the world’s soul, I am the dialogue between my Self and *el espíritu del mundo*. I change myself, I change the world” (70). It is important to know our selves and not be afraid to hear our own voice in opposition to someone else’s. And so, we must ask difficult questions and be comfortable in not knowing...in acknowledging the spaces in between...in bridging the gaps...between our hearts and the hearts of others. I believe teaching is the most dangerous occupation, but if we fuse our power with love, we can do wonders.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*We are ready for change.  
Let us link hands and hearts  
together find a path through the dark woods  
step through the doorways between worlds  
leaving huellas for other to follow, build bridges.  
Cross them with grace, and claim these puentes (bridges) our “home”*  
(Anzaldua, 1986, p. 576).

Private independent schools currently educate one percent (1%) of school-age children in the United States (U.S.) (Bartels, 2012). With more than 1400 private, independent schools in its membership body, the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) is the most prominent private independent school organization in the country. The member schools range from early childhood education through high school, single-sex/gender and co-educational schools; some are religious while others are non-sectarian; and include both day and boarding schools. NAIS, founded in 1962, advocates for independent schools and defines them as schools with a self-developed mission and program, governed by an independent board of trustees and privately funded (NAIS, 2012). Member schools look to NAIS for guidance, data-driven information, professional development, and networking opportunities that will enhance teaching and learning for all students.

Bartels (2012) noted that the majority of private independent schools continue to primarily serve “the wealthiest families in our country” (p. 81). The elite private school tradition began in New England and many of the most prominent schools today were established as early as 1628 (Collegiate School in New York, NY) and 1709 (Trinity School in New York, New York). Adams (2000) reported that a significant number of high-level leaders in the United States are products of the private independent school system in the U.S. Some influential leaders

include President Barack Obama (Punahou School), Bill Gates (Lakeside School), Al Gore (St. Alban's School), Condoleezza Rice (St. Mary's Academy), Senator Edward Kennedy (Milton Academy), John F. Kennedy (Choate-Rosemary Hall), George Bush, Sr. and George W. Bush (Phillips Academy), Kathleen Kennedy Townsend (The Putney School), Madeline Albright (Kent Denver School), and Ted Turner (McCallie School). Private independent schools continue to be perceived as elitist due to high tuition costs and history of legacies (preferences given in admissions on the basis of familial relationships). Indeed, Crookson and Persell (2008) found that within NAIS schools, fifty-three percent (53%) of students had at least one relative who had attended an elite boarding school. The exclusivity within independent schools is a result of the history of all-white admissions policies, high tuition, and a cadre of alumnae from the United States' upper crust (Blackburn & Wise, 2009; McManus, 2015; Medina & Luna, 2000). Given that NAIS member schools are educating our future national and global leaders and our world is becoming increasingly diverse, it is imperative that we examine the ways in which historically under-represented students experience and benefit from this exclusive educational milieu (Pernambuco-Wise, 2011; Pinkus, 2013).

Though there are many forms of diversity, and all organizations and communities are diverse (with respect to age, gender, political views), a number of immutable characteristics, such as race and ethnicity, have historically been used to systematically disadvantage groups of people throughout U.S. history (Sue & Capodilupo, et. al. 2007). As private independent schools in the U.S. grow in ethnic and cultural diversity, those same educators struggle to understand the influence of race, racism, and social justice in their schools today (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Some independent school researchers have learned that the psychological cost of attending

selective schools for historically underrepresented students, such as Latin@<sup>1</sup> students, can be low self-esteem, high stress, low self-efficacy, and unhealthy ethnic identity development (Arrington, Hall & Stevenson, 2003; Blackburn & Wise, 2009; Cooper & Datnow, 2000; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007).

The data collected and analyzed in this study through Delgado and Stefancic's (2001) critical race theory (CRT) lens will focus less on how and why students identify ethnically and racially, but rather on how their racial and ethnic identities, as well as the way in which the school responds to students' racial and ethnic identities, influences their educational experiences, if at all. Though there is a growing body of work within Latin@ Literary Criticism (Latin@ Lit. Crit.), this research study is located within the broader umbrella of CRT in order to highlight the Latin@ experience as a case study in light of the institutional racism within U.S. society. In this way, the researcher asserts that though members of particular ethnic groups have distinct experiences, they are all impacted and affected by the larger white dominant culture of power.

It is important to note that the "Latin@" identity is a social construction and a product of racial classifications being imposed on certain sub-sets of the population. There is "Latin@" race and yet, there is a shared experience due to this country's historical response to Mexicans already residing in the Southwest and West, migrant farm workers, immigrants from Central and South America, Cuba, Puerto, and the Dominican Republic. The "Latin@" identity is complex and the ways in which this "self" has been informed and constructed is influenced by country of

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<sup>1</sup> "Latin@" is spelled using the "at symbol" to replace the letter "a" or "o." Pizarro, Montoya, Nañez, Chavez, & Bermudez (2002) are Latin@ educators who formed Maestr@s, a group contending that the Spanish language is a manifestation of male hegemony. Maestr@s coined the use of the term because it is a visual intervention and a re-coding of information to different linguistic, epistemological and ideological systems (Pizarro, et. al, 2002, p. 290).

origin, immigration status, gender and gender expression, language, sexuality, phenotype, and socio-economic status.

The ability to critically understand one's social location, the "intersectionality" of immutable characteristics such as race and ethnicity, is essential if we are to employ "aggressive, color conscious efforts to change the way things are" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 51, p. 22). Students in our schools are more than their "race" or ethnicity, or gender, or sexuality. While students are all of these at once, at times, one piece of our identity may weigh more heavily (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 56). Though the students in this study self-identified as "Latin@," there was a allegiance to their family's country of origin and they embraced the divergent historical, political, and economic contexts that informed their lived experiences.

This qualitative research study is an example of what Delgado and Stefancic (2001) called "on-the-ground activism" (p. 93) that may contribute to a better understanding of the multiple and complex ways "racism is embedded in our thought processes and social structures...[that] keep minorities in subordinate positions" (p. 22). This study may support independent school leaders in assessing the ways in which they perpetuate or disrupt the status quo of white racial superiority and develop healthy ethnic identities of students by listening to and acknowledging the power and depth of student voice.

Although NAIS has long been a proponent of diversity in schools, and it recently published clear recommendations regarding justice and equity, there is little to no data that helps educators in this field better understand the experiences and tend to the needs of this minority population of students of color. Despite the efforts and programs that currently exist in many U.S. private independent schools, it is unclear how the students of color are responding.

This research strives to uncover prevailing patterns of the experiences of students of color, specifically those of self-identified Latin@s, and also the ways in which independent schools challenge the dominant white culture of power and institutional racism (Medina & Luna, 2000; Yosso, 2006). Independent schools, indeed all schools, are an important cog in the U.S. social machine that continue to intentionally or unintentionally sustain hierarchies, mostly based on race and class (Bonillo-Silva, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Noguera, 2000). Because independent schools continue to primarily serve and prepare the one percent (1%) to be social, cultural, political, and technological global leaders, it is important to examine these institutions. Also, as these schools increasingly reach out to underrepresented students, we must examine how independent schools strive to humanize the historical “other” and provide a foundation for empathic, conscious, informed and responsible citizenship (Hollins, 2011; Kahla, 2009).

Though the experiences of students of color in public schools have been researched to some extent over the past sixty (60) years, there has been minimal research conducted on the experiences of students of color (specifically Latin@s) within predominantly white independent schools. Given this gap in the existing research, this qualitative study seeks to uncover and bring to light the stories of self-identified students of color within six (6) independent NAIS and People of Color in Independent Schools (POCIS) member secondary institutions (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade) within Northern California. The mission and vision of POCIS is to provide leadership, advocacy, and support to all leaders and educators within member schools. POCIS strives to foster equity, inclusion, multiculturalism, and racial justice within independent schools by providing job networks, professional development, and affinity spaces to students and adults of color struggling to navigate predominantly white spaces.

Throughout this research study, the researcher will use the term “people of color” and apply it to historically underrepresented ethnic and racial groups within NAIS schools, classrooms, and curricula. The term “white” refers to European-American people that have historically been the majority in the U.S., whose collective history has been over-represented in curricula, and who enjoy the presence of a majority white adult faculty and staff within NAIS independent schools. The terms “private”, “independent”, and “private independent” will be reserved for NAIS member schools.

## **Background**

This background section will explore the challenges faced by students of color in the public sector, followed by a review of how the history of institutional racism continues to manifest in NAIS schools. It is important to examine the role race and racism play in our country, particularly in light of the persistent racial opportunity gap within schools today (Campano, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Nieto, 2002; Noguera, 2006; Rothstein, 2004; Sauer & Sauer, 2010).

Demographers estimate that by 2048, the majority of students in United States’ public schools will be “of-color” (Dessel, 2010). This steady growth of ethnic diversity within the U.S. student population has kept the discourse around race, ethnic diversity and multicultural education fueled (Alexandra, 2001; Bonillo-Silva, 2010; Nieto, 2002; Tatum, 2012; Wise, 2010). Latin@ people make up 17% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census 2013). The NAIS Facts at a Glance for 2012-2013 highlights that the percentage of students of color in NAIS schools is 27.6% and “Hispanic” students make up 4.1% (NAIS, 2013). California has the largest Latin@ populations in the nation at 38% in 2011; in 2015, 53% of all California’s school age children identified as “Hispanic” (Pew Hispanic Center). Yet, the Latin@ population in California

Association of Independent Schools CAIS schools is 6% (McManus, 2015). At the 2015 CAIS Heads and Trustees Conference, Executive Director, Jim McManus highlighted the gap between current demographics in California and the pervasive underrepresentation of Latin@s in CAIS schools.

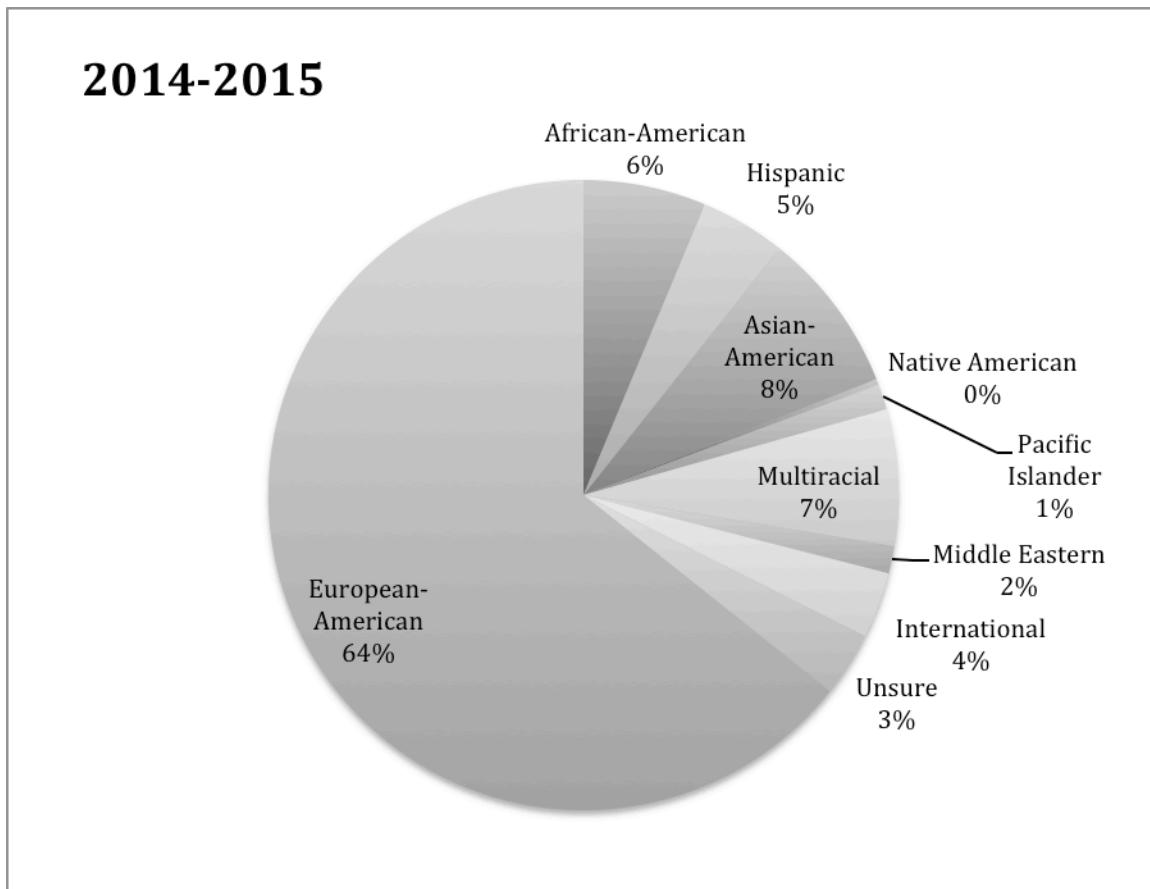


Figure 1. Student racial and ethnic diversity reported by NAIS member schools in 2014-2015

Kozol (2005) asserted that the “hidden curricula” within public and private schools in the U.S. communicates to students that inequality based on race and class should be expected. Schools “are key institutions where we rank, sort, order, and differently equip our children along ‘racial’ lines even when we hope for schooling to be the great equalizer” (Pollock, 2004, p. 4). The current conditions make it imperative that students are challenged to critically examine the connection between the past and the present social order so that our country’s future leaders are

not complacent to the way things happen to be. In 2014, the Pew Research Center revealed that though white students are the minority in U.S. schools, the majority of teachers remain white and middle class (Dack & Tomlinson, 2014). We must raise the “critical consciousness” of students in both public and private schools so that they may see themselves as potential change agents – generating ideas and leading change in alliance with adults (Horton and Freire, 1990). Raising critical consciousness, or “conscientization”, has the potential to transform thinking (Freire, 1976) and when done in the spirit of mutual inquiry and authentic collaboration, it can contribute to sustainable transformation in the current social order.

Though it is clear that the central tenet of educational equity is racial and social justice for all groups (Howard, 2006; Lorde, 1983; Nieto, 1992), the United States’ legacy of slavery, Jim Crow laws, Native American removal, Anti-Asian immigration legislation, and Mexican deportation manifest themselves in U.S. classrooms through the persistent “racial achievement gap” (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Kahla, 2009; Noguera, 2006; Sauer & Sauer, 2010; Tyack, 1974) and prison industrial complex (Alexander, 2011; Davis, 2012). The history of institutional racism in the U.S. is explicitly connected to the current state of public and private schools because prior to the Civil War, “non-whites” were denied access to formal schooling (Haney-Lopez, 1996). Post-Reconstruction, schooling for children of color was characterized by systemic segregation and sub-standard schools (Darling-Hammond, 1994, 2004; McCray & Beachum, 2010). Researchers have found that an overwhelming number of U.S. students of color attend public schools that are significantly funded at lower levels than schools in wealthier (and often whiter) areas (Baker, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 1994, 2004; Kozol, 2006; Orfield, 2006). This disparity in funding results in an “apartheid” system in U.S. schools where students

of color and poor children are denied access to the promise of education and the potential for social mobility (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

When public and private schools finally did open their doors to students of color in the 1960's and 1970's, barriers such as white flight, de-facto segregation, and racism remained for students of color to achieve educational equity (Loewen, 2006; Orfield, 1996; Tyack, 1974). For instance, the curriculum remained solidly Euro-centric and devoid of multiple perspectives (Loewen, 1995; McCray & Beachum, 2010; Miner, 1992, Yosso, 2006). Over that last half-decade, students of color have often been perceived as problems needing attention (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Ponds, 2008). Often, the schools attended by students of color are under-resourced and plagued with low-skilled teachers who believe that if students are not academically "successful", it is due to racial and cultural deficiencies (Coleman, 1964; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Kozol, 2006, Yosso, 2006). In many cases, teachers believe that students from ethnic minority groups do not succeed academically due to deficiencies in their home lives (Ponds, 2008). This is known as the "cultural deficit theory" (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Villegas (1991) defines this "cultural deficit theory" as a pattern of low expectations of students based on a perceived lack of intellect or cultural sophistication; these low expectations become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy resulting in low student of color achievement. The pervasive subscription to the "deficit theory" was initially informed by Oscar Lewis's (1968) "culture of poverty" theory. Lewis conflated the reality of differential access to rich learning experiences due to lack of funding or geography when growing up in a low-income family with a problematic and endemic "culture of poverty". This "culture of poverty" theory continues to be used to rationalize persistent and pervasive educational inequities, often drawn along color lines

(Darling-Hammond, 2004; Medina & Luna, 2000; Noguera, 2000, 2009; West, 2003; Yosso, 2006).

The notion that schools are, at present, a real place where any person in U.S. society can acquire the tools needed to climb the ladder of social mobility is not only severely misguided, it is false. People of color have been systematically “de-capitalized socially” by our system of schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) that perpetuates the myth that the Eurocentric master narrative is more valid and valuable than the perspective and histories of people of color and other marginalized groups (Yosso, 2006). Schools often celebrate and positively acknowledge students who behave in ways that mirror the white majority of school leaders and teachers within schools. In this way, teachers function within “cultural deficit model” that forces students of color to choose between their own culture and the culture of power (Medina & Luna, 2000; Yosso, 2006).

Since what is capable of being read, analyzed, and critiqued is produced by those in power within our society, all students must also possess the skills to produce material that may not coincide with what is presently fashioned and promulgated in order to alter the status quo to a more equitable distribution of power. Education is connected to this power because these skills allow access to knowledge and knowledge allows access to self-knowledge and radical possibilities. Making authentic space in the curricula for other cultures, other histories, and “counter-stories” has largely been avoided in this country (Yosso, 2006). Openly challenging, dismissing, and systemically silencing these counter-stories disempowers students and reinforces the sense that they do not belong, and at worst, do not deserve to be educated.

The way in which U.S. educators address or fail to address the legacy of race and racism is a serious matter. This is a matter that W.E.B. Du Bois predicted in 1903: “Herein lie buried

many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century...for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line" (Darling-Hammond & Tate, 1998). The "problem of the color line" continues to inform the reality of students of color within U.S. schools and contributes to a social hierarchy along racial and ethnic lines. Schools do not exist in a vacuum; schools are a product of our society's history of racist and discriminatory policies and practices, primarily regarding students of color, which in many ways continue to negatively affect them and "remain at the heart of racial inequality in the United States" (Orfield, 1996).

Racism in schools is embedded or nested in the larger structure of the U.S. and must be addressed by educators if all students are to be adequately served (Shields, 2013). Although these phenomena have been explored by a number of researchers, there remains a gap in the research about the experiences of historically underrepresented students of color, specifically Latin@ students, within U.S. independent schools (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Delpit, 1995; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Medina & Luna, 2000; Nieto, 1992; Noguera, 2000; Ogbu, 1988; Valenzuela, 1999).

A review of recent literature suggests that although there has been much progress made to reduce active and de-jure racism, discrimination and cultural blindness in public and private education still exist (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Wise, 2006; Tatum, 2011). The researcher's review of previous studies also surfaced key factors that hinder and augment the academic achievement, healthy ethnic identity formation, and positive school experiences of students of color in U.S. schools. The literature review (Chapter 2) will also demonstrate that private independent schools continue to be mostly wealthy and white, have different levels of

commitment to supporting students from underrepresented ethnic backgrounds, and do play a role in impacting ethnic identity formation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to NAIS, the student-bodies of private independent schools in the United States today continue to be predominantly white (76%) and extremely segregated along racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007). The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and Northern California People of Color in Independent Schools (POCIS) have made great efforts in the past twenty (20) years to advocate for and increase ethnic diversity, though it remains unclear how students of color are experiencing this predominantly white and elite world as racial and/or ethnic minorities. A study conducted over ten (10) years ago by NAIS found that seventy-five percent (75%) of Black students described having to make special efforts to fit into their private school communities, and eighty-two percent (82%) had negative racial experiences at their schools. Finally, sixty-two percent (62%) of the students interviewed reported feelings of simply not belonging (Arrington et. al, 2003).

Students and adults of color, primarily Latin@ students, continue to be underrepresented within NAIS independent schools (NAIS, 2013). Though many independent schools have allocated resources to services directly supporting an ethnically diverse community, it is unclear how Latin@s experience schooling. Much of the existing literature examines the experiences, the academic performance, or test scores of students of color within public schools or in higher education. Some research exists on ethnic minority student groups within Catholic parochial schools. The recent research studies that exist have focused on the important experiences of African-American/Black students, but few have explored the experiences of specifically Latin@ students within U.S. independent schools. Pearl Kane (2003, 2008) is one of the only researchers

examining the experience of people of color within independent schools, but her research has focused on the importance of an ethnically diverse faculty for the benefit of all students.

Statistics show that students of color are numeric minorities in independent schools (NAIS, 2012). While schools have agency only over their institutional policies and practices, educators can closely examine structures that can positively influence lives of students of color in private schools (Tatum, 2003; 2007). This study will contribute to existing literature by inviting students of color, specifically Latin@s, to the table. By examining these often-silent stories, school leaders can consider policies, practices, and mental models that may inform the experiences of all students. Without a clear understanding of the role race and racism have played in the way the world is presently fashioned, schools cannot equip students with the tools necessary to challenge the social and cultural hegemony that education often works to propagate.

### **Purpose of the Research**

As there is a lack of research exploring the experiences of racially and ethnically underrepresented students in U.S. independent schools, the purpose of this study is multi-faceted. This study seeks to better understand the experiences of self-identified upper school Latin@ students enrolled in California Bay Area NAIS and POCIS member schools. Another purpose of this research project is to hear Latin@ student perceptions of school programs focused on diversity and inclusion, as well as learn what characteristics of the school environment both augment and detract from students' of color socially positive and academically sound experiences. Including long silenced voices and making space for counter-stories is essential to this study because counter-stories challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center...and can facilitate transformation in education (Yosso, 2006, p. 15). Finally, this researcher will partner with the participating students to make recommendations to school

leaders as they continue to explore school structures, policies, and practices that contribute to positive student experiences.

Kimberle Crenshaw (1995) draws attention to structural intersectionality. Structural intersectionality implies that “structures shape one’s experiences and intersect to create one’s social reality”. Youth in NAIS and POCIS schools grapple with making informed decisions about the many facets of society that impact them. Gloria Anzaldua (2002) also speaks to intersectionality as well in her book, *This Bridge We Call Home*, when she urges people to see identity as “complex, permeable terrain...to move beyond separate and easy identifications, creating bridges that cross race and other classifications” (p. 2). As Anzaldua stated (1990), “If we [Latin@s] have been gagged and disempowered by theories, we [Latin@s] can also be loosened and empowered by theories” (1990).

### **Research Question(s)**

This research study will be guided by two central questions: “What formative experiences have the deepest impact on Latin@s while attending Bay Area independent high schools, and how do these critical incidents inform their identity as people of color in U.S. society?” If educators are to better understand the experiences of self-identified Latin@ students in independent schools, the following sub-questions will elicit data from participating students and equity leaders:

1. How do the racial and ethnic backgrounds of self-identified Latin@ students affect their perception of critical school experiences within predominantly white POCIS member schools?
2. What tools or opportunities, if any, have the participating schools provided the students so that they may develop ethnic identities and critical consciousness regarding

oppressive elements in their lives?

3. In what ways, if any, do your schools explicitly and deliberately challenge the dominant white culture of power and/or demonstrate its values and appreciate your identity as a Latin@ student?

4. To what extent are you satisfied with your decision to attend this school as it relates to your identity formation?

### **Theoretical Framework: Critical race theory (CRT)**

The researcher's observations were informed by critical race theory (CRT) and this theory served as the lens through which the findings are explained. Critical race theory (CRT) is the study of the relationship between race, racism, and power. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) provide a basic framework of CRT as a theory that considers economics, history, conscious, and unconscious feelings, and examines the larger social structure that maintains the status quo. Since CRT examines and challenges issues of social and racial justice, oppression, and the history of white supremacy, this framework is appropriate for this study (Yosso, 2006). Creswell (2007) states that CRT, as a worldview, provides a platform for researchers to engage in positive social action in collaboration with research study participants. The CRT framework was influential in the researchers' reflections on cultural norms, policies, and practices that impact underrepresented students of color in Bay Area independent schools.

Dr. Daniel Solorzano (2013) explains that CRT is a lens through which historically silenced or excluded communities of color can observe and interpret social phenomena. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1998) remind us that "naming one's reality" is a central tenet of critical race theory because stories provide the oppressed "vehicles for psychic self-preservation" (p. 57). By inviting students of color to be the center of gravity for this study, the researcher expands the

circle of academic discourse beyond white men and women. Also, calling in new voices and approaches to research has the capacity to transform academia and the way in which schools engage with race and racism to challenge all forms of subordination.

### **Summary of Methods**

This qualitative research study is situated in the critical theory frame (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) and aims to advocate for Latin@ students by placing student narratives at the center of this study. Critical theory does not take the power structure for granted and assume that society is oppressive and should be challenged (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). Critical theory is grounded in an authentic and genuine desire to transform society alongside those who will benefit most from a radical social transformation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Yosso (2005) reminded us that in order to engage in true social transformation, we must include and give credence to the lived experiences of historically marginalized and silenced people of color. As such, the researcher will dialogue with students to analyze their school experiences to propose strategies for collective action that bear witness, challenge, and aim to change oppressive conditions.

This research study will explore how the race and ethnicity of self-identified twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) grade Latin@ students perceive their educative experiences within six (6) predominantly white independent upper schools (grades nine through twelve) in Northern California's Bay Area. All of the participating schools are active members of NAIS, CAIS, and identify as POCIS members. All of the participating schools are co-educational, non-denominational, and employ a designated equity leader. Also, all participating schools support an active student of color affinity group and regularly participate in all POCIS events and benefit from POCIS services. Each of the six (6) schools is located in one of the following areas: the North Bay,

South Bay, San Francisco, and the East Bay. (See Appendix B for initial informational email and Appendix C for Head of School/Division Head release form.)

There are two (2) groups of participants. The researcher used a purposeful sample of twelve (12) self-identified Latin@ students and six (6) equity leaders from the six (6) participating schools. The twelve (12) self-identified Latin@ students are seniors who have been at the school for the last four consecutive years. The second group of participants consists of six (6) equity leaders. The equity leaders are adults employed by the participating school that assisted with identifying participants, coordinated one-on-one student interviews on campus, participated in a one (1) hour semi-structured interview as part of the research study, and were invited to attend the focus group discussion. (See Appendix D for the informed consent form of the equity leader.)

Purposeful sampling was employed to intentionally generate a diverse sample of Latin@ twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) grade students. (See Appendix E for informed consent form in English, Appendix F for informed consent for in Spanish, and Appendix G for participant assent form.) Considering that this research is interested in generating data that will best help explain the educative experiences of Latin@ students in independent schools, maximum variation sampling (a type of purposeful sampling) provided the best data (Creswell, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Patton, 1990 & 2002). For small samples, such as within this study, finding significant diversity can be challenging due to the nuances within each personal story (Patton, 1990). For this study, the researcher sought ethnic, language, and gender diversity in each school and did not at all intend to generalize or essentialize the experiences of Latin@ students. Rather, the researcher hoped to identify variations and common themes that emerged within the sample studied to engage the participants in generative dialogue regarding the narratives. As such, maximum

variation sampling aims at capturing and describing the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a number of participants (Patton, 1990). As this research study included only twelve (12) students, maximum variation sampling strategy “turns this apparent weakness into a strength by applying the following logic: Any common patterns that emerge from great variations are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program” (Patton, p. 53).

The researcher conducted two (2) individual open-ended interviews lasting approximately one (1) hour with each student, one (1) semi-structured interview with each equity leader at each school site, and two (2) 3-hour focus group discussions with as many participants as possible. Student’s personal stories drove the data of this research study, as “storytelling is integral to understanding lives and...all people construct narratives as a process in constructing and reconstructing identity” (Marshall & Rossman, p. 23). The individual sixty (60) minute open-ended interviews with each student participant focused on their life history (early educational classroom experience, family, friends, neighborhood, etc.) and their reflections on and perceptions of their experience at their school sites as it relates to their ethno-racial identity. (See Appendix H for guiding questions for the open-ended interviews with students.) The researcher was most interested in presenting these often-ignored student narratives as counter-stories to the traditional “grand narrative” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

The sixty-minute (60) interview with each equity leader focused on current school policies, programs, and structures that are intentional responses to institutional racial diversity and equity goals. (See Appendix I for semi-structured interview questions with the equity leaders.) The data collected during one-on-one interviews with the student participants were compared to data provided by the equity leaders. This data, along with school artifacts were examined through the

CRT lens (Marshall & Rossman 2011).

The data was coded and analyzed using an inductive qualitative analysis geared toward identifying patterns by means of thematic codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Patton, 2003). “Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis” (Patton, 1987, p. 306). The process developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), Traditional Analysis Sequence, framed the process. The process will be explained in full in Chapter 3 (three).

This study utilized Delgado and Stefancic’s (2001) basic CRT framework, built on critical legal studies, radical feminism, and thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci and W.E.B. Du Bois. Critical race theory (CRT) (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) is the central theoretical framework for this research because student voice must be located at the center of this study so that those being advocated for are working in collaboration with the researcher. While Delgado and Stefancic (2001) emphasized that reality is socially constructed (2001), Marshall and Rossman (2011) also asserted that critical theory has four (4) assumptions. The four (4) assumptions include that research is impacted by power, research is impacted by individual identifiers (such as race, class, and gender), that social identifiers (such as race, class, and gender) must be included in order to understand an individual’s experience, and that groups historically excluded from research must be invited to the table (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Marshall and Rossman (2011) confirmed for the researcher that personal storytelling and the collection of counterstories offset the master narrative.

To ensure trustworthiness (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), the researcher triangulated the data collected from the one-on-one open-ended student interviews with the semi-structured

interviews with equity leaders and artifact examination (Patton, 2002). The researcher attempts to be as transparent as possible, not merely as a researcher examining how Latin@ students experience, understand, and make meaning of their schooling within private schools, but also as an educator. By being transparent about the researcher's own experience and challenges as a female student and educator of color within predominantly white teaching and learning spaces, she makes herself visible as a researcher as well as an interested and subjective actor rather than a detached and impartial observer (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). As such, the researcher kept a journal of any assumptions or biases, to clarify how these preconceived notions may impact interpretations of the phenomenon experienced by young people of color. Thus, the twelve (12) student interviews, six (6) interviews with equity leaders, the focus group discussions, the use of maximum variation sampling, triangulation of data, critical feedback from the chair and committee members, along with deliberate transparency by the researcher, ensures trustworthiness within this study.

### **Limitations/Delimitations**

There are limitations inherent in the study due to its design. The researcher requested to only interview Latin@ students as these continue to be the most underrepresented, historically excluded groups within CAIS and POCIS schools. Moreover, the researcher worked under a gender binary (male/female) by attempting to have a balance between female identified students and male identified students from the six (6) schools.

There are also a number of delimitations in this study. The study focused only on ethnicity and race in the absence of other important identities such as gender, gender expression, nationality, sexuality, or language. Clearly, the intersection of race and/or ethnicity with other important social identifiers impacts the experiences of students of color within schools. Because

institutional racism continues to be challenging for independent schools, this study will focus on this single socially constructed immutable characteristic.

Another delimitation of this study is a sole focus not only on ethnicity and race, but also only on the experiences of Latin@ students. The researcher did not seek the feedback from other self-identified students of color or white students enrolled in private independent schools within this large urban region. The resulting gap in information will be addressed, at least in part, by the researcher's triangulation of data with interviews with equity leaders (regardless of racial/ethnic background) and artifacts.

An additional delimitation of this qualitative research study is that the researcher only interviewed students in the twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) grade at the time of the study. The researcher limited the study in this way because students in their fourth (4th) year of the same independent school may be more articulate or reflective about their high school experience. Because there are a number of Latin@ students that may not self-identify as Latin@ and the equity leader will only consider students who have self-identified in their registration materials as Latin@, this may have reduced the total population of Latin@ students from each school sample as potential participants. Another delimitation is that the student participants were identified by each participating school's equity leader and this selection process may be subject to that leader's own conscious and/or unconscious bias.

Also, the voices in this study represent only the perceptions of twelve (12) students in six (6) independent upper schools in this particular region of Northern California. The researcher chose to limit the sample size due to a restricted time frame in which to conduct the study. As this is a qualitative study, and thus it is not generalizable, the researcher hopes that the results may be transferable (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

An additional delimitation is the fact that the researcher chose to only work with NAIS, CAIS, and POCIS member schools in that these schools have a stated commitment to not only a diverse school population, but also to an equitable school environment. POCIS, CAIS, and NAIS upper schools tend to have more explicit programs and policies in place for underrepresented student populations.

As this study is couched in a critical frame and CRT lens, a qualitative study is most appropriate in gathering narratives and counter-stories. Due to the importance of this study, other regions and school divisions (beyond ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) and twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) grades) might pursue an exploration of the experiences of self-identified students of color (including other marginalized ethnic groups) and white students in their independent school environments.

### **Assumptions**

The researcher chose to write this dissertation on the experiences of self-identified students of color within U.S. independent schools. In the researcher's eighteen years as an educator, she has confronted contradictions between what this country and specific schools say they value, and what they actually prioritize by their policies and practices. The researcher is currently the Middle School Director at Park Day School (PDS) in Oakland, California. The researcher also most recently served as the Dean of Equity and Inclusion at the Athenian School in Danville, California between June 2007 and June 2012. As the Dean of Equity and Inclusion of this middle and upper independent school, the researcher assumed a significant leadership role in the Athenian community. The researcher's primary responsibility was to provide leadership in furthering the goals of diversity, inclusion, and equity at Athenian. The researcher served as leader, collaborator, guide, resource, teacher, and facilitator for students and adults in shaping and sustaining an inclusive community. The researcher was often in the middle of many formal

and informal discussions regarding student experiences of passive or aversive racism, stereotyping, and cultural insensitivity both in and out of the classroom. Over the years, students shared both painful and hopeful anecdotes with the researcher, illuminating their experiences as underrepresented students in the independent school world.

An important assumption of the researcher is that all students deserve the best possible education, regardless of their race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status or class, gender identity, sex, religion/belief system, citizenship status, (dis)ability, age, or sexual orientation. As CRT is the conceptual framework for this study, in many ways it is also the conceptual framework for the researcher's life. The researcher is committed to and believes in the notion that schools can serve as sources of self-discovery and growth toward a more equitable and loving world. Although schools and educators continue to face many challenges intricately connected to a larger social structure, such as institutional inequality, the researcher is confident that schooling can play a pivotal role in reshaping the landscape of the United States. Schools do not exist in a vacuum. They are a product of our society's history of choices and lack of social consciousness resulting in little critical thinking and sense of hope for the future. This can and should be addressed by schools and this is why the researcher is an educator. The researcher's role as a community leader and advocate for equity in schools also feeds the researcher's assumption that educational equity is deeper than curricular content. Educational equity includes pedagogy, forms of assessment, classroom /school climate, as well as school structures and practices regarding power/access to power.

The researcher is also clear that her own identity will inform the way in which she responds to the data. The researcher is a Latin@, a child of Central American immigrants, and has a long history as an underrepresented student, teacher, and administrator within independent

schools. The researcher's experiences of racism (institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal) have informed the paradigm or worldview that shape this research study (Guba, 1990). As one of the few women of color within the researcher's previous school, current school, and in the Bay Area, it is important for the researcher to be an ally and advocate for the students of color in independent school settings. However, another important assumption is that a single educator cannot undo systemic inequities in a school or the larger society. At the very least, the researcher strives to not replicate those inequities in her own curricula and pedagogy—her own spheres of influence.

A major assumption held by the researcher is that education is inherently political because teachers in independent schools have the power to choose readings, activities, structures, as well as decide how students will be assessed and engaged (or not engaged). As a longtime administrator and current division head, the researcher believes that dialogue about and action for racial injustice is often avoided. In most cases, students of color within elite private schools do not have the cultural capital to be heard (Yosso, 2006). Some students and families have limited experience in the world of independent schools, others may be recipients of financial aid and/or are on scholarship, and others may have parents or guardians who do not speak English as a first language, if at all. All of these factors may contribute to a silenced experience and lack of responsiveness from school officials.

Though many students of color are grateful for the opportunity to attend elite and selective schools, many face multiple barriers: they struggle with a sense of loneliness (from being “the only one”), the need to “culturally commute,” the pressure to “represent” their ‘race’, and an expectation to fulfill or challenge stereotypes. The researcher also assumes that though

students of color are not a monolithic group with one single experience or story, there may be a shared experience that must be explored by independent school educators.

## **Significance**

This study seeks to contribute to the limited research regarding the experiences of Latino@ students within predominantly white independent schools in Northern California. As students of color continue to be significantly underrepresented and not exposed to an ethnically diverse student and adult population in independent schools, this study will provide educators and school leadership information for considering their school climates, institutional support systems for ethnic minority students, professional expectations of cultural competence, and systems of recruitment and hiring. The heads and equity leaders within participating schools may reflect on the patterns that surface from this qualitative research study to further intentional efforts that support the acculturation process for underrepresented students of color.

This study may also inform the continual development of formal academic and social support systems offered to this target population of students and their families. Sharing the experiences of current students of color may illustrate the efforts that have been made thus far as well as where efforts need to be targeted in the future. This research study intends to shed light on areas of dissonance between the growing population of students of color and the ways that some Bay Area independent schools respond to not only the students, but the culture of power in general. Some of the structural inequities, such as tuition costs averaging \$30,000, are deep-seated and rooted in a legacy of racism and classism (NAIS, 2012).

## **Definitions of Terms**

**Aversive racism.** Aversive racism, a concept developed by Cornell University psychology professors John Dovidio and Sam Gaertner (2002), is “the inherent contradiction that

exists when the denial of personal prejudice co-exists with underlying unconscious negative feelings and beliefs” about people of color manifesting themselves in socially acceptable ways (Dovidio & Gaertner, p. 51). Aversive racism can be the more diffuse feelings of anxiety or uneasiness around “the other” and look different than historical instances of racism, but often has the same impact. Because those who experience the feelings of aversive racism have every intention of being equitable and deny having any negative feelings toward people of color, they will not directly discriminate. Their unconscious bias, however, they will discriminate when their behavior can be justified on the basis of some other factor other than race (Tatum, 1997). Aversive racism is often a primary contributor to micro-aggressions.

**Black people.** Encompasses all people of African descent/heritage from the African Diaspora.

**Code-switching.** A conscious strategy by which students of color move back and forth between behaviors associated with their group membership to navigate challenges of a given social context.

**Culture.** Non-fixed “behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people” (Yosso, 2005).

**Critical Race Theory.** Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the study of the relationship between race, racism, and power. CRT considers the intersection of economic structure, national history, culture, and conscious and unconscious feelings, and examines the larger social structure maintaining status quo (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

**Cultural competence.** Cultural competence is the capacity and the willingness to work with students and their families across differences effectively and authentically. Cultural competence requires educators to engage in constant self-reflection to build self-awareness. This

self-awareness allows for unconscious biases to surface, blind spots to emerge, and an ability to interpret exchanges between the educator and students (as well as their family) from a variety of perspectives. Cultural competence is a lens in need of constant adjustment as context is always in flux (Kahla, 2009).

**Culture of power.** Lisa Delpit (1995) defined the “culture of power” as the invisible codes and rules that provide access to power and reflect the values and practices of those already in power (white people).

**Cultural proficiency.** Cultural proficiency is distinct from cultural competency in that the individual has moved beyond practice and has incorporated the principles in to all facets of their life.

**Deficit Theory.** The belief that low-income, students of color underperform their white peers due to cultural values and behaviors in their home environments (McWhorter, 1993).

**Equity.** Equity is distinct from equality in that it calls all in the community to see each student as an individual while also understanding how their social location (race, ethnicity, gender, etc.) influences their educative experience. Equity involves providing each student not only with equal access or equal conditions, but rather the tools and attention needed for that student to thrive.

**Equity leaders.** Diversity coordinators, multicultural directors, diversity committee chairs, and/or any adult held accountable for diversity efforts within private independent schools.

**Ethnicity.** Ethnicity is a shared common identity based upon language, religion, social institutions, history, customs, and/or connection to territory or ancestry. Ethnicity is not the same as race.

**Gas-lighting.** The term “gas-lighting” is taken from a play, “Angel Street,” written by Patrick Hamilton in 1938 and a 1944 film. The premise of the play is that a man is mentally abusing his wife by manipulating information in her environment and creating doubt in her mind. For instance, people of color experience racial micro-aggressions on a daily basis but are often made to doubt their reality when the culture of power professes that we are in a post-racial society.

**Identity formation.** Identity is not static; rather it is a dynamic process that is dependent on the context in which individuals find themselves. Personal identities are complex and include one’s beliefs, values, skills, along with immutable characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, social class, sexuality, etc. (Chatman, Eccles & Malanchuk, 2005; Erikson, 1968). Personal identities, however, are distinct from social identities in that if an individual’s personal identity is part of the dominant group, it may go unnoticed. When an individual has an immutable characteristic that is not part of the dominant group, such as race, ethnicity, or sexuality, they tend to be more aware of their membership of a marginalized social group (Chatman, Eccles & Malanchuk, 2005; Tatum, 1997). The impact of membership of a social group depends on the political, social, and historical context in which an individual resides.

**Identity safety.** Classrooms that are intentionally student and meaning-centered foster a sense of safety. Teachers that foster identity safety maintain high expectations for all students, acknowledge varied backgrounds of students (particularly immutable characteristics) and actively incorporate these identities into the curriculum (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013).

**Independent schools.** NAIS, founded in 1962, defines independent schools as those with a self-developed mission and program, are governed by an independent board of trustees,

and are privately funded. As of today, 1% (one percent) of the U.S. population is educated within these schools.

**Institutional racism.** Racism is an institutional system of advantage based on race; racism involves ideology and behavior.

**Latin@.** Latin@ refers to individuals living in the United States with origins in Latin America or the Spanish-speaking Caribbean (often of mixed heritage including European, Indigenous, and African). Latin@s are not an ethnicity or a “race” as there are many cultures, languages, ethnicities, and phenotypes that constitute “Latin@s” in the U.S. The word “Latin@” is spelled using the “at” symbol to replace the letter “a” or “o” in resistance to the male-genderedness of “Latino”.

**Micro-aggressions.** Daniel Solorzano (2013) describes micro-aggressions as “assaults in subtle, automatic, or unconscious forms” that have a negative, cumulative impact on people of color in the U.S. Aversive racism is often at the core of micro-aggressions. Some effects of daily micro- aggressions include self-doubt, low self-concept, anger, stress, poor academic performance, and poor health. Derald Wing Sue (2007) describes micro-aggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (p. 271).

**Multicultural education.** Sonia Nieto (1992) states that multicultural education “uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection and action (praxis) as the basis for social change...and promotes the democratic principles of social justice” (p. 307). Multicultural education should be comprehensive and reject all forms of oppression in schools.

**Northern California People of Color in Independent Schools (POCIS).** Northern California POCIS is a non-profit organization that supports the academic achievement, professional development and advancement, self-determination and well-being of students, families, and adults of color in PK-12 San Francisco Bay Area independent schools.

**Passive racism.** Passive racism is any behavior that does not actively challenge the expression of beliefs, attitudes, and actions that contribute to the maintenance of racism (Tatum).

**People of Color (POC).** A political term used to describe a shared experience of race-based marginalization and oppression in the United States. “People of color” is a term applied to historically under-represented ethnic and racial groups within U.S. schools, classrooms, and curricula (such as Black, Asian, Indigenous, Latin@, Middle Eastern and Arab).

**Race.** Races are socially constructed groups, defined by arbitrary physical characteristics like skin color and hair texture, used for the purposes of creating and maintaining distinctions within the human population and racial hierarchies. Although race is an erroneous biological construct, it is an important social construct worthy of examination (Omi & Winant, 1994).

**Tokenism.** Being valued by an organization or an individual primarily because of one’s ethnic or racial identity, leading one to question their skills and competence (Medina & Luna, 2000).

**White.** The term “white” refers to European-American people that have historically been the majority in the U.S., whose collective history has been over-represented in curricula, and who enjoy the presence of a majority white community. The proper noun “white” is not capitalized because on the whole, those in the white majority have chosen not to self-identify in a similar way that Latin@s or African-Americans describe themselves in these racial terms.

**White privilege.** White privilege refers to advantages enjoyed by white people beyond those commonly experienced by people of color in those same social, political, and economic spaces (nation, community, workplace, income, etc.). It differs from racism or prejudice in that a person benefiting from white privilege does not necessarily hold racist beliefs or prejudices, and can be, as is often the case, unaware of their privilege.

## **Summary**

Historically, independent schools have educated the most affluent and privileged white students in the nation (Bartel, 2012). Though this remains true in many respects, NAIS schools are actively considering the importance of ethnic diversity in light of shifting demographics, an increasingly global society, along with evidence suggesting that diversity engenders excellence (Page, 2011). However, while the dialogue regarding diversity may be as alive as ever, a thorough and systematic exploration of the experiences of students and families of color within U.S. independent schools is lacking.

As the majority of recent research explores the perceptions, barriers, and successes of students of color within the public and Catholic sector, as well as at the college level, there is scant data on the experiences of students of color within U.S. independent schools. In general, the literature suggests that a need to investigate the distinct and complex experiences of these underrepresented students of color is warranted. The lack of empirical research examining the ways ethnicity and race may impact the personal and academic development of students of color in predominantly white private schools is further grounds for this study. As such, the purpose of this research study was to bring student stories to the surface in an effort to better serve Latin@ students. This researcher hopes to challenge independent school leaders to examine how these institutions perpetuate race, racism and white privilege. The data collected and analyzed in this

qualitative study may help independent school educators grapple with this study's main research focus: the factors, big and small, that both augment and detract from Latin@ students' educative journeys within Bay Area NAIS, CAIS, and POCIS upper schools.

This research study was guided by two central questions: "What formative experiences have the deepest impact on Latin@ students while attending Bay Area independent high schools, and how do these critical incidents inform their identity as Latin@s in U.S. society today?" If educators are to better understand the experiences of self-identified Latin@ students in independent schools, the following sub-questions elicited data from participating students and equity leaders:

1. How do the racial and ethnic backgrounds of self-identified Latin@ students affect their perception of critical school experiences within their predominantly white POCIS member schools?
2. What tools or opportunities, if any, have the participating schools provided the students so that they may develop ethnic identities and critical consciousness regarding oppressive elements in their lives?
3. In what ways, if any, do your schools explicitly and deliberately challenge the dominant white culture of power and/or demonstrate its values and appreciate your identity as a Latin@ student?
4. To what extent are you satisfied with your decision to attend this school as it relates to your identity formation?

The following chapter presents the recent research exploring the schooling experiences of students of color and Latin@ students in U.S. public and private schools. The literature review will also provide a base for understanding how and why CRT and a structural analysis of

institutional racism are appropriated lenses for this study. The researcher will present a brief history of private independent schools in the U.S. and of institutional racism in U.S. public and private schools. The researcher will then explore recent literature on the experiences of ethnically underrepresented Latin@s and people of color within predominantly white learning spaces. Finally, the researcher will review current challenges still facing NAIS schools in addressing diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice. Many studies have explored the pervasive racial disparities in the U.S. public school system, but few studies have explored the schooling experiences of students of color within elite private schools.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

*May we honor other people's feelings,  
respect their anger, sadness, grief, joy as we do our own.  
Though we tremble before uncertain futures...  
may we dance in the face of our fears* (Anzaldua, 2002, p. 575).

Exploring the experiences of Latin@ students within Bay Area private independent schools may allow NAIS and POCIS school leaders to live out their professed or articulated missions regarding inclusivity, equity and justice. This research study hopes to contribute to a shallow pool of literature exploring how historically underrepresented students of color, particularly Latin@ students, within private independent schools experience and navigate their ethnic identities. Enlisting the voices of students is an integral piece of this study as youth have experience and knowledge that can enhance work toward racial justice in schools when done in partnership with adults.

This literature review will include an overview of the researcher's overarching theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory (CRT), along with a context of how it applies to an analysis of schools. The centrality of CRT and the notion of intersectionality in this examination of the educative experiences of students of color and the schooling system will be addressed in each section of the literature review. A brief description of the evolution of NAIS independent schools, a review of the current context of independent schools, and findings from recent studies demonstrating the impact of the underrepresentation of adults and students of color within predominantly white, independent schools in light of CRT and Anzaldua's (1987) concept of "taming wild tongues" will be presented. The researcher also explored the research regarding the role of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in twenty-first century private schools. The researcher examined the pre-service education and training of developing teachers and school

leaders on power, privilege, justice, and race relations. Chapter Two concludes with a review of the challenges school leaders have in enacting systemic change, a summary of the found research, and recommendations for filling the current research void.

This research study was guided by two central questions: “What formative experiences have the deepest impact on Latin@ students while attending Bay Area independent high schools, and how do these critical incidents inform their identity as people of color in US society?” If educators are to better understand the experiences of self-identified Latin@ students in independent schools, the following sub-questions will elicit data from participating students and equity leaders:

1. How do the racial and ethnic backgrounds of self-identified Latin@ students affect their perception of their critical school experiences within predominantly white POCIS member schools?
2. What tools or opportunities, if any, have the participating schools provided the students so that they may develop critical consciousness along with the capacity to act as agents against oppressive elements in their lives?
3. In what ways, if any, do your schools explicitly and deliberately challenge the dominant white culture of power and/or celebrate non-majority cultures with the hope of raising critical social consciousness?
4. To what extent do you see yourself as an agent of change in your school community and/or to what extent do you see yourself as a mirror of the status quo?

The researcher used the CRT lens to explore the schooling experiences of twelve (12) self-identified Latin@ students within six (6) distinct Bay Area independent high schools. This analytical lens will allow for a thorough examination of the role ethnicity and racial identity play

in the experiences of Latin@ students in predominantly white private schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Though the LatCrit Theory sector has been influential since Rodolfo Acuña (1972) first published *Occupied America*, this researcher has chosen to locate this study under the broader umbrella of CRT. As institutional racism and white supremacy have influenced the lives of all people in the U.S., and in particular historically subordinated communities, this research study examines the Latin@ experience as a case study. The Latin@ experience in the U.S. has been invisible and overshadowed by the binary of “Black” and “white” and it is this researcher’s aim to bring the racialized experiences of Latin@ students into sharper focus.

In addition to membership in NAIS, most independent schools in California are also members of California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS), a non-profit organization for pre-K-12 (twelve) schools. The mission of CAIS is to support and improve academic programs and character development through professional development and by advocating for ethnic and socio-economic diversity (CAIS, 2013). As this research study is situated in the San Francisco Bay Area (California), the researcher has gathered data from CAIS.

The 2010 U.S. census showed that people of color make up 59.9% of California’s population while the percentage of white students is 57.8% of the CAIS network (<http://2010.census.gov/2010census/#>). Table 1 demonstrates that students of color are grossly underrepresented in CAIS schools. The statistics in Table 1 further demonstrate that both historically underrepresented students of color and students in need of financial assistance to access an independent and private education in CAIS schools were in the minority by 2015.

Table 1

*Percentage of students of color and financial aid in CAIS schools 2014-2015.*

Enrollment of SoC as %	Total Enrollment of SoC	23,187
Enrollment of Students of Color as %	Total Enrollment	37.6%
Percentage of African American Students		4.0%
Percentage of Hispanic American Students		5.8%
Percentage of Asian American Students		12.7%
Percentage of Native American Students		0.2%
Percentage of Pacific Islander American Students		0.2%
Percentage of Multiracial American Students		11.9%
Percentage of Middle Eastern American Students		2.8%
Percentage of International Students		5.4%
Percentage of Unsure about diversity		4.4%
Percentage of European American Students		54.7%
Median % of Students on Financial Aid		21.2%
Median Financial Aid Grant		\$ 15,580

*Note.* “SOC” is an abbreviation for Students of Color as defined by NAIS.

Each year, CAIS hosts a conference for Heads and Trustees in either Northern or Southern California. In 2015, CAIS Executive Director, Jim McManus, focused his keynote address in Los Angeles on the significant gap between the high number of school-aged Latin@ student population in California and the under-representation of Latin@ students in CAIS schools today. Figure 2 shows the percentage of students by ethnicity/race in California school districts today, contrasted by the percentage of students of color enrolled in CAIS schools. In

particular, Mr. McManus highlighted that Latin@ students constitute only 6% of CAIS schools, but over half (55%) of California's school-age population.

District	White	Hispanic	Asian	African American	Native American	No Resp/Multiple
<b>California K-12</b>	26	53	12	6	1	3
<b>San Francisco</b>	11	26	41	10	1	12
<b>Berkeley</b>	35	24	8	20	0	12
<b>Oakland</b>	9	42	16	29	0	4
<b>San Jose</b>	26	52	15	3	1	4
<b>Sacramento</b>	19	37	20	18	1	5
<b>Monterey</b>	23	53	12	6	0	6
<b>Santa Barbara</b>	34	59	3	1	1	3
<b>Los Angeles</b>	9	74	7	9	0	1
<b>Pasadena</b>	16	59	6	16	0	3
<b>Anaheim</b>	5	86	7	2	0	1
<b>San Diego</b>	23	47	14	10	0	5
<b>CAIS Schools</b>	55	6	12	4	1	16 + 3

Education Data Partnership, [http://www.dasl.nais.org](http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/App_Req/EdDataClassic/fsTwoPanel.aspx?#!bottom=/_layouts/EdDataClassic/profile.asp?Tab=1&level=04&reportnumber=16&county=00&district=00000&school=000000#studentsbyraceethnicity and 2015 National Association of Independent Schools, DASL, <a href=).

Figure 2. Percentage by Ethnicity of Children in California School Districts shared at the CAIS Heads and Trustees Conference (January, 2015)

While there are many contributing factors that are beyond a school's control, there are a number of factors that school leaders have the influence and the opportunity to change in order to improve the educative experiences of students of color (Tatum, 2003; 2007). Notable scholars, such as bell hooks (2010), stress that a thorough critique of the educational environment of schools is necessary (including the curriculum, pedagogical practices, and the capacity for all members of the school community to see, name, and act upon oppression in the interest of a more just and equitable school). This research study aims to conduct a thorough critique by collecting qualitative data from Latin@ students within independent schools.

There has also been significant research done on the experiences of students of color within U.S. colleges and universities. Given this existing research, some patterns have emerged. Many research studies emphasize the relationship between multicultural education in teacher training programs/professional development and cultural competence, the negative impact of the persistent underrepresentation of people of color, the need to hire and retain an ethnically representative faculty/administration of color, and the importance of providing space for students and educators of color to reflect on their schooling experiences as ethnic and racial minorities. The impact of racial and ethnic-identity on youth in primarily white spaces can be examined through the lenses of CRT and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989).

### **Sources/Searches**

Literature on private school education in the United States is scarce. Extensive searches on databases such as EBSCO, ERIC, JSTOR, SAGE, etc. turned up few research studies about the experiences of students of color, particularly Latin@s, in private independent schools. The research studies that do surface examine students within Catholic parochial schools. Descriptors used in various combinations included private school diversity, independent school diversity, private school minorities, independent school minorities, Black/Latino/African-American/Hispanic students private school, Black/Latino/African-American/Hispanic students independent school, minorities boarding school, diversity boarding school, private school, private education, elite school, private school history, private education history, stereotype threat, internalized racism, critical race theory, and ethnic identity formation. Given that research is scarce, the researcher has organized this literature by themes and not by research publication dates.

Table 2 indicates the main sources for the literature used to inform this study. Of the fifty-eight (58) research articles, all were peer-reviewed and all were qualitative studies. As there is a dearth of literature on the experiences of students of color within independent schools, seminal articles more than ten (10) years old and notable books written by experts in the field of multicultural education, social justice, and institutional racism were used.

Table 2

*Database Searches*

Database	Source	Number
AERA	Articles	8
AISNE	Articles	1
Education Full Text	Articles, Books	15
ERIC	Articles, Books	21
JSTOR	Articles	1
Harvard Magazine	Articles	1
nais.org	Articles, Statistical Reports	11
ncea.org	Articles, Statistical Reports	1
Presentations/Conferences	Lectures, Poster Presentations	4
ProQuest	Dissertations	4
Other readings	Articles, Chapters, Books	44
Sage	Articles	17

**Overview of the Literature Review**

Adolescence is a critical time in identity formation (Erikson, 1968). An individual's race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, (dis)abilities, class, sex, nationality, and religion impact identity formation. Identity formation includes the impact of race and class within the school context (Raible & Nieto, 2003; Tatum, 2007). Darling-Hammond and William (1995) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) argued early on that school leaders must employ critical race theory (CRT), "a radical critique of both the status quo and the purported reforms" (p. 62). Ortiz and Jani (2010) define CRT as "a race-based critical paradigm that assessed power differentials

at all levels” (p. 190). To reform society would be to recreate and refabricate existing systems that may or may not result in meaningful changes in the end. The researcher is committed and loyal to forging a new unity that builds on the strengths, realities, and stories of all groups within learning communities.

### **Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) places race as the center of analysis and explores the transformations of the relationships among race, racism, and power (Bell, 1992). The seminal reader, *Critical Race Theory* (1995), edited by Gary Peller, Kimberle Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, and Kendall Thomas, presents new paradigms for activists entrenched in resisting systems of oppression in the United States. Critical Legal Studies (CLS) (the work of law students and lawyers) was the precursor to critical race theory (CRT). There are two main foci of CRT: to understand the relationship between white supremacy and the oppression of people of color, and to understand and alter the historical collusion between the law and white supremacy (p. xiii). One of the main purposes of CRT is to pursue scholarship, “antithetical knowledge,” and develop counter narratives by inviting historically excluded or silenced voices (p. xiii). Critical race theorists are inherently political and explicitly aim to oppose systems of oppression by presenting the realities of people of color.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) likens culturally relevant pedagogy to CRT in that it can lead to collective, not merely individual, empowerment. Parker and Villapando (2007) argue that CRT is a useful tool that school leaders can use to examine policies and procedures in the struggle to achieve social and racial justice. Meanwhile, Gorski and Goodman (2012) argue that a core belief of CRT is that institutional racism cannot be isolated from other forms of oppression such as hetero-normativity, homophobia, and sexism. This connects to Kimberle

Crenshaw's notion of political intersectionality (1989). Political intersectionality – the many ways in which race, ethnicity, gender, sex, sexuality, religion, (dis)ability, and class manifest in our lives – is also central to understanding the stories of students of color (Crenshaw, 1989). The concept of intersectionality has been foundational for analyzing the interrelationship between categories of identity, in this case ethnicity and race, and social inequalities.

Dr. Daniel Solorzano (2012) asserts that CRT is similar to a polarizing filter of a high-end camera. By twisting the outer ring, one can see what the eye previously could not because the polarizing filter literally saturates the color in the moment waiting to be captured. By turning the lens, color, “race,” and racism come into clear view (Solorzano, 2012). In this way, CRT is a tool by which we can understand the everyday racism that plays out in school and in the schooling experiences of students of color (Solorzano, 2012). Critical race theory is a lens through which we can understand the world around us and move the scrutiny off students of color for the “achievement gap” and focus on institutional accountability based on equity and inclusion.

Bonillo-Silva (2010) based his research-based book, *Racism Without Racists*, on a convenient sample of 627 black and white college students at a large Mid-western university and claims that our society is predicated upon an ideology that maintains a racial hierarchy. Bonillo-Silva (2010) claims that racism is not dependent on individual acts of racism; racism is sustained by a system of institutional racism. The popular notions of colorblindness and a post-racial society are promulgated in schools today and perpetuate false beliefs in equal opportunity and individualism (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003; Bell, 1992). In promoting these myths, schools become neutral and passive players in maintaining institutional racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

In their article “A Race(cialized) Perspective on Education Leadership: Critical Race Theory in Educational Administration”, Parker and Villapando (2007) argue that “critical race theory is a valuable lens with which to analyze and interpret administrative policies and procedures in educational institutions and provides avenues for action in the area of racial justice” (p. 519). Parker and Villapando (2007) urge leaders to see the importance of CRT in making institutional decisions “if the focus is on changing the culture of the schools to meet the educational and emotional needs of the students, parents, and staff to create a different community based on love and caring for students of color” (p. 523). The gap in educational opportunities in the U.S. continues to be drawn along racial and ethnic lines. As such, school leaders must address this critical problem by looking through a racial lens (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003). Yet, concentrating efforts only on the learning in the classroom deflects attention from the “persistent social inequities...[and] larger political movements needed to bring about real social change” (Cambron-McCabe & McCarty, 2005, p. 211).

Finally, Yosso (2005) reminds us that the CRT framework “calls into question White middle class communities as the standard by which all others are judged...This shifting of the research lens allows critical race scholars to ‘see’ multiple forms of cultural wealth within Communities of Color” (p. 82). Yosso (2005) wrote an influential article in which she incorporated Solorzano’s five (5) tenets of CRT, a critique of “deficit thinking” and a nod to Anzaldua’s (1987) call to acknowledge and honor historically silenced voices. Yosso’s (2005) basic premise is that scholarship has systematically negated the lived experiences of people oppressed by institutional racism and the CRT lens purposefully calls on marginalized people to tell their stories. The five (5) tenets of CRT, according to Solorzano, begin with the notion that race cannot be separated from other forms of oppression and is fundamental in our understanding

of U.S. society. The second tenet assumes the need to challenge the dominant culture and mindset, such as white privilege and the myth of equal opportunity. Critical Race Theory also strives for social justice that includes the eradication of all forms of oppression, beyond racism. The fourth tenet recognizes that people of color have knowledge and expertise necessary to authentically understand racial oppression. Finally, the fifth tenet draws upon scholarship from a variety of disciplines. Yosso (2005) found that historically and systematically silenced voices are empowered by telling and listening to the stories of others with a similar background. By engaging in storytelling, individuals can better understand how to respond and resist explicit and implicit subjugation.

Yosso (2005) also tackled one of the most pervasive ways in which students of color, specifically Latin@ students, are subjugated: deficit thinking. Latin@ students are hampered by deficit thinking because some teachers assume that this student population enters the space with little or no knowledge of mainstream/dominant cultural capital and that their parents/families do not value or support education (Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) defined five (5) forms of cultural capital adapted from Oliver and Shapiro (1995) comparing community wealth versus cultural capital. According to Yosso (2005), Oliver and Shapiro's (1995) model demonstrates that the knowledge and skills that historically underrepresented students bring to the table are often unseen or disregarded. Yosso (2005) shared Oliver and Shapiro's model that demonstrates Latin@ students contribute much more beyond social and economic capital. For instance, Latin@ students share a legacy of familial hopes and dreams, optimism, and a belief in social mobility through education. Many Latin@ students also bring the experience of navigating spaces with more than one language and learning to listen and tell stories (linguistic capital). Latin@ students also often come to school with a strong sense of family (family capital).

Yosso's (2005) use of Oliver and Shapiro's model also claims that Latin@ students bring "navigational capital," the capacity to navigate institutions that function in the culture of power. Finally, Latin@ students may bring "resistant capital" – referring to a lens and practice at pushing against injustices.

Yosso's (2005) article supports this researcher's choice to utilize CRT for this study because "CRT shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color as places full of cultural poverty or disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from these communities' cultural assets and wealth" (p. 82). The researcher of this study understands that storytelling is an essential tenet of CRT. As such, the researcher listened to, recorded, and analyzed the experiences of historically underrepresented Latin@ students within independent schools. Storytelling brings to light previously silenced, omitted, or ignored realities and also serves to challenge the narrative of the dominant culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The researcher hopes that by capitalizing on the wealth of young people, leaders in independent schools can develop structures and policies that can engender more justice and equity (Yosso, 2005). By reframing the "problem" away from "the achievement gap" and "student success" in partnership with the youth, researchers may hold institutions accountable for retention, access, and racial climate of campuses to locate problems and solutions.

These previous studies affirm this researcher's commitment to making space for long-silenced voices of color to impact academia through the CRT filter as educational leaders and institutions have not been held accountable for inclusion and academic success for students of color. The researcher declares that research situated in the CRT epistemological frame has the potential to raise racial consciousness in predominantly white independent schools. The inquiry

here is centered on *why* the educational experiences are what they are for Latin@ students and not on the request that people simply stop being racist.

In summary, schools continue to manifest and perpetuate national inequities. Schools and educators have faced – and continue to face – many challenges intricately connected to a racist (and sexist, homophobic, Christo-centric, male-dominated) larger social structure, such as institutional racism, de facto segregation, unequal distribution of funds and resources, poorly trained teachers, culturally biased curriculum, teaching, and testing. By examining this challenge with a CRT lens, the researcher believes that schooling enacted from a social justice framework can play a pivotal role in reshaping the landscape of the United States. Critical race theorists strive to affect the level and reality of equity and justice through *macro* (institutional), *meso* (structural), and *micro* (personal) levels.

Critical race theory keeps history at the center and infuses the experiences and observations of the disproportional number of people of color and those in poverty who continue to be subjected to institutional forms of oppression. The ultimate goal of education cannot be to simply produce more consumers for our capitalistic system. Since those in power create and perpetuate cultural norms as we know them, social stratification can only be challenged by critically conscientious consumers and producers (Rodriguez, 1993, p. 9).

### **Historical Context and the Evolution of Independent Schools**

The following section places NAIS independent schools in the larger history and context of the United States to illustrate how these influential and elitist organizations are products of a racialized and white supremacist system. Private independent schools currently serve some of the most powerful and privileged students in the United States (Bartels, 2012). The largest and arguably the most influential private independent school network is the National Association of

Independent Schools (NAIS). Member schools range from pre-school to high school, single-gendered/sex to co-educational day and/or boarding schools, religious and secular. NAIS was founded in 1962 and continues to provide support and guidance to its member schools in how best to meet the needs of the enrolled students time over time. NAIS recognizes that historically underrepresented students of color may have particular challenges and unique needs given the history of ethnic exclusivity and white privilege within the independent school system (Little, 2012). As such, NAIS offers an annual Diversity Leadership Institute for staff from member schools who are directly responsible for furthering equity and inclusion, an annual HEADS Equity and Diversity Summit, an Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism (AIM), and numerous other resources (<http://www.nais.org/Pages/Learn/KnowledgeCenter/Diversity-and-Inclusion.aspx?src=megamenu>).

Private independent schools in the U.S. today continue to be predominantly white (76%) and extremely segregated along racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007). The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), the California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS), and Northern California People of Color in Independent Schools (POCIS) have made great efforts in the past twenty (20) years to advocate for and increase ethnic diversity, though it remains unclear how students of color are experiencing this predominantly white and elite world as racial and/or ethnic minorities.

In the years of the early republic, most schools were small town schools or “little red school houses” (Kennedy, 2011). Over time, rich, white, elite, young men and boys were educated in independently run private schools requiring tuition (Kennedy, 2011; Pernambuco-Wise, 2011). Many of these “academies” (private schools), such as the Collegiate School

(1628), Trinity School (1709), Ursuline Academy (for girls) (1727), Germantown Academy (1763), Exeter (1781), Georgetown Preparatory School (1789), Deerfield Academy (1797), and Milton Academy (1798), came to be known as “academies.” Until the end of the Civil War, most students who received a formal education were white and male (Kennedy, 2011). Roman Catholic missionaries interested in ensuring that religious traditions would live on in new Protestant America founded many early schools, such as Ursuline Academy and Georgetown Preparatory.

In response to private academies, the first public high school, English High School, opened in Boston in 1821. By the 1830’s and 1840’s, public common schools became more numerous in response to growing immigration (Glenn, 1998). Common school advocates, such as Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, argued that schools were responsible for developing civic virtue, morality, and common “American” values (Glenn, 1998; Jeynes, 2006). As such, these educational leaders argued that common schools should be funded by public means and be under federal government direction with the goal of erasing the religious and cultural beliefs and practices of (Catholic) immigrant parents (Kennedy, 2011; Pernambuco-Wise, 2011). Horace Mann was a Protestant and adamant about including morality and religion within the emerging U.S. public school system (Jeynes, 2006). As such, a vast majority of public common schools in Massachusetts included the (Protestant) Bible within the curriculum (Jeynes, 2006). Mann argued that an emphasis on Christianity and morality would not only produce a more educated populace, but a nation saved from its “evil” with “God’s truth” (Jeynes, 2006).

Given the passage of the Naturalization Law of 1790, only “whites” could be citizens and enjoy the privileges of U.S. citizenship (Haney-Lopez, 1996; Takaki, 1993). Thus, students of color were denied access to these tax-supported public schools in most states (Darling-

Hammond, 2004; Beachum & McCray, 2010). With the end of the Civil War, tax-supported common schools were seen as a vehicle to unite the once fractured country (Jeynes, 2006). Moreover, facilitating the “American melting pot” was also of prime import to Mann and his supporters (Glenn, 1998).

The establishment of Native American assimilation boarding schools and assimilationist programs are examples of how schools were used to “Americanize” “non-whites” to the “culture of whiteness” (Sauer & Sauer, 2010; Tatum, 2007). The cultural genocide perpetrated in the Indian residential school system was heavily influenced by the notion of white supremacy, with the end goal of responding to the “Indian problem” in the 1800’s. U.S. Army Lt. Richard Pratt founded the Carlisle Indian School in 1879 and coined the infamous phrase, “Kill the Indian to Save the Man” as a motto for the Carlisle School. Including the historical “other” in U.S. public schools and assimilation boarding schools aimed to encourage allegiance to the “dominant culture” (Lambert, 2008). The schools played a vital role in the systematic destruction of Native cultures, Native languages and family units. Research conducted by The American Psychiatric Association correlates high suicide rates, substance abuse, violence, and other negative health issues with the long-term ill effects of the residential school experience on Native communities. These researchers suggest that in order for Native and white people alike to heal from this racist past, there must be “understanding and addressing the historical and cultural impact of trauma on aboriginal peoples” (Pember, 2015).

Though new Catholic immigrants were eager to assimilate to the mainstream “American” culture, many hoped to preserve their Catholic beliefs apart from the Christian Bible taught in most common, public schools (Glenn, 1998). Catholics founded St. Mary’s School (1792) in Philadelphia, is considered to be the first parochial school in the United States (National Catholic

Educational Association, 2013). In many ways, because Catholic (and other religious schools) were established in response and in resistance to public schools, they were seen as divisive by Mann and others (Glenn, 1998). In 1869, ten percent (10%) of school age children attended Catholic schools and by 1884, that number had grown to sixteen percent (16%). Despite the continued growth of Catholic schools, the common school dominated the landscape of schools in the U.S. until the Great Depression (Glenn, 1998).

The history of institutional racism in the U.S. is important to the evolution of public and private schooling because of its lasting adverse impact (Zuniga & Castaneda, 2000). When public (and private schools) finally did open their doors to students of color in the 1960's and 1970's, many barriers remained for students of color to achieve educational equity (Tyack, 1974). In many instances, the curriculum remained solidly Euro-centric and devoid of multiple perspectives (Loewen, 1995, 2009; McCray & Beachum, 2010; Zinn, 1994, 1995). Though many private and religious schools (primarily Catholic schools) were established to expand education to the poor or marginalized, the majority of U.S. independent schools (initially founded as boarding schools) were established as elite and exclusive learning spaces for the U.S.'s white, upper class boys, as seen in Figure 3 and Figure 4 (Brosnan, 2001; Cookson & Percell, 2008).

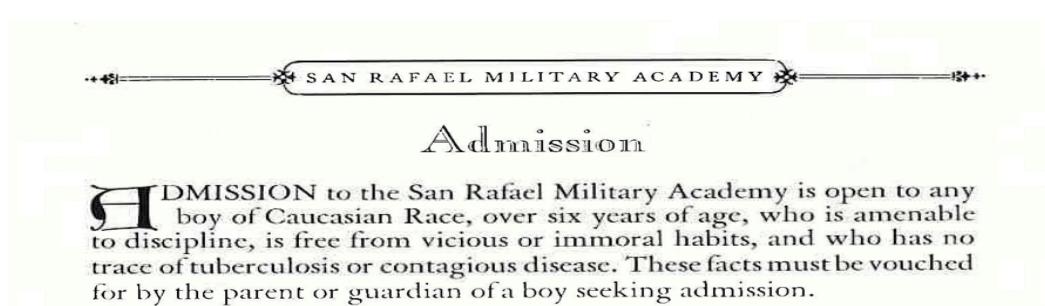


Figure 3. San Rafael Military Academy Annual Catalog No. E. San Rafael, CA: San Rafael Military Academy, 1931



Figure 4. Afternoon tea at Westlake School for Girls in 1920, an elite finishing school for young women in Southern California

During the 1930's, many private schools began to identify as "independent", a term without the connotation of wealth and elitism (Pernambuco-Wise, 2011). In some cases, Catholic schools also expanded their educational outreach to the poor and/or marginalized within the United States, such as a school in Baltimore founded in 1831 for poor children (NCEA, 2013). Still, given U.S. patterns of residential segregation and racism, many Catholic (and other religious schools) remained exclusively white (Reardon & Yun, 2009). Some non-religious independent (boarding) schools did, however, open their doors to new ethnic minorities at higher rates in response to new immigration and Black Northern migration after World War I and II (Brosnan, 2001). For instance, Philips Exeter Academy was one of the first private boarding schools to unapologetically admit Black students after the Civil War (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education Foundation, Inc., 2003). Today, non-religious and non-Catholic private schools are the most ethnically diverse private-independent schools (85% white) and there

remains a dearth of research on the experiences of this minority student group (Reardon & Yun, 2002).

Though some schools, such as Green Acres (1935), Georgetown Day School (1945), Burgundy Farm Country Day School (1946), and Athenian School (1965) were founded as interracial schools, most private schools remain more segregated than public schools. In fact, “white students in secular private schools attend schools that are, on average, 85% white” (Reardon & Yun, 2002, p. 3). Many schools, such as Georgetown Preparatory School, St. Albans, and National Cathedral School, struggled with the decision to admit students of color in the period following World War II as public schools began to respond to pressures to desegregate (Strauss, 2004). Reardon and Yun (2002) wrote a detailed report examining the levels of segregation in private schools and the implications of racial segregation on society. The authors found that white students are more isolated in private schools than in public schools and that white students are more likely to attend private schools in areas where the Black student population is highest (Reardon & Yun, 2002). One of the motivating factors for gathering the data was because a comprehensive examination of private schools and the 10% of U.S. students attending those schools had never been conducted. Also, Reardon and Yun, (2002) were interested in learning the level at which private schools may increase racial, ethnic, and socio-economic class stratification in society at a time when some were arguing for vouchers (public funds) to pay for private school.

The report by Reardon and Yun (2002) presented descriptive statistics on private schools in the U.S., the level of ethnic segregation within private schools, and the possible correlation between the racial composition of a neighborhood and the number of white students enrolled in private schools in that area. The researchers had four main data sources which included the

1997-1998 Common Core Data (CCD), results from the 1997-1998 Private School Survey (PSS), the October Current Population Surveys (CPS) for 1988, 1999, and 2000, and the School District Databook from 1990 (Reardon & Yun, 2002). The researchers in this study (2002) noted that potentially higher income levels of white people was not the reason for higher white enrollment as the data show that in all income brackets, whites far outnumbered students of color. Reardon and Yun (2002) were also interested to note that 13% of white students in suburban areas, compared to 20% of white students in urban areas, were enrolled in private schools though there was only a 1% difference between the two among Blacks, Latinos, and Asians.

In Reardon and Yun's (2002) analysis of the data, they found a considerably high level of Black and white isolation by using the exposure index, "the average exposure of one group to another among schools" (p. 29). The researchers found that though patterns of segregation were high in private schools, levels of segregation were lower in secular private schools than in Catholic or religious schools (p. 31). The authors of this report suggest that private school leaders more closely examine the "patterns and isolation of their significant minority enrollments as well as the serious segregation of white students" (Reardon & Yun, 2002, p. 46).

Though the demographics have shifted over the past fifteen (15) years, independent schools in the U.S. continue to be predominantly white and wealthy, as compared in Figure 5 and Figure 6.

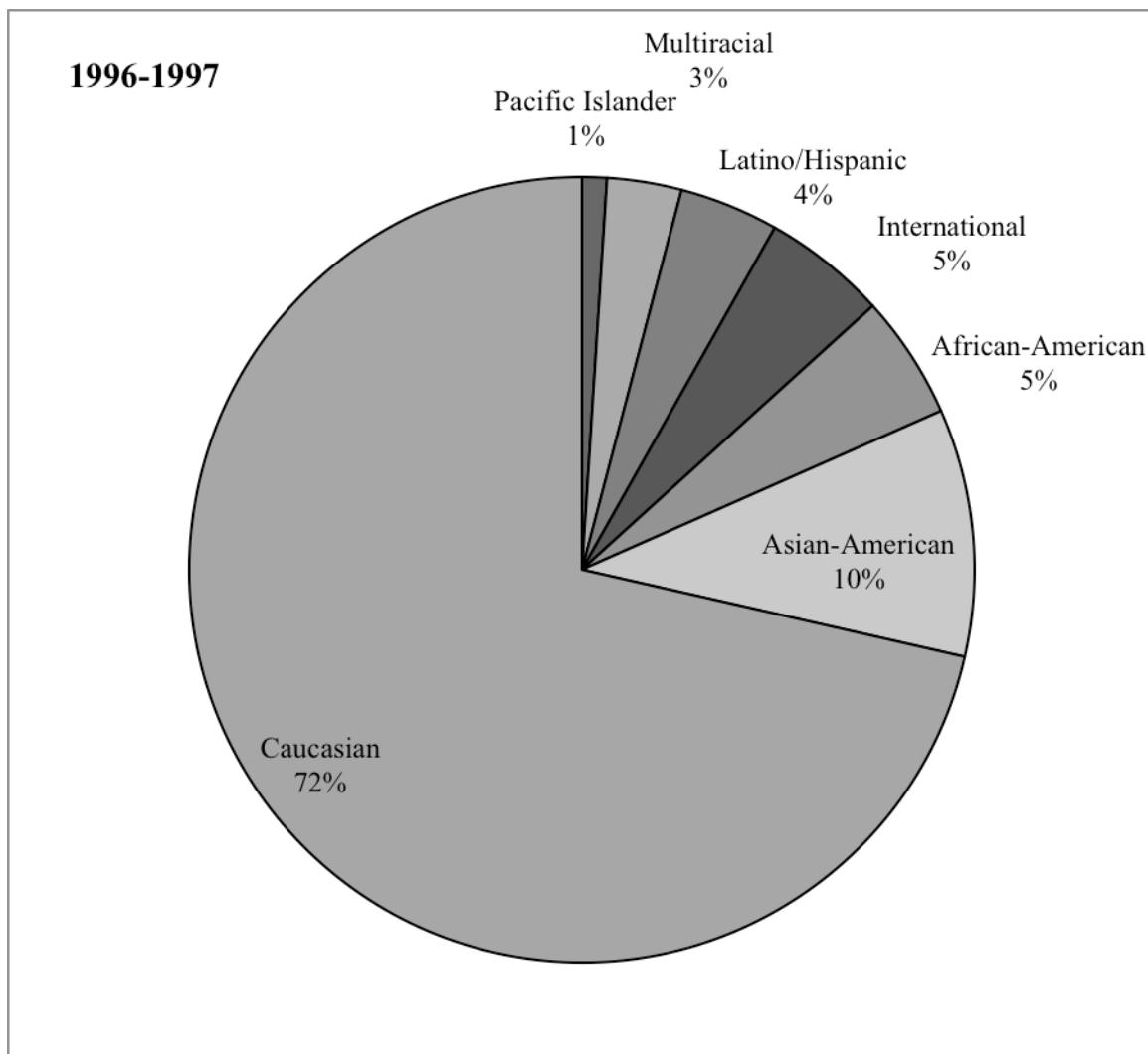


Figure 5. Ethnic diversity of NAIS Schools in the 1996-1997 academic year (as reported by member schools). Data gathered from the 2015 National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), DASL, <http://www.dasl.nais.org>).

## 2014-2015

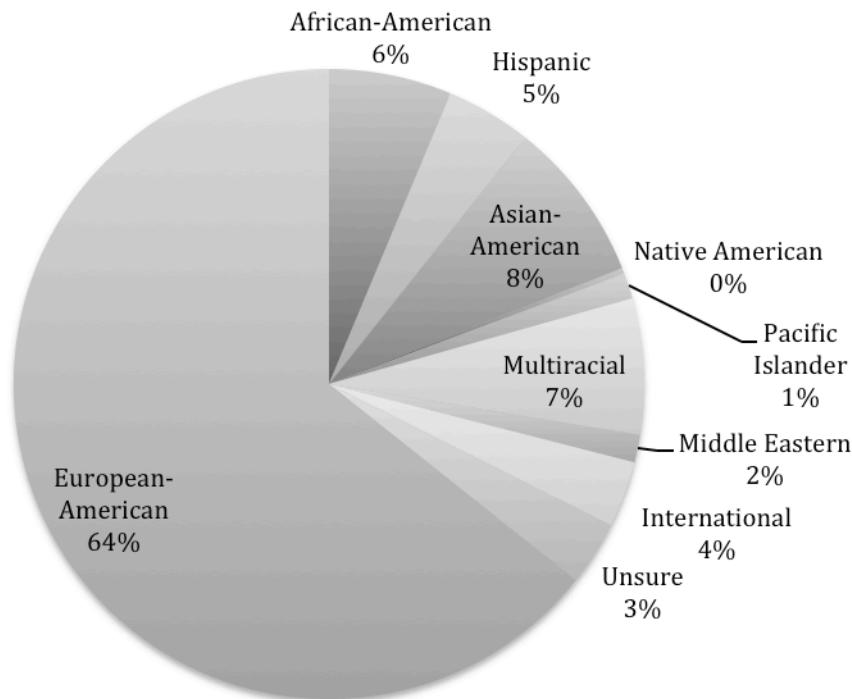


Figure 6. Ethnic diversity of NAIS Schools in the 2014-2015 academic year (as reported by member schools. Data gathered from the 2015 National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), DASL, <http://www.dasl.nais.org>)

From the CRT lens, the notion that the system needs to be “fixed” is erroneous because the system of schooling in this country is producing the intended results. Given the U.S. history of white supremacy and the cost of private-independent schools, we must remember that elite private schools were developed by and for white people (boys) (Kane, 2003; 2008; Pernambuco-Wise, 2011; Reardon & Yun, 2002). Schools in this country were meant to assimilate people to the dominant (white) culture. The fact that schools today are “failing” students of color and reproducing the “achievement gap” should not be a surprise. In this country, traditional elitist and exclusionary education institutions will not be transformed by promoting a more

representative community, but a representative community that meaningfully contributes to the life of the school (Kidder, 2003, p. 121).

The landscape of schools in the United States is rapidly changing. Demographers estimate that by 2050, the majority of students in U.S. public schools will be “of-color.” It is also clear that U.S. private schools are striving to become more ethnically and culturally diverse. The growing number of Latin@s in the student population is significant and calls school leaders to re-examine their institutional policies and practices in the effort to ensure that all students are served with a spirit of respect and dignity.

From a CRT lens, independent schools are a product of U.S. society and are infected with the sickness that is white supremacy. It is imperative that we examine our national consciousness and how this consciousness (or unconsciousness) impacts our schooling system. We must be vigilant in naming how this unconscious (or conscious) bias and/or racism is replicating current systems of oppression that benefit few and hurt all people. For true and sustainable change to occur, those in positions of power, such as white school leaders, must enter into the dialogue of examining race and racism in meaningful ways.

Independent schools must be reconstructed, not simply reformed, for authentic and sustainable transformation. No longer can the predominant white teaching and leading population cling to “color blindness” and claim that historical acts of racism (and institutional racism) have no long-term consequences today. All students need educators who “un-learn” and deliberately re-learn the history of our country that they were never taught. This researcher asserts that the educational system is meant to replicate the existing structures of oppression and culture of power. Even though many independent schools endeavor to graduate “global citizens”

and future change agents, the practices, policies, and programs in place to ensure allied behavior on the side of transformation remain unclear and ineffective.

### **Race in Independent Schools**

From a CRT lens, the underrepresentation of people of color within independent schools is no accident. Critical race theorists recognize the connection between historical acts of oppression, systematic exclusion, and disenfranchisement and the fact that a disproportional number of people of color and those in poverty continue to be subjected to deficient schools, appalling housing conditions and medical care. Being “the only one” and systematically underrepresented as a student of color can be especially difficult when people of color are significantly underrepresented at all levels (curriculum, student body, staff, faculty, and administration) within NAIS schools (see Table 3, Table 4, and Table 5).

**Current trends in NAIS schools.** Though the number of people of color in independent schools is still small, secular private (boarding) schools have the most racially diverse enrollments and the lowest levels of segregation primarily because these schools draw from vast geographic areas (Reardon & Yun, 2002). The number of people of color and middle to low income individuals within NAIS schools continues to grow (Kane, 2003; 2008). Since 2000, the total percentage of students of color in NAIS schools has increased from 19% to 29% and students receiving financial aid have also grown from 16% to 22.5% (NAIS, 2015; Pernambuco-Wise, 2011) (see Table 3). Also, in 2003, the percentage of Latin@ students were 2.7% and NAIS reports that by 2014-2015, the percentage of self-identified “Hispanic” students in NAIS schools grew to 4.4% though the total Latin@ population in the U.S. was 17% (NAIS, U.S. Census, 2013). By the end of 2015, the total faculty of color as a percentage of the total faculty was 13.1% and the total administrators of color as a percentage of all administrators was 11.7%.

It is notable that these figures are lower than they were at the end of 2013, 13.8% and 12.2% respectively (NAIS).

Table 3

*Percentage of SOC/Financial Aid in NAIS School 14-15*

Enrollment of SoC as %	Day Schools	Boarding Schools	All Schools
	28.9 %	29.7%	29.0%
African American Students	6.2%	6.7%	6.3%
Hispanic American Students	4.5%	3.9%	4.4%
Asian American Students	8.7%	5.7%	8.3%
Native American Students	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%
Pacific Islander American Students	0.3%	7.7%	1.3%
Multiracial American Students	7.4%	4.6%	7.0%
Middle Eastern American Students	1.4%	0.8%	1.4%
International Students	1.6%	14.3%	3.4%
Percentage of Unsure about diversity	3.5%	2.4%	3.3%
Percentage of European American Students	66.1%	53.5%	64.3%
Median % of Students on Financial Aid	20.8%	34.5%	22.5%
Median Financial Aid Grant	\$ 11,244	\$ 23,440	\$ 12,166

*Note.* “SOC” is an abbreviation for Students of Color as defined by NAIS.

Recently, NAIS established a new consulting service for equity, justice and leadership and outlined the Principles of Good Practice (PGP) for equity and justice (NAIS, 2012). The increased number of students from non-traditional backgrounds contributes to the opportunities and challenges faced by private school leaders to foster equitable and inclusive spaces for all. Brosnon (2001) reminds educators, “many independent schools have a long history of not mirroring the nation’s diversity in race (or socioeconomic status). Academic elitism is one thing, but exclusivity based on race and economics is another — if you consider your institution to be a morally guided one.”

Today, many independent schools strive to be accessible to historically underrepresented students through expanded recruiting efforts including partnerships with programs such as A

Better Chance (ABC), a program intended to recruit talented and bright underrepresented students of color into the “select sixteen” (16) private independent schools (Slaughter & Johnson, 1988). The researcher developed Figure 7 to present the “select sixteen” (16) schools that organized in response to the Civil Rights Movement and the desire to integrate historically racially exclusive schools.

1. Phillip's Academy, Massachusetts (1778)	2. Phillip's Exeter Academy, New Hampshire (1783)	3. Episcopal High School, Virginia (1839)	4. Hill School, Pennsylvania (1851)
5. St. Paul's School, New Hampshire (1856)	6. St. Mark's School, Massachusetts (1865)	7. Lawrenceville, New Jersey (1883)	8. Groton, Massachusetts (1883)
9. Woodbury Forest School, Virginia (1889)	10. Taft, Connecticut (1892)	11. Hotchkiss School, Connecticut (1892)	12. Choate, Connecticut (1896)
13. St. George's School, Rhode Island (1896)	14. Middlesex, Massachusetts (1901)	15. Deerfield Academy, Massachusetts (1903)	16. Kent School, Connecticut (1906)

Figure 7. “Select Sixteen” Schools (Slaughter & Johnson, 1988)

Partnerships with programs such as ABC have also been coupled with a focus on increasing financial aid and community outreach efforts (Bartels, 2012, p. 82; Little, 2012). Though attending private independent schools can benefit many historically underrepresented students of color, the price of admission can often be low self-esteem, high stress, low self-efficacy, and unhealthy ethnic identity development (Arrington, Hall & Stevenson, 2003; Blackburn & Wise, 2009; Cooper & Datnow, 2000; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007).

Transformational social justice leadership “entails not only challenging others’ deficit thinking, but also opposing inequitable educational practices that are widely implemented and under-scrutinized” (Cooper, 2009, p. 697). As such, NAIS recently articulated and published the PGP regarding equity and justice at their schools (NAIS, 2012). All PGP are foundational standards that encourage ethical behavior for all administrators and school leaders who strive to “to create and sustain diverse, inclusive, equitable, and just communities that are safe and welcoming for all” (NAIS, 2012). Figure 8 presents the best practices for equity and justice recommended by NAIS.

National Association of Independent Schools  
**PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE**

## EQUITY AND JUSTICE

**PREAMBLE:** The following principles provide common ground for interaction between independent school professionals and their many constituents (parents, students, colleagues at other schools, and the public). The NAIS Principles of Good Practice for member schools define high standards and ethical behavior in key areas of school operations to guide schools in becoming the best education communities they can be, to embed the expectation of professionalism, and to further our sector's core values of transparency, excellence, and inclusivity. Accordingly, membership in NAIS is contingent upon agreement to abide by "the spirit" of the PGPs. (See ["General Considerations Regarding NAIS Principles of Good Practice"](#) on the NAIS Website.)

**OVERVIEW:** *NAIS schools value the representation and full engagement of individuals whose differences include – but are not limited to – age, ethnicity, family makeup, gender, learning style, physical ability, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. NAIS welcomes and celebrates the diversity of our member schools; we expect member schools to create and sustain diverse, inclusive, equitable, and just communities that are safe and welcoming for all; we recognize to do so requires commitment, reflection, deliberate planning and action, and ongoing accountability. The following NAIS Principles of Good Practice for Equity and Justice provide the foundation for such an independent school community.*

1. The school establishes the foundations for its commitment to equity and justice in its defining documents (mission, core value, and/or philosophy statements).
2. The school respects, affirms, and protects the dignity and worth of each member of its community.
3. The board of trustees and the head of school articulate strategic goals and objectives that promote diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice in the life of the school.
4. The school develops meaningful requirements for cross-cultural competency and provides training and support for all members of its community, including the board of trustees, parents, students, and all school personnel.
5. The board of trustees and the head of school keep the school accountable for living its mission by periodically monitoring and assessing school culture and ongoing efforts in admission, hiring, retention, financial aid, and curriculum development.
6. The school works deliberately to ensure that the board of trustees, administration, faculty, staff, and student body reflect the diversity that is present in the rapidly changing and increasingly diverse school-age population in our country.
7. The head of school ensures that diversity initiatives are coordinated and led by a designated individual who is a member of one of the school leadership teams, with the training, authority, and support needed to influence key areas of policy development, decision-making, budget, and management.
8. The school uses inclusive language in all written, electronic, and oral communication.
9. The school adopts a non-discrimination statement applicable to the administration of all of its programs and policies, in full compliance with local, state, and federal law. That said, the school makes the law the floor, not the ceiling, for establishing itself as a diverse, inclusive, safe, and welcoming community for all students, staff, and families.

*Approved by the NAIS Board in November 2012*

15



Note. NAIS developed the PGP in collaboration with Dr. Steven Jones in 2012

Figure 8. NAIS Principles of Good Practice for equity and justice

These PGP provide clear steps that U.S. independent schools can take to support students of color in acclimating to predominantly white learning spaces. Critical race theorists advocate for moving beyond assimilation and creating authentic spaces where students of color can acculturate to or disrupt the existing culture of power. The NAIS PGP only help assimilation, not a genuine acculturation process. In general, the efforts in NAIS schools have focused on increasing ethnic and socio-economic diversity and cultural pluralism.

**The challenge of underrepresentation.** The low representation of people of color within NAIS schools was a lightning rod for NAIS to coordinate the annual People of Color Conference (PoCC), and later the Student Diversity Leadership Conference (SDLC). People of color had been expressing the need for a more empowering experience, an experience that more realistically mirrored the growing diversity of the United States. The mission of the PoCC is to provide a safe space for networking and a professional development opportunity for people, who, by virtue of their race or ethnicity, comprise a form of diversity termed "people of color" in independent schools. PoCC serves as an energizing, revitalizing gathering for people who experience independent schools differently (NAIS, 2015).

NAIS endeavors to create opportunities for students and their parents/guardians from historically underrepresented backgrounds to access all resources and develop personal connections within the school community. These national conferences were also an avenue for leaders and educators from NAIS schools to learn from the unique lens and wisdom of people of color, as those voices were often in the minority and systemically marginalized.

At the 2012 NAIS People of Color Conference (POCC) in Houston, Texas, it was reported that of the 1400 independent schools in the NAIS network, only fifty (50) schools have heads of color (4%). There is still much work to do in placing people of color who have successfully navigated independent schools in positions of leadership (Kane, 2008). In this way,

all students can have examples of adults of color with college or higher degrees, in a profession where they are leading lives of purpose. Although statistics provided by NAIS demonstrate that the number of people of color in independent schools has increased over the past decade, it is unclear how the structures, programs, and policies within these schools have changed to meet the needs of this new population.

Table 4 and Table 5 show the growing percentage of adults of color within the country's most elite NAIS schools within the last decade. The 2014-2015 statistics provided by NAIS demonstrate that though the number of people who identify as "of color" continues to grow, the vast majority of those employed within independent schools continue to identify as white. Jim McManus rallied the Heads and Trustees to meet these demographic changes head on if school leaders are to adequately prepare all students for the Twenty-first century and an increasingly global world.

Table 4

*Percentage of Adults of Color in NAIS schools 2002-2003*

Role	Total
Faculty of Color	10%
Administrators of Color	14%
Instructional Support of Color	10%
Total Other Staff of Color	22.2%

Table 5

*Percentage of Adults of Color in NAIS schools 2014-2015*

Role	Day	Boarding	Total
Faculty of Color	12.8%	15.1%	13.1%
Administrators of Color	12.5%	8.9%	11.7%
Instructional Support of Color	16.2%	17.1%	16.5%
Total Other Staff of Color	30.3%	21.0%	26.8%

Though the statistics provided by NAIS indicate that independent schools are more racially and socio-economically diverse than public and private religious schools, there remains a gap in the research regarding the extent of segregation or negative experiences connected to race within the independent school sector. In response to this dearth of research and action, educators from the Bay Area, eager to continue the dialogue sparked at the NAIS annual PoCC, formed a regional network now known as Northern California People of Color in Independent Schools (POCIS). Northern California POCIS is a non-profit working board. The mission of POCIS is to support and advocate for students and families of color within Bay Area independent schools. There are currently fifty-two (52) active school members paying dues to the organization and enjoy access to all POCIS resources, events and workshops. POCIS strives to uphold, promote, and further the PGP set forth by NAIS to more fully serve an ethnically diverse student body in an increasingly global world.

Recent studies show that “more than ninety percent of those in teacher education programs are mostly white, middle class, and from non-urban backgrounds” (Landsman & Lewis, 2006; Murray, 2010, p. 48). The gap in ethnic representation between the adults in the school community and the student body influences the learning experiences of all students. Indeed, recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions and studies on higher education demonstrate that diversity contributes to an exceptional educational enterprise and is a “compelling governmental” interest (Gurin, Hagda, & Lopez, 2003). White children exposed to people of color in positions of power and influence can also do wonders to combat internalized stereotypes about people of color (Tatum, 2007). Pearl Kane (2003) asserts that although teachers of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds can be positive forces in the classroom, white students and students of color both benefit from an ethnically diverse teaching body.

***Underrepresented adults of color.*** Pearl Rock Kane and Alfonso J. Orsini (2003)

conducted one of the seminal research studies dedicated to the experiences of people of color in independent schools. This study culminated in the seminal book *The Color of Excellence* and reported that of the adults of color in NAIS schools that responded to their survey, sixty-five percent (65%) were employed at their current school for fewer than five (5) years. Indeed, eighty-six percent (86%) of the respondents reported an intention to continue teaching, but not in their current school. The reasons provided became important themes: a desire to be in a more diverse setting, feelings of isolation, perception of limited job advancement, and low salary. Diversity is paramount when it comes to education and diversity at all levels within a school and communicates volumes about a school.

The findings from Pearl Kane and Alfonso Orsini (2003) demonstrate that most participants within the study found their position at their current private independent school as a result of previous direct contact with the school. The participating adults of color felt isolated at their schools for diversity-related reasons (limited numbers of faculty and students of color); they experienced extra demands as persons of color in the form of being expected to coordinate diversity work, support all students and parents of color, and be a spokesperson for their race. Though most participants felt that they wanted to do this work, it was difficult with the limited number of people of color with which to share the workload. This reality can often become overwhelming and lead to burnout. Schools can improve their performance by being more creative in recruiting faculty and administrators of color and by expanding their profile of the “perfect” candidate. Finally, schools are also more likely to improve their performance in attracting and recruiting people of color when they involve significant segments of their school communities in the diversity effort (Kane & Orsini, 2003).

This study was a monumental five (5) year mixed method study of the experiences of students and teachers of color within U.S. independent schools. These researchers from Colombia's Teachers' College collected and analyzed empirical data from NAIS and national statistics on teachers and teaching. The researchers later solicited first-person narratives from alumni of color or people of color working within independent schools. Kane and Orsini (1993) argue that “[teachers of color] are especially significant in the independent school world, where students of color, especially scholarship students, often are separated either on a daily or full-time boarding basis from their homes, their communities, and their cultures” (p. 10). This study continues to be a primer for educators in independent schools and brings to light quieted voices.

As schools at all levels strive to diversify leadership that more clearly reflects the student population, trustees and hiring committees must move beyond mere platitudes regarding diversity, combat the trend toward colorblindness, and educate themselves about the benefits of minority leaders (Munoz, 2010). Munoz's mixed-method study explored the experiences of Latin@s serving as community college presidents, chancellors, or CEO's through a questionnaire and interviews. It is clear that although the student bodies within colleges, particularly community colleges, are becoming increasingly non-white and a small number of Latin@s have been able to attain high levels of prominence, the leadership within these institutions continues to be predominantly white and male (Munoz, 2010). The research study explored the variables that Latin@ community college presidents identify as having the most impact on their career success, the ways in which Latin@s overcome barriers and challenges in their path to the presidency, the practices or policies that would transform community college cultures to be more inclusive, and the ways in which higher education administration has changed in the last ten (10) years for Latin@s.

This study utilized critical theory as the framework. Munoz (2010) asserts that it is not an accident that Latin@ leaders are in the minority, despite the growing number of students of color in the nation. Munoz (2010) claims that institutions must deliberately examine and rebuild recruitment and hiring systems. Participants named the important role trustees play in hiring the “face” of the institution and the habit of hiring committees that “hire themselves.” A lack of awareness of unconscious bias of hiring committees contributes to the maintenance of the status quo even when institutions claim to want to advance diversity efforts. The study found that Latin@ presidents account for only four percent (4%) of community college presidents, though the Latin@ presidents in this study were just as academically prepared or, in some cases, surpassed their counterparts (upon a thorough critique of their resumes).

A recent qualitative, grounded theory (GT) doctoral study explored the characteristics that lead to female headships within NAIS private independent K-12 schools (Pernambuco-Wise, 2011). Though this study did not focus on female leaders of color, the researcher did find evidence demonstrating that most senior school leaders continue to be white males (Pernambuco-Wise, 2011). Pernambuco-Wise (2011) utilized the grounded theory method to build theory regarding the experiences of female leaders within NAIS schools. The researcher used a purposeful, snowball sampling method to locate nineteen (19) female heads of NAIS and twelve (12) recruiters. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews and triangulated the data by analyzing participants’ resumes, demographic surveys, and interviews with search consultants.

Pernambuco-Wise (2011) found that seventy-nine percent (79%) of the nineteen (19) school heads identified as white, sixteen percent (16%) as African-American/Black, and five percent (5%) as Asian-American. Given the existing literature, Pernambuco-Wise (2011) learned that the female heads of color tended to use their role as heads of school to further

School goals regarding diversity. One of the participants in this study explained that education was a “civil rights issue...I feel like I have a social justice piece, particularly when you work in a place where there is privilege, like in an independent school” (Pernambuco-Wise, 2011, p. 173). Another participant from the same study claimed, “the children of colour are never going to see themselves as [equally] valuable, if they don’t see powerful people of colour” (Pernambuco-Wise, 2011, p. 175).

***Underrepresented students of color.*** A mixed method study conducted over ten (10) years ago by Edith G. Arrington, Diane M. Hall, and Howard C. Stevenson (2003) examined the experiences of African-American students in independent schools. This study (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003) is now known as the Success of African-American Students (SAAS) in Independent Schools project. The main findings reveal that encouraging black students to connect to the school community and to their social-emotional wellness promotes academic success. The findings also note that schools should deliberately teach about race and racism and acknowledge that experiences of racism are real and have negative impact on students (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003).

The researchers obtained their qualitative data by conducting one-on-one interviews with fifty-nine (59) girls and fifty (50) boys between grades six (6) and twelve (12). The researchers also conducted focus groups of six (6) to eight (8) students in grades nine (9) through twelve (12). In addition to conducting individual interviews with students and teachers, the researchers also collected two waves of quantitative data. The first set of data included survey questionnaires from 109 middle and upper school students and the second wave included 122 students: sixty-eight (68) girls and fifty-four (54) boys. In these survey questionnaires, researchers asked student participants to respond to questions about “learning satisfaction,

teacher support, school fit, and perceived quality of education" (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003, p. 2). Arrington, Hall, and Stevenson (2003) measured students' self-esteem in three (3) environments: home, school, and with peers. Though students reported above average levels of self-esteem, the researchers noted that scores for self-esteem at school were statistically significantly lower than self-esteem scores for the home environment. The researchers (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003) also explored the students' psychological sense of school membership, the extent to which students feel they belong in their school, are respected at school, and are perceived as contributing members of the school community.

Though the students responded positively to whether or not they had social/cultural opportunities (64%) or to whether or not they felt prepared for college (91%), there was a statistically significant drop in scores for school fit. For instance, seventy-five percent (75%) of participants reported that "they had to make special efforts to fit into their school communities", eighty-two percent (82%) shared that they had negative experiences at school, and forty percent (40%) felt that the school did not treat all students the same (p. 2). Arrington, Hall, and Stevenson (2003) found similar results when analyzing the PSSM scores. Though in many categories (such as having a teacher/adult they could trust or feeling that peers liked them) the scores were moderately high, some categories demonstrated very low connection between the students and the school community (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003, p. 3).

The student questionnaire listed approximately forty (40) racial events that could occur. Almost all of the student participants reported positive feelings about the Black cohort in their school and their membership in that cohort; very few reported active forms of racism such as being called a racial epithet or being exposed to racist humor; and no student reported being physically hurt in a racially-related incident (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003, p. 5). There

was, however, more variance in the way in which Black students described the role and impact of “Blackness” at their school. This variance results from the reality that Black students, or any group of students, are not monolithic - “research clearly indicates that black students will engage with race because of their unique characteristics, developmental history, and experiences across social contexts such as the family and neighborhood” (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003, p. 5). These researchers also found that race and racism grow in import and influence the older students are.

The researchers found that more than forty percent (40%) of the students experienced about half of the potential scenarios, such as “white people act surprised at their intelligence or hard work” (forty-three percent [43%]) and “feeling that it is necessary to change their speech or appearance when around white people” (Aaronson, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003, p. 5). The students who “had been racially socialized by parents and other adults so that they have coping responses ready when they encounter racism” reported that they felt stronger after incidences of racism because they had the tools to respond; the tools that students used most frequently included “speaking out” or “proving them wrong” (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003, p. 5).

The Black students interviewed in Arrington, Hall, and Stevenson’s (2003) study had varying experiences, but all did express the understanding that a healthy racial identity was crucial, especially when confronting racism (p. 1). One of the conclusions that pertains to this research study of Latin@ students is that school leaders must understand how race is addressed, or not, in schools and how students, particularly students of color, experience racism. The researchers (2003) note that educators must deliberately nurture the connection African-American students feel with the school while simultaneously acknowledging that they face particular race-related challenges. The researchers also found that seventy-five percent (75%) of

Black students described having to make special efforts to fit into their private school communities, and eighty-two percent (82%) had negative racial experiences at their schools. Finally, sixty-two percent (62%) of the students interviewed reported feelings of simply not belonging (Arrington et. al, 2003).

The researchers in this study also highlighted the influence of whiteness in NAIS schools on students of color, in this case Black students, and on the entire school community (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003, p. 3). Most students and teachers are white in NAIS schools, thus bringing and experiencing a dominant value system, white privilege, as well as capital resources to the school. This allows a majority of white students to navigate the school with more ease and expect access to positions of power (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003, p. 4). These researchers claim that students of color actually benefit from being educated in this milieu because they acquire academic and cultural capital, allowing them to access traditional markers of success in the U.S. Still, Arrington, Hall, and Stevenson (2003) recognize that this “access” comes at a price in that students of color learn, implicitly and explicitly, that who they are and where they (may) come from, is less valued by their school community and the culture of power (p. 4).

From interviews with teachers, Arrington, Hall, and Stevenson (2003) noted that school leaders do not know how to “deal with racial and cultural diversity” (p. 4). The white teachers interviewed in this study reported approaching race as being only “skin deep”, and making it difficult to combat the cumulative damage of the “myth of sameness” on all members of the school community (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003, p. 4). Many teachers reported that discrimination and racism was not a problem for Black students at their school.

Researchers Hungerford-Kresser and Amaro-Jiménez (2012) conducted a qualitative research case study focused on the early college experiences of five (5) Latin@ urban-schooled students. All participants graduated in the top ten percent (10%) of their high school class and were guaranteed admission into competitive four-year state universities. The researchers contend that understanding the college experiences of Latin@s and first generation college-goers is imperative if educators are to identify the useful strategies for navigating predominantly white learning space. The purpose of the study was to better understand these student experiences in light of their identity development. The research questions that guided this 2012 study were: 1) “What are participants’ perceptions of the process of navigating academic literacies at the university?” and 2) “How does this process impact their identity negotiations?”

Two conceptual frameworks ground this study: 1) identity literacy and 2) college readiness (2012). The researchers (2012) maintain that identities are fluid and the cultural worlds in which people participate, such as school, influences how they see themselves and define themselves. As such, first-generation college-bound Latin@ students must learn to navigate these predominantly white spaces by strategically learning the hidden curricula and social mores of the institutions (Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jimenez, 2012). The researchers expand on traditional theories of college readiness (Conley, 2010) and introduce a degree of cultural responsiveness that argues that college readiness is a fluid component of identity formation.

Hungerford-Kresser and Amaro-Jimenez (2012) employed a qualitative case study method to keep the student experiences at the center of the study. The five (5) Latin@ college freshman were chosen because all were considered “college ready”, had participated in programs to enhance college success, were in the top ten percent (10%) of their graduating class, were

first-generation college-bound students, and had been admitted to a competitive four year college. Though all were strong academic students, the state school to which all had been accepted identified each of the students as “at-risk” and enrolled them in to their bridge program for low-income and first generation college-bound students.

Data were collected over the course of participants’ first three (3) semesters in college. Data were collected through semi-structured focus group interviews and multiple semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The data were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1984). This method calls for researchers to create categories as data is reviewed and coded. An extensive review of the categories allow for the identification of themes. The researchers also examined these themes using Fairclough’s (2003, 1995) levels of discourse looking at power and knowledge in the university.

The researchers identified two (2) distinct sets of challenges: common challenges and unique challenges. Hungerford-Kresser and Amaro-Jimenez (2012) defined “common challenges” as those related to the navigation of coursework and “unique challenges” as those related to navigating social and cultural capital. The researchers chose this distinction because they are specifically related to these students’ identifications as Latin@s. The researchers found that college-readiness meant much more than a set of academic skills and that participants had to navigate a complex identity processes while adjusting to the (white) cultural institution encased in issues of power and race. Therefore, the researchers assert that urban high schools should offer opportunities to critically confront discourses of power with and for students (Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jimenez, 2012).

The main limitation of this study is the method with which participants were identified. The researchers used the academic standing (the top ten percent [10%] of their graduating class)

as a primary factor for participation. It was also unclear how the data collected from the students were triangulated.

These findings are significant because it provides a road map to one possible strategy schools can employ to improve the academic, social-emotional, and racial identity formation of students of color in schools. Schools can play a crucial role in teaching and fostering positive coping mechanism for students of color to respond to racism, and other forms of oppression. These researchers (2003) recommend that educators engage themselves and their students in candid dialogues about white privilege and active, aversive, and passive racism in their schools.

Furthermore, Arrington, Hall and Stevenson (2003) urge that the number of students of color must increase so that there is a critical mass and the possibility of voices heard from various communities across the school (p. 6). While Black students, and students of color remain underrepresented, schools should offer affinity spaces where “youth from the same or similar racial communities can come together and be emotionally reinforced within the school setting” (p. 6). It is also notable, in light of this research study, that these three (3) researchers (2003) interviewed students and engaged them in focus groups to hear their stories and include student voice. It is unclear, however, how the researchers (2003) triangulated the data. Also, it is not known how many teachers were interviewed, the ethnic identity of the teachers, and the number of schools that participated in the data.

Existing literature would indicate that all students, primarily students of colors, benefit from having peers, teachers and mentors that share similar ethnic and class backgrounds (Kane, 2003; Tatum, 2002; Umbach, 2006). In “The Only One”, Afi-Odelia Scruggs (2010) describes her experiences as a student of color within a predominantly white school who was often “the only one”. The pressure of having to “represent your race,” live up to the stereotypes of others,

and feelings of isolation can deeply impact a young person's capacity to excel in schools (Tatum, 2007).

Few studies have been conducted on the experiences of students of color within private schools where they are most notably underrepresented, but Young and Brooks (2008) researched the experiences of graduate students of color. In this qualitative study utilizing interviews and focus group, researchers noted that although all graduate students would benefit from explicit support systems, students of color need a distinct kind of support. The finding of this study recommends that support for graduate students of color includes recognizing and engaging issues of race and racism in programs, providing mentors, creating and sustaining multi-tiered and multi-purpose support networks, and establishing and sustaining formal and informal support structures. The study found that this was often a challenge as race and racism is difficult to recognize and engage because most faculties in higher education programs are white, most student populations are a majority white, and many educators are fearful of discussing race (2008). These researchers stress that the avoidance of racial discourse in schools and in teacher preparation programs are "unacceptable" and that a "difference-blind" approach does not adequately meet the needs of graduate students of color (pp. 393-396). Furthermore, faculty must move beyond simply acknowledging that inequity exists, but must be "protected and supported" in addressing those inequities (p. 397).

Based on their research, there are five (5) areas in which institutions can consider their support of graduate students color: recruitment, orientation and induction, faculty and peer mentoring, in-program experiences, and career mentorship. This study is important because although the landscape of the U.S. is changing, the institutions preparing teachers are not being culturally responsive to their student populations, nor to the millions of students in U.S. schools.

This study highlights that a color-blind approach and general “best practices” will not meet the needs of students from traditionally under-represented backgrounds.

Similarly, Dr. Beverly Tatum (1997) also contributed to the importance of a cohort that could support minority student ethnic identity formation. Tatum (1997) analyzed the identity formation process for African-American adolescents. She employed “psychology of Nigrescence” for her own exploration of racial identity: 1) pre-encounter, 2) encounter, 3) immersion/emersion, 4) internalization, and 5) internalization/ commitment. Tatum (1997) discussed the impact of the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO) program and the Student Efficacy Training (SET) introduced in a Boston, MA suburb in an effort to support African-American students who were struggling academically. The SET required African-American students to meet together once a day with two faculty members. The SET was a designated safe, affinity place only for African-American/Black students. Tatum found that these spaces countered the development of “oppositional identities” that are a response to Black children being exposed and aware of the impact of racism on racial identity and their personal future. Tatum (1997) concludes, “[educators] need to provide adolescents with identity-affirming experiences and information about their own cultural groups, but they sometimes flounder because this information has not been part of their own education” (p. 74).

Tatum’s (1997) study is important because she observed African-American students over time and developed a relationship with the participating METCO students within the SET program. The longevity of this study contributed to the emergence of more authentic stories that were then coupled with Tatum’s first-hand experiences as a college professor. This study demonstrates the benefits of qualitative studies in examining racial dynamics within the U.S.

In many ways, independent schools continue to manifest and perpetuate racial oppression through severe underrepresentation at all levels of the school structure. John Ogbu's (1998) study was foundational to the Kane and Orsini (2003) study with respect to the need to provide students of color with role models that are reflective of whom they are. Black students act out against the culture of power, whiteness, and are often reprimanded for their behavior. Students then see the institution as rejecting who they are. This can be complex for Black students with few African-American or Black role models to emulate who have both achieved academic success without “[giving] up one’s minority identity” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 2).

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) explore the notion of “acting white” for marginalized Black students. Ogbu and Simons (1998) went on to research the difference in experiences for students from distinct ethnic and racial backgrounds. In this mixed-method study, John Ogbu (1998) strived to explain the reasons why students from particular minority groups perform better than students from other minority backgrounds in their schooling. Ogbu and Simons (1998) found that although cultural and language differences may contribute to academic success in schools, the history of institutional racism and discrimination in society plays a large role in the ways in which minority students and their families experience schooling.

John Ogbu's considerable years of research have led him to differentiate between minority groups: voluntary and involuntary minorities. Ogbu and Simons (1998) stress that academic success in school is not a result of any group's genetic superiority or inferiority and argue that although members of distinct minority groups should be treated as individuals, they have noted patterns of behavioral response to schooling in the United States. In general, voluntary minorities perform better in schools than do members from involuntary minority groups due to differences in expectation, point of view, and belief in the “American Dream.”

Ogbu argues that voluntary minorities immigrated to the United States with hopes and the expectation of a better life. Some voluntary minorities include recent immigrants from various Asian countries and Central America. Involuntary minority groups include African-American, Native Americans, and Mexican-Americans. The conditions in the U.S. essentially marginalized them and their collective experiences leave them less hopeful. Ogbu coined this the Cultural Ecological Theory.

John Ogbu (1998) hopes that the Cultural Ecological Theory will aid teachers and administrators to better understand why a student and/or their family may react or respond to an experience in school in a particular manner (p. 158). In no way does this theory explain the behaviors of all members of a single racial or ethnic group, as all teachers and administrators should see each child as an individual, yet, it can be helpful in shedding light on patterns of institutional racism and hegemony that may negatively affect a student's academic performance, particularly in predominantly white spaces.

Ogbu and Simon's (1998) major finding and/or recommendation is for teachers and school administrators to build trust with students and their families by assuring them they have their best interests in mind, demonstrating a belief that the student can succeed, having an authentic desire for the student to succeed, and explicitly expressing interest in and honor for the student's cultural, ethnic, and linguistic background. Above all, a teacher must foster a trusting relationship with students (p. 180). John Ogbu's (1998) Cultural Ecological Theory can help educators to better respond to the powerful historical and societal forces of racism and discrimination. Ogbu (1998) recommends that schools make their curricula culturally relevant and multi-culturally inclusive because, "involuntary minorities see the curriculum as an attempt

to impose white culture on them...[leading] them to question the curriculum for not including information about their minority history and experiences" (Ogbu, 2008, p. 178).

Fryer's (2006) longitudinal study also examined the notion of "acting white" (Ogbu, 1986). The 1984 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health provided the data of the representative sample, including more than 90,000 students between seventh (7th) and twelfth (12th) grades. Fryer's (2006) study moved beyond students' own self-reporting of school popularity and measured the number of times other students within the same school named an individual "a friend." The findings surfaced that the effects of "acting white" were real and occurred more often when Black students comprised less than 20% of the student population. In public schools, Black and Hispanic students' popularity declined as their GPA increased. For boys of color the negative social ramifications for higher grades were seen at an even lower GPA. Fryer (2006) did not find this difference within the private sector and noted that, "attending a private school [has] quite large benefits for African-Americans" (p. 57). An important follow-up to this study would be to understand why a difference existed for African-American boys in the private sector even though they remain a significant minority (under 20%).

These conclusions also support Crosnoe's (2005) findings that Latin@ students in private schools, with several Latin@ role models, achieved the highest academic success. Crosnoe conducted a mixed-method study with a large sample of Latin@ students (2,602 students from 69 high schools). Crosnoe collected both qualitative and quantitative data. A total of 90,000 students completed surveys for the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health in 1994, but a representative sample of 2,602 students was used for this study. In addition, 112 parents and administrators were interviewed and census data was collected.

Crosnoe found that “...in schools with more Hispanic teachers, Hispanic students were more likely to be found in the high-achieving, strongly oriented profile than in the high-achieving, moderately oriented profile” (p. 579). The sample of Latin@ students was divided into sub-groups: country of origin, relationship to immigration (first, second, or third generation), public or private school, large or small school, high or low community expectations, and the level of representation of other Latin@s in the adult and student body. Crosnoe measured socio-economic status and parent education levels as well.

Crosnoe (2005) described Latin@ students in this study as fitting in to one (1) of four (4) profiles. Crosnoe (2005) identified four (4) student profiles: students with simultaneously high levels of achievement and school orientation; students with simultaneously low levels of achievement and school orientation; students whose high achievement is not matched by a commensurate level of school orientation; and students who maintain a high level of school orientation despite a relatively lower level of academic achievement (p. 564). Crosnoe defined school orientation as the level of involvement a student has in school along with their attitude toward school and schooling. Crosnoe (2005) found that U.S. born Mexican-American youth are most at-risk and warrant the most attention and resources. Crosnoe (2005) also discovered that students from two (2) parent homes fare better, while Latin@s at schools with high populations of Latin@ adults and students also had positive results.

In the end, Crosnoe (2005) challenged the practice of identifying Latin@ students as “at-risk” and focused on opportunities for success. He urged educators and policy-makers to acknowledge that some pockets within the Latin@ community are doing quite well and that by identifying the strengths all students bring to the table, schools can better serve more students. Crosnoe’s (2005) study appropriately examined the many variables that may impact academic

achievement and social adjustment of Latin@ youth. Unfortunately, a critique of this study is that students' primary language was not considered because Adolescent Health does not include this variable in its survey. Given that language is often a barrier for Latin@ youth, it would have provided an important insight to this study.

In 2003, the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education Foundation, Inc. (JBHE Foundation) completed the second portion of a quantitative study examining the level of African-American/Black representation at twenty (20) of the nation's most prestigious boarding schools. The foundation developed a survey for twenty (20) elite independent boarding schools and sought out data in 1999 and 2003. The research group found that African-American/Black student population was as high as 12.2 % at St. Andrew's School (Delaware) and as low as 4.9% at the Thatcher School (California). Of the twenty (20) participating schools, only 5% reported African-American/Black enrollment over 8%. The researchers found that between 1999 and 2003, African-American/Black enrollment increased by 9.7%. The JBHE Foundation, Inc. also noted that the number of African-American/Black faculty continues to grow in the most elite private independent schools, though it is important to note that some schools did not employ a single African-American/Black faculty (2003). This is an important study and yet, a critique is that this data is not paired with qualitative interviews. A mixed-method approach may shed more light on the significance and impact of African-American/Black representation on students, faculty, staff, school culture, and families.

Aronson and Steele (1999) conducted an important mixed method study on mostly sophomore students at Stanford University. This research study found that ethnic minority students in predominantly white learning spaces experience higher levels of stress due to what Claude Steele (2003) identifies as "stereotype threat." They found that Black college students

might perform less well than their white peers due to their isolation. Also, underrepresented students in predominantly white spaces look to additional support structures and/or adults who share the same background (Umbach, 2006).

“Stereotype threat” (2003) had a significant effect on the ways in which Black undergraduate students at Stanford University performed on ability tests. The researchers also found that Black students from middle class backgrounds were more likely to be impacted by “stereotype threat” than were students from lower socio-economic classes. Though being from the middle class may have afforded some Black students more opportunities to be better prepared academically and socially at Stanford University, some of the students from upwardly mobile backgrounds are more invested and interested in being embraced by the dominant white culture of power. “A person has to care about a domain in order to be disturbed by the prospect of being stereotyped in it” (Steele, 1999, p. 6). In this way, those students are more likely to dis-identify with all things “not white” and feel even more rejected from the white majority when made to feel isolated or different.

The researchers found that each time Black students were told the test measured ability, they performed less well than when they were not told this. Researchers noted that when Black students were under “stereotype threat,” they “tried too hard” and became inefficient as they took the standardized test (Steele, 1999, p 6). Researchers believe that what Black students and other students of color need to not only hear, but see in action, is that negative stereotypes about them do not need to determine their academic lives. For instance, the researchers also tested whether or not there was a racial divide between teachers and students. They found that when standards were clear, high, measureable, and attainable, Black students trusted the feedback and performed well. Researchers also noted that students from lower socioeconomic classes were not only

impacted by “stereotype threat,” it became conflated with other challenges, such as sufficient preparation and lack of identification with school achievement. The researchers concluded that clearly, different student populations need distinct pedagogies and approaches.

Aronson and Steele (1999) encourage school leaders to improve the level of racial trust experienced by students of color on predominantly white campuses. When students who are admitted to “elite” institutions come in with acceptable scores, but without a cohort to share experiences, they can feel isolated and unworthy. Thus, though it seems as if all they need is confidence, what they need to know is that the institution believes in them. Again, this is reflected in Scruggs (2010) article when Jarrod Swartz, Executive Director of Just Communities, says that underrepresented students of color constantly ask this question, “Do I belong here? Do I belong in this class?” (p. 2)

To combat these feelings, Ladson-Billings (1995) urges teachers to “show the students that the teacher recognizes and honors their cultural and personal experiences and will help make school a less alien place” (p. 180). Ladson-Billings’ (1995) qualitative, five (5) year longitudinal and ethnographic study examined the classroom practices that may impact academic achievement of African-American students. The researcher reminds us that teachers striving to meet the needs of students from non-dominant groups are simply practicing “good teaching” (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) demonstrates that meeting the needs of students who do not fit the norm of the culture of power is imperative in ensuring overall student success. Teachers must understand that authentically connecting with African Americans and other students of color will lead to higher levels of success. All teachers, of any ethnic or cultural background, can connect with students from groups different from their own if they

practice culturally relevant pedagogy, a “pedagogy of opposition not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment” (p. 160).

By normalizing the experiences of white, middle class children within the curricula and in the classroom, schools miss the opportunity to adequately prepare students of color for higher education and the possibility of upward social mobility (Yosso, 2002). By accepting and perpetuating the notion that white is the norm and the bar by which everything is to be measured, educators fail to really see, hear, understand, and tend to the needs of students of color who often have life experiences quite distinct from the middle class, white dominant group (Tatum, 2007). Another positive outcome of having a student body, faculty, and leadership that is ethnically representative of all students is that white children will have their internalized stereotypes challenged (Tatum, 2007).

In summary, Ortiz and Jani (2010) stress that employing CRT goes beyond hiring adults of color, enrolling ethnic minority students, or offering a single class where multiculturalism will be covered. Change must be systemic. The dynamic of a predominantly white staff with little formal training in race, racism, bias, multicultural education, and culturally relevant pedagogy, working with a growing student of color population contributes to the normalization of whiteness and categorizes anything non-white as “diverse” and deviating from the “norm” (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Students of color thrive when they are able to learn with, from and be mentored by a community with whom they can connect (Noguera, 2009).

**Summary.** These research studies demonstrate the positive impact of a critical mass of students of color and also adults in a school. It is important for all students to have “windows” to other cultures, languages, and backgrounds so that they can more effectively engage with and build cross-cultural communities. It is equally important for students (and adults) to have

“mirrors” in which they can see themselves and feel authentically like there is a place for them at their particular school. If students do not feel as if they belong or if there are not examples of people with similar experiences successfully navigating the waters of independent schools, self-doubt, fear, and loneliness can overcome students and adults alike.

Furthermore, when students’ immutable characteristics (such as racial and ethnic identity) are not named as influential in their daily experiences and held close by adults in schools, students can become confused about the nature of race and racism in the world. Students and adults of color have daily experiences at school that seem to be connected to their race, but when school officials and their (predominantly) white peers negate this reality, students can feel even more alone. Micro-aggressions are real and the denial of these interactions as “race-based” can be hurtful and, at times, debilitating.

This dynamic is known as “gas-lighting.” The term “gas-lighting” is taken from a play, “Angel Street,” written by Patrick Hamilton in 1938. The premise of the play is that a man is trying to drive his wife mad by having her believe that what she is experiencing is not actually real. This is a form of mental abuse in which a person manipulates information and creates doubt in the mind of the victim. For instance, people of color experience micro-aggressions on a daily basis. Because the impact of these micro-aggressions (and in many instances, macro-aggressions) are not easily identified or understood (and in some cases ignored or denied) by those in the dominant majority, they can easily be dismissed. The image of a burning cross, a Klan member, or great numbers of Mexicans being deported during the Great Depression are what many identify as “racism”, so if there is no evidence of “violence”, racism is challenging for many to see, name, and respond to. As such, people of color in independent schools must continue to engage and empower one another in order to survive and thrive. Ethnic affinity

groups, conferences built to foster healthy identities and solidarity, and structural opportunities for partnership with allies are important to ensure sustainability within this under-represented population. Transformation will be difficult, but when done in a collective, the burden and labor can be shared.

These studies demonstrate that though there is significant energy and effort in schools to “diversify” (ethnically and racially), there remains a lack of critical exploration and acceptance as to why schools have been, and continue to be, overwhelmingly white. Without a conscious understanding of the historical patterns of exclusion and oppression that inform our current reality, there is little hope for transformation.

### **Pre-Service Coursework**

Schools of education are responsible for developing educators that can respond to inequities, yet in many ways, schools continue to “deny the politics of racism, sexism, heterosexism...that inform how and what we teach” (hooks, 1994, p. 37). Many school leaders believe willfully in good intentions and any discussion that is explicitly about race and historical practices of exclusion is often avoided. The goal of this research study, based in CRT, is to lift the veil of colorblindness and the myth of a post-racial society.

This section of the literature review begins with a synthesis of research conducted primarily within the last decade, calling for teacher and administrator credentialing programs to better prepare educators to deliberately respond to growing student diversity, as well as the need for inclusive curricula and school cultures. Colleges and universities have the influence to develop or improve meaningful offerings and training for pre-service teachers and educational leaders in equity education if they are to play a role in combatting deficit thinking, marginalization, and systemic oppression of historically underrepresented students. If leaders

are not being trained to lead multicultural, equitable, and just schools, how can they foster and develop a social justice lens in their students? This research uncovers the need for universities and credential programs to provide more meaningful and comprehensive training in multicultural education and social justice frameworks.

Pre-service and continued professional development in multicultural education and cultural humility are important for teachers as the student population continues to grow with students who identify as “of color”. Bolman and Deal (2008) assert that if “an [organization] devalues certain groups, word tends to get out and alienate customers” (p. 158). The more explicit each teacher, educational leader, and school is about its commitment to all students, social justice, and practicing multicultural leadership, the more culturally proficient educators will be drawn in and stay on board. Each school must know what it wants and be explicit about cultural competence and multicultural education expectations throughout the hiring process. These studies also demonstrate that it is important to have general professional development and appropriate training for employees to develop and strengthen their capacity to manage challenging topics of race, class, religion, and sexuality within and beyond their classrooms.

Gorski and Goodman (2012) examined the extent to which current “multicultural” offerings within teacher education programs focused on race and racism in relation to other immutable identifiers that have social significance. The essential question was, “Is there a hierarchy of oppression in multicultural teacher education (MTE) coursework?” Gorski and Goodman’s (2012) study explored the time and depth that forty-one (41) courses from teacher education programs from across the country allocated to race and other marginalized political markers such as gender identity, sexuality, and religion. The forty-one (41) course syllabi were collected from an earlier study gathered by Gorski in 2009. Gorski and Goodman (2012) not

only examined the forty-one (41) course syllabi, they collected survey results from former or current instructors of these multicultural courses. The majority of participants were female (71.8%), white (71%), and heterosexual 76.7%.

Gorski and Goodman (2012) found that the majority of courses focused significantly more time and attention on race and racism (21.67 % of class time). Other forms of oppression were allocated less time: gender and sexism (7.16%), sexual orientation (3.76%), class (3.61%), language (3.55%), physical (dis)ability (2.20%), and religion (1.91%). Furthermore, 4.5% of syllabi had no mention of race while up to 70% neglected religion, for instance. This study is important in that it not only calls on schools of education to improve the efficacy in preparing teachers and school leaders for a diverse student body, it recognizes that though race and ethnicity remain important identifiers, they cannot and should not be understood in a vacuum (Gorski & Goodman, 2012). This study is also essential in demonstrating that schools of education are still failing to prepare pre-service teachers and leaders for an increasingly diverse student population. This study is critical because it urges educators to not departmentalize identifiers such as race, but instead, focus on the intersectionality of identity (Gorski & Goodman, 2012). In other words, it is necessary to examine immutable identifiers, such as race, in the context of other identifiers and potential stressors.

Futrell, Gomez, and Bedden's (2011) article cited figures from the 1999 National Center for Education Statistics that further demonstrates the lack of preparation provided for future teacher leaders. Findings suggested that 80% of teachers were not prepared for an ethnically diverse classroom and 60% of deans in schools of education suggested that their programs were not adequately preparing teachers to serve English as a Second Language (ESL) and ethnic minority students.

Cioochelli and Cho (2007) explored the efficacy of the Fordham University Initial Teacher Education Program (ITE) in preparing students to teach in multicultural settings. The researchers attempted to answer whether or not Fordham's ITE program is successful in preparing students to effectively meet the needs of racially and ethnically diverse student populations. Researchers conducted two surveys of the students within one cohort and included forty-one (41) white students and twenty (20) students of color.

Fordham University had never assessed whether or not its efforts were resulting in more culturally responsive teaching by their graduates as a result of the thirty-nine (39) units program. The participants in the study completed a pre- and post-test. There was an assumption that the students of color in the program entered with some level of cultural sensitivity given their own racial and ethnic backgrounds. The researchers found that both white and of color students already had some level of sensitivity to cultural diversity, but that the white students experienced more significant change in attitude than did the students of color (Cioochelli & Cho, 2007).

Cioochelli and Cho (2007) call for teacher education programs to make deliberate efforts to ensure that students are critically questioning their assumptions and biases about students, communities, and the teaching and learning relationship. Providing beginning teachers with the space to learn about cultures distinct from their own and teaching them about the historical oppression experienced by various groups may give them the skill set to more effectively work in multicultural settings (Cioochello & Cho, 2007). This research study would have benefitted from observing students navigating culturally diverse classrooms and responding to the various needs of students.

To conclude, Murray's (2010) article on social justice education also urges, "teacher education programs [restructure] to ensure that diverse populations are represented" so that

students can develop their social justice lens (p. 50). As students in educational leadership programs, there is little to no opportunity to examine their own consciousness and connect it to their practice (Murray, 2010). When school leaders are invited to explore their own social locations, be self-reflective about their own attitudes and beliefs, and practice humility in safe settings, “the result is an arena for transformative learning and action” (Murray, 2010, p. 49).

Schools of education are responsible for preparing educators (teachers, counselors, administrators) to meet the needs of all students (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Hatwood, Gomez, & Bedden, 2003; Kose, 2009; Tatum, 2012). These studies show that many teacher preparation programs do not adequately prepare teachers and teacher leaders to effectively respond to the needs of the increasingly diverse student population (Cioochelli & Cho, 2011; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Parker & Villapando, 2007). Again, it is the system that must be examined with a critical lens for transformational and systemic change to occur.

### **Equity and Inclusion Efforts in Schools**

In 1983, Audre Lorde wrote, “there is no hierarchy of oppression” - no one identity or form of oppression outdoes another. For instance, trying to argue that sexism is worse than racism, but less problematic than homophobia, is in fact also a form of oppression and stunts forward movement. Though many in the field of multicultural education would agree with this assertion, race and ethnicity continue to dominate the dialogue (Nieto, 2002; Gorski, 2010, 2012).

In the past thirty (30) years, multicultural education has been defined in a number of ways. An early advocate of multiculturalism, Sonia Nieto (1992) defines multicultural education as a systemic approach to the concept of schooling, teaching, and behaving with all students and

school constituents for the purpose of eradicating racism and all other forms of oppression. In this way, schools can foster spaces where all students, regardless of their immutable characteristics, can feel seen, challenged, and held. This requires adults in school communities to be culturally competent and culturally humble. Gary Howard (2006) defines cultural competence as “the will and the ability to form authentic relationships across difference.”

Lisa Delpit (1995) was an early and influential contributor to the dialogue around multicultural education. Delpit (1995) challenged the invisible, yet pervasive, “culture of power” that continues to serve as a barrier for students of color to experience academic success (p. 24). Delpit (1995) defined the “culture of power” as the invisible codes and rules that provide access to power and reflect the values and practices of those already in power (white people). Students who are not part of the dominant white group must have these invisible codes shared with them in order to access power and social mobility. Those already in the dominant white culture of power are less likely to acknowledge the “culture of power”, while those with less or no power are very aware of the existence of this “culture of power” (Delpit, 1995). Delpit (1995) asserts that the predominantly white teaching body must explicitly acknowledge the existence of a “[white] culture of power”, and they must name and teach this “culture of power” to actively and deliberately include historically marginalized groups.

**Leading equity efforts.** Cooper’s (2009) qualitative study is important because it investigated “how educational leaders can promote equity-oriented reform that would strengthen demographically changing school communities” (p. 702). Cooper conducted close to forty (40) semi-structured interviews with three principals, as well as numerous faculty, staff, and parents. He also engaged in ethnographic observations and collected relevant school artifacts. In Cooper’s qualitative comparative case study of two southern elementary schools (one semi-rural

and the other rural) and their three principals, he found that “educational leaders need better preparation and encouragement to be accountable for serving a diverse and changing public” (p. 695).

Cooper noted that the three (3) participating principals all identify as “equity-oriented leaders” but have “not adequately addressed the cultural tensions and separatist politics that marginalize ethnic and linguistic minority students” (p. 695). The three (3) principals reported having minimal pre-service multicultural training and one expected her new doctoral program to focus on issues of “diversity and equity” (Cooper, p. 711).

Cooper’s study brings to light the misguided multicultural education efforts of a white, female principal from a semi-rural school with a high number of Latin@ and Black students and students receiving free and reduced-fee lunch. She embraces the “celebratory approach to multicultural education...rather than a more critical approach that integrates culturally relevant curriculum and addresses power, privilege, and agency” (Cooper, p. 705). This superficial approach to the growing diversity in her school kept the principal focused on ensuring that each class had at least one Black student in it as opposed to including diversity in the school’s three (3) year strategic plan (Cooper, 2009). Similarly, Cooper (2009) found that the other white female principal espoused equity-oriented ideals though she was not able recognize her own cultural biases toward Latin@ students in her school. The third principal, a Black female, communicated “biases that hinge on racist and anti-immigrant schools of thought and on scripts that wholly conceptualize African-Americans and Latin@s as being deviant, threatening, and disruptive” (Cooper, p. 716). None of the three (3) principals have moved beyond an understanding of multicultural education that merely celebrates diversity, and as such, are not

addressing institutionally supported inequities and a community stratified along ethnic and racial lines (Cooper, 2009).

Cooper's (2009) research leads him to believe that school leaders "lack sufficient understanding of cultural biases and social tensions" that can derail socially just personal intentions (pg. 717). Cooper (2009) quotes Marshall (2004) in his criticism of educational preparation programs in which "equity concerns are given lip service," resulting in "educational leaders often lack[ing] the preparation and support needed to significantly oppose the status quo" (Marshall, 2004, as quoted by Cooper (2009), p. 697). This study also demonstrates the effectiveness of in-depth interviews and observations. Though Cooper conducted over forty (40) interviews, the sample size of three (3) is extremely small and this sample size should be increased for further study.

Romney, Ferron, and Hill (2007) conducted a quantitative study measuring the success of "diversity directors" within NAIS schools. The study focused on NAIS schools in Eastern Connecticut that were also members of SPHERE, a consortium of ten (10) schools committed to improving diversity within member schools. The researchers developed an online questionnaire for thirty (30) individuals (ten [10] diversity leaders, ten [10] heads of schools, and ten [10] deans of faculty from SPHERE member schools). The researchers aimed to conduct a needs assessment of SPHERE, and a pilot research study exploring the various characteristics that may account for effective diversity leadership in private independent schools. The survey asked for specific information from diversity leaders (such as years in the position, activities in and out of school, skill set and personal definitions of diversity). The survey also requested information about the participating school's definition of diversity, diversity priorities, level(s) of

institutional commitment to diversity, and movement from priorities to action in their open-ended question portion.

The findings from Romney, Ferron, and Hill's (2008) study demonstrate that shared and inclusive definitions of diversity positively correlated with higher perceived success rating of the diversity leaders. Schools that rated their diversity director as more "successful" also demonstrated more alignment in the school's institutional diversity priorities. This quantitative study found that part-time directors of diversity were less successful than full-time directors, due to lack of time and competing priorities. Overall, the research showed that those "diversity directors" with titles of "Dean" or "Director" were perceived as more effective than those with "coordinator" titles. The findings from Romney, Ferron, and Hill also show that diversity directors that are perceived as more "successful" enjoy a trusting relationship with their direct supervisor, have six (6) to 10 (ten) years of experience in the field, and have served as a teacher and/or division head. Those with one (1) to two (2) years less experience were rated "moderately unsuccessful." When asked what were the most important skills for "successful" diversity directors, "conflict management," "group facilitation", and "trust-building" were most cited by the participants.

The main limitation of this study is the low number of participating schools and respondents. The researchers noted that a large-scale, longitudinal study that includes students and families is needed to get a better understanding of the state of diversity and multicultural education work in private independent schools across the country. Romney, Ferron, and Hill (2008) acknowledge that exploring the gender and racial identity of diversity directors could be beneficial. The leadership of principals and heads of school is paramount, along with the work

of diversity leaders. Yet, classroom teachers hold a significant level of influence in furthering equity and inclusion in schools.

McCray and Beachum (2010) researched how some personal factors, specifically gender and race, influenced high school principals' perceptions of multicultural education as a theory. The researchers developed a survey that included a four-point Likert-type scale to examine the role of race and gender identity for 126 participants in a southeastern state of the United States. The researchers distributed 302 surveys and the response rate was forty-two percent (42%). After conducting an ANOVA test, researchers did not find any statistical differences due to race or ethnic identity, but there was a statistical difference between gender identities ( $F_1, 124 = 5.436, p < .05$ ). The researchers found that male principals placed a higher value on the importance of multicultural education for all students. The researchers also noted that male principals had more years of experience as the Pearson's Product Moment correlation data demonstrated ( $r = -.233, p < .01$ , two tailed). It is unclear, however, whether gender identity or years of experience were the cause of such a statistically significant difference between male and female principals.

McCray and Beachum employed Fernandez's (1996) definition of multicultural education: "the belief that multicultural education is for all students, elevates students' self-esteem, is embedded in cultural pluralism, and recognizes the social, political, and economic community and societal constructs of students of color" (p. 1). McCray and Beachum also used Gordon's (1978) definition of cultural pluralism: "giving and taking, and more importantly, the sharing of and mutual respect for ideas, customs, and values" (p. 3). Given these two definitions, the researchers found that there are four ways in which school leaders misconstrue multicultural education: 1) missionary approach - "minority" students are deficient and need to be "brought up

to speed with mainstream culture”, 2) minstrel approach – the non-white, minority cultures are presented in a flat, one-dimensional manner, doing nothing to alter the status quo, 3) tolerance approach – students are taught that diversity should be tolerated, as opposed to authentically revered and valued, and 4) color blindness and “cultural tourism” – dilution of the goals and potential of multicultural education and cultural pluralism (pp. 3-4).

The result of McCray and Beachum’s (2010) quantitative study urges schools of education and other professional development programs to understand and address the intersection between personal characteristics of rising leaders and how they do or do not relate to multicultural education in schools. The authors assert that as the United States increases its level of ethnic and racial diversity, it is imperative that school leaders possess the skills necessary to equitably meet the needs of all students and not practice misguided notions of multicultural education. The researchers urge schools of education and other professional development programs to understand and address the intersection between immutable characteristics (identity) of rising leaders and how they do or do not relate to multicultural education within their schools.

One critique of this study is the assertion that when “women and other minority groups began to rigorously examine the content of what was being taught in schools, they discovered that many aspects of what they considered important to their respective group was not part of the learning experience” (p. 2). This point is a monumental oversimplification as women and other minority groups did not have to “discover” this. This reality has been widely known and accepted, but it was not until women and other minorities acquired positions of power and influence, that they were able to publicly denounce and challenge the blatant omissions that would benefit all students, not simply those from their “respective groups” (p. 2).

**Teacher efficacy.** Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) has researched multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy for over two (2) decades and asserts that meeting the needs of students who do not fit the norm of the culture of power is imperative in ensuring student success. Ladson-Billings' seminal study on culturally relevant pedagogy continues to greatly inform the educational landscape. Her three (3) year qualitative longitudinal study explored the various factors that allowed for African-American student success in the classroom. She combined classroom observations with in-depth individual and group ethnographic interviews. She also gathered test score results as well as information from parents, guardians, and school leaders for trustworthiness. Her study included eight (8) teacher participants who primarily taught African-American students and who demonstrated low rates of discipline referrals and high attendance rates, and considered standardized test scores as part of her measures for student success. The teachers were first recommended as potential participants by African-American parents and further recommended by the principal because of their proven demand and reinforcement for academic excellence in all their students.

The study found that what most contributed to a teacher's efficacy was their philosophy and purpose for teaching, as well as their self-concept as a teacher. All of the participants saw their work as a "calling" and actively chose to work with a low-income and majority African-American student population. The teachers had in common the belief that all students were not only learners, but teachers as well. The teachers were responsive to the students and used their existing knowledge as a springboard for learning in the classroom, and did not simply rely on state curriculum standards. The teachers deliberately attempted to forge relationships with all of the students by getting to know each one as an individual.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) urges teachers to “show the students that [they] recognize and honor their cultural and personal experiences and will help make school a less alien place” (p. 180). Ladson-Billings stresses that striving to meet the needs of students from non-dominant groups is simply good teaching and imperative to student success. All teachers, of any ethnic or cultural background, can connect with students from groups different from their own if they practice culturally relevant pedagogy. As a result of this study, Ladson-Billings (1995) also called for “inserting culture into the education” and incorporating students’ home language in to the classroom (p. 1). This means, prioritizing what the students already know and the skills they bring to the classroom from their own home cultures.

This 1995 landmark study was strong because it combined qualitative and quantitative data, included data from a variety of sources (students, parents/guardians, teachers, school leaders), and also went beyond a single snap-shot through a longitudinal study. The study clearly demonstrated that teachers who employ culturally responsive teaching understand that culture (race, ethnicity, language, socio-economic status) is foundational to learning and social transformation.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) urges teachers to “show the students that the teacher recognizes and honors their cultural and personal experiences and will help make school a less alien place” (p. 180). Ladson-Billings stresses that striving to meet the needs of students from non-dominant groups is simply good teaching and imperative to student success. The fact that some students do not feel as if teachers are authentically connecting with them is tragic.

Dr. Beverly Tatum followed up her seminal book, *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* (2003) with *Can we talk about race? And other conversations in an era of school re-segregation* (2007). Tatum (2007) conducted a two (2) year demonstration

project funded by the Carnegie Association. Tatum (2007) led the teachers in examining their feelings toward those of other racial and/or ethnic groups, developing anti-racist curriculum, and exploring practices that benefitted and contributed to educational achievement for all students. The project sought to explore the combined effects of interventions for teachers, parents, and students in a district with a growing student of color population.

The project was conducted in a small northeastern school district where the teaching population was 99.9% white. At the time of the study, the percentage of students of color was twenty-four percent (24%). The project had three (3) components including an after school cultural identity program for middle school students, a series of parent education workshops, and professional development for teachers, but this book focused on the professional development portion of the project.

The two (2) year study included eighty-three (83) educators. Each semester, twenty-four (24) teachers voluntarily participated in the program. Of the eighty-three (83) participants, eighty-five percent (85%) of the teachers identified as white and the other fifteen percent (15%) as of color. In two (2) of the four (4) semesters, all of the participants were white. The teachers who self-identified as “of color”, also self-identified as Latin@. The participating Latin@ teachers were from a district close by and were invited to participate in the study only if there was space. Most of the participants, sixty-two percent (62%), were teachers or specialists in elementary school while nineteen percent (19%) worked with high school students and sixteen percent (16%) worked with students in middle school. Administrators within the district made up five percent (5%) of the participants. The median number of years teaching was fourteen (14). Tatum’s (2007) assumptions were that in order to develop competence that supports

positive student racial identities, teachers must actively examine their own racial identities and biases first.

The course Tatum (2007) developed aimed at supporting teachers to “recognize the personal, cultural, and institutional manifestations of racism and to become more proactive in response to racism within their school settings” (p. 72). The participants were asked to apply their learning from the course. Dr. Tatum (2007) analyzed fifty-nine (59) action plans and these plans ranged from making the curriculum more inclusive of people of color (fifty-six percent [56%]) to exploring anti-racist behaviors (thirty-percent [30%]). Some teachers created bibliographies of multicultural books while others focused their attention on individual students of color in their classrooms.

Tatum (2007) found that many participants realized that “false assumptions that were based on internalized stereotypical generalizations regarding people of color...undermined [teaching]” (p. 75). One teacher reflected on the fact that “students need to know that [social inequities] are real and apparent within our school and in our community” (p. 75). Some Latin@ participants conducted a study exploring disciplinary actions against white and Puerto Rican students. Though the teachers found that there was a pattern of disproportionately harsher punishments for Puerto Rican students, those teachers did not share the findings with the principal. Another participant reported working with students to increase their sense of empowerment. Tatum (2007) reported that participants shared a sense of responsibility to address inequity in their classrooms and schools, along with a desire to work with and for the students of color. One teacher wrote, “I was insensitive...and blind to the effects of racism...the White privilege audit...helped to open my eyes and shock me into taking some positive concrete steps toward combatting racist attitudes in my daily life” (p. 78).

While Tatum (2007) claims that there was no impact on larger systems since this was only a two (2) year demonstration project, the teacher feedback evidenced that there was a significant impact on individual teaching practices. Tatum also asserts that anti-racist professional development is most effective when it is voluntary as this can motivate and inspire educators who would not otherwise be interested.

Ingalls, Hammond, Dupoux, and Baeza (2006) conducted a qualitative study with seven (7) teachers from a rural southwestern, American Indian Apache reservation school on the importance of culturally responsive teaching. The researchers utilized a focus group model and coupled those with observations collected by the teachers and analyzed by the researchers. They analyzed reflections written by the teachers and developed a folk taxonomy of categories where there is a distinction between pervasive mainstream pedagogical practices and those of this Native American tribe. The five (5) areas of note included: Learning Styles; Reflective Learning; Cooperative Learning; Non-Verbal Learning; and Behavior Modification Learning (Ingalls, Hammond, Dupoux, & Baeza 2006). The ways in which these differences play out inform educator pedagogy when working with American Indian groups (and other ethnic/cultural minorities).

All teachers must learn the culture of American Indian students and families and authentically embrace each student's cultural background (Ingalls, Hammond, Dupoux, & Baeza 2006). This requires that teachers adjust their pedagogy to meet the needs of each student, "These strategies can enrich the education of the American Indian population and alleviate fears that relate to loss of group identity, alienation, and anxiety during the learning process" (Ingalls, Hammond, Dupoux, & Baeza, 2006). The authors urge educators to employ culturally sensitive teaching practices because they believe that American Indian culture and cultural values are

significantly distinct from mainstream U.S. values. Due to this, it is important to practice culturally responsive teaching to combat the high levels of referrals and high school push-outs that continue to plague the Native American population.

The concerning issue and major point for readers to consider is that the educational system appears to have done very little to change the manner in which teachers interact with American Indian students and their families. The success rate for a large segment of American Indian children in rural schools will continue to reproduce the same disturbing results: high drop-out rates, low graduation rates, and a disproportionate over-representation of American Indian students in special education programs. This is a critical issue for rural schools serving this population and their families. Culturally unresponsive teaching practices continue to be used in many schools. Thus, training agencies, in-service delivery, and other teacher preparation programs should focus on using the solutions to the commonly known problems discussed in this article.

**Summary.** From a CRT perspective, schools continue to manifest and perpetuate national inequities because teachers and school leaders have not developed a strong social justice lens and do not know how to effectively lead multicultural organizational change. Because the majority of teachers in the United States continue to overwhelming identify as “white” (more than ninety percent [90%]) and a growing number of school age children identify as “of color”, there is a dearth of school leaders able to effectively respond to ethnic and cultural diversity. It is clear that although all school staff and faculty can be integral in effecting change within a school, division heads and principals are most capable of transforming a school culture through the implementation of policy, a thorough critique of the curriculum and pedagogical practices, as

well as strengthening the capacity for all members of the school community to see, name, and act upon oppression in the interest of a more just and equitable school and world.

Many of the frameworks employed by multicultural and diversity programs (as described in this literature review) aim at ensuring white students' and white adults' comfort while increasing their cultural competency and cultural humility. Cultural celebrations, special informational bulletin boards, and diversity events seek to increase empathy and awareness in white people, and expect that people of color will be patient, generous, and helpful in educating the dominant culture. As white people maintain their positions of power and influence in the U.S. school system, programs often focus on maintaining the sense of emotional safety of the white people in power and/or in the majority. It is time that schools stop expecting that the historically underrepresented populations will assume the arduous (and unpaid) burden of educating others and serving as part of a school's experiential educational program for the predominantly white population. These research studies show that adults of color in independent schools are often expected to lead diversity initiatives, whether they are trained to do so or not, and to serve as counselors and mentors to students of color. This leads to "teacher burn-out" and low retention rates of adults of color.

Though the research presented in this literature review demonstrates that some schools, educational leaders, and teachers are attempting to raise awareness and positively impact the educational experiences of all students, the institutional changes necessary for transformation will not come about with solutions centered on growing awareness and empathy among white people and others in positions of power. School leaders must focus more on equity and less on "diversity." In many ways, diversity has come to mean everything and nothing at once. Equity requires giving each individual that which they are due as fully human and deserving of dignity.

We must turn our attention to institutional changes and less toward aiming to change individual feelings. This puts the onus on individuals, both white and of color, and leaves institutional policies, practices, and structures largely in place and unchanged.

### **Leading Systemic Transformation**

Leading schools is an enormous challenge in and of itself and helping all students as they navigate the waters of identity is an important facet of school leadership. All school leaders, students, teachers, school personnel and parents/guardians walk through the world with intersecting social identities shifting depending on a given situation or circumstance (Crenshaw, 1989). The challenge for NAIS school leaders is to speak loudly in resistance to color-blindness as these schools are products of a society in which identifiable groups have systematically been (mis)treated differently. Crenshaw (1988) noted, “the challenge...is to create a counter-hegemony by maneuvering within and expanding the dominant ideology to embrace the potential for change” (p. 119).

There are many important roles that school leaders assume (Kose, 2009). These many roles require school leaders to initiate, lead, and manage school-wide changes by developing the ability to engage in “difficult work that requires a shift in values, attitudes, and behaviors...[in order to] to address fundamental social justice issues” (Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy, 2005, p. 214). The following research studies and articles bring to light the dissonance between the growing population of students from historically marginalized ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds and the lack of preparation for teachers and school leaders with a developed social justice lens (Cooper, 2009; Kane, 2008; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Kane, 2008; Kose, 2009; Parker & Villapando, 2007).

**Principal efficacy.** Grissom and Harrington's (2010) quantitative research study examined the challenge of recruiting and retaining effective school principals, primarily in urban school districts. The authors' own review of the literature shows "relatively substantial criticism aimed at pre-service programs...[and] does little to inspire excitement about the apparently substantial role that universities play in providing in-service professional development opportunities for principals" (p. 586). Superintendents from across the nation reported that universities are ineffective in developing the "knowledge and skills that will translate into behaviors associated with high-quality school management", primarily in urban school districts (p. 587).

Grissom and Harrington (2010) found that many research studies on principal effectiveness are based on small-scale case studies and personal narratives. Their study included a nationally representative sample of public school teachers (37,960) and their schools/principals (7,410) from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) (Grissom & Harrington, 2010, p. 590). The Schools of Staffing Survey requires a school-wide questionnaire, collects data from the principals in a survey, and gathers information from a random sample of teachers. Though this study did not focus solely on multicultural education and leading for social justice, Grissom and Harrington (2010) did consider that there is "too great an emphasis on theory and too little applicability to principals' day-to-day needs" in meeting the needs of a diverse student populace (p. 607). If leaders do not have the skills to respond to the increasingly diverse students, then the theory has little impact.

Similarly, Gardiner and Enimoto's (2006) qualitative multi-case study of six (6) white principals from four (4) elementary and two (2) high schools, within one (1) urban school district, demonstrated lack of pre-service training in multicultural education. The researchers

conducted interviews, observations, and gathered relevant data (Gardiner & Enimoto, 2006). Of the six (6) principals interviewed, not a single one (1) recalled ever taking a course on multicultural education. Gardiner and Enimoto's (2006) study defined "multicultural leadership" in terms of that which allows principals to respond to diversity by "affirming cultural pluralism and educational equity" (p. 218).

Gardiner and Enimoto (2006) observed that programs within schools of education focus on "managerial, instructional, and participatory leadership," and do not explicitly focus on "diversity [and the need] to provide education that is culturally sensitive to difference, is free from discrimination and prejudice, and promotes educational equity" (p. 218). Without the necessary coursework that may develop an effective social justice lens, many principals will struggle to "support, facilitate or be a catalyst for change" (p. 219). For instance, one principal in this study communicated that leading for social justice was not significant for her, "...teachers have just had limited exposure. Would they be willing to learn? Sure. But I don't think the need has been there" (p. 221). Some principals were also incapable of tending to the various needs of a diverse student and community because they "appeared to be unaware of the negative impact that a mono-cultural assimilation environment can have on student learning" (p. 224).

The lack of training or deliberate course work around leading for social justice also allows some principals to disengage from issues of social justice. "I feel that the mission of schools is learning. I will leave the issue of pursuing social justice to others as I work with my students, parents, and communities" (p. 224). In many instances, these leaders were indifferent to or unaware of the experiences of marginalized groups. These principals operated from color-blind perspectives and/or avoided combating oppression such as homophobia and racism, as they are often perceived as hot-button issues. Gardiner and Enimoto (2006) noted that several

principals were unsure of what was meant by cultural proficiency and had “little knowledge of culturally proficient instruction beyond basic learning styles information” (p. 223). In many cases, the principals in this study were exposed to multicultural education and incorporated social justice curricula while on the job (Gardiner & Enimoto, 2006).

Gardiner and Enimoto (2006) assert that “university preparation programs could also provide support” for on the job application of these multicultural skills since “these [principals] achieved...certification in programs with no attention to issues of diversity, social justice, or multicultural education” (p. 224). Still, some principals in this study did view multicultural education as integral to their effectiveness as school leaders. “Principals who are multicultural leaders will value diversity; hire teachers and staff of color when possible; and find ways to integrate curriculum that reflects multicultural ideas, music, literature, and activities that will lead to improved student outcomes” (p. 220). Yet, even when principals are committed to enacting change, there is little knowledge of how to engage in sustainable praxis. By participating in this particular research project, some of the principals with the least experience around issues of social justice, diversity, and multiculturalism came to realize that “diversity is a worthy cause” and began to move away from the “devastating notion of color-blindness” (pp. 224-225).

In his qualitative multi-case study, Kose (2009) asserted that school leaders would benefit from on-going opportunities to reflect on identity, along with professional development in the field of social justice. Kose (2009) examined the work of three public school principals in three mid-western school districts. All three (3) white, female principals explicitly communicated a commitment to socially just teaching and learning, but Kose was trying to ascertain how this stated commitment manifests in their work in support of social justice. Kose conducted over

forty (40) semi-structured interviews with the participants and triangulated his findings through observations, gathering of relevant artifacts, and interviews with numerous staff, faculty, and administrators at each school site. His findings found that five (5) primary roles most positively impacted school culture and the teacher relationship to professional development oriented toward social justice.

The primary roles played by the principals in this study included: transformative visionary; transformative learning leader; transformative structural leader; transformative cultural leader; and transformative political leader. The author reports that it was imperative to set clear school goals regarding social justice, providing a framework for developing social justice competency, developing structures such as learning communities and time in the schedule for teachers to collaborate in their development of social justice, and strengthening the community in support of institutional changes. Kose wrote,

each principal communicated...the importance of serving, affirming, and maintaining high expectations for all students, particularly those who had been traditionally marginalized. Principals did not communicate a vague universal understanding of all students; they explicitly and tacitly adapted their leadership vision according to the unique individual and group needs of students (e.g., by race/ethnicity, ability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation) (p. 639).

Kose (2009) suggested that universities develop or improve meaningful offerings and training for pre-service teachers and educational leaders in multicultural education if they are to meaningfully contribute to a transformation of “low expectations, deficit thinking, marginalization, and cultural imperialism of diverse students” (p. 631). Schools of Education and other credentialing programs do not fully integrate social justice into the curriculum; it is an afterthought if it is included at all. Kose further suggests that Schools of Education re-imagine the criteria used to admit students to allow for a more diverse student population. In this way, future school leaders could learn from a variety of experiences and points of view.

Schools in the U.S. today are in need of effective teachers. Heifetz, et al. (2005) Adaptive Leadership model is an effective tool for empowering change within a distributed leadership model. This adaptive problem is grounded in the complexity of values, beliefs, limited resources, and loyalties to provide a safe place where educators can engage in conflict and work towards the goal of teaching all children well.

It is equally vital that school leaders reveal “large system failures” (Bolman & Deal, p. 26). Leaders must make a deliberate choice to challenge the beliefs, values, and frameworks that have not only been presented to them, but those in which educational leaders have been working. Educational leaders are actors, players, change agents, and as such, can “reconstruct knowledge, rather than reproduce it” (Taylor, p. 206). Burns (1978) suggested that transformational leadership, explained in the next section of the literature review, requires a synergy between self and other knowing. This self-awareness is essential in living an ethical life and serving as an ethical leader.

**Systemic thinking.** This brief section of the literature review explores leadership theory and the ways in which school leaders may have to reframe notions of leadership for equity. System thinking is a wholly appropriate model to consider in relationship to a research study grounded in CRT. As Senge’s “fifth discipline” can be useful in enacting organizational change, there remains a blind spot, in that change agents do not necessarily know what they don’t know about the lasting impact of racism and white supremacy when they claim to be looking at the entire system. Leaders interested in sustainable change can employ system thinking to see how a system, the U.S., functions as a whole. This suggests that everyone in a system “shares responsibility for the problems generated by the system” (Senge, 2006, p. 78). System thinking denies the assumption that any one individual, such as an ineffective principal, is responsible for

any given problem. System thinking is a useful conceptual framework that surfaces patterns and can clarify pathways to effectively change the system, focusing on the process, rather than the outcome. Senge asserted “the problem is we see straight lines where we should see circles” (p. 70); we must see relationships rather than disconnected events.

Kegan’s (2000) constructive developmental model theory asserts that we cannot examine that to which we are “subject” until it can become “object” to us. Though this is a valid critique of Systems Thinking, Derrick Bell (2002) employs an understanding of systems thinking when claiming that the larger U.S. system is the reason for racial inequality - “those disadvantaged by the system who should challenge the status quo are culturally programmed to believe that those who work hard, make it; and for those who don’t make it, well that’s just the breaks” (p. 8). If educators are to improve the standard of education for all students, we must approach the challenges so that we may see “interrelationships, rather than things...see patterns of change, rather than static ‘snapshots’” (Senge, p. 68). The system thinking approach allows leaders to better understand that change at one level will lead to a change at another level, indeed, “everything must change at once” (Delgado and Stefancic, p. 79).

From a CRT lens, independent schools do not exist in a vacuum and POCIS schools are part of a larger nested system. Demographers estimate that by 2050, the majority of students in U.S. schools will be of-color. This change is significant because more than ninety percent (90%) of teachers in the U.S. continue to overwhelmingly identify as white and there is a scarcity of educators skilled in multicultural leadership (Landsman & Lewis, 2006).

Daniel Kim, co-founder of Pegasus Communications, developed a highly useful tool for considering large-scale systems change. Kim’s “Levels of Perspective” framework demonstrates the value of having a clear purpose that will influence structures. These structures can produce

new patterns, resulting in a series of events reflecting the larger purpose. Kim's framework is a useful tool for looking at systems, creating vision, and animating people toward change. This framework allows leaders to see events within larger nested systems and paradigms as it breaks down a given system into distinct levels. A critique of this model is the fact that mental models are driven by "our assumptions about how the world works and what is important" (Kim, p. 18). Changes in mental models can only be achieved through significant reflection on those assumptions. This model can be limited by what an individual can actually examine as "object" and can inhibit a leader from distinguishing the multiple points of view from which the same system can be experienced. Some events and patterns identified by some individuals may be blind spots for other stakeholders. By juxtaposing the present mental models of many NAIS and POCIS schools with the individual school's stated goals, educators can better understand the systemic structures and patterns that are needed to not simply react to the present crisis, but ensure long-term change (Kim, pp. 17-18).

*Adaptive leadership* (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009) is a model that enables leaders to "[mobilize] people to tackle tough challenges and thrive" (p. 14). Heifetz et al. (2009) prescribe the practice of "getting on the balcony...keeping one eye on the events happening immediately around you and the other eye on the larger patterns and dynamics" (p. 7). Adaptive leadership is an iterative process that observes, interprets, and designs interventions to address complex challenges. Change is ongoing. This model requires two core processes: diagnosis then action. Diagnosis identifies problems within the organization that need to be attended to as part of adaptive change.

Heifetz et al. (2009) claim that "adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties" and cannot be solved quickly (p. 19).

The metaphor of ““getting on the balcony” and above the “dance floor” depicts what it means to gain the perspective you need to see what is really happening” (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 7).

Engaging in diagnosis involves “collecting data, exploring multiple possible interpretations of the situation and alternative potential interventions”, and this cannot be done alone (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 7). The process of diagnosis must include all players (self, students, teachers, principals, parents/guardians, school culture, and existing structures) and they must all share in the practice of “challeng[ing] the status quo” (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 26). The suggestions for changing the present social order will then be an outgrowth of shared language (the words used as a community must have the same meaning), common purposes, the challenging of assumptions and one another, and finally, the creation of an inspiring vision (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 9). Educational leaders can champion a systemic change and “mobilize toward some collective purpose, a purpose that exists beyond [their] own individual ambition” (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 3).

It is not only important that educational leaders understand the nature of the challenge, but that the other stakeholders also understand the issues in a meaningful manner. All of the players in this adaptive challenge “must be able to acknowledge what they do not know and need to discover...open themselves to experimentation, and [give] up some old truths” (Heifetz et al., 2009, pp. 105-106). As a collective, we must move away from these “old truths” or the paradigm that low-performing students of color will never be able to perform as well as white, affluent students due to larger social ills out of each school’s control. Educational leaders must lead a movement to alter the present mental model where many teachers and affluent parents blame environmental and social-cultural conditions for the failure of low-income Latin@ and Black students. Though many educators believe that all children can progress with good

teachers, well-managed funds, open communication and clear systems of accountability, Heifetz et al. (2009) recommend that leaders deliberately and publicly validate the diversity of voices within the community to examine how the core values of underrepresented students of color are being honored through the systems in schools today (p. 123).

James MacGregor Burns (1978) developed the theory of transformational leadership which identifies transformational leaders as those who cultivate the development of followers, act morally by staying grounded in a collective purpose, and realize “actual social change measured by intent and by the satisfaction of human needs and expectations” (p. 3). Burns (1978) argued, “almost all leaders must settle for far less than universal affection. They must be willing to *make enemies* –to deny themselves the affection of their adversaries. They must accept conflict. They must be willing and able to be unloved” (p. 43). In managing conflict, Burns’ (1978) theory of leadership requires that leaders meet people where they are in order to lead them. In order for this to happen, leaders must know where they are and where followers are within the nested system, respectively.

Indeed, Kegan (2000) asserts that the capacity to deal with adaptive challenges requires transformational learning. Leaders must be willing to raise their critical awareness of the world because transformational leadership is beyond simply knowing the self. It requires one to know the other and the self...to be able to synergize the two. Burns (1978) urges transformational leaders to “[recognize] a real need, [uncover] and [exploit] contradictions among values and between values and practice” (p. 43). School leaders can create spaces for teachers, students, and parents/guardians to ask hard questions and support the various group members through the rough waters of change. Another characteristic of transformational leadership is striving for a

higher purpose beyond one's own self-interests. Leaders must aim to inspire young teachers and students, especially the students who have felt marginalized and invisible.

Kezar and Eckel (2008) conducted a qualitative research study to examine leadership in U.S. colleges. This study built on “elite interviews” with twenty-seven (27) college presidents with extensive experience as presidents and in furthering diversity agendas (Kezar & Eckel, 2008, p. 5). These presidents demonstrated evidence of reflective leadership practices and represented diverse educational institutions with diverse student populations. This study found that college presidents, with the “authority and leverage...critical to institutionalization,” employ a combination of transactional and transformational leadership strategies when furthering an institutional diversity agenda, no matter where the school is on their diversity journey (2008, p. 2). Furthermore, the researcher triangulated the data from the phone interviews by analyzing relevant artifacts.

Kezar and Eckel used definitions of transformational and transactional leadership developed by Burns (1973) and Bass (1985). The researchers’ theoretical framework stated that transformational leaders are those “who inspire and motivate people by appealing to their moral and intellectual sensibilities”, and as such, tend to be more critical of the status quo than transactional leaders (pp. 2-3). Transactional leadership refers to “leaders who generally work in a reciprocal fashion with their associates, where they bargain and negotiate using rewards or power in order to influence and create change” (Kezar & Eckel, 2008, p. 2). The researchers also utilized Bass and Avolio’s (1997) concept of the “full range leadership model,” suggesting that transformational and transactional leadership were not mutually exclusive and could be combined to achieve maximum results.

Through their study, Kezar and Eckel demonstrate that as schools continue to engage in conversations regarding diversity, inclusion, and social justice, school leaders must reflect on their leadership, so as to bring about positive change most effectively. Presidents shared that their existing school cultures often informed whether or not they emphasized transformational or transactional leadership models. Though Kezar and Eckel utilized Hurtado's (2002) continuum of diversity development on college campuses, they found that no matter the stage of the journey, both forms of leadership were necessary and appropriate. Still, presidents were clear that transformational leadership called on school communities to engage their hearts. The researchers found that "campuses that were early in developing their diversity agenda needed transformational leaders who exhibit individualized consideration by listening to students and faculty of color...and who are charismatic" (p. 9).

No matter how well intentioned the leader, listening to students and faculty from marginalized backgrounds is imperative in fully understanding the complexities of responding to diversity and social justice in our fast changing society. One (1) white female president shared, "through conversations with students I've been humbled. I realize the issues are more complicated, that they change, and that on-going conversations are critical if we are to truly create campuses where all students can be successful" (p. 10). Another president stated, "People on campus need to know that the president sees this as an ethical commitment. The faculty knows that I care deeply about these things...and that I think this is the lifeblood of the campus" (p. 10).

Presidents at schools that were midway through their diversity journeys were able to move away from their personal understandings and vision formation, concentrating on developing an institutional vision for diversity goals. A president noted that although he had

publicly vocalized support for diversity initiatives, “many staff and faculty who had been champions of diversity...felt really marginalized...you have to provide forums for conversation, have an open door policy, provide resources and support they haven’t received in years, and show them your personal commitment” (Kezar & Eckel, 2008, p. 11). The researchers concluded that even the schools that were further along in their diversity efforts needed to “recognize that the campus structures and cultures needed to be rethought, as they were not created for a diverse student body” (p. 12). Another president shared, “I needed to ask people, ‘What are you afraid of?’ You need to get that question on the table because oftentimes people are afraid to debate...and I think it’s just about the fear of challenging our existing norms” (p. 12). The presidents in this study demonstrated courage and a clear personal vision toward leveraging their position of power to improve the educational experience of all community members.

By and large, presidents noted that they employed transactional leadership techniques when responding to matters such as hiring people from underrepresented backgrounds and implementing systems of accountability for cultural competency. The participants in Kezar and Eckel’s (2008) study understood that “while I like to speak to people’s hearts and minds, I’m just as willing to speak to their ego or pocketbook. People are motivated by different things...I will use whatever strategy works for a particular group” (p. 13). In much the same way, presidents of color had to adjust their leadership styles in order to be most effective. Kezar and Eckel (2008) surfaced that presidents of color had to be more strategic, in a way that white presidents did not have to think about, not only in their application of the transformational approach to leadership, but in advancing diversity initiatives in general. Presidents of color expressed the concern that they were “more likely to be attacked for supporting a diversity agenda” because people see their

passion as a personal agenda and not part of the institutional commitment to diversity (Kezar & Eckel, 2008, p. 15). The researchers remind leaders of color to “recognize that what works for the majority of their colleagues may not have the same pay-off for them and in fact may hinder their effectiveness” (Kezar & Eckel, 2008, p. 16).

Presidents must employ transactional, transformational, and full range leadership strategies when furthering an educational institution’s diversity agenda. Some strategies are more effective in distinct contexts. What works for a white president at one university may not work as well for Black president at another institution. The researchers found that school culture, more than type of school or demographics, impacted the use of transformational or transactional leadership. Researchers also found that transactional and transformational leadership was necessary and effective at schools no matter the phase of diversity process. Almost all participants used a combination of both leadership styles on a regular basis.

Along those lines, Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) also urge school leaders to “reconstruct roles and relationships at the school level around a vibrant core purpose focused on social justice and directed at improving student learning” (p. 215). In their article, “Educating School Leaders for Social Justice”, Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy address the challenges that schools of education and other certification programs currently face in adequately preparing school leaders to be social justice advocates in their schools. The authors present four frames to consider in preparation for administrators to lead in transformational ways: the standards movement (based on the standards of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium), the selection of leaders, the achievement gap, and the privatization of education. “The very act of creating standards is an inherently biased process in which preference is given to a particular perspective and other points of view are silenced... specifically, questions have been raised

about whether the standards give sufficient attention to social justice issues such as diversity” (Cambron-McCabe & McCarty, 2005, p. 206). The way in which schools identify potential leaders must also allow for underrepresented people to enter the pipeline to leadership. As such, schools of education must reimagine what it means to be a leader, “principals...provide moral stewardship to schools...[leaders] play a central role in creating and sustaining school-wide change” (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005, p. 210).

### **Summary of CRT Framework**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an important, appropriate, and necessary frame for this research study because it pushes educators to question why opportunities for critical thinking, transformational learning, and safe learning environments have been reserved for the white and the wealthy children in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2008). The systemic and collective denial of the impact of race in schools and schooling contributes to the continued social stratification along racial, ethnic, and class lines. Critical race theory is a useful paradigmatic lens to examine the schooling experiences of historically underrepresented students of color. From a CRT lens, school leaders and educators must recognize the salience and power of racism, whiteness, and the myth of a meritocracy. This analytical lens will allow for a thorough examination of the role of race and ethnic identify formation on underrepresented Latin@ students (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). By centering the research on the voices of Latin@ students who have navigated their private, independent schools (in spite of their institutions), researchers can move beyond traditional “deficit” approaches and contribute to the important disruption of racism within U.S. schools.

Recent and other seminal studies indicate that students and adults of color continue to report higher levels of marginality, failure, and push-out rates than their white peers due to the

legacy of race and racism in this country. These studies reveal that ethnic identity does, in fact, play a role in a students' educative experience. Ethnicity, and other forms of identity diversity within independent schools, continues to grow. Though many independent schools express a desire to educate students as global citizens who are compassionate and culturally aware, the majority of adults in independent schools are white educators with little training in multicultural awareness and cultural competency.

Some studies revealed that when school leaders, teachers, and teacher preparation programs explicitly foster racial understanding, recognition of racial and cultural bias, and the development of cultural competence, students and adults of color might feel more included. There are many important roles that school leaders assume. These many roles require school leaders to initiate, lead, and manage school-wide changes. Heading schools effectively calls leaders to develop many capacities. Some are harder to quantify, such as the ability to engage in "difficult work that requires a shift in values, attitudes, and behaviors...[in order to] to address fundamental social justice issues" (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005, p. 214). These research studies and articles bring to light the dissonance between the growing population of students from historically marginalized ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds and the low "percentages of principals who are [of color]" and/or white principals, with a developed social justice lens (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Kane, 2008; Parker & Villapando, 2007, p. 521).

Schools of education are responsible for "produc[ing] high-quality teachers, counselors, administrators, and other graduates...to provide high-quality education to [all] children" (Hatwood, Gomez, & Bedden, 2003, p. 5; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). From the CRT perspective, schools continue to "deny the politics of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and so

forth that inform how and what we teach" (hooks, 1994, p. 37). Until teachers and administrators in all schools, public and private, transparently acknowledge that race and ethnicity continue to influence student experiences in predominantly white learning institutions (white curricula, white faculty, white administration), schools may continue to underserve this growing population of students (Tatum, 2007, p. xii). School leaders, particularly white leaders, must understand that race and racism not only affects them, but that they have a responsibility to learn about themselves as racial beings so that they may play a role in transforming our society away from the racial hierarchy still alive in this country due to lingering effects of historical acts of oppression (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Olsen, 2011; Tatum, 2007).

## **Conclusion**

This qualitative research study seeks to better understand the factors within independent schools that contribute to positive perceptions of the schooling experiences of self-identified Latin@ students. In this review of the literature, the researcher presented a brief history and evolution of independent schools within the context of U.S. history and critical race theory. The researcher also attempted to make connections between the racialized experiences of students of color within U.S. public schools and colleges, and historically underrepresented students of color in independent schools. The researcher examined multicultural education, pre-service and professional development, along with the opportunities and challenges of leading systemic change,

This review of literature shows that over the past ten (10) years, there has been a deliberate focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion as essential to movement toward learning spaces that foster social transformation, not social reproduction that "fail(s) students with a pedagogical logic that not only assures the ascendency of a few", but a caste of brown people

living as second and third class citizens (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 30). It is essential that we make the space to tell our racial stories because

racial storytelling is the first step to healing racial fear...without racial storytelling, educators, politicians, parents, law enforcement and children are stuck tolerating differences, acquiescing to levels of racial avoidance rather than committing to the higher ground of racial literacy and competence – of humanity” (Stevenson, 2015, p. 29).

The following chapter, Chapter 3, will review the methodology used for this study.

## Chapter 3

### Method

*May we seize the arrogance to create outrageously  
Soñar wildly –for the world becomes as we dream it*  
(Anzaldua, 2002, p. 575).

#### Overview

This chapter will begin by describing the purpose of this qualitative research study along with the research questions informing this study. A description of the procedures, participants, setting, data collection strategies and data analysis procedures will follow. The trustworthiness and transferability will also be explained. A summary of the research approach for this study will conclude this chapter.

It is unclear how Latin@ students are experiencing independent schools in light of their racial/ethnic backgrounds. The researcher hopes to fill a gap in current research by exploring data collected from twelve (12) students and six (6) equity leaders within six (6) National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) member upper schools (grades 9-12) in the Northern California People of Color in Independent Schools (POCIS) network. The data collected and analyzed in this study will focus on the ways in which self-identified Latin@ students make sense of their experiences in predominantly white learning spaces.

The research question that informed this study was: “What formative experiences have the deepest impact on Latin@s while attending Bay Area independent high schools, and how do these critical incidents inform their identity as people of color in U.S. society?” To better understand the experiences of self-identified Latin@ students in independent schools, the following sub-questions will elicit data from participating students and equity leaders:

1. How do the racial and ethnic backgrounds of self-identified Latin@ students affect their perception of critical school experiences within predominantly white POCIS member schools?

2. What tools or opportunities, if any, have the participating schools provided the students so that they may develop ethnic identities and critical consciousness regarding oppressive elements in their lives?

3. In what ways, if any, do your schools explicitly and deliberately challenge the dominant white culture of power and/or demonstrate its values and appreciate your identity as a Latin@ student?

4. To what extent are you satisfied with your decision to attend this school as it relates to your identity formation?

### **Epistemological Assumptions and Theoretical Framework**

This study explored common threads in the experiences of self-identified Latin@ students within Bay Area NAIS and POCIS Gold Member upper schools. The phenomenon of being a minority student of color in a private independent school will be studied through the collection and analysis of data in the form of oral stories. Providing self-identified Latin@ students the opportunity to reflect on and share their stories is both empowering to the students and useful to school leaders interested in providing positive learning spaces for all students. A qualitative approach allows students to tell their stories in their own words and shed light on what systems and programs are appreciated by the students and contribute to positive schooling experiences. Lincoln and Guba (1985) reminded us that qualitative research studies maximize the possibility of truly understanding the experience of individuals within a particular context in this case, students of color attending predominantly white independent schools.

The researcher's epistemological paradigm was critical theory. As such, the researcher acknowledges that the present reality in which we live has been socially constructed by various factors (gender, race, language, class) of the historical players (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). A key epistemological assumption of critical theory is that most adults in the United States are culturally assimilated into a dominant mindset and have difficulty critically evaluating the world around them. To the extent that this is so, we are subject to that mindset and assume the world as we experience it as truth; we cannot and do not critically assess this truth – we are the truth. A popular phrase within the school of critical theory is “you can't tell a fish about water”: the water surrounds the fish and traps it in its world. The dominant white culture that permeates U.S. society is a prominent example of “the water” or unexamined “truth” that is so difficult for many people to see. White individuals must first identify that they have (white) privilege and acknowledge the impact it may have on their life. When an individual lives with (unseen and unearned) privilege, it becomes part of their world. It is difficult to identify their reality as privileged, but rather it is viewed as simply the way the world works.

Critical theory is a framework that advocates for and works in partnership with marginalized and historically silenced groups. Critical theorists seek to understand marginalized and oppressed populations within society by engaging in dialogue with those individuals and communities (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). This study is framed by critical theory so that the researcher can come to know the reality of Latino@ students while also helping students discover nested systems of oppression and historical nuances at play. Lincoln and Guba (1994) asserted that critical theory is, indeed, both dialogic and dialectical. The researcher hopes to not only challenge any cultural hegemony in schools, but also hopes to provide the participants a dialogic relationship to develop a critical consciousness about their own experiences.

Critical theory problematizes the status quo and seeks to “liberate” human beings from systemic forms of oppression (Torres, 1998). Examining how the experiences of Latin@ students within U.S. independent schools are influenced by a long history of institutional racism, white supremacy, and classism is essential if education is truly going to be the “practice of freedom” (hooks, 1994). As the researcher explored the experiences of Latin@ students within predominantly white and elite spaces, critical theory was appropriate as this frame was utilized to bring to light issues of power and privilege (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Freire (1973) asserted that efforts to liberate the oppressed must be done in collaboration and solidarity with the participants within a study; “research participants [will] speak for themselves” in hopes of putting new ideas into action (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The researcher was intentional about including student voice as an integral force in understanding, challenging, and ultimately changing the structural forces that negatively impact Latin@ student experiences during formative years of identity formation. When historically marginalized youth discover their capacity to effect change, oppressive systems and structures no longer feel static and a result of their own failings. They can acknowledge that challenges they face stem from social forces beyond their control and that “human agency constructs reality is power – a power that has very specific educational and youth development outcomes” (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, pp. 6-7).

Critical race theory (CRT) was the central theoretical framework for the researcher (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The basic CRT framework is built on critical legal studies, radical feminism, and thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci, W.E.B. Du Bois, Cesar Chavez, and the Black Power movement. The CRT lens is useful in a study such as this because bringing the impact of race and racism to light in our society, specifically within the school system, is a vital first step to

change. This study also adhered closely to the CRT tenet of intersectionality (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). Although understanding that race and racism are formative processes within their social contexts, this researcher was aware that race intersects with gender identity, socio-economic class, sexuality and other important identifiers. Furthermore, the knowledge gained from the research should be critical. The CRT lens is useful to engage educational leaders and teachers within the independent school world in praxis – critical reflection that may inform practice/action through the application of theory (Freire, 1970).

The researcher also incorporated the seminal work, “Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack of White Privilege” of Peggy McIntosh (1998). McIntosh (1988) coined the phrase “white privilege” and describes it as what allows white people to not have to know or care whether or not race is a social construction and whether or not our criminal justice system is racist. For many white people, their world has never been explained to them or experienced by them in racial terms (McIntosh, 1988). As independent schools continue to be overwhelmingly white, it is important to examine conditions within these schools through the white privilege lens.

The researcher also recognizes every individual’s political intersectionality – the many ways in which race, ethnicity, gender, sex, sexuality, religion, (dis)ability, and class manifest in our lives (Crenshaw, 1986). Crenshaw (1986) coined the phrase intersectionality in the 1980’s and it spoke to how multiple power structures interact in all people’s lives, but specifically to how these systems impact women of color.

Qualitative researchers collect stories as data to understand a shared experience from a variety of perspectives. In this case, Latin@ students and equity leaders from multiple Bay Area private independent schools will share their “realities” in their own words (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As the population of students of color (including Latin@ students) grows within

independent schools, these narratives may help to illuminate the structures and mental models impacting the learning environment of this important student population. This study explored the extent to which there is “an essence to an experience that is shared with others who have also had that experience” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 20). Allowing Latin@ students the space and time to reflect on their personal stories may bring to light patterns of behavior and experiences shared by students of color within private independent schools and provide an important example of youth and adults collaborating for collective change.

This research study may stimulate students and school leaders, in partnership, to challenge the status quo and potentially bring about sustainable institutional change. Although this study cannot be generalized to other populations, the study may provide insight and information to independent school leaders as they examine their campus climate through the lens of this minority student population, toward the end of creating and/or maintaining learning communities where all students are seen, valued, and heard.

### **Research Design**

A qualitative approach is an especially appropriate and valuable methodology with groups who have had limited power and influence in society, such as under-represented students of color in the independent school sector (Smith, Savage, & Fabian, 2002). Qualitative inquiry focuses on how people understand their own experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2009). This approach allows the researcher to collect data from the subjects’ own perspective, context, and vocabulary (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). A qualitative study is appropriate given that the lived experience of students of color, particularly Latin@ students, within private independent schools has not been sufficiently explored within existing literature (Creswell, 2007). This approach is appropriate for this study since the purpose of this research is to explore

the experiences of Latin@ students in independent schools firsthand, rather than examining quantitative data.

**Sample Selection.** NAIS People of Color Conference (PoCC) and Student Diversity Leadership Conference (SDLC) was the conference where, fifteen (15) years ago, educators of color decided to form a group that could support educators and students of color within NAIS schools in the San Francisco Bay Area throughout the year, Northern California POCIS (POCIS). POCIS is a now a non-profit organization that supports the academic achievement, professional development and advancement, self-determination and well-being of students, families, and adults of color in PK-12<sup>th</sup> grade San Francisco Bay Area independent schools. The mission of the organization, presently known as Northern California People of Color in Independent Schools (POCIS, 2011), states that,

POCIS is made up of educators from diverse professional and personal backgrounds who believe that equity, inclusion, multiculturalism, and racial justice are integral to quality education for all. POCIS of Northern California promotes and facilitates dialogue among people of color and their allies to foster multicultural understanding and community building. POCIS advocates for increasing ethnic and cultural diversity at all levels in independent schools. POCIS provides resources and expertise to child-serving professionals on building inclusive curriculum, developing cultural competence in students and adults, and fostering leadership in students and adults of color within schools. POCIS encourages school structures, policies, and practices to reflect a long-term and sustainable commitment to equity and inclusion (Northern California POCIS mission statement, 2010).

As of October 2014, fifty-two (52) independent schools are active members of the organization. POCIS member schools gain free access to POCIS resources and workshops, and regularly participate in NAIS PoCC Conference and other programs that foster racial justice and inclusivity in schools. Of the fifty-two (52) member schools, twenty (20) have an upper school program for grades nine (9) through twelve (12).

The researcher spoke with eleven (11) potential schools among these twenty (20) that met the following criteria:

1. schools that have a designated equity leader/liaison
2. schools that have an active student of color and/or Latin@ affinity club
3. schools that regularly fund students, faculty, and administrators to attend POCIS conferences/workshops, White Privilege Conference and/or SDLC
4. schools that are co-educational
5. schools that represent three Bay Area regions (San Francisco, East Bay, and South Bay)

Potential schools were identified through the list of current People of Color in Independent School (POCIS) Member Upper Schools (grades 9-12) in the Bay Area. The researcher sent email invitations to Heads of School and/or Equity Leaders to eleven (11) schools that were current POCIS Member Schools (and by default also members of NAIS and CAIS). All of the participating schools have a stated commitment to employing an equity leader, supporting ethnic affinity groups, and actively participating in local and national opportunities for community growth with regards to diversity. Two (2) of the schools declined to participate and two (2) did not respond to the request. Although additional schools fit the criteria to be invited, seven (7) willing schools ensured that sampling could cease.

This qualitative study used a purposeful sampling method (Creswell, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). A small sample size ( $n = 12$ ) was selected because this project intends to achieve an in-depth understanding of experiences for this population (Creswell, 2007). The equity leader of each participating school identified two (2) self-identified Latin@ students from any/all gender identities and/or sexes in the current twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) grade. Including two (2)

students from each school, plus the equity leader from each of the six (6) schools provided a total sample size of eighteen (18). This number of participants avoided theoretical sampling saturation, potentially impeding data analysis (Creswell, 2007), although the researcher reserved the right to interview more students if more data was necessary.

The general demographics for each school's profile included in this study were obtained from various offices, publications, and websites. To protect the anonymity of the institutional identity, a pseudonym was assigned to each participating school. School demographics are presented in two (2) parts that describe region, school type and grades served, size, tuition, percentage of students receiving financial aid, percentage of students of color (SOC), percentage of adults of color (AOC), and percentage of Latin@ students. Table 6 provides the first half of the data and Table 7 provides information on the ethnic diversity breakdown of the six (6) teaching and learning communities.

Table 6

*General demographics of participating schools.*

School "Name"	Region	School Type	School Size	US Tuition	Percentage of students on FA
City School	San Francisco	9-12/Day	1474	\$19,100	30%
East Academy	East Bay	6-12 Day/Boarding	450	\$36, 325	23%
Hill School	East Bay	9-12 Day	360	\$38,670	24%
Old School	East Bay	K-12 Day	875	\$35,455	25%
Tunnel High	East Bay	K-12 Day	700	\$33,600	20%
Southern Prep	South Bay	6-12 Day/Boarding	350	\$38, 750	20%

Note. Some schools have a tiered tuition structure. The tuition listed here is specific to the Upper School (US) Day students, if the school has multiple divisions and a boarding program. All of the participants were day students within their schools. In addition to tuition, some schools also charge fees for books, trips, transportation, etc.

School sizes ranged from 350 to 1474 students for the 2014-2015 academic year. Tuition for day upper school (grades 9-12) ranged from \$19,000 to \$38, 750. The average tuition for the six (6) participating schools is \$33, 650, not including extra fees. Though the tuition rates are high, all participating schools are committed to a socio-economically diverse student body. As such, the average percentage of students in these schools that receive some level of financial aid is 23.8 %.

Table 7

*Ethnic diversity at participating schools.*

School “Name”	Percentage of SOC	Percentage of AOC	Percentage of Latin@ students	Percentage of Multiracial Latin@s
City School	42%	10%	12%	N/A
East Academy	51%	17%	4%	2%
Hill School	52%	24%	2%	NA
Old School	51%	30%	4%	8%
Tunnel High	40%	8%	1.5%	0.6%
Southern Prep	25%	15%	9%	4%

Note. Data were provided by EL’s and school website

Although there are differences within each school, all of the participating institutions have well-manicured landscapes, buildings in good to excellent condition, exceptional athletic and fine arts facilities, high tech libraries, and small class sizes.

After speaking with the head of school and/or equity leader, the researcher sent an email with a description of the study (see Appendix B). Once the equity leader or head of school agreed to participate, the researcher sent an email explaining the purpose of the research, a description of the study, a formal request for participation, and copies of the various consent forms (see Appendices B through G). The first two (2) schools in each Bay Area region to submit the forms were chosen to participate in the study.

The researcher created eighteen (18) profiles to provide a brief description of the lived experience of the participants. This was important to emphasize how Latino@ people are not a monolithic group. As culturally and economically marginalized groups in the United States, Latin@ youth continue to experience similar struggles against systemic racism and prejudice.

**Student participants.** Individual profiles are included to highlight the lived experience of each participant. Profiles were developed from individual interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of each participant and to show how each participant is distinct. These personal profiles provide a biographical synopsis of each participant. To maintain anonymity of each participant, explicit details have been limited.

***Alberto.*** Alberto was born and raised in East Oakland. He continues to live in East Oakland with his mother, father, and older brother. Both of Alberto's parents are originally from Mexico and Spanish is the primary language at home. Spanish is Alberto's first language, but he is fully bilingual.

Alberto learned about Old School from an elementary school teacher at an international community school. This teacher introduced his family to the ECHO program. ECHO stands for The Educational Coalition for Hispanics in Oakland. ECHO's mission is to "promote and provide Latino students and their families with the necessary tools to achieve academic success in all areas of their educational careers, teach and inform them about their rights and responsibilities in public education, and help them develop leadership skills to become effective leaders of their communities". Alberto applied to three (3) independent middle schools and chose to attend Old School. Diversity was not a factor for Alberto and he admits it was not something he took into consideration. He did not realize that he would essentially be the only Latino boy in his class and he goes on to say, "...it [being the only Latino] didn't really affect me. I don't think they saw me any different. I don't know if it's because I don't look Mexican. Like I feel when you think of a Mexican person you have all these assumptions and stereotypes. But I'm a bit more white, I guess."

Though his parents expressed discomfort in the Old School community due to their broken English, they were committed to his staying because they knew it would be beneficial to his future. His parents continue to be immensely proud that he is able to have a superior education, but have always reminded and urged Alberto to embrace Mexican culture and not be ashamed to speak Spanish. Alberto says, “It was mostly hard for my parents when I was in Middle School and after being here for nine (9) years, she’s definitely gotten a lot more accustomed to being here...and her English has improved.” As a senior, Alberto is co-President of the Latino Club (with Claudia) and has also opted to volunteer at an elementary school in East Oakland. He hopes to be a high school teacher and is excited to start his freshman year at UC San Diego.

**Alex.** Alex is a senior at City School and was born and raised in San Francisco. Alex lives in a “medium-class neighborhood that’s not too bad” with her father, who is originally from Guatemala and her mother, who is originally from the Philippines. She also lives with her paternal grandmother. Her older sister graduated from City School and is currently enrolled at U.C. Berkeley. The primary language at home was Spanish, but she learned English alongside Spanish.

Before enrolling at City School, Alex attended a Catholic elementary school that has since closed down. In fact, her class of thirty (30) students was the last class to graduate from that school. Alex describes her previous school as diverse, with a large population of Filipino and Latin@ students. Alex was the only graduate from her eighth (8<sup>th</sup>) grade class to attend City School. At first, Alex described being “confused” at the lack of diversity. She quickly accepted “being a minority because everyone is really accepting and the teachers don’t make me feel like a minority.” Alex cherishes her time at City School and is grateful for her education.

She is currently the President of the Latin@ club and several other clubs. She is most proud about an organization she founded in high school in which she collects supplies for a school in Uganda. She spoke about having had the opportunity to go to Uganda this past summer to deliver those materials. Alex is eager to begin college at St. Louis University as she plans on being a pediatrician and starting a non-profit.

**Bris.** Bris is a senior at Tunnel High. Her parents immigrated from El Salvador and Mexico respectively at the tender age of seven (7). Her mother was raised in San Francisco by an aunt because her mother had died in El Salvador and “her dad kind of just left.” Her dad came from Mexico with his parents and two siblings and moved to the East Bay, where her family currently lives. Bris was raised by her paternal grandparents because her parents “were just working a lot to make the little money that they could.”

Bris attended local public schools until she was admitted as a “Making Waver.” Though she was in the Making Waves program by the fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) grade and attended academic support sessions, she did not enroll in an independent school until the seventh (7<sup>th</sup>) grade. She credits her parents for aiding her success by dropping her off and picking her up from her Making Waves tutoring sessions four (4) nights each week. They also never balked at taking her back and forth to Tunnel High though it was at least forty-five (45) minutes away without traffic.

She then was admitted and enrolled in Tunnel High as a ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) grader. Bris described the transformation she experienced as a result of being at Tunnel High. “I changed a lot. In the ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) grade, a lot of the kids used to call me ‘chola’ (Spanish for female gang member) and stuff. It was hard. I stopped dressing like that and I feel like I changed their perception of Latin@s – me and Peter have.” She is deeply involved in community service efforts and is most proud of the work she does with low-income Latin@ youth in the Fruitvale district of Oakland.

She is also the president of the Latino Club at Tunnel High and she recently accepted an offer to join the freshman class at the University of Redlands.

**Claudia.** Claudia was born and raised in East Oakland. She lives in East Oakland with her two parents and younger brother. Her older sister is enrolled in college. Both of her parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico and their primary home language is Spanish. Her parents did not graduate from college so she is first-generation college-bound and her parents have always said, “Education is everything. And I want you to have nice things that we haven’t been able to give to you.”

She was recruited to apply and was accepted as a sixth (6<sup>th</sup>) grader to the A Better Chance (ABC) program. An elementary school teacher pulled her aside and told her she thought she could “do something more.” Claudia’s older sister was already a scholar with ABC. She opted to attend Old School’s Middle School as her sister was already enrolled. She went on to Old School’s Upper School. Though she did not gain access to independent schools until middle school, Claudia’s younger brother is already enrolled in Old School’s lower school and is in the fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) grade.

As a senior, Claudia volunteers at her old charter school. She describes feeling “at home” in her neighborhood, but also a sense of being disconnected from “them.” Claudia is happy for the chance to give back to her community and feels all students should have this opportunity.

Claudia has come to appreciate who she is and from where she comes. She is grateful to have gone to Old School because it has allowed her to question and explore her identity. She believes that being a minority at Old School forced her to understand and appreciate her culture

in a deep manner. She is grateful that Old School has always supported the student led and run Latino Club, of which she is the co-President.

**Leo.** At the time of this interview, Leo was a senior at East Academy. Leo's parents are both from Mexico and are no longer married. Leo spends most of this time with his mother and two younger siblings. He has a relationship with his father. Leo's father came to the United States in his mid-teens after having dropped out of school in Mexico. He initially came to the U.S. illegally and moved to the Los Angeles area without being able to speak any English. Leo's parents met in San Leandro at twenty-one (21) and Leo soon followed. Leo's father learned English alongside his son, Leo.

Leo's school experience had been at all public schools through the end of middle school. His middle school is located in the Fruitvale district of Oakland and was predominantly Latin@ and Mexican. In the younger years, the teaching was bilingual, but in the middle school, the instruction was in English. His two younger siblings currently attend that public middle school. At the end of seventh (7<sup>th</sup>) grade Leo applied to the A Better Chance (ABC) program, was admitted, and with their guidance and support, he was admitted to East Academy.

The mission of A Better Chance (ABC) is “to increase substantially the number of well-educated young people of color who are capable of assuming positions of responsibility and leadership in American society.” Information from the ABC website explains that the organization was established during the Civil Rights Movement, specifically in 1963. In response to the cry for integration, twenty-three (23) heads of schools publically committed to ethnically diversifying the schools in which they led. The goal was to expand the profile of the students served within their schools with academically talented, but economically and ethnically challenged, students. Between the founding of ABC in 1963 and 2013, the organization's

student cohort has grown from fifty-five (55) students in nine (9) schools to over 2,000 students in over 300 schools.

Leo notes that his parents' flexible work schedule made it possible for them to drop off and pick him up at inconvenient times. In his senior year, Leo wrote and directed a film about his cultural shock and transformative experience transitioning from the local public school to East Academy in a predominantly white and affluent area in the East Bay. Leo describes the film as a "fair warning to people who are looking to go to a private school. It [is] about the challenges and the cultural differences."

Leo is excited to begin his first year at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, although he anticipates that "culturally, it is a very different place."

**Lucas.** Both of his parents immigrated to the United States in the early 1990's. His mother is from Guatemala and his father is from Nicaragua. He lives in Richmond with his two (2) siblings, an older sister and a younger brother, and his grandmother. The primary language at home is Spanish.

His older sister was born in Nicaragua and immigrated to the United States with her parents. She began community college, but did not finish. Lucas attended a KIPP school in San Francisco. One of KIPP's priorities was to have students enroll and thrive in independent schools. It was in this way that Lucas learned about Hill School. Hill School was the only school that accepted him and provided him with the necessary financial aid.

In addition to being Latin@, Lucas also points out that his family is Protestant and Mormon, and that often plays a large role in how he feels singled-out at school. He shared, "Like people do not talk about religion...at all. My parents get worried that I will become an

Atheist because of all of the liberals here.” Lucas is looking forward to enrolling at USF in the fall.

**Mario.** Mario was born in Redwood City and lives with his mother, grandmother, aunt, and younger sister. His family emigrated from Mexico nearly twenty (20) years ago. He has an extremely large and supportive family and network of friends from his time in public middle school. His first language is Spanish and he is an avid soccer player. He hopes that his talent on the field will enable him to be accepted to the University of California, San Diego. At the time of the interview, he was still waiting to hear.

He attended public middle school and was resistant to attending Southern Prep. One of the teachers told his mother about their outreach program and encouraged him to apply. He continues to have very mixed feelings about Southern Prep but is grateful for having met his girlfriend, because “even though she is white, she is the only one here who really gets me.” Mario has spent most of time at school playing soccer, struggling through classes, and spending time with his white, Jewish girlfriend. Though he says many of his classmates know they are in a relationship, it is essentially a secret because her parents and her extended family do not support her dating “a Mexican.”

**Mateo.** Mateo was born and raised in San Francisco. He lives with his parents in San Francisco. Both of his parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico. His mother left Mexico as a young child and did her schooling, through college, in the United States. His mother speaks both English and Spanish, while his father continues to struggle with English. His father also came to the United States from Mexico.

Mateo has very mixed feelings about his time at City School. One of the final thoughts shared with me was,

Mateo: It was way different than what I thought it would be. The prep program kind of gave me a false sense of what it would be like because, like, the prep program was like a home and a real nice community and when you get to City School, it's not nice at all. At least that's how it felt for me. It's more like we are guests at the school, not real members of the family, or even the community.

Researcher: What part of the experience made you feel like you were a guest?

Mateo: Everything. Everything in and about the school told me that. The teachers are rude without knowing it. They treat us different. I can't really explain it.

Mateo is an active participant in City School's Latino Club and works as a teaching assistant in the School's support program for historically underrepresented students. He is looking forward to graduating and enrolling at Whittier College in September.

**Naila.** Naila is an only child and her parents, both immigrants from Mexico, are now divorced. She describes both sides of her family as "very different." Her mother did not attend college, while her father graduated from University of Pennsylvania. She lives in Oakland and went to a public school all her life before enrolling in City School. She learned Spanish and English simultaneously, but Spanish is her primary language. Naila communicated that speaking in English is not allowed in her home because that is considered disrespectful in her family. Most of her extended family lives in Oakland and she is the only person in her extended family to attend a private school.

Naila was encouraged to attend Hill School's summer program by her sixth (6<sup>th</sup>) grade social studies teacher. The summer program is geared to students from Oakland public schools and most students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Naila was deeply impressed by the Hill School students who served as mentors so she decided to apply to ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) grade. The Hill School was the only school to which she applied. Naila was greatly impacted by the summer

program and has continued on as a tutor ever since. Naila anticipates being accepted to a competitive liberal arts college and looks forward to medical school.

**Necahual.** Necahual is a senior at Southern Prep. She lives with her parents and younger sister. Both of her parents were born in Mexico and are not in the United States legally. This makes Necahual very nervous at times, but she is quick to say she is not ashamed. Spanish is the predominant language spoken at home because her father stresses the importance of “sticking to your roots” and being proud of where one comes. She is one of the only students from her neighborhood to attend a private school. Necahual reports that many of her friends in her neighborhood are “Dreamer.” and her mother dreams of being an immigration lawyer.

Both of her parents are housecleaners and Necahual demonstrates an enormous sense of pride for how hard her parents work. She reports that she has a strong work ethic because of her parents and is excited that her mother is now pursuing a law degree.

Necahual attended public schools before enrolling at Southern Prep as a ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) grader. She was introduced to the independent school world when the Equity Leader (EL) at Southern Prep encouraged her parents to have Necahual apply to “the Bridge.” The Peninsula Bridge Program was established in 1989 and aims to prepare students from low-income school districts to apply, be accepted, and thrive in independent schools in the San Francisco Peninsula/South Bay Area.

By her junior year, she was more appreciative of being Latin@ and now she is proud to be Latin@. By the time of the interview she enthusiastically stated, “None of the things you [peers] said about me are true and my parents are none of the things you said.” She is still very connected to her home community and not so much to Southern Prep. Though she is confident as Necahual at Southern Prep and no longer tells her peers that her name is “Nicole,” she still has

to respond to people in her own community who disparage her “acting white.” She points out that her closest friends from her neighborhood support her and say, “as long as you are getting an education and more opportunities, that’s good.”

Necahual has emerged as a leader on campus, particularly as the president of the Diversity Club at Southern Prep. She is excited to enroll at the University of San Francisco (USF) in September and wants to major in Social Work so she can work with the children of immigrants.

**Peter.** Peter is a senior at Tunnel High and like the other participants, is a senior (he has been enrolled at Tunnel High since ninth [9<sup>th</sup>] grade). Peter was born in Oakland, but raised in Richmond, California by his two parents with three (3) older siblings. As with most of the student participants, Peter’s parents emigrated to the U.S. from Mexico “like twenty (20) years ago.” Though his first language was Spanish and Spanish continues to be the language most spoken at home, Peter said, “English is my most dominant language, just because I speak it more.”

Before enrolling at Tunnel High, Peter attended the local public school where “it was all Latin@. Maybe there’d be a few Blacks in each grade, but it was mostly Latin@.” He would have enrolled at the public middle school but he, “fortunately made it into the Making Waves education program” and attended an independent middle school in El Cerrito. Making Waves was established in 1989 and its mission continues to be to provide educational opportunities to students in urban, Title 1 school districts. His older sister had also been a Making Waves student and attended independent schools. His sister, however left the program and “like after like a semester or two at the public school she realized what she had before was a lot better.” His sister ended up graduating from an independent school and a U.C. school. One sibling

rejected Making Waves and did not go to college and the other sibling that was pressured into Making Waves also began college, but then opted for a program in marketing instead.

Peter ended up at Tunnel High because although he had attended the orientation for another private school, “I think I got like a final grant from Tunnel High. It’s a lot of money so my parents couldn’t afford for me to go [to Tunnel High].” Peter’s parents both have manual labor jobs and rarely participate in his schooling. Peter and his father have a turbulent relationship because Peter’s father wants his home to emulate the homes in Mexico where children are surrounded by family members, not going out of the home with friends. He recently said to his father, “It’s still a lot different here. I still love you guys but I need “friend” time. I can’t explain all of my issues to you guys.” He described his time with his friends as a “stress reliever.”

Unable to clearly fully articulate what he was experiencing, Peter seemed to be grappling with one of the most fundamental dilemmas facing most immigrant youth in the U.S.: the struggle between remaining loyal to their cultural origins and traditions or immersing themselves in mainstream U.S. culture. Although Peter’s family transmitted him with a solid racial and cultural identity, he felt pressure to fit in and adopt cultural values of the U.S. Peter is an avid soccer player and hopes to play in college. He is currently the captain of the soccer team. He is eagerly anticipating his first year at U.C. Riverside.

***Sylvie.*** Sylvie lives in the same town as Eastern Academy with her father and her mother. Her mother is from Columbia and her father’s ancestors trace back many generations in the United States. Though from an early age she embraced her “Hispanic” heritage, it was to some degree, a step removed from her daily life. Sylvie does not remember a time in which her

identification as “Hispanic” actually mattered and she wonders if anyone with whom she does not have a personal relationship knows that she identifies as “Hispanic” (she presents as white).

The question for Sylvie was where, not if, she would attend college. With a mother and father who were college graduates and who provided any financial resource necessary, she received a quality public education before enrolling at East Academy’s Middle School. She is very happy to be attending University of Colorado in the fall.

Sylvie has been a serious academic with a small circle of close friends, none of whom are people of color, but she is friendly with the majority of students in her class. She did not participate in any diversity events in her time at East Academy, she did not attend Latino or Diversity Club meetings, nor did she opt to take course offerings on Latin American, Latin@, or diversity issues.

The researcher interviewed twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) grade students as they may be more reflective or articulate about their schooling experience, thus being more resourceful as subjects than younger students (Patton 2002). Each participating senior student attended that school from the ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) grade so that they may have a more clear understanding and a depth of experience within the School and its program.

The researcher coordinated with each school’s equity leader to schedule a date, private location, and times for all on-campus interviews. The names of all participants were changed to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used for all participants to protect their privacy. Names or any other identifiable information of the school or participants were not included in any of the researcher’s notes or the final report.

Table 8 illustrates the gender identity, ethnic identity, first language, generational relationship to family immigration story, and school of each student participant.

Table 8

*Demographics of participating students.*

Name	Gender ID	Ethnicity	First Language	Generation	School
<i>Claudia</i>	Girl	Mexican	Spanish	First	Old School
<i>Alberto</i>	Boy	Mexican	Spanish	First	Old School
<i>Bris</i>	Girl	Salvadoran/ Mexican	Spanish/ English	First	Tunnel High
<i>Peter</i>	Boy	Mexican	Spanish	First	Tunnel High
<i>Sylvie</i>	Girl	“Hispanic”: Columbian/ white	English	First	East Academy
<i>Leo</i>	Boy	Mexican	Spanish	First	East Academy
<i>Necahual</i>	Girl	Mexican	Spanish	First	Southern Prep
<i>Mario</i>	Boy	Mexican	Spanish	First	Southern Prep
<i>Alex</i>	Girl	Filipino/ Guatemalan	Spanish	First	City School
<i>Mateo</i>	Boy	Mexican	Spanish	First	City School
<i>Lucas</i>	Boy	Guatemalan/ Nicaraguan	Spanish	First	Hill School
<i>Naila</i>	Girl	Mexican	Spanish/ English	First/ Second	Hill School

Of the Equity Leaders (EL's), four (4) of the six (6) have been educators for over twenty years. The age range for the EL's spanned mid-30's to early 60's. The EL's identified as Latin@ (n=4), Black-American (n=1), and Chinese (n=1). Three (3) out of the six (6) EL's have an advanced degree (Master's Degree). Three (3) of the six (6) EL's earned a teaching

credential. The EL's held a variety of teaching and educational administrative jobs within their schools or at prior schools, some titles concurrently, for example being a teacher and a Dean. One (1) EL worked as trainer and consultant outside of the educational field and this is his second appointed as an EL within independent schools.

Two (2) of the six (6) EL's that participated in this study are working in their second or more appointment. Two (2) of the six (6) EL's are currently in their first appointment as EL in any kind of school. One (1) EL, Melanie has worked as an EL at all of the independent schools in which she has worked for the past twenty (20) years and though Phil is an EL at East Academy, there is a full-time administrator who serves as the Dean of Equity and Inclusion. Betty also leads the diversity work at Old School, but job shares the role of EL.

All of the EL's, except for one EL, were the first in their family to graduate from college. Of the EL's that had school-age children of color, all sent at least one of their children to independent schools or planned to. For instance, both children of one EL went to public schools K-5. One child stayed in public school through high school because of a learning difference that was well accommodated through the public school system while the other child attended independent schools 6<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grades.

### **Equity Leaders (EL) participant profiles.**

**Betty.** Betty was born in New Orleans, but has lived in Oakland since she was three (3) years old. Her parents were first-generation Chinese, but she was raised speaking English because her parents wanted her to be as "American" as possible. Her father was a graduate of U.C. Berkeley, as was Betty and her two (2) siblings. Betty lives in Oakland with her husband and both of her children are college graduates.

Betty has been a member of the Old School community for over forty (40) years. She began as a Lower School teacher and later taught math and drama in the Middle and Upper Schools. She is presently a full-time administrator, working in admissions, financial aid, and diversity. She is also one of the founders of the School's community outreach program, and while no longer its program director, she remains actively involved as an Advisory Board Member.

**Joel.** Joel is a native of the mid-West. Joel recently moved to the Bay Area from the mid-West after spending most of his career as a consultant and diversity trainer in the business sector. Before moving out West to his position at Hill School, he served as an EL at an independent school in the mid-West.

Joel described coming to the West Coast from the mid-West as if he was a character in the Wizard of Oz, in that he came from an extremely segregated black-white space to a space full of color. He experienced a drastic cultural transition and it is very clear to him that people in the United States are telling very different racial stories depending on their zip codes. He is enjoying his work at the Hill School immensely.

**Melanie.** Melanie was born in East Los Angeles in 1971. Her father was born in a tiny village outside of Guadalajara, Mexico. He came to the United States at age of eighteen (18) with his father, but was the first to set down roots. Melanie's mother was born in Petaluma, California, is white and a second generation Californian. Melanie is the product of a second marriage and her parents have been divorced for decades. Melanie has several stepsiblings and half-brothers and sisters.

Melanie grew up in Half Moon Bay in a highly segregated community. There were few families of color that were not migrant workers. As such, most brown students were segregated

in to English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms. As her parents divorced early on, she was raised by her white mother and struggled with dyslexia, especially since her white teachers assumed “my reading challenges were because we spoke Spanish at home.” Still, she is not bilingual, as she did not grow up with her father for very long.

She is the first person in her family, on both sides of her family tree, to attend college. She has been teaching for twenty (20) years. As many of the student participants, Melanie was chosen by the Multicultural Alliance as a rising teacher with profound potential. The Multicultural Alliance introduced her to the world of independent schools and supported her in earning her MAT from Brown University before she completed her BA from San Francisco State University.

As a woman of color, she feels she has been consistently held to a higher standard, passed over for promotions and devalued as a member of the faculty and administration at most of her schools. She holds fast to her role as a teacher of color as a model and staunch advocate for students of color. She tirelessly challenges her white students' assumptions about people of color both in the classroom and as an example of what a “Mexican person” can be.

**Phil.** Phil was born and raised in Fresno, but his mother was born in Colton, California. All but three (3) of his grandparents were born in Mexico. The hope from his father’s generation was that there would be no need to “work the system” anymore because there would be equal access. As such, his parents did not raise Phil speaking Spanish so that he would more easily assimilate to U.S. society (though he was second generation by then).

Phil went to Catholic schools his entire educational career. It was at a private, Catholic liberal arts college where Phil met his mentor. Phil’s mentor was the most influential and gifted teacher he ever had. It was this teacher who encouraged him to become a teacher. Phil has

worked in Catholic schools, colleges, and at East Academy for the majority of his career. In this time at East Academy, he has worked in admissions, curriculum, equity, and in the classroom.

He lives near East Academy with his wife and youngest daughter. His middle daughter graduated from East Academy and his youngest daughter is currently in the Middle School at East Academy.

**Pablo** Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Pablo learned to navigate cultural differences and challenging circumstances at an early age when he and his mother moved to the Midwest. Pablo was bilingual at a young age. Pablo quickly understood how the U.S. racial classification system can essentialize the experiences of diverse ethno-racial groups and also privilege whiteness. Pablo presents as white and is often exposed to racist remarks and “deficit” teaching philosophies.

Pablo’s mother was also an educator. This and his racialized experiences are what propelled Pablo to focus his efforts in education in changing the landscape of private schools and making systemic changes. Pablo lives with his wife and three (3) young children in the South Bay.

**Ted.** Ted’s multiracial mother is a third-generation Mission district resident and Ted’s father was born in the U.S. Ted’s father identified as Mexican, Filipino, and Spanish. Ted was born in the Mission District of San Francisco, but was raised in a predominantly white suburban community. He was regularly one of the only few students of color throughout high school.

Ted grew up with a limited racial consciousness because brown and black people did not exist in the world that was presented to him in school. Ted never had a teacher of color until college and the curriculum he experienced was through a European lens. After college, he took a

job working overseas to help develop a language academy. After living in various countries overseas, Ted joined the faculty at City School as an English teacher.

He was surprised to find himself teaching in a private school as he was a product of the public school system. City School emphasized their outreach program for under-represented students and he has been connected to that program ever since. He initially had a positive experience with the students, staff, and administration and he has been there for fifteen (15) years. Ted hopes that his son will one day attend City School.

Table 9 highlights the ethnic identity, generational relationship to family immigration story, first language, years as an educator and years as an equity leader, and school for the equity leader.

Table 9

*Demographics of Participating Equity Leaders (EL's).*

EL “Name”	Ethnicity	First Language	Generation U.S.	Years in education	Years as EL	% of job as EL
<i>Ted</i> City School	Mexican/ Multiracial	English	Second/Fourth	20	6	100%
<i>Melanie</i> Tunnel High	Mexican	English	Second	20	20	15%
<i>Joel</i> Hill School	Black/ American	English	N/A	5	15	100%
<i>Betty</i> Old School	Chinese	English	Third	44	14	40%
<i>Phil</i> East Academy	Mexican- American	English	Second	33	10	0%
<i>Pablo</i> Southern Prep.	Argentinian	Spanish	Immigrant	15	5	20%

## Procedures

A qualitative approach was most appropriate for this study because in order to understand the reality of subjects, we must make space for their stories (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The meanings of those narratives were explored in tandem with the participants at the final focus group discussions. The data collected from students and equity leaders in Bay Area independent schools may help to inform teachers, educational leaders, and school administrators in fostering schools that meet the academic and emotional needs of all students, regardless of their ethnic background. This qualitative research study utilized open-ended dialogues with students, semi-structured interviews with equity leaders, and guiding interview questions were followed up by appropriate probing questions (Hatch, 2002; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The critical theory framework also invites a focus group model so that the researcher, the equity leaders, and youth participants could partner in making meaning of the data and offering potential strategies to bring about more racial equity in schools. The CRT frame also informed the interview schedule and researcher responses as the researcher was interested in drawing out stories that speak to how race and ethnicity may have influenced Latin@ student experiences during their time in independent schools.

The researcher asked about students' experiences as self-identified Latin@ students enrolled in Bay Area POCIS member schools. The researcher engaged the students in an open-ended interview to encourage students to tell their story in their own manner (Moustakas, 1994) (see Appendix H). The researcher's responses and probing questions were informed by a thorough analysis of current research regarding the experiences of Latin@ students within predominantly white learning spaces. The researcher analyzed the transcripts and created a chart demonstrating emergent themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). However, as the researcher was

interested in partnering with students, the researcher concluded the study with a focus group that included as many research participants as possible. The focus group was an opportunity for the researcher to partner with the students to make recommendations to school leaders as they continue to explore school structures, policies, and practices that contribute to positive student experiences.

The researcher followed guidelines to ensure trust with participants and complete a sound, ethical study. Some guidelines included transparency and clarity in describing the study, successfully completing the IRB (Internal Review Board) process, acquiring permission through consent and assent forms, protecting confidentiality and anonymity, and allowing for transcription checks. The researcher put these structures in place to minimize the risks of the study to the school, students, and equity leaders. Students' grades and academic standing were not impacted by a student's decision to participate, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time. Research participants' experiences were not reported to school officials or anyone else without permission unless the information given proved to be harmful to themselves or others.

Three (3) pilot open-ended interviews were conducted at a private, co-educational POCIS member upper school in the Bay Area. The equity leader of that school identified two (2) self-identified Latin@ students in the twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) grade for the first two (2) pilot interviews. The third semi-structured one-on-one pilot interview was conducted with the pilot school's equity leader. The researcher conducted the three (3) one-on-one pilot interviews at the pilot school site in a private setting. The researcher solicited feedback on the open-ended interview from both students and de-briefed the semi-structured interview with the equity leader. Once the researcher piloted, transcribed, and reviewed the pilot interviews and shared those with the committee, the

researcher finalized the interview schedule. The semi-structured interview also included follow-up questions for clarity and depth (Patton, 2002).

The individual one-on-one interviews were conducted in each participant's school when classes were in session and lasted approximately sixty (60) minutes. Each individual interview was recorded (audio and visual). All on-campus interviews were reviewed for accuracy and transcribed as close as possible to the day on which they were administered at each school site to maximize clarity. Once each interview was transcribed, the researcher color-coded the transcripts as patterns emerged out of the narratives (Creswell, 2009). The use of quotes from the participants also lent credence to the themes. As the transcripts were coded, the researcher also made personal memos in the margins and kept a personal journal, supporting the data when necessary.

The researcher gathered as many participants as possible from the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 interviews in a three (3) hour focus group to share and discuss any emergent themes and/or contradictions. The first of two (2) focus groups were conducted at one participating school when classes were not in session. The focus group was recorded (audio and visual). The transcript from this focus group was reviewed for accuracy and transcribed as close as possible to the focus group day. The researcher partnered with students and equity leaders to make meaning of the patterns and developed recommendations to school leaders as they continue to explore school structures, policies, and practices that contribute to positive student experiences. The researcher gathered as many participants as possible from interviews during the 2014-2015 school year for a second focus group.

The researcher recorded field notes during each interview day: descriptive information of what the researcher sees and hears along with the researcher's feelings and reactions to what is

seen and heard (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Observations were useful in collecting objective data that could be compared to data gathered from interviews (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). The field notes of descriptive data augmented the information collected from the dialogues and interviews because the field notes described the general setting (wall displays) and the general school community (student groupings in the halls and in the lunch room). The researcher collected and examined artifacts from each participating school such as mission statements, strategic plans, statistics, school websites, etc. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) suggest that information collected from interviews, observations, and the examination of artifacts may provide the reader with a clear understanding of the school setting (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009).

As the researcher was at each school site for many hours, the researcher engaged in non-participant observations of the general student population in between class periods, during breaks, lunch, and any time the researcher was not conducting a formal, private interview (Gay, Mills, Airasian, 2009). The non-participant observations may or may not have involved the students or equity leaders, as this was an opportunity for the researcher to gather more data about the school site. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) encourage researchers to utilize a common framework for each observation, such as identifying the students/adults involved, making notes of those leading, and in what specific ways do students engage within their school environments. The researcher also took note of the setting of the interview space, the office of the equity leader, and the school grounds. The researcher did not, however, interact with the students or participate in the context being observed in any way (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). These formal and informal non-participant observations helped the researcher better understand the data collected

from one-on-one interviews and dialogues regarding school atmosphere, structure, and behaviors.

The data collected was coded and analyzed using an inductive qualitative analysis (Patton, 2003). The researcher will utilize Miles and Huberman's (1994) Traditional Analysis Sequence, an iterative process. The researcher has interpreted their sequence in Figure 9.

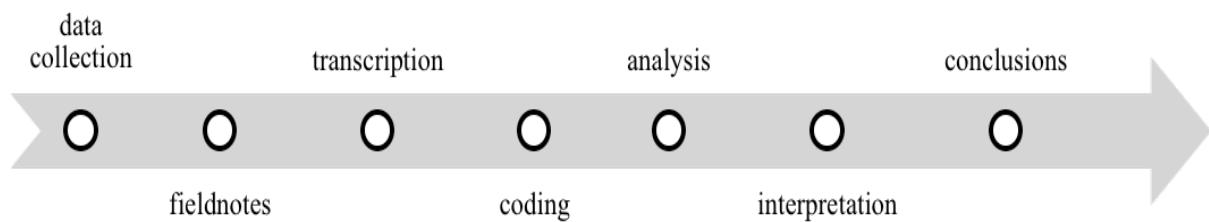


Figure 9. Traditional Analysis Sequence (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

The researcher used aggregate data only when reporting on the results of the research. All materials were kept in a password-protected file accessible only to the researcher. Hard copies of the data gathered were stored in a secure file cabinet in the researcher's private home office and electronic copies were stored on the researcher's personal home computer. Back-up copies that are stored on data storage devices, such as thumb drives or CDs, were also stored in a secure file cabinet in the researchers' home. Data was destroyed once transcripts of the interviews were made. Signed consent forms were kept separate from the study data.

**Trustworthiness.** The data from the one-on-one student interviews was triangulated with one-on-one interviews with equity leaders, observations, and artifact examination. All interviews were transcribed as close as possible to when they were administered and the researcher utilized context summary sheets to organize researcher reflections (Patton, 2003). This allowed the researcher to summarize each interview and observation (Patton, 2003). The

researcher informed the participants that all materials were to be stored in a safe location. The researcher also offered each student and equity leader the opportunity to review data from their own personal interview and to view amended write-ups to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of what was said was accurate. Participant review of the data is important in establishing trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The final stage of this research study utilized a focus group. Focus groups allowed for dialogue between populations that may not normally interface. This shared space also facilitated growth because participants came to know and understand their own experiences by listening to the experiences of others. The researcher was guided by the awareness that while critical social research can contribute to emancipation, people remain enslaved if researchers insist that a people can only be emancipated with their help (Stahl, Tremblay, & LeRouge, 2011).

The researcher understands personal biases and assumptions must be separate from the data analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2007; Peshkin, 1988). The researcher's experience as a first-generation Latina who learned English as a second language and experienced K-12 education as "one of the only ones" when a student, teacher, and administrator inform the way in which she views and experiences independent schools today (Scruggs, 2010). Since the way in which the researcher understands the issues raised within this study stems from her own social location, the researcher was "mindful of the water in which she lives" to be able to recognize and responsibly respond to her own subjectivity (Drago-Severson, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). It is also not enough to simply identify that to which the researcher is subject; the researcher must constantly examine and articulate how her own research collection, analysis, and interpretation may have been impacted by her subjectivity (Peshkin, 1998). In making the researcher's values explicit, "the enquirers admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively

report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field” (Creswell, 2007, p. 18). It is therefore imperative that “the researcher’s focus [became] balanced-understanding and depicting the world authentically in all its complexity while being self-analytical, politically aware and reflexive in consciousness” (Patton, 2002, p. 41).

As such, the researcher kept a personal journal (Creswell, 2007). The researcher kept a record of personal bias and attitudes toward the data. The researcher looked for key terms in personal writing and crosschecked observations and analysis (Peshkin, 1988). The researcher put greater emphasis on elevating other points of view that were different from the researcher’s own beliefs, thus suspending her own “superior apprehensions” (Kegan, 1994, p. 302). The researcher was clear that she was not intending on solving a problem. In order to do this research well, the researcher was committed to following Peshkin’s (1988) advice to “consciously attend to the orientations that will shape what [the researcher sees] and what [the researcher] makes of what [she sees]” (p. 21). The researcher documented experiences that may be useful to school leaders within independent schools that may not have access to these stories in their efforts to make positive and sustainable changes. The researcher was committed to a study that is valid, trustworthy, and openly and authentically acknowledges personal subjectivity throughout the entire process.

### **Summary of Methods**

Though the majority of students, teachers and administrators in private-independent schools continue to be white and wealthy, interest in increasing the number of people of color within these schools, along with an interest in their experiences, is growing. NAIS, the largest private school member organization in the country, is providing support and leadership to independent schools within their network to ensure best practices regarding diversity, equity, and

inclusion. A qualitative design was chosen for this study because the researcher wanted to uncover and provide data from the perspective of young, self-identified Latin@ students. The theoretical framework for this study was CRT. Critical race theory strives to promote positive social change by allowing those who have been historically oppressed to speak their own truth.

Through CT and CRT, this qualitative study aimed to explore the perceptions of Latin@ students within predominantly white independent schools within the San Francisco Bay Area. The sample size was twelve (12) self-identified Latin@ students and six (6) equity leaders, all of whom were interviewed at their school sites. Data triangulation was achieved by the eighteen (18) interviews, focus groups, informal observations, and artifact examination.

As there is a dearth of literature on the experience of historically under-represented students of color within independent schools, the data collected may provide guidance to schools leaders. Although this qualitative study cannot be generalized to other populations, the findings may provide insight and information to independent school leaders in examining their campus climate through the lens of this minority student population to create and/or maintain learning communities where all students are seen, valued, and heard.

Chapter 4 will provide an in-depth synopsis of participant narratives. This is followed by Chapter 5, the findings, which describes in thematic form the experiences and recommendation of the students to school leaders.

## Chapter 4

### Results

*May the roaring force of our collective creative heal the wounds  
of hate, ignorance, indifference and  
dissolve the divisions creating chasms between us.*

*Open throats so we who fear speaking out raise our voices...  
Pay homage to those whose backs have served as bridges  
(Anzaldua, 1986, p. 575-576).*

The findings are presented in this chapter. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews of twelve (12) self-identified Latin@ students triangulated with six (6) equity leaders from six (6) NAIS (National Association of Independent Schools) and POCIS (People of Color in Independent Schools) member schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. These data were also augmented by two (2) focus groups comprised of student participants and equity leaders from the six (6) participating schools. The data collected and analyzed in this research project concentrated on the ways in which self-identified Latin@ students make sense of their experiences in predominantly white independent schools.

The research question that informed this study was: “What formative experiences have the deepest impact on Latin@s while attending Bay Area independent high schools, and how do these critical incidents inform their identity as people of color in U.S. society?” Research sub-questions that elicited data were the following:

1. How do the racial and ethnic backgrounds of self-identified Latin@ students affect their perception of critical school experiences within predominantly white POCIS member schools?
  
2. What tools or opportunities, if any, have the participating schools provided the students so that they may develop ethnic identities and critical consciousness regarding oppressive elements in their lives?

3. In what ways, if any, do your schools explicitly and deliberately challenge the dominant white culture of power and/or demonstrate its values and appreciate your identity as a Latin@ student?

4. To what extent are you satisfied with your decision to attend this school as it relates to your identity formation?

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section includes a profile and brief description of each participant along with demographic summaries. The second section presents the various categories that emerged as themes through the coding process. Lastly, the results are presented.

### **General Demographics of Participants**

Potential schools were identified through the list of current People of Color in Independent School (POCIS) Member Upper Schools (grades 9-12) in the Bay Area. The researcher sent email invitations to Heads of School and/or Equity Leaders to eleven (11) schools that were current POCIS Member Schools (and by default also members of NAIS and CAIS).

All of the participating schools have a stated commitment to employing an equity leader, supporting ethnic affinity groups, and actively participating in local and national opportunities for community growth with regards to diversity.

The following tables provided general demographics of participating schools, student participants, and EL participants. The identity of each school and participant will kept anonymous. Subjects were assured of anonymity so the researcher assigned each school, student, and equity leader a pseudonym.

Table 6

*General demographics of participating schools.*

School “Name”	Region	School Type	School Size	US Tuition	Percentage of students on FA
City School	San Francisco	9-12/Day	1474	\$19,100	30%
East Academy	East Bay	6-12 Day/Boarding	450	\$36, 325	23%
Hill School	East Bay	9-12 Day	360	\$38,670	24%
Old School	East Bay	K-12 Day	875	\$35,455	25%
Tunnel High	East Bay	K-12 Day	700	\$33,600	20%
Southern Prep	South Bay	6-12 Day/Boarding	350	\$38, 750	20%

Note. Some schools have a tiered tuition structure. The tuition listed here is specific to the Upper School (US) Day students, if the school has multiple divisions and a boarding program. All of the participants were day students within their schools. In addition to tuition, some schools also charge fees for books, trips, transportation, etc.

Table 7

*Ethnic diversity at participating schools.*

School “Name”	Percentage of SOC	Percentage of AOC	Percentage of Latin@ students	Percentage of Multiracial Latin@s
City School	42%	10%	12%	N/A
East Academy	51%	17%	4%	2%
Hill School	52%	24%	2%	NA
Old School	51%	30%	4%	8%
Tunnel High	40%	8%	1.5%	0.6%
Southern Prep	25%	15%	9%	4%

Note. Data were provided by EL’s and school website

Table 8

*Demographics of participating students.*

Name	Gender ID	Ethnicity	First Language	Generation	School
<i>Claudia</i>	Girl	Mexican	Spanish	First	Old School
<i>Alberto</i>	Boy	Mexican	Spanish	First	Old School
<i>Bris</i>	Girl	Salvadoran/ Mexican	Spanish/ English	First	Tunnel High
<i>Peter</i>	Boy	Mexican	Spanish	First	Tunnel High
<i>Sylvie</i>	Girl	“Hispanic”: Columbian/ white	English	First	East Academy
<i>Leo</i>	Boy	Mexican	Spanish	First	East Academy
<i>Necahual</i>	Girl	Mexican	Spanish	First	Southern Prep
<i>Mario</i>	Boy	Mexican	Spanish	First	Southern Prep
<i>Alex</i>	Girl	Filipino/ Guatemalan	Spanish	First	City School
<i>Mateo</i>	Boy	Mexican	Spanish	First	City School
<i>Lucas</i>	Boy	Guatemalan/ Nicaraguan	Spanish	First	Hill School
<i>Naila</i>	Girl	Mexican	Spanish/ English	First/ Second	Hill School

Table 9

*Equity Leader (EL) Demographics.*

EL “Name”	Ethnicity	First Language	Generation U.S.	Years in education	Years as EL	% of job as EL
<i>Ted</i> City School	Mexican/ Multiracial	English	Second/Fourth	20	6	100%
<i>Melanie</i> Tunnel High	Mexican	English	Second	20	20	15%
<i>Joel</i> Hill School	Black/ American	English	N/A	5	15	100%
<i>Betty</i> Old School	Chinese	English	Third	44	14	40%
<i>Phil</i> East Academy	Mexican- American	English	Second	33	10	0%
<i>Pablo</i> Southern Prep.	Argentinian	Spanish	Immigrant	15	5	20%

**Emergent Themes**

In this study, during initial selective coding, the themes that emerged for the Latin@ students were six (6) for opportunities and five (5) for challenges. Triangulation of the data from Latin@ students with that of the EL’s resulted in three (3) for opportunities and three (3) for challenges. Table 4.5 shows the themes that emerged. Items that are designated with (EL) indicate that when triangulating the data, that particular category emerged for the EL as well. Similarly, (EL\*) indicates that the category emerged for the EL and not the students.

Table 10

*Emergent Themes.*

Themes	Opportunities	Challenges
	Being hand picked	Being “one of the only ones” (EL)  <i>-notion of diversity</i>  <i>- “minority” status</i>
	Support Systems * (EL)  Supportive adults  <i>-parents</i>  <i>-EL's and other mentors</i>	Aversive racism  <i>- “stereotype threat”</i>  <i>-academic insecurity</i>  <i>-fear of negative stereotypes</i>  <i>-code-switching/acculturation</i>
	Finding place and people (EL)  <i>-student cohort</i>  <i>-affinity clubs</i>  <i>-conferences</i>	Managing micro-aggressions (EL)  Socio-economic class  Institutional Structures (EL)
	Finding Voice (EL)	
	Gaining “access” (EL)  <i>-future over present</i>	

### **Themes of Challenge.**

***“The only one.”*** The classroom is a place of contradiction for students of color.

Although the classroom environment functions as a space for risk-taking and learning, it can also function as a place that invokes a negative physical and emotional response. Although Necahual was excited when she first applied to the Bridge program, she shared, “when I shadowed independent schools there weren’t that many Latin@s. I was like, I don’t feel comfortable here (at Southern Prep) and I can’t relate to any of these people.” Alex also expressed surprise in that she knew that City School would be predominantly white, but actually, being at the school and seeing so many white people was a shock. She relayed to the researcher that in her class of 365 seniors, there are sixteen (16) or 4.4% self-identified Latin@ students. At one point or another, every single student participant counted on their hands or talked of the actual number of individuals. There was a sense of shock that a school in the Bay Area or San Francisco would not have more students of color at a “great school like City School.”

In response to hearing students express frustration and loneliness, Joel offered the following perspective, “We have to start with us. If families can look around and see that Brown people work here, are affirmed, and stay, then perhaps they will see it as a viable option for their child.”

All but two (2) of the students (Naila from the Hill School and Sylvie from East Academy) discussed the sense of being a “minority” and a resistance/anger to the notion of “diversity” at their school. Mateo from City School stated, “I feel that people say, ‘Oh, City School is so diverse’, but from my perspective, I don’t feel City School is really that diverse”. Bris remembers her first day of seventh grade (7<sup>th</sup>) grade when she transferred from a public middle school to an independent middle school saying, “it was a culture shock for sure.” Of her

first day she said, “I could tell the difference in what I was wearing and what the other kids were wearing. It was also full of white students. It was really hard for me, I really hated it, and I was sad all the time. I remember I would come home crying all of the time.” Peter reported, “So now that I think about it, if I had the same mentality that I do now, I don’t know. I guess all the white students – I don’t think they looked at us differently, but um, because we were all really good friends. It was a really small school.”

When talking about the Latin@ representation at Tunnel High, Bris spoke passionately about this,

there are only a handful, a couple of Latin@s here – like I can count all of them on my hand. Like the freshman and the seniors have Latin@s, but the junior and sophomore classes lack them. I worry that when Peter and I graduate, there will be like three (3) or four (4) left...I’d die for another Latin@ student. It’s ridiculous. When I see another Latin@ on campus, I’m like, ‘Hey, let’s be friends please’. And I reach out to them. As weird as it may sound, I tell them ‘I’m here for you. I know what you are going through’ – especially the freshman. And now, they walk up to me and tell me about things that happen. It’s cool. We are like one big family. And we rely on each other... to bring each other up and support each other, to motivate each other. I am still friends with the seniors and juniors that did that for me. It’s because of them that I’m running the Latin@ club and going to these conferences (Latino Summit, White Privilege Conference {WPC}, People Of Color Conference {POCC}, and Student Diversity Leadership Conference {SDLC}).

Though students report high levels of satisfaction with student diversity conferences, City School continues to be resistant to sending students to the White Privilege Conference (WPC) and other NAIS sponsored diversity conferences. Yet, there has been a surge in the institutional commitment to sending faculty each year, despite the high cost. East Academy has experienced a shift over the course of the past two years. Whereas nine (9) years ago, eight (8) adults and six (6) students attended POCC and five (5) years ago, five (5) staff and six (6) students attended the White Privilege Conference, this past year, East Academy had zero (0) representation at either conference. Though the EL at Hill School invited and encouraged Naila to attend SDLC, she

refused the invitation two (2) years in a row. Hill School regularly sends students to SDLC, but not to WPC.

Mateo, from City School, expressed sadness at the lack of diversity within his class. The nuances in recruitment practices are not lost on students of color and they respond very passionately toward some of the efforts.

It's lonely not being able to relate to that many people, but I get by. It's kind of sad. The school says it's trying to get more students of color, which is good, especially in their advertising. But I find it hilarious when I get calls like the night before asking me if I would be willing to be in a few photos during my free period. I mean, it takes me two (2) hours just to get to school by bus, and when I get there, I'm alone with like one other Black kid that I barely know and they ask us to like hug in the picture.

When the researcher entered the EL's office at City School the day of the interviews, her personal journal noted that there were somewhere between nine (9) and eleven (11) students who presented as Black or African-American chatting, doing work, and eating. When the EL asked them to leave so that we could have privacy, one boy replied, "Where are we going to go? There is nowhere else to go." As soon as that period was over, another large group of Latin@ and Black/African-American students entered the EL's office. As the researcher was waiting for the next student to be interviewed, that group of students immediately began asking the EL and the researcher about their thoughts on "All Lives Matter" demonstrations in the stead of "Black Lives Matter."

Pablo, from Southern Prep recalled a time this academic year when a Black, male, freshman was having a difficult time. Though Pablo reached out to him, he could sense that this student needed something more or something different. He asked the student if he was interested in talking to the only Black staff member and after their one-on-one talk the student said, "He said everything I needed to hear. I feel so relieved knowing I am not alone in this." Lucas

recalled, “I literally did not know anybody [at Hill School]. I did not know about certain Middle Schools and private schools in Oakland, neighborhoods, streets. Like, I did not know anything. So I was alone a lot, trying to figure out who else did not know anything.”

Silvie, from East Academy, communicates some conflict at the start of the interview, when she says,

I think it's really easy if you are being nit-picky about it, to feel like a minority. I think East Academy could celebrate the minorities, but I think maybe they don't because you get into the argument of what really is the minority, because everyone could feel that way depending on the community...I think there needs to be more of that [celebrating minorities] because I don't think there is a lot of that here. I think so that the people who are can feel acknowledged and celebrated... I don't think there are a lot of chances to talk about being Hispanic at East Academy...or maybe it's because I didn't take Latin American History or that I am not involved in some of the things that talk about that so I am speaking from my personal experience.

In fact, at East Academy, there is an active club for all students, but geared in particular to students of color, a Latin@ cultural club, a Latin American History seminar and a Race in the U.S. seminar, and various optional events. The EL leader from East Academy did acknowledge that in many ways students could graduate from the high school and not have engaged in deep critical reflection of race and other forms of oppression and ethnic identity formation.

Joel also discussed the challenges of authentically connecting with students, but particularly with underrepresented students of color. When the researcher asked him what the biggest challenges were for Latin@s at Hill School, he did not know. He admitted that as a man of color, he is not a Latin@ man and so [Latin@] students do not come talk to him about [their experiences]. He has been to a few Latin@ club meetings, but he is still new to the community and trying to understand the landscape. Joel also notes that a part of the challenge is that there is so few [Latin@s], that “their experience can sometimes become a novelty. When you are one of the only ones or one of a few, people like to collect the exotic, and examine it by asking a lot of

questions. This can be exhausting to any student of color. So, Latin@ students seem to retreat and almost just not be.” Joel is pleased that the Latin@ club is very active because they have an outspoken and active Latin@ adult moderator. She speaks Spanish fluently and really cares about the issues impacting Latin@s. Joel very clearly stated that he needed help and expected support from other adults at school to meet the needs of all students.

Joel is also very open about the current state of Hill School regarding ethnic representation. For example, he pointed out that [Hill School] is not really accessible to those people who are mobility assisted. Joel said,

We want those people to feel successful. We want all people to feel welcome here. And, we have to ask ourselves why we are not there yet. From a strategic standpoint, we have a plan laid out to address that challenge. In order to do this, we have to talk about it.

We do not have as many Black or Latin@ students as we would expect here, based on the general population. Yes, we have many students of color here and we are doing much better in that regard, but Black and Latin@ students continue to be underrepresented and so are their families. We are very honest about that. And so we are also really honest about the reasons why we believe that may be. Some of it comes down to branding and marketing. Some may not be aware of Hill School as a real option. Even if a family may know who we are as a school, they may not know we give out over two (2) million dollars in aid each year and we are trying to increase that because we know that money is a chief barrier for all families and we also have to appreciate that there are Black and Latin@ families that do not need aid who aren’t here either.

We have made gains attracting students of color overall. In fact, we are seeing 60% of our new class is students of color, but when we look inside that population, African-American students are underrepresented. We have also been attending new fairs such as the public school fair in San Francisco. We have been spending more time in San Francisco and as EL, I have been at every recruitment event. The Diversity Night has shifted a bit and it is our final recruitment event in December. All prospective families are invited and we tell them why diversity is important and how it impacts their students’ education. They touch base with different groups of students and we invite faculty and staff of color and students and families of color. It’s like an open space format.

When the researcher asked why it was important for Alex to connect with other Latin@ students, she spoke of wanting to find a “comfort zone” because she was the only one from her elementary school to enroll at City School. It was important to her to be with people that understood her and shared her culture because the conversations had by her white peers initially intimidated her. She reports, “I just could not relate and I felt very backwards.” She eventually formed a small group of friends that were not Latin@ or Filipino, in fact they were white. This was an important turning point because though they did not share the same cultural or class background, they shared the same values and interests that extended beyond materialism, the social scene, and popular culture.

Claudia and Alberto, from Old School, discounted the importance of low numbers. For them, being literally the only boy and girl in their class to identify as Latin@ was not an issue because they had “gotten used to it.” Both shared the sentiment that schools “like this are not meant for people like us, so why get all mad about it?” Still, during the focus group interview, both shared a hope that Old School will enroll more Latin@s, more students from various areas of Oakland, and other students of color. They explained that the Latino Club is a small club with very low participation and they understand that the administration places the responsibility of keeping the Latino Club on the shoulders of the students. Claudia says, “I thought it was my role as the one of the only Latin@s to step up and bring my experiences into the club. My mom does a lot of cooking and I thought it would be great to help in that way.”

Participating students discussed the classroom and the fact they were “one of the only ones” was a constant factor. As such, it was “risky” to participate in classroom discussions because students felt they automatically became the center of attention when they spoke. Although the students recognized the benefit of offering their point of view, when they spoke

they were aware of the need to screen their thinking and communication so as not to confirm negative stereotypes. Bris recalls worrying that she was actually perpetuating the stereotype by NOT talking because she did not want people to think that about her [as a student].

***“Stereotype threat.”*** The participating students’ high school experiences speak to the struggles that many poor, working-class, students of color encounter as they attempt to navigate through the educational system. Though many students came from their local public schools feeling academically adept, the transition to independent schools shook their confidence. Stereotype threat refers to being at risk of conforming to a negative stereotype about one’s group (racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, sexuality, etc.). According to Steele, “culturally shaped stereotypes suggesting poor performance can, when made salient in a context involving the stereotype, disrupt performance of an individual who identifies with that group” (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Although some students in this study attended independent middle schools, the upper school classroom environment revealed a fear of fulfilling negative stereotypes of Latin@s.

Leo became increasingly concerned with how he presented himself in class. He found that he constantly had to prove himself to others. All of the students in this study, except for Sylvie, shared in this experience. Having a limited academic background led Leo to question his abilities and whether he belonged at East Academy. This academic self-doubt, that comes with an awareness of being the minority in the class and/or academically substandard, is what psychologist Suinn (2006) calls imposter syndrome. Experiencing imposter syndrome and being in a new, academically rigorous environment created much anxiety for Leo, which impacted his initial level of participation and interaction. One must understand that this academic experience is a result of a complex struggle between how students perceive themselves as Latin@s and how

they believe peers and faculty members perceive them. Leo shared that part of his resistance to being at East Academy was to simply ‘not care’. Leo proclaimed, “You guys [peers at East Academy] were already ten (10) steps ahead of me so why even try? I was the smart kid at my school, but here...if I seem like I don’t care then I don’t look bad.”

In the classroom, most of the participants are constantly aware of what they say and how they say things. Mario, from Southern Prep, expressed it succinctly, “When I first got in here I felt smart too, but then I got here, and I did not feel smart anymore because the kids looked down on me. Nobody wanted to work with me in class and no one talked to me. And I was like, ‘I am not dumb, I was just at a school where the level was not as high.’” Alex says that even when she was placed in small groups, she was physically isolated (they would turn their desks away from her) and both implicitly and explicitly silenced (her ideas were disregarded). She is able to laugh about it now because some of those students have since apologized and pointed out how “unique and rare” she is. For instance, she does not “take her education for granted” and is an “independent thinker.”

Alex, from City School, mentioned that she experienced a negative reaction to the racialized perceptions peers held of her. Alex’s fear of potentially fulfilling negative stereotypes was at the center of her thought process in virtually every class in her first two (2) years of school even though she thought of herself as academically strong. Instead of paying attention to the material being discussed, Necahual found herself grappling with how she should articulate her question, which at times distracted her from the academic discussion at hand. By the time she was a junior, Bris began to say, “if they’re not worrying about me, why should I care about them?” These experiences illustrate that participating in school caused some anxiety and frustration in some classrooms, but they are all grateful for the resilience they now have.

In the researchers' early conversations with Alberto and Claudia, both were confident that being Mexican-American, low-income, and first-generation college-bound helped them get in to college. Alberto did acknowledge that he had a strong GPA, but his counselor told him, "Oh, you're first generation, you'll be good. You shouldn't worry about college so much." Claudia agreed and said that as a "minority" it was "a bit easier." Still, she added that it was not something she thought would help her very much so she focused on having the strongest grades possible. They both noted that it was a regular topic of conversation and a "running joke" in the senior class at Old School. As the conversation went on, their tone changed and they both discussed the hardships of not having the resources to take a preparation course for the SAT's or private consultants to help them with their college applications. Claudia ended the interview by adding, "I feel like I had more self-motivation because I knew I didn't have all of the resources – literally no money to get all this additional help – I knew I had to work harder."

Necahual is still "afraid" of asking most teachers for help, but she does feel somewhat safe with the three (3) other teachers who bring up relevant topics to Latin@s in the U.S. Necahual translates the interest and competency in issues of social justice of these teachers to how they feel about her.

***Negative stereotypes.*** Bris believed that an unspoken code existed within the classroom that she had to "represent" all Latin@s. There was a shared understanding by all of the student participants that their academic performance within the classroom was generalizable to the entire ethno-racial group, "Latin@". All of the students, except for Sylvie, displayed characteristics of stereotype threat (i.e., believing that peers and teachers judged her negatively because of her ethno-racial identity, assuming she brought nothing to the discussion because of her lack of

preparation as a Latin@). This consequently made the student participants cautious of communication patterns within the classroom.

Necahual, from Southern Prep, said that many of her peers expected that she would have eight (8) siblings, have a boyfriend in a gang, and a dad in prison, “That was not true for me, and they would be like, ‘So, are you not really Mexican?’” The students at City School, Tunnel High, Hill School, and one student from East Academy discussed how difficult it was to adjust. This was particularly difficult for the students who came from local public schools. Necahual explained her experience, “the academic level was so high compared to the school I came from and my worst grades were in my first two years because I just couldn’t get used to it...I used to think I was good at English, but I guess I wasn’t.” Necahual admitted that she felt stripped of receiving a proper education because of this country’s negative stereotypes of people of color. “Like, I realized that the government must not care about us...why would they make schools for these younger [white] kids so much better? These little white kids would be like, ‘You haven’t learned that yet?’” By the time she was at Southern Prep and from her conversations with the children of the homes that her mother cleaned, she equated the lack of resources in her previous public education to the worth of the students, such as herself, that were relegated to those school environments.

Peter said that his main goal at Tunnel High was to not be “the stereotypical Mexican” so that his [white] classmates could actually say, “You guys aren’t all the same.” Peter went on to reveal that he learned to talk to [white and affluent] peers and parents. Peter acknowledges that by going to Tunnel High, he is no longer “just one person.” By “being forced to be a different person at school, I’ve learned how to talk to people.” He articulated being able to “code-switch” and he is confident that he could now garner internships because “he knows how to talk to

somebody...I know how to present myself." He understands the value of making connections with influential people.

Alex was intimidated by looming negative stereotypes such as "Hispanics don't go to college or succeed in life or do professional jobs...like I wanted to break those stereotypes and prove people wrong." When asked if she confronted those stereotypes at City School she readily offered that those stereotypes were already embedded in her psyche.

Naila was very aware of the "regular stereotype" about Latinos and she was determined to "prove them wrong" because not "all of us are like that." When the researcher asked Naila what she meant by "like that," she replied, "you know, dumb and lazy." She recalled that for her, academically, [Hill School] was really hard. She recalled that most of her friends went to "really good schools" and claimed "9<sup>th</sup> grade was so easy" and that "they just cruised by." Though Naila initially struggled, she received significant support from her teachers and her friends. For Naila, "it was not an option to fail and I tried really hard to ask for help, but also not to make people think that I was just not as smart, you know?"

The next section speaks to the code-switching, assimilating, and change that occurred in many of the student participants within this study. Part of the survival techniques for these students required a certain amount of each of these tactics over the course of four (4) years.

**Code-switching.** For most of the student participants, the first years were the most difficult. All of the participants agreed that explicit and implicit encounters and messages let them know that the norm by which they were being judged was the white norm. It was clear that they needed to learn the acceptable codes for language, dress, and behaviors, not only to be academically successful, but to actually be seen. The irony was that by changing, they knew they would not really be "seen" in this competitive environment. Some resisted the change and

eventually opted to resist and are now “seen” as outspoken advocates against racism. Others adopted some of the white normative behaviors.

The challenge for some of these participants is that they anticipated that their identity (who they were and where they were from) would be compromised by the end of their four (4) years. The negative (and inaccurate) assumptions held by their white peers prompted feelings of anger, inadequacy and loneliness, causing the participants to want to leave the school and/or justify their place at their schools. Bris’ peers would say, “Yeah, you are here because they [the School] need[s] diversity. I’m like, why is that the only reason you think I am here? What about you? How come you are legitimately here and I’m not?”

Leo did not want to go to East Academy initially. He did not want to leave his friends, his neighborhood, and “become white.” Some of his worries turned out to be true in that he lost touch with most friends from his Fruitvale neighborhood. “I spent so much time commuting...there was never anytime to be at home.” Leo worried that he would hate it so much that “it would not be worth it.” In fact, he spent most of his ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) grade year wondering if he “hated it enough to leave.” He felt that in his first two (2) years, he literally did not know who he was because he was constantly “shifting back and forth.” Eventually, he simply floated. By junior year, he developed the capacity to choose a voice and stance and code-switch successfully.

Necahual, from Southern Prep, confessed that when she first arrived she did not feel proud of being Latin@. She quickly internalized the looks and the comments in this new environment and concluded that she must be a “lesser person.” Necahual began to wonder if the negative stereotypes about Latin@s and Mexicans were actually true and she simply hadn’t noticed. Necahual began to self-monitor her speech and behavior so that she would not be

accused of being “too ghetto” and not a smart, serious student. “I used to talk like that, but not anymore. It’s kind of hard for my family and friends, but it’s what I have to do. I know it.”

Bris experienced a notable transformation between her ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) grade and twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) grade year. She rebuffed the new “white” identity she had honed while at her independent middle school and chose to “show up” at Tunnel High as what she believed her white peers expected of her. Bris recounts,

I used to wear big, gold hoops and really tight jeans, tight sweaters, and a lot of make-up. Then I began to realize that these white kids are going places and we need to teach them. They have taught us things and I appreciate all that they have taught us. Like now I speak properly and I don’t talk ghetto like I’m from the hood or anything. Like, I’ve taught them what Latin@s do and what we can achieve. And I think this is valuable for them because when they go out in the world, they won’t be as judgmental as all of the other kids might be who have not seen a smart, strong Mexican girl before.

Bris recalls asking her mother to stop sending her to school with foods from El Salvador and Mexico, “[The white students] would bring in like pasta and really gourmet meals. And my mom made me *frijoles* (beans) and some *carne asada* (grilled beef)- something really Latin@. I would bring in *pupusas* (a traditional Salvadoran dish made of a thick, handmade corn tortilla, usually filled with a blend of cheese and pork meat) and I remember getting asked, ‘ewww, what is that?’” When Bris first arrived at Tunnel High she resisted by not doing well her freshman year. She regrets this tactic, “I didn’t realize the resources that I have here, but it was also very hard for me to assimilate into this new culture.” Bris ultimately assimilated by “starting to speak properly and dress differently.” My cousins accused me of “acting all white...I didn’t know what to say...it was hard.”

Claudia had a similar experience also involving food, but overall she had an easy transition. She immediately felt welcomed by her peers and felt at home almost immediately. Still, she noticed that she was the only student eating burritos and Mexican food for lunch. She

asked her mother to stop making her Mexican food. Claudia was not teased because of her mother's culinary choices, but she was aware that her lunches made her different from her peers. As the years wore on at Old School, Claudia became more resistant to speaking Spanish and her mother would accuse her of "getting *gringa*." As she began Old School in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, she made this change before high school began. By the time of this interview, Claudia has recalibrated once again and now appreciates her Latin@ culture and the way in which it makes her unique at Old School.

Claudia was spurred by the negative stereotypes. The ideas that some in her school community may have had about Mexican and Latin@s provided her with determination and internal motivation. She communicated such grit, "the biggest reward of being a Latin@ student at a school like this is proving to yourself and to your peers that you can steer away from stereotypes and be better."

When the researcher asked Peter how Tunnel High had played a role in developing his sense of himself, if at all, he had an extended response. Peter said "it has made me stronger. I used to be kind of sensitive to jokes about my background but over the years I just learned, I would just push it aside. I actually say something to them like it's not okay, but I'm guessing that it's just preparing me for later in life. I'm gonna have people criticize me and I've got to learn to just bounce back from that." Peter was able to gain some resilience from his experience and also became more adept at "picking his battles" as a form of self-preservation. Peter said, "If I got mad at every culturally insensitive remark I heard at school, I would be mad all the time. What kind of life is that?"

Alex had somewhat of a distinct experience. She was the only one from her working class Catholic elementary school to be admitted to City School. She was underprepared for the

lack of ethnic diversity and found the first two years socially difficult. Academically, Alex was thriving. The question for Alex was where, not if, she would attend college. Her personal narrative speaks to the struggles associated with being a high achieving, Latin@ attempting to fit within a particular educational environment and the challenges she encountered from being rejected by some of her peers of color (for not being “brown enough”), and questioned by her white peers (who assumed she was not smart enough). Alex recounts that white peers resisted having her in their working groups and were consistently surprised when she scored well on tests, particularly when she scored higher than they did.

At the time of the interview, Alex had become friends with many of the white students who had initially rejected her. The researcher wondered what changed and Alex reported that they saw that she was “different” from the other Latin@s because she was “not lazy and actually cared about her work.” In fact, Alex was not concerned with the lack of students of color in her honor’s and Advancement Placement classes. She noticed the lack of racial diversity, but she dismissed it as evidence that they were simply not as smart as she was and that she was “different from them.” This prevented her from having more friends of diverse ethno-racial backgrounds. The researcher wondered about Alex’s relationship with other Latin@ students or students of color at City School. Alex shared,

So it’s not like anyone ever accused me of acting ‘white’ (accepting ‘white’ American norms of interacting, behaving, and speaking), but I was unable to relate to their experiences. I have little interaction with them, but don’t feel bad about it because I am being really successful.

Alex is grateful that City School has prepared her for the academic rigors of the collegiate environment and felt that most of her teachers were invested in her education, supportive of her learning, and they encouraged her to participate. She said, “I guess that was kind of cool because as a student of color, they [teachers] don’t really push us, but they were

trying with me.” She was happy that she was able to gain the respect of white peers by challenging negative stereotypes. She also spoke about how proud she is to be Latin@ which is why she is one of the Presidents of the Latin@ club on campus. Alex also pointed out the education she has been given at City School now allows her to teach her father and she will even “correct his Spanish for him”.

Naila shared some of the same sentiments as Alex. Naila shared that she was fortunate to make many friends, all whom identify as white. She claimed that her being Latino did not make a difference and that she anticipated that the friendships she had made at Hill School would last a lifetime. As the interview proceeded, Naila shared some internal conflict,

I think the ties I have made with my friends will last forever. Even though there is a disparity in income between me and my friends, they are very accepting. It would have been really hard for me to go to Hill School if I had not received financial aid. When I go to my friends’ houses and I see the cars they have...and their willingness to spend money on things I would not... (long pause) and I watch how easy it is for them to just swipe their card and I am, like, just a lot more careful...well, I have to be actually.

(A few minutes of silence pass.)

I definitely...like now...I...this is kinda bad...but like sometimes, I don’t know...I have to... I feel like I have to follow what they do... in a way like I should dress a certain way...or I should, um, not act this way, like tone down some things. I don’t feel like I’m not myself...I’m just changing. Like, it’s not necessarily a bad thing. I mean, like I don’t know, going to their houses and stuff is nice and I strive for that and it’s what I want to have when I get older.

Researcher: Can you tell me more about what you mean by ‘tone things down?’

Naila: I feel like I’m trying to tone things down because it’s not like my friends can relate to my experiences so I am not even going to talk about this or that. So I just don’t share some stuff about me and my life. I mean, I probably don’t share as much as I probably could just cuz I know it’s a lot different. Like, I don’t know, is it even worth explaining it to them? You know?

It’s really annoying when my cousins, who have a majority of friends that are Latino or African-American because most of the kids at their schools are that...when they see me they are like, ‘How are your white friends and your white

school?’ Or, they are like, ‘Naila is trying to be white’. Like, what am I supposed to say to that?

I’m sorta sad ‘cuz I even feel like my grandmother resents me and she says that I am different now. She says I am straying from our culture and family values. They were like, ‘We want you to go here [Hill School] and go to college, but now they are like, ‘La que se cree tanto (‘The one who thinks she is so great’).

Claudia and Alberto, at Old School, had a very different experience. They both enrolled at Old School in the sixth (6<sup>th</sup>) grade. At the focus group interview, both desired to be like the majority of their classmates, “normal.” They shared their belief that racial and ethnic distinctions don’t matter. They both felt immediately embraced by their peers and experienced academic success. Claudia found her place at the school as a dancer and Alberto as an athlete. They are both co-Presidents of the Latino Club.

Pablo, the EL from Southern Prep, discussed the recent success (as measured by ninth [9<sup>th</sup>] grade GPA’s and retention rates of current low-income Latin@ and African-American students) of the support program at Southern Prep. He celebrated the average GPA in the ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) grade for this student population that is now as high as 3.5 and was as low as 2.0 four (4) years ago. When asked about how these students relate to their ethnic identity as Latin@, there was a concern, wondering about the impact of being in a dominant white environment in their formative middle school years. Pablo declared:

Now we are at the point where the kids are really integrated and comfortable, but now it’s about them keeping their identity...but, I’d rather be working on that than making sure kids feel safe and not wanting to get the hell out of here. A lot of those kids are not joining the diversity club...they are dressing as the stereotype of a sombrero at Halloween...they don’t deny that they are Mexican when asked, but they certainly don’t want to rock the boat.

By the end of their time at their respective schools, all participants had a sense that not only were they responsible for refuting negative stereotypes by their positive academic records, but that they had the responsibility to speak out against negative stereotypes and prejudice. As

such, Bris, Veronica, Leo, Mario, Alex, and Mateo all became voices that were respected. This is discussed further in the final section of “Themes of Opportunity.”

The next section explores how negative stereotypes and prejudice impacted participants’ day-to-day experiences at school.

***Micro-aggressions.*** For many of the student participants, it was evident that the role of negative stereotypes and group representativeness also impacted their ability to feel authentically part of the school community. “I get called wetback – just awful things – sometimes I have an accent and pronounce words differently. I was raised speaking Spanish.” That kind of interaction ultimately fueled Bris and some of the other students. She did discuss the difficulty of speaking up and out in response to racist or negative stereotypes because then she, and her other friends of color, were classified as mean, angry, and divisive. She declares,

Things like that make me want to do more for this community, like stand up in front at Town Meeting and recite my poem (printed in the final section of Chapter 4) and say ‘You guys expect me to do this, this, this and fail all the time, but I’m here talking in front of you all – all 300 of you – telling you my story...From these awful experiences I feel like we (her and Peter) taught others never to do or say those things because it’s not okay.

Necahual catalogued numerous hurt, and racially charged exchanges over the course of the four years:

Are all of the people in your family *cholos* (low-income person who dresses in a manner of Mexican-American sub-culture)?; Can you get me drugs?; or they wear sombreros for their senior pictures...I bet your mom cleans houses...and I’m like, she does, but that doesn’t mean all Mexicans do. Like they want me to be ashamed. Like, how many siblings do you have because Mexicans have so many babies? I bet you guys make babies in taco trucks while you work. And I am like, what? They were saying it so much that I was starting to believe it.

Necahual shares that although in her senior year she finally embraced her given name, Necahual, instead of “Nicole”, many students and teachers continued to call her “Nicole” because they said

they simply could not pronounce her name. She reports not liking this, but also feels that there was nothing else she could do.

Some students in this study also described being told they were not smart or worthy of their spot at the school in a variety of ways. For instance, Alex, from City School recalls her freshman year. She reports,

I would give an answer in class and someone would whisper ‘No, that is not right’, and then the teacher would say ‘Yes!’ It was really frustrating at first but then I thought it was kind of funny when I got better grades and I could see them make faces and stuff. When I did not tell them what they wanted to know, they acted mad at me. Like they were entitled to know because they were so privileged and they assumed I was only there because of affirmative action or something.

Mateo from City School also noted that when he told peers and teachers that he was part of the support program, he would get “weird looks” and “be treated different from teachers.” When the researcher asked for clarity about what he meant, Mateo said, “It was like something changed. Like, it was sort of like, I was only there because I needed extra help and I was supporting this program, but like, I was not really worthy of being a student there. It was just the feeling I got.”

Mario, from Southern Prep, also discussed discomfort in speaking up in class because he experienced being constantly interrupted in class with phrases like, “Oh, wait. That’s not right.” Mario also described the body language/non-verbal cues of other students in class, such as audible sighs, shoulders dropping, heads going on desks, or eye-rolling (none of which were ever addressed by teachers). Necahual asserts, “It was definitely an eye opener because they [white peers] don’t think that a lot of people of color know as much as they do. I mean, I know just as much or more than they do.”

Veronica and Mario note that there is a significant Asian population, “from a variety of Asian countries” at Southern Prep, but “the culture of power is still white.” From their

perspective, though the “Asian” students are not white, they have deep prejudices against people of color, particularly Black people, and are extremely wealthy (tuition for international boarders at Southern Prep is \$58, 775 and at East Academy it is \$59, 450, both inclusive of additional fees). Peter explained that, “I don’t look Mexican. My family, we kind of look Asian. Asian kids used to make racist jokes and it used to make me mad...I mean, not all Mexicans look the same. Like, you can’t tell me that I’m something that I’m not.”

Although City School is a place where Alex has acquired the necessary academic skills to succeed in her collegiate studies, it has also been a place where Alex learned to be critical of race and how it functions. Alex tells, “Whether it’s realizing that [white people] are intimidated by you or realizing that some of them [white people] are in awe of you, but won’t tell you to your face...that’s an eye-opener, for anyone.”

Ted, the EL at City School, said that one of the most critical data points that emerged from the NAIS AIM (Assessment of Inclusion and Multiculturalism) Study was the pervasive student-reported “taunting and teasing...essentially all the micro-aggressions if you want to call them what they are”. When pressed, the EL noted, “by and large the students who reported statistically significant higher levels of micro-aggressions were the students who identify as ‘of color’”.

Melanie, the EL from Tunnel High (at the time of the interview), shared that her educational philosophy is firmly grounded in the belief that adolescents need to be nurtured, and valued, to become creative and compassionate citizens who are empowered to affect change in their world. Deliberately teaching ethical leadership, critical thinking, and cross-cultural communication has empowered her students to serve the community, strengthen their character,

and build their self-confidence. Melanie concluded with, “I empower students to look at the world around them, and ask how they can create positive change.”

**Socio-economics.** Most of the student participants in this study were going to be the first in their families to potentially go to college. The parents of the participants would offer encouraging words but the lack of familiarity with the academically rigorous environment made the academic experience all the more challenging. As impressionable adolescents, most of the student participants were not only surprised with the extravagant homes and enormous amount of wealth, they were also embarrassed by their own class status.

Although they did not quite understand the socioeconomic politics, it was clear that their experience was distinct from the majority of their classmates. Money was a hugely influential factor in the high school experiences of the student participants. Ten (10) out of the twelve (12) students reported missing out on activities and social gatherings due to limited funds. There was a sense that a “common” high school experience was sacrificed in order to access the benefits of a private school education.

Parental involvement with the education of student participants was also limited. Parental education for most, except for Sylvie, was cultural. This meant that the children were well aware of the cultural value of education to achieve the “American Dream,” but parental involvement was limited due to their inability to assist them with their academic performance. Alberto, Claudia, Bris, Peter, Leo, Veronica, Mario, Alex, Lucas, Naila, and Mateo all shared that though their parents were not able to help them with their work, they always knew that they had parental support. Leo was grateful that his mother had a flexible job, so she could pick him up at inconvenient times because he knew that all students did not have that.

Also, almost all of the families in this study made their selection to a particular independent school based on financial aid offerings, as opposed to other parents who may have the choice of deciding which independent school is the best fit for their child and their family. Peter told about the struggles he continues to face as a senior receiving significant amounts of financial aid. “Well for one, I know my parents can’t afford a lot and [going to Tunnel High] really requires you to get a lot of stuff. I feel bad every time I ask for a book or something. And sometimes, I won’t even ask for a book, like I’ll try to print a copy or try to read it online if it’s available.” Peter also marveled at the fact that he did not know his family was so poor until he came to Tunnel High. He spoke about always having what he needed, such as a clean house and clean clothes. It was not until his senior year that he was able to look back and realize just how “broke” his family was. He credits his parents for always reminding him what was most important and so he never really desired all of the “stuff” his peers seemingly took for granted.

Bris also emphasized the socio-economic challenges at both the independent middle and upper schools she attended, “I asked my parents if they could buy me stuff from [Abercrombie and Hollister], but I understood they couldn’t really do that…We could barely afford to send me to [school]…at Tunnel High, there were times I thought that I just couldn’t do it.” Lucas shared that Hill School was the only school to accept him and offer him a generous financial aid package. Though he did not know anything about Hill School, he enrolled because it was the only school that gave him aid. Naila also attended the Hill School after learning about it after being accepted to a free summer enrichment program as a middle school student. Hill School was the only school to which she applied and was happy that the School offered her the necessary aid.

Similarly, Necahual ended up enrolling at Southern Prep because they offered her substantially more financial aid than the private, Catholic school, with a more robust Latin@ population. Though she did not want to attend due to the fact that she did not want to be one (1) of three (3) Latin@s in her class, her parents would not turn down this incredible opportunity. One of the tactics used by Necahual in her early years was to lie about her family circumstances. Her peers would refer to her neighborhood as “the ghetto”; so she would say she lived in a different neighborhood and when she spoke to her parents in front of her peers, she would only speak English. She concluded, “I thought I was fooling people, but I really wasn’t.”

Bris also chose her school based on the financial aid grant. She said this of Tunnel High, “[Tunnel High] is crazy different. I go to school with some of the richest people in the Bay Area and I’m struggling to pay for prom.” I am also going to a great college, but I made my choice based on the fact that they gave me a lot of money. That convinced me.” She was curious about some of her peers making college decisions that were not necessarily financial – that was difficult for her to imagine. Bris also noted that [the white students] were more prepared for things – academically speaking. “[The white students] had tutors and stuff coming to their homes at night. I knew I had tutors through Making Waves, but that was like two (2) tutors for like sixty (60) kids!”

Many of the student participants highlighted that their parents had a strained relationship with the schools. None of the students blamed the schools in any way but all recognized that their parents had a difficult time “fitting in” and “feeling comfortable.” When the researcher asked Peter why his parents did not come to the school or communicate with the school more often, Peter answered,

They care, it’s just they don’t feel comfortable here. Because their English is not so strong, coming here is like having to expose them. Like at

sporting events, all the moms will be here and my mom will just be on the side. It's kind of sad to see, but I'm just glad she came. She came for me. It felt really good.

The inability of some faculty members to recognize that certain students had more academic capital than others was a major cause of discontent for most of the student participants. The fact that most of the students in this study did not have college educated parents to provide them support as they navigated the “invisible curriculum” placed some students at an academic disadvantage. Bris, Veronica, Alex, Peter, Necahual, and Leo all believed this inherently privileged some students and placed other students at a disadvantage.

Transportation was also a big issue for many of the student participants. Many independent schools strive to have a student body that is ethnically, socio-economically, and geographically diverse. In some cases, independent schools are located in cities with predominantly white populations. As such, some schools may recruit students from areas far beyond their immediate geography. Some schools even provide bus service to transport students from Marin County to San Francisco, Oakland to areas further East, or East Palo Alto to other parts of the South Bay. Peter shared, “it takes like 40 minutes and sometimes an hour just to get here in the mornings. I have to get up really early.” Leo also said, “East Academy is so far from my house and many events are so inconveniently timed.” Mateo bemoaned the two (2) hour bus ride each way on the San Francisco MUNI. He wondered whether or not teachers actually understood this added pressure and the dangers of going home after late school activities. He shared, “Even if some kids had cars, they were definitely not going to drive to my part of the City just to drive me home. And, my parents worked nights, so...I was stuck on the bus or not going to stuff. Teachers never really asked me.” Mateo, of City School, said this at the focus group interview,

They [white students] don't see us as human beings. I wish they would just have more empathy for us. I have empathy for them. While I will never be rich or live in the hills of Marin, I can and do imagine what it is to live in the hills. I don't think they think of me like that. I take the bus from Richmond everyday, to get to school, go to practice, do my homework...by then it's past nine (9:00 pm). My mom is a single mom, I know she works harder than me and I help her with the chores and then I do it all over again. I wish they could at least try to see. And they just don't.

Necahual embraces her East Palo Alto community and sees herself as a transient through Southern Prep. One of her challenges in her first two years was navigating the two (2) main groups in her home community. One of the groups consists of those that hang out on the street and the other, those that want to do all they can to "get out of EPA." One of her early struggles was deciding with which group she would ultimately identify. She is now clearly someone who wants to "get out", but has every intention of returning in order to give back to her home community.

One of the most salient stressors for Alex and Naila, and their families, is worrying about how they will pay for college and post-graduate plans. They are both committed to attending a private, liberal arts college so their families depend on them to earn scholarships. Naila shared that she is the only one among her cousins that "will probably go to college, because like, one of my cousins just dropped out of high school and she is only a junior. So there is a lot of pressure on me...I'm like the family's only hope."

Lucas shared that one of the greatest shocks he experienced at Hill School was the dress culture of students and faculty. The KIPP School Lucas attended was very structured and strict. Coming to Hill School, was "odd" for him because he thought people "dressed sloppy and talked in such a casual way to the teachers". The culture around dress expectations was not what he expected from a private school. Before coming to Hill School, he and his friends joked about rich, white kids. He recalls, "At KIPP, me and my friends tried to be flashy, even though we

had to wear uniforms in Middle School...we tried to have nice sweatshirts or cool shoes. Part of the culture shock was I was surprised that these kids acted like they had no money and they were not trying to show off." He did not expect to see students wearing pajamas and flip-flops to school and teachers in shorts. He says, "I used to feel overdressed at school and I still kinda do. I have just gotten used to it. My parents think that education has to be respected so I dress kinda nice for school."

Pablo added that one of the greatest needs for students on financial aid are books. In his experience as EL, these students often began the school year without the necessary books and supplies. When teachers would ask students about it, they would simply say "they forgot it at home." In dissecting this problem, the issue was that these students were not yet skilled in self-advocating, the students lacked an authentic relationship with an adult on campus to talk to, and there was a sense of potential shame for not being prepared. The support system in place today anticipates this potential need, the questions are asked ahead of time, and equips students with what they need to be successful.

Joel observed that one important difference between his work at the independent school in the mid-West as compared to his work at the Hill School, was parental expectations of public and private schools. In the mid-West, parents could realistically expect that their child could receive a quality education in the public schools. Here, in the Bay Area, the parents do not have the same expectations of public schools so that there is a "stark contrast" in the hopes for opportunity.

One of the final thoughts shared at the focus group interview was a sentiment from Lucas regarding his experience at the Hill School:

I thought my family was a little more well-off than a lot of the other kids I went to school with at KIPP and then I got here and I was, ok, wow. I didn't know this

kind of thing was real...like, I thought, that is just in the movies, not real life. I realized that I did not know what life was, sort of. Like, I'm still not sure what is real because it's like I'm like watching it all through a window because nothing about their life is like my life. They don't really know mine and I don't really know theirs. Like, we are both sort of guessing about each other, you know? Then, that makes me feel kinda sad...but at the same time, like, I guess I don't really care.

**Institutional practices.** In describing their interactions with white peers, participants expressed overall frustration and fatigue with the lack of exposure to racial diversity and socioeconomic awareness. More than half of the participants (Bris, Peter, Leo, Veronica, Mario, and Lucas, Mateo, Necahual) did not have many (if any) white friends because they never felt necessarily understood. There was an overall confusion about why the [white] students had no ideas of the privilege they had. All of the student participants also expressed a sense of responsibility to educate the community and raise awareness around racial injustices at school.

Bris expressed concern that the number of Latin@ students is not higher even though the school communicates a desire to further diversify the student body. She also expressed concern about the future of diversity programs at Tunnel High as Mrs. Guajardo is leaving Tunnel High at the end of the academic year. Bris believes the efforts were led more by Mrs. Guajardo (Melanie) and individual students interested in diversity, but that the school is actually not invested in equity work on an institutional level.

When the researcher asked students how teachers and other school officials responded to racist or culturally insensitive comments and jokes, one of the students from Tunnel High replied, “a teacher will not necessarily report it, but say, ‘hey, you shouldn’t say that’ or ‘apologize to him’, or something”. Both of the students at East Academy claimed that teachers did not seem to notice. Necahual stated, [the administrators] need to educate some of the

teachers here because some of them don't know anything and they approach us like we are stupid, but we are not, so it kind of makes us lose hope in ourselves."

Sylvie reports that although East Academy says that it is important for students to be self-aware and well rounded, there are rarely any meaningful opportunities to discuss issues of race and identity. She expressed surprise when she realized that the interview with the researcher was one of the first times she was invited to think critically about her identity as a "Hispanic." She was unsure of the role race has played in her life. She identifies her race as white (she presents white), but holds fast to her ethnic identity as Hispanic as she believes it has had a significant impact on her life. By the end of the interview she asserts, "I think the high school could have done a better job of asking us to think critically about our lives, about how race matters or how this has impacted our lives."

There was an overall sense that Latin American history, Mexican-American history, civil rights and Latin@ issues are a significant omission. Bris agreed with this noting that not having courses on Latin@ history and culture was a dark spot for her education at Tunnel High. She was grateful for the classes on race she was able to take but resented that Latin@s were not a part of that dialogue. She recalled an exchange that occurred in class one day,

We were talking about things that have happened to different races that have been oppressed and I mentioned Cesar Chavez and my teacher kind of brushed it off...I felt sad...he was like, 'I don't care what's important to you' or maybe they just didn't know about Cesar's movement...but why not? You know?

Claudia and Alberto both agreed that the curriculum at Old School was lacking in the same way. They both recalled a quarter in their freshman year where they studied Latin America and a unit in tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) grade U.S. history when the teacher,

Briefly mentioned Cesar Chavez and we briefly discussed the Mexican territory that was there before, but it was nothing big. I think because our school wants us to be well-rounded students and learn about all these different things, there seems

to be a tiny gap in my education. Like they offered a course on Asian history and European history and I took both, but in terms of Latin-American topics, I wouldn't know much if I had not taken a Spanish class this year or if I did not have a family who is Hispanic.

Joel was very proud of the diversity of courses available to students at Hill School. He also felt very confident that various teachers integrate social justice issues, women's rights, civil rights for those with disabilities, and other topics connected to marginalized groups. Though this is Joel's first year as EL at Hill School, he was impressed with the sophisticated strategic plan and institutional structures in place to further equity and inclusion efforts. For instance, there is a Diversity Committee in the Board. Though Joel is not a standing member of that committee, he regularly meets with the committee chair. The board committee communicates that this is "vital, yet challenging work." Joel appreciates that board members, the administration, and faculty members acknowledge "the messiness of the work."

The researcher noted a poster board in Joel's office that read, "We call on all members of our school community to join together on a continuing learning path as we strive toward an inclusive community." Hill School deliberately communicates that differences should be noticed and highlighted as a means of growth for individual community members, as well as for the community. The main goals of the EL for Hill School include increasing cultural self-awareness and cultural intelligence, improving the efficacy of cross-cultural relations, and countering oppression through inclusion. In his interview Joel stated, "You know how well you are doing with diversity just by looking at your board. If that is pretty homogenous, how can you expect that those who you are leading will live the purported values?"

During the focus group interview, both Alberto and Claudia from Tunnel High agreed that at Old School, being politically correct was the ultimate goal. They felt this was distinct from strategies employed at Hill School. The students were grateful that Old School students

and adults were encouraged to use the “correct terms to explain something while keeping in mind not insulting anyone.” This meant that discussions about privilege tended not to happen because it leads to people feeling attacked. They appreciated this tactic because it maintained a sense of community.

One of the few ways in which Old School could improve, according to Alberto and Claudia, was with respect to the curriculum. If there is exposure to Latin American topics, it is relegated to food and festival. For instance, the students noted that just the other day their Spanish teacher hired a salsa dancer and next week they were going to learn to make tamales during long blocks. When I asked them what kind of activities and events they had led as co-Presidents of Latino Club they mentioned *Dia de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead), *Cinco de Mayo*, taco lunches, and a viewing of the movie, *Cesar Chavez*. Claudia explains,

I don’t think the school specifically targets changing negative stereotypes or changing the way we think about them, but they do try and help us navigate through stereotypes in our family groups in which we talk about race, gender, equality, but as a whole I feel like students here are smart enough to know it’s not okay to verbalize these stereotypes at school.

Necahual feels that school should have all teachers go to the People of Color Conferences, not just “the teachers who care.” It is clear to the students in this study which teachers attend year after year, and which teachers do not attend. Pablo shared that when Southern Prep began delving in to issues of racial equity, many teachers balked. As teachers who subscribed to the notion of “colorblindness,” the very notion of seeing and discussing race was a racist act. This was similar at all six (6) schools to varying degrees over the past ten (10) years as reported by the EL’s. The increased institutional support and participation in NAIS People of Color Conference (POCC), NAIS Student Diversity Leadership Conference (SDLC), POCIS (People of Color in Independent Schools), and most notably, the White Privilege

Conference (WPC) and the Youth Action Conference (YAP) is an indication that dialogues about race, racism, and other forms of oppression are becoming more prevalent. All six (6) of the participating EL's recognized that conversations of privilege and cross-cultural skill development had to occur at every level of the institution in order for sustainable change to occur.

Necahual also perceived an inequity in how students from distinct ethnic backgrounds are treated in regards to disciplinary matters. Her recollection of drug-related transgressions is that white students get three (3) chances (if not more), but students of color immediately get suspended. Necahual believes it is correlated to the amount of money a family donates to the school. No other student mentioned this.

The researcher asked Peter what he thought about students participating in racial justice efforts and he fervently communicated that he did not believe that people [at his school] care about racial justice because they are not around it. They live in areas that are predominantly white, "so it's not really a factor for them."

Pablo shared that the administration at Southern Prep were in conversations about how to fuse goals for diversity and expectations of cultural competency with the existing school values so that they are not separate to the "core mission." This was a theme for all EL's and all spoke at length about the gradual shifts over time at each of their institutions. One distinction is that Southern Prep and East Academy had their attention turned on students developing cultural competency whereas Hill School emphasized developing the cultural competency in the adults. Lastly, City School's strategic plan aimed to develop the cultural competency in the Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

The formal diversity work at City School began in 2002 when a committee<sup>3</sup> of faculty and staff was formed to discuss the reasons why a particular demographic of students was struggling. From this committee came a senior elective on the history and evolution of race and racism in the United States, a fund for students on financial aid for books, prom, and other ancillary needs, and an expanded meeting place/space for underrepresented students. Though Ted is glad the elective is still popular and offered, he believes that systemic change will only come if courses like this are formally included in the core curriculum. The Latino club at City School has also experienced a series of peaks and valleys since its inception. Today, it has a high student following and is led by a committed Latin@ teacher.

City School has also founded and continued to financially support a multi-day conference for Latin@ students from private schools across the nation. The EL reported that each year, numerous students write about the Latin@ conference in their college application essays. They describe that weekend as a powerful moment in their education. Another important institutional shift was the hiring of two school counselors with extensive and explicit training in working with students of color and students from low socio-economic backgrounds. City School has also instituted a resource center for any student with learning needs, a free period for all students to meet their teachers, and a 1:1 technology program that is folded into students' financial aid packages if necessary.

Though City School currently has a very developed strategic plan and there has been significant growth in the past fifteen (15) years, there continues to be a disconnect between theory and practice. Ted, the EL at City School, recalled that

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<sup>3</sup> The researcher was a member of this initial committee and also co-developed the elective curriculum still in use at City School today.

at the beginning of the day, it's all anchored in the mission...all of this. It's all anchored in our accreditation where this is a growth area and prior to even the existence of the EL position or prior to the admissions director taking his position, he walked in to an accreditation plan that said diversity could be achieved through admissions. And now, we are in year one (1) of a comprehensive six (6) year strategic plan for diversity.

The school faculty and administration have been honing their knowledge of theory regarding the power of a critical mass of adults, “stereotype threat,” and white privilege, but when it comes to institutional behavior, the theory does not necessarily inform the practice. School admission is a key area where *praxis* continues to be a challenge for many schools. For instance, Ted relayed an anecdote that recently occurred during an admissions deliberation:

Placing so much emphasis on test scores and parents' personal statements in the application process is problematic. If there is a fairly 'unsophisticated' application everyone on the committee will be condemning it, 'they did not put enough time in it or they obviously don't care'. Then, I will look at the personal data and note, 'Vietnamese is the only language at school, no college graduation, and no evidence of a high school graduation. At the point that this eighth (8<sup>th</sup>) grader filled this out without parental support...' Come on...and we are expecting the same level of sophistication as other applicants whose parents are fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) generation alumni or fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) generation college?

Joel also spoke to the importance of those in leadership asking hard questions of themselves, particularly when contemplating unconscious bias in admissions and hiring practices. For instance,

When [families of color] ask the question, 'How will I see myself reflected here?' Historically we have said, 'Wow, we're not sure that you will'. Today, we can say that that is different. In our faculty, Black and Latin@ faculty are still underrepresented, but the senior administration has a large representation of people of color. Increasing the number of people of color in administration and faculty, specifically Black and Latin@, these are salient challenges that are ubiquitous for independents schools and we know that this is not ok. There are talented folks of color out there that haven't always been looking at this school. We ask ourselves, 'Why did we not make that hire?' Sometimes we do say, 'Hey, I think there was some bias there'. That is a pretty powerful conversation to be having in our senior admin meetings.

There are a lot of myths out there about [people of color]. People of color that survive in private schools tend to be highly skilled and talented people. Their experience is different. Their needs are different and if we want to be an employer of choice for all people, we have to understand that and cater to it.

One of the deciding factors for Joel to move to Hill School was the sophisticated strategic plan that he adopted when he assumed the position. He was impressed that the strategic plan was led and pushed by the senior administration, developed by students, parents, faculty, and board members, and accepted by the Board. The school went so far as to hire a consultant to look at the strategic plan through the lens of diversity and inclusion.

Likewise, Phil from East Academy stresses that equity and inclusion flow through all areas of the school and this assumption communicates that diversity is important to the school at every level, just like admissions and advancement. Phil stated at the focus group, “[Equity and inclusion] affects everything we do. Part of the role of the EL is to articulate exactly to what the school will be accountable.”

### **Themes of Opportunity.**

***Being hand picked.*** During the application process, all but three of the students experienced being “hand-picked.” The students reported that a teacher singled them out to apply to talent identification programs or specific schools. Bris recalled that it was her fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) grade teacher that helped her apply to the Making Waves program. Bris articulated that when she had been singled out by her fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) grade teacher to apply to Making Waves, “I was really into school. I used to get made fun of a lot and I was like this chubby little girl who was really into math and stuff.” Though five (5) students from her school applied to the program, she was the only one accepted to Making Waves.

Necahual was also tapped by Pablo, the EL at Southern Prep and the site director for the Bridge program at that school, to apply to Southern Prep. Pablo recalls that he saw a definite

“spark” in her and felt that she had the strength and skills to do well. As a Latin@ immigrant in this country, it was important that historically underrepresented and low-income students have opportunities for educational advancement. Necahual contends that Pablo advocated for her not only to be admitted, but that she also receive financial aid.

Leo also remembers a teacher at his public middle school pulling him and eleven (11) other student aside to apply to A Better Chance (ABC). The teacher said that he had identified them because they were in the top ten (10) percent of their class, but by the end of the process, he was one of three (3) students to be accepted. Claudia was also hand-picked by an elementary school teacher to apply to ABC. Likewise, Alberto, a senior at Old School, remembers the evening when a teacher from ECHO called his parents at home and told them he was smart.

During one of the focus groups, Phil, the EL from East Academy, was struck by all of the stories of being “hand-picked.” As Phil described it as a “life-changing moment...someone asked a question, offered a direction, there was a tapping of the shoulders. Someone made a personal investment in you.” He goes on to say that as an educator, he has a responsibility to act on behalf of students. Phil asserts that educators must do more than believe in students. They must “DO something.” Phil recalls being earmarked by his mentor in college to join the seminary and be a teacher. Phil talked about “a calling, being called. At that point, my name was revealed to me.”

The researcher also shared an experience when she was identified by her school counselor as a potential application for the Summer Search program while a sophomore at City School (a school in this research study). The mission of Summer Search is to “help low-income teenagers transform what they believe is possible for themselves and develop the skills they need to become college-educated leaders who give back to their families and communities.” The

school counselor saw her potential and limitations and urged her to apply. This experience gave her access to opportunities that greatly impacted her college prospects and opened the door to a future as an educator. As a college sophomore and junior, Summer Search facilitated a teaching internship at the Hill School (a participating school within this study) and at an exclusive, independent boarding school on the East coast.

Naila's social studies teacher singled her and three (3) other classmates out from her East Oakland middle school to apply to the summer program for underrepresented students at Hill School. She was the only one from her middle school to attend. Naila initially did not want to attend the summer program because she saw it as extra work. Her mother, however, "forced her" to attend, and Naila could not be more grateful for that. Her cousins all attend public schools and one recently dropped out as a junior in high school. She recalls not enjoying school because she was not challenged and often scared due to all of the "conflicts" that happened at her school. She shared that she did not have any close connections to the teachers and she was pleasantly surprised to see how "driven and happy" the mentors from Hill School were at the summer program. She was thrilled because she "never thought [she] could actually do anything about [her] public school situation."

Melanie, the EL from Tunnel High, was also identified as a diamond in the rough with high academic potential as well. She was accepted in to the Multicultural Alliance and admitted to Brown for a special Masters in Teaching program.

***Support Systems.*** Many independent schools are striving to improve the acculturation process for historically underrepresented populations, such as Latin@ students. At four (4) of the participating schools, formal academic and social support systems have been put in place to improve the acculturation process during the initial transition. All of these programs continue

providing support throughout students' entire experiences at City School, East Academy, Old School, and Southern Prep. All of these programs took considerable time, energy, and funds to bring to fruition.

Although the EL's at these four (4) schools were passionate about the need for explicit support programs for underrepresented and low-income youth, more voices were necessary to move toward institutional change. In all of these cases, the majority of those voices calling for change were not in positions of authority (in fact at one school, the current EL was not in that position in an official capacity). There are many factors to consider when looking to create or improve systems of support for underrepresented students: school mission, strategic plans, political landscape, budgets, geography, etc. For instance, one important change happening this summer at City School is geographical. The EL's office is going to move to a more central and visible location on campus because,

As an English teacher at heart [Phil] and as such, [he] sees the world through symbols and metaphors and I think there is something very powerful, and not in a positive way, that this office and the [office of support for underrepresented students] is symbolically in the back of the bus. From a physical space standpoint, what does that metaphorically say when the Diversity Office is in the bowels of the school? It's also important to separate [Diversity Office and the support services office] so it does not at all seem as if this work is only to benefit 'the brown kids'.

This is an example of an institutional shift that carries heavy symbolic meaning and can help communicate where the heart of the work is for City School.

At Southern Prep, data from nearly ten (10) years ago revealed that the majority of Latin@ and African-American students that came to Southern Prep left by the end of their ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) grade. An administrator charged a committee to find out why. The findings of that committee revealed that students were reporting "an utter disconnect" and it was incredibly difficult for students to acclimate. The teachers did not have the capacity to understand what

was going on and students were “essentially in a ‘fight or flight’ state so as fourteen (14) and fifteen (15) year olds, they chose to flee a seemingly unsafe environment.” The central question at Southern Prep became, ‘How can we support the whole student?’ and a backwards design approach was employed to develop the support program that currently exists.

Pablo emphasized that the school also needed to remember that not only is Southern Prep reaching out to underrepresented communities, but that students and their families had skills, perspective, experiences, and unique cultures that would enrich and invigorate their school. Advocates for increasing ethnic and socio-economic diversity and improving the way in which Southern Prep responded to students of color insisted that this reciprocal relationship stay central to the conversation. Pablo recalled: “Many faculty, and some administrators, were excited to bring in more ‘scholarship kids’ and we had to shift that mindset a little bit and find out what we could do better.”

In the last two (2) to three (3) years, the support program has vastly improved though the seniors in this study did not benefit from these new structures. There is a more intentional and structured approach to both the students and families as soon as the students matriculate. Families are invited to come and learn about the various programs, offerings, and methods of communication used by the school so that a parent-school partnership could be forged early on.

Students are also invited to come to a summer program where they can explore the summer reading together and a “boot camp” on math, reading comprehension, and basic writing skills. Pablo stressed that the students of color were academically strong and were often coming from public schools. He said: “We were expecting these ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) graders to compete with students who had been in private schools since Kindergarten or first grade and had already developed study skills, they know how to self-advocate, they know how to be. Which is also

why we began advocating for students to come in sixth (6<sup>th</sup>) grade and we are already seeing that result with the kids that are in the ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) grade now. Their GPA's are 3.5's and 3.6's across the board."

Pablo found that for that program to be successful "we could not plug a hole here and there...it had to be a year-round program from the first moment they join our community, with constant offerings all the way through to when they get ready for college applications and the college financial aid process". East Academy and City School follow much the same model.

Committees were established at City School and East Academy as early as 2002 to investigate the high attrition rates of boys of color and over-representation of students of color in disciplinary actions. These two (2) schools also had recommendations from WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges). Also, City School participated in the NAIS AIM (Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism) Study this academic year and the recommendations were that the School put its energy on the following three (3) areas: admissions, hiring, and curriculum.

The initial goals of the support program established at East Academy were:

1. Solidify East Academy's commitment to all students, with particular attention to underrepresented students;
2. Bolster the morale of the adults in the community who have been waiting for senior administrators to make decisions that reinforce said commitment; and
3. Emphasize the expectation that as an institution we must move beyond color-blindness and acknowledge institutional systems of privilege.

This was also a precursor to the establishment of an updated teacher evaluation system that now includes cultural competency. This explicit professional expectation also requires East Academy

to provide support and instruction for the employees so that they can effectively meet these important performance expectations.

Some “hard data” suggests that the funds allocated to the support program six (6) years ago do not compromise other programs, the program fits within the budget, job descriptions have not been drastically altered, stipends are ample, and the need for space does not undermine the existing summer programs. Even more importantly, the program allows for an increase in services: a formal social-cultural transition for new underrepresented students of color, academic skill building each summer, family support services to increase a sense of partnership, and a safe space for the cohort to meet and grow together. The administration has improved its own skill base around race, class, and inclusion (by attending a variety of classes, workshops, and conferences), as well as responding to WASC and Board recommendations in a concrete manner.

***Important adults.*** The students described the words of their parents who communicated their hopes and dreams for their children. All of students credited their families for pushing them to do well in school and stick it out at independent schools. Half of the student participants told about wanting to transfer out of their school in the first two (2) years of high school, but their parents would not support that. Bris recalls that she wanted to go to a Catholic high school because it was more diverse than Tunnel High but her parents believed that she would be distracted by friends and social pulls. Necahual’s dad stated, “No, you are staying. It will get you to college. I don’t care how we are going to do it, but you are going because you don’t know how hard it is to clean toilets”.

There were other influential adults in their lives who propelled them through the most difficult times. Joel, the EL from Hill School, said this during our one-on-one interview:

And, at the end of the day, we know that a student’s outcomes are most determined by the beliefs and expectations of a teacher. If a teacher believes you

can learn, you will learn. They will find a way for you. Right? If a teacher does not believe you will learn, they will make excuses for you. And they may not even know it. My job is to help folks to be healthy enough -in their mind, body, and heart- and have the right tools to live this work every day. The application is just different at each school and perhaps each classroom because you have to meet people where they are.

Student participants also all identified adults of color as those with whom they felt most comfortable. The adults of color offered academic support, advice, mentorship, and affirmation that they belonged at their particular school. Also, most of the adults of color either ran affinity groups, were the campus EL, or taught courses on racial diversity, social justice, and oppression – this provided the space for participants to think critically about their identity in relationship to their own lived experience in schools and in society.

Necahual told how the EL from her school, Pablo, told her he believed in her and knew she could do it. She was clear that knowing that someone cared about her was vital to her staying at Southern Prep, as she did not feel that she necessarily mattered to other adults at her school. Necahual shared,

The teachers in whose classes I was doing bad, they weren't even offering to help...like there was nothing. Like no one ever bothered to ask me anything. I saw teachers happy to help other students, but I was like, maybe it's because they think I'm dumb and don't have potential or whatever.

Leo recounted the moment at the end of his ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) grade year when a teacher told him to “make a choice...you are wasting this opportunity. What you are doing will be worth it in the end.” Leo was struck by the honesty and it was the first time someone called him on the fact that he was “simply doing enough to get by.” This teacher saw more potential in Leo and pushed him to commit himself to the endeavor of school, of being his best. This was a turning point for Leo in that he threw himself into his work, but it all solidified the notion that other adults simply didn’t care how he was doing. He wondered if they ever noticed his inner turmoil.

Necahual and three (3) other participants discussed the importance of teachers, staff, and mentors of color to look up to. Necahual claimed that at Southern Prep, the staff of color was regularly the butt of jokes for their desire to raise conversations about other cultures (Brazil and Peru) and encourage students to speak Spanish in the classroom. She also wondered about the lone, Black man on staff, serving as the basketball coach, about whether or not he ever heard all of the racist jokes. When asked why it is important to have Latin@ represented in the adult body, Bris talked of it being “empowering...I definitely look up to my advisor (who is from Costa Rica<sup>4</sup>) and Mrs. Guajardo because I see myself teaching the community like this when I am older and being like them, empowering the students who go to an independent school that I may teach at.”

Leo spoke highly of a history teacher, Curt, (teachers are referred to by their first names) from East Academy; Alex highlighted a history teacher, Mrs. Juarez, from City School; Bris stressed the importance of Mrs. Guajardo (Melanie); and Necahual talked of Pablo. All of the adults shared one thing in common: they all encouraged the students to speak in their own voices. All of the students discussed the power of not having to code-switch with these particular adults. These teachers embraced them for who they were and encouraged them to bring all of themselves into the learning space and in to their academic work. This in turn, raised their level of confidence and positively impacted their academic performance.

Alex identified her school counselor (also a woman of color) as the person who got her through the difficulties of freshman year. Her counselor bolstered her by letting her know that the first years are transitional for everyone and “no one really knows what they are doing and that her ethnicity should not define her or limit her involvement in school. She attributes this

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<sup>4</sup> The advisor’s country of origin was changed to protect confidentiality.

kind of advice to propelling her to pursue leadership opportunities at City School. She also trusted her counselor because she had experienced some of the same challenges as a person of color in academia.

Ted proudly discussed the openness and responsiveness of City School staff to equity and inclusion professional development. Ted reports that students often share moments when teachers have “brokered difficult conversations and comments in class about race and other difficult comments.” One of the ways in which cultural competency and cultural humility have been developed is through monthly brown bag lunches and afterschool happy hours where faculty members explore challenging topics together based on recent research studies. And yet, Ted stresses that “very little that we do on the academic side of the building is ultimately sustainable if the stewards of the school are not buying in, modeling, engaging in this work”.

Joel, from Hill School, asserted, “Equity work has to be a lived experience that needs to be felt and modeled by the school leadership. Anyone who is an EL has to be nimble and adaptable. The real work is the journey and that cannot be rushed.”

***Finding place and people.*** As a freshman, Alex struggled with finding “her people.” She noted that there were so few Latin@s in each class that it seemed that every “small clique had a Latin@ of their own.” She remembers the thrill of discovering the Latino Club because there was a large group of people with similar backgrounds as children of immigrants who were also first-generation college-bound: “I was humbled to be a part of such a strong group of kids.” When asked about her cohort of friends now, Alex offers, “I have no Hispanic friends because my friends don’t necessarily define my culture. Because that is me. I choose who I want to become. Like, if I choose to value it or not. Like, I’m president of the Latino Club and we did a

lot of events this year that made the City School community more aware that Hispanic students are here.”

Bris remembers her years at the independent middle school where she says, “I had friends- they were all the kids from Making Waves. We just bunched up together. And we had our own little clique of the ten (10) kids from Richmond.” Peter recalls that he really did not want to go to Tunnel High, “I didn’t feel comfortable...I knew like two other students, but wasn’t close to anyone.”

Necahual talks of the places at school where she has felt the most safe and the most herself. She noted that those spaces were those in which “teachers are into diversity and people have to watch what they say.” She noted that she feels more comfortable in Spanish or Latin American history classes because it is easier to “understand, remember, and speak up.” She felt that she could have a deeper relationship to what she was learning and actually perform better academically when it was so connected to her own life.

Other than in those classrooms, Necahual never found a community at Southern Prep. This is something she did not want her EL, Pablo, to know because he played such an integral role in seeing her through the entire four (4) years). She revealed that she only attended one (1) social event outside of school and that she has no desire to spend time with the majority of her classmates. She described her classmates as “people she sees everyday, but as long as they can’t see me, they are nothing to me.”

Leo also shared that the close friends he has had since ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) grade (one Black student and one white student),

have always been willing to get into more discussions that would make a lot of people uncomfortable...uuuhhhh...social issues. Some people don’t know where they stand in the conversation. To address the issues, you have to know where you stand, but first you need to learn about the issues so you know where you

stand. If the School's mission is to send out well-informed students that know how to participate in the world, they have to know about important social issues. Every student, not just those who may be interested in the conversation, should have to genuinely argue a point. The conversation should start in 9<sup>th</sup> grade class, even if some students will be at different levels.

For instance, Peter described a typical situation in his early years where “say we have a test coming up soon...like people get in groups together to do research and sometimes we don’t even hear about them. Like everyone’s in there except you and the other Latin@ in class.” The researcher asked if he still experiences that in his senior year and he replied, “I’d say that it has started getting more inclusive as people got to know me better.” I also asked Peter about his relationship to the Latino Club, but he said it was less of an affinity club (an intimate club that provides the opportunity for students who share a common identity to explore that identity and share both positive and challenging experiences) and more of a cultural club.

Peter also talked about the difficulty of connecting with other Latin@s at Tunnel High who may choose to not participate in the Latino Club or attend conferences such as the Latino Summit. He believes that there may be more Latin@s at Tunnel High, “but they still really care about their image and they will do all they can to not be seen or affiliated with these type of people [Latin@]...I feel like that’s messed up...like you are leaving your own people”.

Joel, the EL at Hill School, strongly believes there have to be some spaces that are specific to Latin@ and Black students, but some spaces also have to be broader than that. For instance, exploring the self and personal identity happens in the classroom through curriculum. The freshman program and advisory program explicitly include discussions on empathy, stories of self (culture, ethnicity, gender). Joes says, “These stories bring the community together because we have the opportunity to see that we are more than just stereotypes. We also have affinity groups (black faculty/student club, gender, LGBTI, multiracial club), open space forums,

because “high emotions and high stakes conversations need to have structure and time.” All of the schools included in this study had affinity clubs similar to Hill School.

Of the twelve (12) student participants, at least half attended at least one (1) student diversity conference such as the White Privilege Conference, NAIS POCC SDLC Conference, POCIS Conference, or Latin@ Summit. These are important as they provide unique affinity spaces. Students such as Peter said, “I was fortunate enough to participate in the SDLC...I would not have been able to pay for it, but with the help of Melanie, they [Tunnel High] generously gave a lot of financial aid for that. So they let me go on the trip and I just realized so much about myself.”

Alberto, from Old School, says,

Every year coming back from SDLC, I feel a little stronger and more proud to be who I am than what I felt before...One thing that I really got from SDLC is that we may be the minority at our school and in independent schools but in the outside world we’re not the minority. I feel like to a certain extent it’s good that we’re in these small communities to spread this kind of awareness. Like, you should get used to people like me so when you’re going off to some other place like outside this state or somewhere else, there’s going to be a lot more of me so you shouldn’t be so ignorant and act like you haven’t seen us before.

Peter, of Tunnel High, also noted, “at SDLC there’s more than 1000 students attending...this is where I get that courage from... we do what is called affinity groups... and you are in there, being around a lot of your people. Just walking into the room, you just see a lot of smiles everywhere because you don’t even know the person, but you already know what they are going through.” Peter also described a relationship with a Latin@ teacher at his school,

Um, coincidentally the only Latin@ teacher here...we have a weird connection...She doesn’t really like me and I can understand why (he described goofing off in her class), but I still feel that she understands what I’ve been through ‘cuz she has been through harder times so she knows and she wants me to do better. She understands me.

Peter emphasized how important it was for Peter to feel seen and understood without having to explain too much.

After Bris attended SDLC, she said her confidence grew and she became inspired by the college talk around her. Bris described herself in her final two (2) years as someone who “takes up space” and is a “visible person on campus.” She explains this transformation as part of her resistance, “You can’t make me hide in a corner. You are going to hear from me. That experience gave me the opportunity to practice fighting back and dealing with hard things.”

Peter made an important distinction between the affinity group experience at POCC SDLC and the cultural club opportunity at Tunnel High. Peter described the scene, “we had a cultural day where we served food from Asia, Mexico, Italy, India...and that’s the only ethnic day I can remember. I feel like we don’t do enough to raise ethnic awareness.” Joel also reflected on a recent visit to a local public school. Students from the high level Spanish classes presented fairytales in Spanish to elementary age children whose language is predominantly Spanish. Lucas was part of the group and Joel shared,

I was stunned to see Lucas. I mean, he was totally different. It was so interesting to watch the body language shift. He was smiling. He was confident. He was clearly bilingual and confident in the language, but it was cool to witness just how much a part language is to who we are. Like he was home. As we drove back to campus, I watched him become less and less at ease and more and more quiet. I was glad he had that moment.

**Access.** In the midst of these dynamics, all of the participants managed to gain a tremendous amount from their independent school experience. All described their academic experiences as the most valuable aspect of their lives, after their families. All of the student participants credit their education with becoming more open-minded and more critical of issues and conversations. Thus, they see their education as purposeful.

All of the student participants, except for Sylvie, realized the only way to escape the system of oppression was by getting an education. All of the students talked about education as a family value, much more than an expectation. All students expected that they would go to college in order to better their family situation, they felt that burden and opportunity very acutely. Though all of the students recounted the hardships encountered in high school, there was an acknowledgment that receiving an education symbolized a sense of achievement and reverence from their families.

Pablo, from Southern Prep, pointed out the school's mission and values as strengths of the school. He noted that it was a priority for graduates to not only be admitted and go to college, but they leave Southern Prep "with resilience, a sense of who they are, how they fit in, connection to community, and a dedication to service" by incorporating this into their classes and programs. In many ways, the students interviewed in this study did graduate with soft skills.

Given all of this, the student participants were split on whether or not they would do it all over again. All were able to identify the many ways that going to their respective schools enabled them to have a "better life." Bris says, "private school definitely changed me but I think I'm definitely grateful for it. Because I don't know where I'd be today. I'd probably be at Richmond High messing around somewhere. I don't know if I'd be going to college." Bris's high self-efficacy allowed her to speak with confidence to illustrate her command of the materials being discussed in class and for Bris, participation was necessary for learning and achieving an overall high GPA. On a subconscious level, however, her ability to speak and confidently engage in academic dialogue with peers/instructors could also be understood as a way of speaking out against the stereotype of the underperformance of Latin@s in elite educational settings.

At one point toward the end of the one-on-one interview with Bris she shared gratitude about “being one of the only Latin@s here”. This was curious as it contradicted much of what she had said regarding the lack of Latin@ representation in the study body. The researcher pressed her and she responded,

As much as I hated it at first...I now love being known as the Latin@ girl coming from Richmond who kind of has an accent. I don't know. There is something about it that motivates me to want to do more and continue working hard and making my parents proud...I've seen myself grow and see the transition I went through between sophomore and junior year where I just said, 'hey, I want to go to a good college and get a large scholarship...I also got serious about mentoring others...and every Thursday I go to Fruitvale to mentor kids who aren't good at speaking English, to help them with their homework or with their reading skills and just become their friend...I really care about them. I want to see them go places...I would do it over. I would come back to Tunnel High a million times over. But freshman year was bad and it took me a long time to find myself. I'm happy that I get to be the face of the Latin@ community...like I hope that I make other Latin@ students proud. I am proud to be one of the few that are representing. And, it's a lot to carry on my shoulders as one of the only. If I mess up, I mess it up for everyone like me that comes after me. I wish that was not part of the package. Like, to get out of here without all of that extra pain would be...I can't even...

Peter explained that he felt his organization and study skills were improved by having been at Tunnel High. In his own comparisons to his Making Waves peers at other schools, he felt that the work he was doing was more challenging.

When asked whether she would do it again [come to City School], Alex responded confidently that she would. She is grateful for all of the “life lessons, good or bad, has like changed [her] to be a person who wants to do better for the good of the community.” She names that City School exposed her to the richness of her culture, specifically through the cultural explorations within her Spanish classes. She also had the opportunity to travel to Costa Rica with her school, further opening her eyes to “her rich Hispanic heritage.”

During the focus group interview, Leo said, “I’m glad I stayed at East Academy because I don’t know if I would be going to Reed without it...well, actually, I don’t know.” Leo described his four (4) years in high school as “putting his life on hold” in exchange for a better future. Melanie recalled a similar feeling when she was in college at an Ivy League school, “I chose my future over my present. I was keenly aware of the sacrifice I was making.” Another EL added,

I have access now. I have the keys. I have the language. And, I was angry in high school. I was angry at the privilege and the ignorance. I was angry all the time. And that anger actually fueled my academic success. It propelled me in to positions of leadership...it was the anger toward “them”. And, yet, I envied them and wanted what they had. But, I don’t know...

Phil pushed, “What don’t you know?”

Melanie, “That you would make that choice again?”

Phil, “Or that it was worth it?”

Bris, “It depends. The sacrifice is about how I feel about myself. I was constantly questioning myself. But I know I will have comfort and access because I paid my dues here...and probably will continue to do so in college, but now I am stronger and more ferocious.

Phil, an EL in his fifties, concluded with the assertion that

there comes a time for reconciliation...yeah, I have paid prices internally and socially. There is a bigger picture in the end. And that is you (speaking to the youth participants in the room). You are the something bigger. When I remember that, I can deal with what I have to deal with. All you can do is believe us...that the sacrifice is worth it. For as much as you may want to give up and give in, don’t.

Necahual had a distinct perspective at the end of the focus group. She offered,

I have a younger sister and I would tell her to come [to Southern Prep] if she feels comfortable. I would not go to Southern Prep again if could do it over. I would be a happier person if I had gone to a public school and I would have done better my first two years in high school. I think I would still be applying to all of the same [colleges] because I have always known that education is necessary to getting somewhere in the world.

**Finding voice.** All of the students were clear that going to their particular independent school “will open doors for me that have been closed...this is what I need to be successful.” The challenges all the students experienced within the classrooms were meaningless compared to the set of competencies gained. Attending these independent schools allowed student participants to begin to deconstruct the internalized oppression that shaped much of their educational experience, impacting their sense of self. Becoming more open-minded and critical of information, these schools taught student participants to be a change agent.

Necahual, Leo, Bris, Mario, and Alex described a heightened consciousness around race as a result of their four (4) years at an independent high school. All understood the role the school and individual teachers played in their socialization process to the dominant culture of power: what to do, how to talk, how to dress if one wanted to be seen, heard, and respected by white peers and faculty members. This experience not only solidified the participants’ determination to succeed in school, but they learned behaviors that will serve them well in college. Clearly, attending these institutions has provided these students with an awareness and level of consciousness around race and racial perception that did not exist prior to their attendance. Being at these predominantly white spaces has also prepared the students for some of the difficulties they will encounter as they continue in the world.

City School creates opportunities for parents of students of color to speak up on behalf of the their children. Students of color volunteer to speak with the Principal, or Board of Trustees, and/or the faculty about their experiences at school. East Academy also has a regular practice of making space for students of color and LGBTQ youth to bespeak their experiences to the administration and faculty at large. This serves to move initiatives forward because the adults respond mire viscerally to student stories, rather than data points and research studies.

Necahual spoke about her transformation over the course of four (4) years. As a freshman, she told her classmates that her name was “Nicole”. Her name, Necahual is Aztec and she felt it was “so Mexican.” Her father would remind her that her name was Necahual, not “Nicole.” “Nicole” would deny living in the “ghetto” and say she actually lived on the border of Palo Alto. By the end of her four (4) years at Southern Prep, Necahual found her voice and learned to stand up again racism and prejudice with a new voice. She now proudly calls herself “Necahual” (no longer Nicole) and says, “If you can’t pronounce it, that’s your bad.” Necahual’s ability to be outspoken, courageous, and provide a different perspective that challenged students and faculty members, led her to be perceived as a respected leader at her school. Necahual admitted, “I don’t talk like I used to. When I speak up, I try not to sound mean or rude. I know that if you want it to stop, you have to sound sophisticated in a way.” At Southern Prep, Necahual learned how to engage and interact with students and faculty, employing different communication tactics. She is cautious of what she says and how she says it. There was a deliberate decision to present in a different way, to adopt Standard English (English language that is normative to formally educated native speakers), to engage in academic discourse at a college preparatory school.

At the end of his senior year, Leo created an autobiographical documentary about transitioning from a bilingual elementary school in the Fruitvale district of Oakland to East Academy as a ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) grader. His intended audience were other students like himself, in particular his younger brother and sister. Leo said, “It’s a fair warning to people who are looking to go to a private school. It was about the challenges and the cultural differences.” Leo showed the film at his school and also showed it at the start of the focus group. This film served as a

springboard for much of the discussion as the themes resonated deeply with the other students and EL's present.

By her junior year, Necahual started gaining more confidence in [her] schoolwork "...and instead of staying quiet when they say racist stuff to me I speak up and do something about it. Like, I don't feel angry with them for being racists, I feel sorry for them. Like, that is when my own mentality started to change. I started working with other Bridge and Latin@ kids when they come here so I can help them." In abandoning a part of her "EPA" (East Palo Alto) voice, Necahual feels that she has lost a part of her cultural identity and self-expression, but gained respect at Southern Prep in the process.

At the end of the focus group interview, Bris offered to share a poem aloud to the group. The researcher asked if it could be included in the study and she agreed. It is included here with permission.

*A lo hecho, pecho*

because my brown skin and femininity automatically makes me a mother  
my self worth has never been handed to me,  
because my only purpose is to feed babies and rock them to sleep  
i'm sorry that i didn't get the next update  
on when i should apply for all of the jobs that society expects me to work  
because i am brown  
because i am brown,  
you can't even view me on an equal level as you.  
i'm expected to teach you Spanish as if that is all that i'm good at  
as if you need any more gateways

into a route of intelligence that my people don't have the opportunity to have freely  
this isn't meant to hurt you,  
or to make you feel uncomfortable  
but hear me out when i say  
that all i have ever wanted was a voice  
a voice that could redo everything that has been done  
perhaps i should speak on how the self that i have tried to create  
always manages to be torn down  
because i am brown  
my brown skin somehow attracts the wrong audience,  
urging them to traumatize me emotionally and verbally  
what else am i supposed to do?  
how do i tell you who i am when my voice cannot be heard?  
no matter how loud i scream, my voice still manages to remain unheard  
to remain unnoticed; to remain unimportant  
i am sorry that i do not fit into the categories in which you have set  
for me and my people  
i am sorry that it kills you for me to be a Latina  
that fits outside of your narrow-minded box  
i am sorry that i'm not letting what's started be what's truly done  
i am sorry that i let your vision shape the ways in which i see myself  
but this time, i'll help us both  
since Spanish is something that you seem to think

is the only defining factor of my self worth  
me siento orgullosa de ser una mujer en nuestra sociedad  
tengo un propósito  
voy a liberarme de estos estereotipos

### **Summary**

Student participants saw U.S. society in two ways. From one perspective, U.S. society continues to be unjust and oppressive. From another perspective, things were improving as evidenced by their own success. They saw their challenging experiences as a key to unlocking the “American Dream,” not only for them and their families, but also for future generations. All of the participants identified themselves in a long-line of change agents that have used their education to better the lives of others.

During the focus group conversations, there was a palpable sense of relief and clarity. They shared frustrations and came to see that though their personal experience was unique, there was recognition and understanding of their shared positionality as Latin@s in independent schools. Following the focus group, the students reported feeling a renewed sense of empowerment, consciousness, resistance, and transformation.

As bell hooks (1987) suggests, “Speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject. Only as subject can we speak, as objects we remain voiceless beings defined and interpreted by others” (p.12).

## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Conclusion

*Caminante, no hay puentes, se hace puentes al andar.*  
“Voyager, there are no bridges, one builds them as one walks.  
— Gloria Anzaldua

This chapter includes a summary of the purpose of the study, the research question, and the sub-questions. Following sections review the methodology and major findings with the student voices (their counter-stories) at the center of gravity. The researcher reflects on these counter-stories in light of critical race theory, the epistemological framework. This chapter also includes the research limitations, implications on leadership practice and pedagogical models, and recommendations from the students that could improve the Latin@ student experience within predominantly white Bay Area independent schools.

#### Research Summary

Latin@ students in independent schools manage distinct worlds and cultural expectations. This study is situated in Critical Race Theory and the theory of intersectionality, which acknowledge that we are all shaped by all of our experiences and these experiences inform our identity. The participants shared their unique experiences as students of color in Bay Area independent schools.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews of twelve (12) self-identified Latin@ students. The researcher triangulated this data by interviewing six (6) equity leaders and exploring artifacts from six National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and Northern California People of Color in Independent Schools (POCIS) Gold member schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. The researcher also gathered data through two focus groups comprised of student participants and equity leaders from participating schools.

The ethnic diversity within private independent schools in the United States today is still very limited. According to NAIS, the combined adult and student populations are predominantly white (76%) and segregated along racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007). Though both NAIS and POCIS have publicly declared a commitment to increasing diversity of all kinds and improving teacher efficacy in regards to multicultural education, it remains unclear how students of color are experiencing this predominantly white and elite world as racial and/or ethnic minorities.

This study aims to contribute to existing literature by inviting students of color, specifically Latin@s, to share their stories. By making space for the wisdom and vision of these students, school leaders can work with historically underrepresented and marginalized individuals. School leaders benefit all students when there is a deeper understanding of the role race and racism may play in a student's educational experience. Without deliberate action that will raise the consciousness of educators and school leaders, schools cannot be a part of the necessary transformation of society through the programs and priorities of those same schools.

This study sought to place the experiences of self-identified Latin@ high school seniors in Bay Area POCIS member schools at the center of this research study. The purpose of this research project was to learn from Latin@ student perceptions of school programs focused on diversity and inclusion, as well as learn what characteristics of the school environment both augment and detract from their social and academic experiences. Including long silenced voices is essential to this study because counter-stories challenge the perceived wisdom of the white culture of power.

The research question that informed this study was: “What formative experiences have the deepest impact on Latin@s while attending Bay Area independent high schools, and how do these critical incidents inform their identity as people of color in U.S. society?”

Research sub-questions that elicited data were the following:

1. How do the racial and ethnic backgrounds of self-identified Latin@ students affect their perception of their critical school experiences within predominantly white POCIS member schools?
2. What tools or opportunities, if any, have the participating schools provided the students, so that they may develop ethnic identities and critical consciousness regarding oppressive elements in their lives?
3. In what ways, if any, do your schools explicitly and deliberately challenge the dominant white culture of power and/or demonstrate its values and appreciate your identity as a Latin@ student?
4. To what extent are you satisfied with your decision to attend this school as it relates to your identity formation?

The researcher used a qualitative approach because qualitative inquiry focuses on how people understand their own experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2009). This approach is appropriate for this study since the purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of Latin@ students in independent schools firsthand, rather than examining quantitative data.

The researcher collected data from students and equity leaders in Bay Area independent schools through one-on-one semi-structured interviews and open-ended focus groups. The critical race theory epistemological framework called for interviews and focus groups so that the

researcher could work in partnership with the students in meaning making and generating recommendations.

The individual one-on-one interviews were conducted in each participant's school when classes were in session and lasted sixty (60) minutes. Each interview and focus group was recorded (audio and visual). The researcher transcribed all of the footage and coded and analyzed the data using an inductive qualitative analysis (Patton, 2003).

### **Major Findings**

The researcher found themes that were both opportunities and challenges from the student's stories in response to the research questions. Table 10 notes the emergent themes. The student participants were eager to share their experiences and many thanked the researcher for allowing them the space to think critically about the impact their schooling had on their identity as Latin@s. Though the students had varied exposure to affinity spaces, curriculum on race and racism, and opportunities to discuss their identity, every single student said, at one point or another during this research study, "Wow, I've never thought about that."

Table 10

*Emergent Themes.*

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<u>Opportunities</u>	<u>Challenges</u>
Being hand picked	Being “one of the only ones” (EL)  <i>-notion of diversity</i>  <i>-“minority” status</i>
Support Systems * (EL)	Aversive racism
Supportive adults  <i>-parents</i>  <i>-EL's and other mentors</i>	<i>-“stereotype threat”</i>  <i>-academic insecurity</i>  <i>-fear of negative stereotypes</i>  <i>-code-switching/acculturation</i>
Finding place and people (EL)  <i>-student cohort</i>  <i>-affinity clubs</i>  <i>-conferences</i>	Managing micro-aggressions (EL)  Socio-economic class  Institutional Structures (EL)
Finding Voice (EL)	
Gaining “access” (EL)  <i>-future over present</i>	

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## **Over-arching Research Question**

*What formative experiences have the deepest impact on Latin@s while attending Bay Area independent high schools, and how do these critical incidents inform their identity as people of color in U.S. society?*

With the exception of Sylvie, all the students were hand-picked to be part of a program for gifted students, outreach program, special scholarship, or pipeline program to grow the number of students of color in predominantly white institutions. All of the students who shared the experience of “being singled out” were clear that the moment of being “hand-picked” was a life-changing moment. Necahaul was the only student within this study who claimed that even if she had not attended Southern Prep, she would still be college-bound. All of the other students each credited an individual adult who saw their gifts and potential and encouraged them to apply to that special program, and eventually an independent school. It is imperative that school programs are able to set students up for success. This often involves some academic support, cultural immersion tips, discussions on identity formation, financial support beyond tuition dollars, and a significant cohort of students.

The students also spoke passionately about their parents’ commitment to their education. The students were grateful that their parents pushed them to “stick it out” even when they wanted to give up or transfer schools. Every single student participant noted that it was their own parents’ belief in them and the promise of attaining the “American Dream” through education that fueled their desire to graduate and go on to college. For all of the students except Sylvie, their formative experience of being “othered” (for racial and ethnic or socio-economic reasons) gave them skills in building resilience, confidence, grit, and a sense of activism.

From a CRT perspective, the themes that emerged demonstrate the power that race and racism continue to have, particularly in our educational system. The Latin@ participants mostly struggled as people of color who also had limited economic means and were (mostly) first generation U.S. and first generation college-bound. All but one of the participants transferred to independent schools (in either sixth [6<sup>th</sup>] or ninth [9<sup>th</sup>] grade) from under-funded and under-resourced public schools.

According to Steele (1995), “culturally shaped stereotypes suggesting poor performance can, when made salient in a context involving the stereotype, disrupt performance of an individual who identifies with that group.” Stereotype threat refers to being at risk of conforming to a negative stereotype about one’s group (racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, sexuality, etc.) when in a predominantly white milieu. Most of the participating students, save for Sylvie and Naila, were overly concerned with how they presented in class, felt as if they needed to “prove themselves”, and experienced periods of extreme self-doubt. This self-doubt is bolstered by the knowledge that they are “the only one” (or nearly) and that they may be the first person of color with whom many of their classmates have interacted in a meaningful way. As such, the students believed that it was their responsibility to “represent” all Latin@s, even when that was not their primary identifier. For many student participants, their identity as “Latin@” emerged as a significant piece of their identity only once enrolled at an independent school.

As stated in Chapter Four, the quiet awareness of being “one of the only ones” in the class (and with that, a questioning of an earned seat at the table) is what psychologist Suinn (2006) calls “imposter syndrome.” Experiencing imposter syndrome and being in a new academically rigorous environment can create added stress and influence academic performance and social engagement.

Most of the student participants perceived themselves as “smart” and capable, but very quickly after starting at their independent school questioned their abilities. Some participants attributed their lack of preparation to their previous public school experience and not on their personal strengths. For instance, Necahual, Leo, and Alex were able to identify that their schooling had not adequately prepared them for an independent school environment. In fact, Necahual sais this: “Like, I realized that the government must not care about us...why would they make schools for these younger [white] kids so much better? These little white kids would be like, ‘You haven’t learned that yet?’” Thus, those students embraced transitional programs and support systems offered by the school. It was the students who were not able to make this distinction that retreated inward and attributed feelings of floundering on their shoulders. This points to the need to explicitly name the disparate schooling experiences in the U.S.

Nine (9) of the twelve (12) student participants shared the fear that negative stereotypes about Latin@s would “stick to them.” Naila was very aware of the “regular stereotype” about Latin@s and she was overwhelmed by the goal to “prove them wrong” because not “all of us are like that.” Necahual, for instance, said,

I am not ashamed of where I come from. I am not ashamed that Latin@s have a lot of kids...either because they are Catholic or poor. I am not ashamed that they have taco trucks or that they clean houses...that is what my parents do – and, not all Latin@s do that. You know? And, I feel like everyone is watching me to see if I do exactly what they think I will do...so I am always thinking and trying to guess...then, I realize I forgot what the teacher was even saying. I’m just ready to go.

It was also sad to hear to so many of the students share that their peers, and in some cases, college counselors, attributed their positive college admissions to their identity as Latin@. As the interviews and focus groups went on, however, those same students articulated a level of frustration and pain at the notion that they were “only accepted” because they were “minorities.”

This solidifies the belief that the U.S. has actually been developed for the white, rich, and powerful. If we subscribe to the myth that all who have been able to be successful in this society achieved this on their own merit, this denies the power and influence of institutionalized racism, white supremacy, and capitalism.

### **Research sub-question one**

*How do the racial and ethnic backgrounds of self-identified Latin@ students affect their perception of their critical school experiences within predominantly white POCIS member schools?*

Students who identify with and/or present as non-white have an additional challenge in that they are significantly underrepresented in the faculty, administration, and the curricula. Eight (8) of the student participants spoke passionately about the need for more adults of color within their schools. The students articulated that seeing others that mirrored their own personal ethnic background made them feel better “about who they are and where they come from.” Another student also said, “It made me know that I could be successful too.” Bris even asked the researcher if they could stay in touch because the researcher was the first Latin@ she ever met with “multiple degrees who was still proud to be a Latin@.” The students are thirsting for role models who “understand their struggle” within independent schools.

Eight (8) student participants were able to name that white privilege and entitlement intersected with stereotype threat, which contributed to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. During the interviews, all but one (1) of the student participants (Sylvie), communicated some degree of the notion that “white was right”, especially when they first joined the independent school community. The students’ notions of “right [was] determined by group norms,” primarily mainstream white norms (Kegan & Lahey, 1984, pg. 221). The students, and their

families, placed high value on the academic and personal endorsements of their white peers and faculty (the culture of power). When the participating students experienced a sense of “failure,” they translated that “failure” as evidence that they were, in fact, not qualified to be there. The “essence” in the way they understood their private reality was based on white supremacy and internalized inferiority (Kegan, 1982, p 113).

The students and all of the EL’s felt grateful for being given the opportunity to be in the space and often felt and expressed a level of deference for the white majority population. There was a desire to “be like”, “be accepted, and “be successful,” while some also recoiled from their experiences of white privilege. In fact, Mateo said,

They just act like they can’t be wrong. For me to be right would be crazy. It’s like...they discovered gravity or something. When I say something insightful in class or someplace...they just look so shocked. I actually feel bad for them sometimes. That must be hard to be constantly surprised and thrown off guard. I am used to being disappointed and I actually think that makes me a stronger person.

Of the twelve (12) student participants, eight (8) participants expressed deep and regular frustration with their white peers and teachers during their high school experience. There was an expectation that the teachers and students would be more in tune with the plight of non-upper middle class people given the notions expressed on school websites and mission statements. The part that bothered Necahual, Bris, and Leo most was the “ignorance and the arrogance in not having to know.” Necahual said,

I really never had a lot of white friends here because they never seemed to even try to understand the amount of privilege that they have and where they come from. They looked at me like I was part of a museum...a real Mexican who could speak English and stand up to them. That was the most infuriating part.

Like many students of color attending predominantly white institutions, the lack of racial and ethnic diversity meant that participants often had the responsibility of educating and raising

awareness around racial diversity in school. When issues related to race and racism emerged in school or the larger environment, tension emerged and shined light on the students that were not deemed white. In fact, Mateo of City School, said this about the dynamic,

I was forced to represent the perspectives of all Latin@s, well, actually, of all Mexicans, because I was never described as anything but Mexican. It was hard to feel like I was in a tank being watched. And then, everyone wonders why I looked stressed and mad all of the time. Can it be that no one understands how difficult it is to represent every single Latin@ person? If I say something wrong, or in an accent, I hurt everyone like me.

As a minority in predominantly white NAIS schools, most participants felt that the responsibility to be a representative model of a particular ethnic group added enormous stress. Leo recalled, “At some point or another, everyone forgets a book or an assignment. But, if you are Latin@ or Black or Muslim (pause) be prepared to hear about it for a while. There is no forgiveness and people love to remind you how ignorant you are.” This dynamic contributed to a constant feeling of “otherness” and not belonging.

While many of the participants felt “other-ed,” they also felt ignored and unseen. According to the participants, the lack of perceived racial and ethnic diversity training for staff members also heightened the experience of otherness by the student participants. When some staff did step in, as allies, it was often on special observance days (special assemblies or public acts of solidarity). These seemingly isolated attempts to engage students in discussions about race and racism were counter-productive and elevated feelings of discomfort and mistrust because there was no previous (or post) evidence of authentic solidarity. The conscious and unconscious stereotypes invoked by some community members’ lack of racial consciousness speak to the power and legacy of white privilege and institutionalized racism in U.S. society.

The salience of white privilege and class entitlement pervasive in the participating independent schools suggest that some white students view their social, cultural, and economic

experience as the “American norm” and that anyone who does not share this lived experience must be lacking in some way. At the two focus groups, the participating EL’s agreed they had been invited to the “party” (independent schools), but not given a seat at the table. This means that independent schools have made it a priority to diversify both the adult and student population, but haven’t actually changed the structure of the dinner party.

The researcher has included a metaphor to demonstrate this dynamic. For instance, schools have invited more guests, but have not rearranged the furniture to ensure every one has a seat at the table. Moreover, the way in which schools welcome, or fail to welcome, historically uninvited guests only solidifies the sense that the new invites are still, only guests in someone else’s home. It is unclear whether or not, if a seat has been fashioned for a guest, there is sufficient room at the table. The new “guests” are not consistently asked if they are hungry, what they can and cannot eat, what they like to eat, or about specific rituals or customs. As such, it remains unclear whether or not individuals feel authentically welcome. How is the food presented or served and in what language? Is what is offered actually healthful and nurturing to the guests (is what is being taught additive to the individual?)

Socioeconomic status has many implications on the Latin@ student experience in independent schools as well. All student participants, with the exception of Sylvie, found themselves at their particular schools because of access to significant amounts of financial aid and of programs targeting “high potential” and “at-risk” students. Without these two access keys, an independent school education was undoubtedly out of reach. All of the students, again with the exception of Sylvie, who comes from an economically affluent family, were dumbfounded and taken-aback by the level of wealth they witnessed upon enrolling at independent schools. The students noted brand-named bags, the make and model of cars, the

number of homes some students had, and the amount of money spent on events such as prom.

All of the participants demonstrated pride in their Latin@ heritage and in their families, but they certainly had feelings about the enormous amounts of wealth they perceived.

Socioeconomic status also often prevented the students and their families from full-engagement in school life. Many students live far from campus and relied on public transportation to get to and from school. Only three (3) of the students had access to a car and only one student had an available parent with a flexible work schedule. For many working-class people, taking time off work is simply not practical. As such, many of these students did not have parents and other relatives present at significant events. Due to language barriers in some instances, parents did not often attend parent/teacher conferences or other meetings.

Students of color also have to manage aversive racism and micro-aggressions regularly. Socioeconomics and cultural stereotypes had the most profound impact on all participants' experiences. Many students enrolled in these learning spaces felt underprepared academically and looked for support from peers and teachers. For some students, being a part of support programs, though useful, led others in the community to assume a deficit. Participants such as Mateo, Leo, Necahual, and Naila reported that some teachers and students responded with negative statements such as, "Yeah, you're in that program because of Affirmative Action and we need to help you do good here." Some students were, in fact, academically over their heads while others were academically able to thrive.

Even those who were not in need of additional support experienced a level of stereotype threat and self-doubt in their 9<sup>th</sup> (ninth) and 10<sup>th</sup> (tenth) grade years. The student experiences at independent schools did one of two things – either it strengthened

their identity as a Latin@ and their connection to family and home community, or, it facilitated assimilation to the dominant culture and distance from their families and home community. Some students discussed experiencing jealousy, envy, and anger from siblings, extended family relatives, and peers in their home community. Many students also experienced a sense of pride and hope from family and friends as well. Schools can continue to build on the efforts of transition programs to lessen the dissonance experienced by some students of color.

Five (5) of the twelve (12) student participants experienced equity work at their schools as nice additions to their schooling, in particular the Latin@ clubs, POCIS workshops and diversity conferences. Even the students that did not capitalize on the offerings (such as Sylvie and Naila) identified those offerings as evidence that their schools cared about how Latin@ students felt. However, the other seven (7) student participants communicated frustration at the “ignorance of some of the faculty and students” and the “constant need to celebrate differences, but only one day a year.”

All of these participants were academically competent individuals who felt like imposters in the classroom. The awareness of their marginal status forced most of the participants to not only question their place at the school, but also their abilities as learners. This self-doubt was further intensified by “being one of the only ones” and the sense of unexamined and unacknowledged white privilege.

### **Research sub-question two**

*What tools or opportunities, if any, have the participating schools provided the students so that they may develop ethnic identities and critical consciousness regarding oppressive elements in their lives?*

The ability to critically understand one's social location, the "intersectionality" of race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, sex, and language is essential if we are to employ "aggressive, color conscious efforts to change the way things are" (Delgado and Stefancic, p. 51, p. 22). We are more than our race, gender, or sexuality. We are all of these at once and, at times, one piece of our identity may weigh more heavily. It is important to see how and where ethnic identity rises to the surface for self-identified students of color in independent schools.

Many students actively participated in Latin@ and/or diversity clubs on campus. For the students who took advantage of these offerings, they had a positive impact on their experiences and informed the pride they felt as Latin@s by their senior year. For many students, this was an opportunity to emerge as a leader and an agent for change. Students appreciated the level of voice and agency they played in the clubs and in program development. In some cases, the students expressed a desire for adult and institutional leadership as they were still learning as well. A few students expressed some anger that their school "left it up to them to educate the school about 'their' culture. What does that mean? How do the kids do that in one day? And then what?" Still, all who were members of the Latin@ club or Diversity club identified those as highlights of their time in school.

For the students who attended the NAIS People of Color Conference (POCC) and Student Diversity Leadership Conference (SDLC), the White Privilege Conference (WPC), POCIS conference or the Latin@ Summit, they were forever changed. Of the twelve (12) participants in this study, eight (8) attended at least one or more of these events. Two (2) of the four (4) students who did not attend had been approached and offered the opportunity to apply to attend, but both opted out.

It is important to note that these two participants (Sylvie and Naila) also reported that they did not often feel like their Latin@ identity mattered very much in their daily interactions at school. Both of these students reported high levels of connections with teachers and students, and also reflected that most of their friendships were with white people. By the end of the interview, both of these students lamented not having spent more time exploring their Latin@ identity at school and sharing their personal stories at school.

Tim Wise (2008) speaks to this dilemma in *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*:

The kids in those classrooms do have a race, and their race matters, because it says a lot about the kinds of challenges they are likely to face. To not see color is, as Julian Bond has noted, to not see the consequences of color; and if color has consequences, which it surely does, yet you've resolved not to notice the thing that brings about those consequences, the odds are pretty good that you'll underserve the needs of the students in question, every time. To not see people for who they are is to miss the cue that some, but not all, of your students are dealing with racism (p. 21).

Most of the students felt extraordinary pressure to excel and prove that they, in fact, belonged at the school. Cultural negotiating and code-switching was at times done alone, and other times with the support of peers or adults. All students spoke of the change they experienced and witnessed in themselves in the way in which they each responded to these challenges. All students experienced some level of what Gloria Anzaldua calls, *conocimiento*.

The explicit encounters experienced with white peers and teachers led some participants to believe that the “white norm” was that by which they were being measured and judged. Students experienced stereotype threat. Stereotype threat refers to the risk of conforming to a negative stereotype about one’s socially constructed group membership (Steele, 1995). Many of the student participants attempted to integrate into the landscape of their independent schools. It is important to note that the onus has been placed on the historically underrepresented students to

assimilate to the white views, norms, values, and practices. This is difficult at any age, but even more so during adolescence. Given that society in general holds negative stereotypes and assumptions about people of color, students in this study either developed feelings of inadequacy or acted out perceived expected stereotypes. This placed an enormous amount of strain on participating students and caused them to “justify” their place at the table. Bris recalls,

I cringed whenever a topic came up about Latin@s when I was a freshman or a sophomore or I was really vocal and came off as mad. Sometimes it made me feel crazy. I wished I could simply concentrate on my studies, or going to prom...I was thinking about bringing my race up or down. That was harsh.

All of the participants, except for Sophie from East Academy, described experiences with peers and teachers that made them have feelings of self-doubt and a sense that they were imitators. Alex said, “Just when I was feeling more confident, all my [white] friends began saying that I was lucky to be Latin@ because that is how I was going to get in to college. That was really hard to hear because I worked so hard to get a 4.0 and somehow that did not matter.” These students experienced “identity threat.” “Identity threat” is when one’s race (in this case) affects achievement due to added stressors.

Feeling alone, unseen, and misunderstood became a part of the participating students’ narrative. It was a contradiction to feel both privileged to be in that milieu and grateful for the access to potential sources of power while simultaneously feeling watched and limited by virtue of a distinct immutable characteristic. These polarized feelings contribute to a sense of double consciousness - a pull to be one’s self while also attempting to be a person easily palatable to the surrounding environment in order to be accepted and/or respected. The energy spent managing feelings of self-doubt and anger undermined academic performance.

For the participants in this study, the schools the students attended were often cold, lonely, and scary places where one mistake could define them. In fact, Mario shared,

That's why I retreated. It was easier to do my work, play soccer, and just hang with my girlfriend. I felt like everyone was waiting for me to say something stupid in class, get in trouble on the streets, or eat 'typical Mexican' food...so I just kinda hid. It was lonely, but it was easier. I literally felt them waiting for me to act 'Mexican.' It's been sorta hard, but not really.

The students in this study not only questioned their academic abilities, they questioned their relationships.

Leo actually named that he feared going to East Academy would "make him white" and pull him away from his family and friends. Leo remembered feeling a sense of unsteadiness because he was constantly "shifting back and forth." By his junior year in high school, Leo was able to name that what he was doing was "code-switching", and yet, during his interview there was a sense that he was never his authentic self while at East Academy. Leo said,

I had friends, but very few. Like, I can name only four people that I am my true self with. With everyone else, I am just there and say what I think they expect to hear from me. They don't even notice, because, I don't think they have ever really taken the time to see me.

Necahual, and many of the other student participants, also shared the fear of "becoming white." Though this was a concern, Necahual had also never been exposed to so many white people and been immersed in a predominantly white space. As such, she began to internalize the negative stereotypes about Mexicans and other Latin@s that were present at Southern Prep. She questioned her own value and the worth of the culture of her family.

Six (6) of the twelve (12) participants resisted their new school culture and the threat of "becoming white" by not doing well academically during 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Students did not speak in class, rejected resources offered, did not try, and did not participate in school activities. Students were able to name that they did not want to assimilate, but by the end of their 12<sup>th</sup> grade, all admitted to having changed their speech, their dress, and often being accused of "acting white" by their family and friends.

Peter said that his main goal at Tunnel High was to not be “the stereotypical Mexican” so that my [white] classmates could actually say, “You guys aren’t all the same.” Peter went on to reveal that he developed “a second Peter that only showed up at school.” Peter explained,

I had to remind myself of what I was doing so that I did not become ‘school Peter’ when I wasn’t looking. You know? Sometimes, I would find myself sweating at school because I did not like how it felt to be ‘that Peter’ and it was what made my friends comfortable. I am definitely tired and hope that college is different.

Peter’s experience is an extraordinary example of double-consciousness. Nine (9) of the twelve (12) student participants described “being someone different at school”, “adopting another personality”, “not bringing up things that reminded people that I was different”, and finally, “sometimes I would act like my ‘school-self’ at home and really make my mom mad.” All, but one of these students were aware of what they were doing by “code-switching” and bringing a distinct self to school. In the early high school years, Necahual (then “Nicole”) and Bris adopted white cultural norms to “be accepted” and “blend in.”

“Code-switching” and developing multiple selves can become dangerous when students begin to forget why they were doing this in the first place. It eventually became exhausting and overwhelming for Necahual and Bris, so they developed yet another persona. They adopted what they perceived others expected them to be. They began “acting Latin@”. Bris described wearing “big hoop earrings, a lot of make-up, tight clothes, and people were kinda scared.” She went on to say, “that was weird because that wasn’t me either. Before, people at my school would be like, why are you trying to be white? Then, when I changed, they were like, oh, you must be in a gang.” These students are constantly holding their breath, feeling like they do not belong, and doubting their own capacity for success. These students feel the pressure to stay

connected to their families and home community while also building a bridge to their new life in independent schools. This balancing act can be precarious.

The task of wearing multiple masks, trying to build connections and stay connected often impacts student voice. Some students develop another tongue to navigate and be understood in their school cultures (such as Necahual, Alex, Bris, and Naila), other students grow silent (such as Leo, Mateo, Lucas, and Mario), and some resist developing a new tongue (Claudia, Alberto, and Sylvie). Peter was the only student who articulated a conscious decision to use his two tongues and was aware of the potential danger of losing the ability for that to be a deliberate choice.

For instance, Naila was surprised when toward the end of her interview she said, “I guess I don’t really share my real self with my friends. I mean, they are my really, really, really good friends...but, like, I don’t know. If I said what I really thought about a lot of things...I don’t know. It’s just not worth it.” This double-consciousness and multiple masks involve losing one’s voice in order to maintain peer relationships, no matter how inauthentic they may be.

In many ways, this research study provided the students a potential space in which to grow in their critical consciousness and awareness of their Latin@ self. Kegan (1982) wrote: “the act of capturing in words significant experiences in one’s life creates some distance from those experiences. Rather than being entirely subject to and embedded in their life story, they begin to hold parts of it as object” (p. 212). As such, the student participants all noted that discussing critical moments in their education, their sense of themselves as students of color, and their journey in their identity formation as Latin@s was a gift for them. During the focus group Mateo said, “I feel more powerful now. Like, I can see that all the pain was not about me, but that many of us feel this way. It’s bigger than just us. I feel less scared because I will look out

for this stuff in college and actually look for people to talk this out with, you know?" The students, then, can critically examine their world and experiences, and not simply be subject to the ways in which our society oppresses and represses the powerless. Naila followed this by saying, "In looking at my life this way, I realized things I had not been able to actually see before."

By engaging students in this process of critical examination, they may gain the language and emerging skills to make different kinds of sense about what occurs in their life. Having new ways of knowing invites individuals to act on what is now known. Research projects such as these can enable students to engage in "praxis", the point at which theory and practice meet (Freire, 1970). Praxis makes space to make deliberate choices to challenge the beliefs, values, and frameworks that have not only been presented to us, but those in which we live, work, learn, and lead.

### **Research sub-question three**

*In what ways, if any, does your school explicitly and deliberately challenge the dominant white culture of power and/or demonstrate its values and appreciate your identity as a Latin@ student?*

All of the students' experiences at school were most influenced by their gender identity, ethnic identity, and socioeconomic status. Due to the fact that these particular identifiers made them different from the majority student population, most of the student participants were required to constantly consider other's expectations (peers from their home community, peers in school, immediate family, extended family and adults at school). The students' "identity" as Latin@ was – and still is – most salient in the way they experienced themselves and perceived others experiencing them.

Students often felt lonely and being surrounded by people whose reality was so distinct from their own was challenging for many participants. Students questioned why each school had so few students and adults of color. For some students, there were feelings of suspicion and a belief that the school was not truly committed to diversity. Students questioned the numerous requests to be photographed for admission materials or to speak for the school. At no point did those students see those requests as proud moments of achievement. In fact, Leo, Mateo, Mario, and Peter all reported feeling “used” by the school and were all very eager to graduate.

One problematic aspect of “being the only one” is that students feel both a pressure to befriend and be in relationship with other Latin@ students (and in some cases other students of color), while also asserting that the perceived commonalities within this highly diverse “ethnic/racial” groups simply do not exist. To some degree, many felt that they did not “become Latin@” until they began in independent schools. The student participants evolved from being “Central American”, “Nicaraguan”, “Mexican”, “Mexican-American” to being “Latin@” in school, while others with even smaller “Latin@” populations often “claimed being a student of color.”

Students also noticed how the school attempted to connect with their parents and home community. The ways in which their parents felt connected or welcomed at the school left an impression on the students and communicated to them how the adults in their schools felt about “Latin@s in general”. Seven student participants shared that their parents had a strained relationship with the school because they could not “fit in” and “feel comfortable.” Peter recalled the times when his mother did come to watch him play basketball and he would notice her standing by herself. He said, “it actually hurt

my heart to see that no one ever reached out to her. It actually made me feel lonelier. But I appreciated that she kept on coming anyway.” The seeming inability of some faculty members to recognize that certain students had more academic capital than others was a major cause of discontent for most of the student participants. The fact that most of the students in this study did not have college educated parents to provide them support as they navigated the “invisible curriculum” placed some students at an academic disadvantage. Bris, Veronica, Alex, Peter, Necahual, and Leo all believed this inherently privileged some students and placed other students at a disadvantage.

#### **Research sub-question four**

*To what extent are you satisfied with your decision to attend this school as it relates to your identity formation?*

In order for authentic and trusting relationships to develop, people must be invited to tell their stories. Many schools operate in a way that mirrors the hegemony within the United States in that it limits or prohibits the voices of the marginalized. All students have stories to tell and responses to the ways in which we school them. When adults make authentic space for student voice, students feel seen. When schools respond to student stories, students feel valued.

This research study explored how many Latin@ students actually develop a dual identity as a result of their time in independent schools. One student, Naila, described a sense of awakening during her interview, meaning that she did not seem to be aware that she had been “code-switching.” In order for her to experience peer relationships and gain acceptance, she unconsciously surrendered or suppressed integral pieces of herself and her experiences because, “[her friends] wouldn’t understand anyway.” Naila developed and used her voice to cover, rather than convey, her actual thoughts and feelings. She began to dress the way her friends did

and she never once invited friends over to her home. One of the last lines from our interview was, “I guess few people really know me. I never really thought about that. Or maybe, they do know me, it’s just a new me.”

In the end, when asked whether or not they would “do it all again”, their responses fell in to three distinct categories as shown in Table 11. Some students readily assured the researcher they would attend an independent school again if given the choice. Another group of students communicated a willingness to do it again, “but only because I know what I can gain from coming [to this school].” The students were referring to the academic, social and cultural capital gained from the exposure. The last group of students said that they would not attend if given the choice because of how hard it was. Necahual said, “I think I would be a happier person and have more self-confidence if I had not come here.”

Table 11

*Would you do it all again?*

<i>"I'm glad I went to this independent school."</i>	<i>"The academics are good and I know I am going to a good college, but..."</i>	<i>"I do not think I would make this decision again."</i>
Alberto	Naila	Bris
Alex		Leo
Claudia		Lucas
Sylvie		Mario
		Mateo
		Necahual
		Peter
<p><i>"I am so glad I came here."</i></p> <p><i>"I think it has been kind of hard, but I don't know, being Latin@ here never really seemed to matter."</i></p> <p><i>"I always never really felt Latin@ here, but I felt that way at home."</i></p> <p><i>"It would be nice to have more adults of color to relate to."</i></p>	<p><i>"I feel lonely."</i></p> <p><i>"I feel distant from my old friends."</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes I forget I'm Latin@."</i></p> <p><i>"I feel really alone and don't think anyone understands me."</i></p>	<p><i>"I hear racial jokes all the time, every day...the sign outside of the library (at East Academy) is a total joke."</i></p> <p><i>"I know they don't mean it, but [my friends] hurt my feelings all the time."</i></p> <p><i>"People think it's actually a good thing to be color-blind here...can't they see I'm clearly not white?"</i></p> <p><i>"I don't even say anything anymore when I hear racist jokes...I just stay quiet cuz... what's the point?"</i></p> <p><i>"I feel stupid here all the time."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm sick of people saying that the only reason I am going to college is because I am not white."</i></p>

The fact that seven (7) of the twelve (12) student participants are unsure of whether or not they would “do it all again” is alarming. What is at stake here? What do they perceive the cost to have been? All of the students were grateful for the strength and resilience gained from the challenging experience, but they also expressed deep sadness and frustration when recalling the painful encounters, loneliness, and feelings of being misunderstood by peers and adults.

Based on the data reflected in Table 11, only five (5) of the twelve (12) seniors reported that they would make the same decision again, given what they know. It is also important to note that the four (4) students who had a positive overall experience were unique from the other participants. For instance, both Alberto and Claudia began attending Old School in the sixth grade. This allowed for a longer period of acclimation and acceptance. Alex had an older sibling who attended City School, so her acclimation process began earlier as well. She witnessed her sister’s experience and successful journey to college. This also provided a sense of what she would potentially experience once at City School. Lastly, Sylvie was the only Latin@ participant who did not choose to attend East Academy for financial reasons. She was not eligible for aid and she physically appears “white.” As such, she reflected that only those to whom to confides that she is Latin@, actually “know”. These unique circumstances may play a significant role in the distinct ways in which these students experienced their high school years at a predominantly white independent school.

Overall, all of the student participants, except for Necahual, agreed that attending their particular independent school had a positive and rewarding impact on their long-term life trajectory. They understand that the connections made at their school, the practice of code-switching, and the regular access to the white “culture of power” will open doors to competitive colleges, jobs, and influential relationships. Yet, eight (8) of the twelve (12) students also

highlighted a sense of “never really fitting in,” “having to prove yourself,” or “”living up to negative stereotypes”.

The researcher asked the students during both focus groups what would be the impact, if any, if all of the Latin@ students transferred out of their schools. In both cases, there was a long period of silence as students studied one another’s faces. In each instance, a student broke the silence by declaring, “nothing.” All others agreed and again, there was silence. At the second focus group Mateo declared, “It’s like, the school expects that it’s going to change me and make me better and I should be grateful. Shouldn’t the school also change because of me?”

### **Connections in light of Critical Race Theory**

Independent schools today are struggling to create an inclusive environment for historically underrepresented students of color. In order to reshape these traditionally white spaces, school leaders must take race, ethnicity, culture, and language into account. Accounting for race and these other important immutable characteristics also requires that educators acknowledge “whiteness.” This, however, becomes problematic in learning spaces where the (white) majority subscribes to the myth of color blindness and a post-racial society. In this paradigm, race does not matter. However, for students of color, they are made aware each day that they, along with their families and possibly home communities, are not white; race does matter. Kimberle Crenshaw (1988) quoted Alfred Blumrosen, “a ‘color-blind’ society built upon the subordination of persons of one color [is] a society which [cannot] correct that subordination because it [can] never recognize it” (p. 106). School leaders have an opportunity to engage in critical self-reflection and to acknowledge the inherent power imbalances in relationships with and between socially constructed identity groups.

This study created a space for students to raise their “critical consciousness” and make visible the process of constructing the self. Raising critical consciousness, or "conscientization", has the potential to transform thinking (Freire, 1976). All of the students involved in this study expressed enormous gratitude for the dedicated time to think critically about their experience at school, with an eye toward their self-identification as “Latin@”. At one point, during each interview, the students demonstrated confusion and surprise at a given question (“I don’t get what you mean? What do you mean, ‘How does my race inform my relationship formation?’” or “Wow, no one has ever asked me that before!” or “I have never thought about it that way...I am really struggling with that...like, I don’t think I’m going to like the answer when I hear myself say it out loud”). During the focus groups, the students all shared a sense of solidarity with one another and the feeling that they were not alone, as they had felt previously. The very act of speaking their truth, being heard and being validated, empowered the students to continue to ask critical questions of their lived experiences and to work as allies for social transformation.

Though many independent schools express a commitment and an interest in diversity, at many schools this does not necessarily translate to anything more than “Taco Tuesday,” a lone Black faculty member, and a handful of “at-risk” students being admitted, given “a full ride” and bussed in. “Diversity” can mean everything and it can also mean nothing. From a CRT lens, these commitment statements are empty if they do not acknowledge that these independent schools, along with the entire schooling system in the U.S., was created in order to maintain a stratified society along racial and class lines. The current system of public and private schooling is producing the results that were intended: an underclass of people of color not benefitting from the “American Dream” in the same way as white people. Independent schools have the opportunity to demonstrate collective values around diversity, equity, and justice that can inform

decisions, institutional practices, and behaviors that may lend themselves to meaningful change in the curriculum, cultural norms, and society at large.

It is imperative that school leaders do not see this study as reinforcement that there is such as a thing as “the Latin@ experience”. Latin@ people in the U.S. are not a monolithic group with a generalizable experience. The researcher’s intention was to bring to the surface distinct voices, experiences, and definitions of what it means to be Latin@ within independent schools today so as to harness the energy of this ever-evolving and powerful whole.

Schools are significant cogs in the U.S. societal machine and can perpetuate the discriminatory social order, a social order that systematically limits opportunity for people of color and other marginalized groups, benefiting the wealthy, specifically White Americans. Real factors in society at the *macro*, *meso* and *micro* levels, specifically in the educational system, ensure this disparity in the social class existence. The establishment and maintenance of a racial hierarchy that places white people firmly at the top of the U.S. social structure reinforces the need to explain away advantage and disadvantage in non-racialized language (Alexander, 2010; Bonillo-Silva, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; McIntosh, 1988; Yosso, 2006). The common attitudes towards race in educational settings within the U.S. are colorblindness, denial, and/or lack of validation of the experiences of students of color (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003, Bonillo-Silva, 2010; Wise, 2010). If school leaders are to address this systemic gap, they must be able to engage the problem with a racial lens in the interest of educational equity (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003) Cambron-McCabe & McCarty, 2005; Gorski, 2012).

The central tenet of educational equity is social and racial justice for all groups (Lorde, 1983; Nieto, 1992; Howard, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2007). Despite this rhetoric, the United States’ legacy of institutional racism, exploitation, genocide, and exclusion of people of color has

a continued negative effect in the landscape of public and private schools today (Darling-Hammond, 2004; De Pry & Cheesman, 2010; Sauer & Sauer, 2010; Tyack, 1974). Race is complex because, though it is a social construction, the long and mostly negative impact of race and racism in this country is nearly impossible to ignore. “Essentializing” is damaging when we attempt to understand “race” as disconnected from the larger system of white supremacy and other forms of institutional oppression. Sexuality, gender identity, religion, class, language, phenotype, nationality will undoubtedly play a role in the way in which race “shows up” or doesn’t in a person’s lived experiences.

Bay Area independent schools do not exist in a vacuum and are part of a larger nested system (see Figure 10). Stone (2002) makes it clear that those with political influence to make policy are not impervious to the media and society’s influence on personal beliefs and views (p. 23). School leaders interested in sustainable change can employ system thinking to see how a system functions as a whole, suggesting that everyone in a system “shares responsibility for the problems generated by the system” (Senge, 2006, p. 78). Systems thinking denies the assumption that any one individual, such as an ineffective Division Head or Head of School, is responsible for any given challenge. It is a useful conceptual framework that surfaces patterns and clarifies pathways to effectively change the system, focusing on the process, rather than the outcome. Senge asserts, “the problem is we see straight lines where we should see circles” (p. 70); we must see relationships rather than disconnected events.

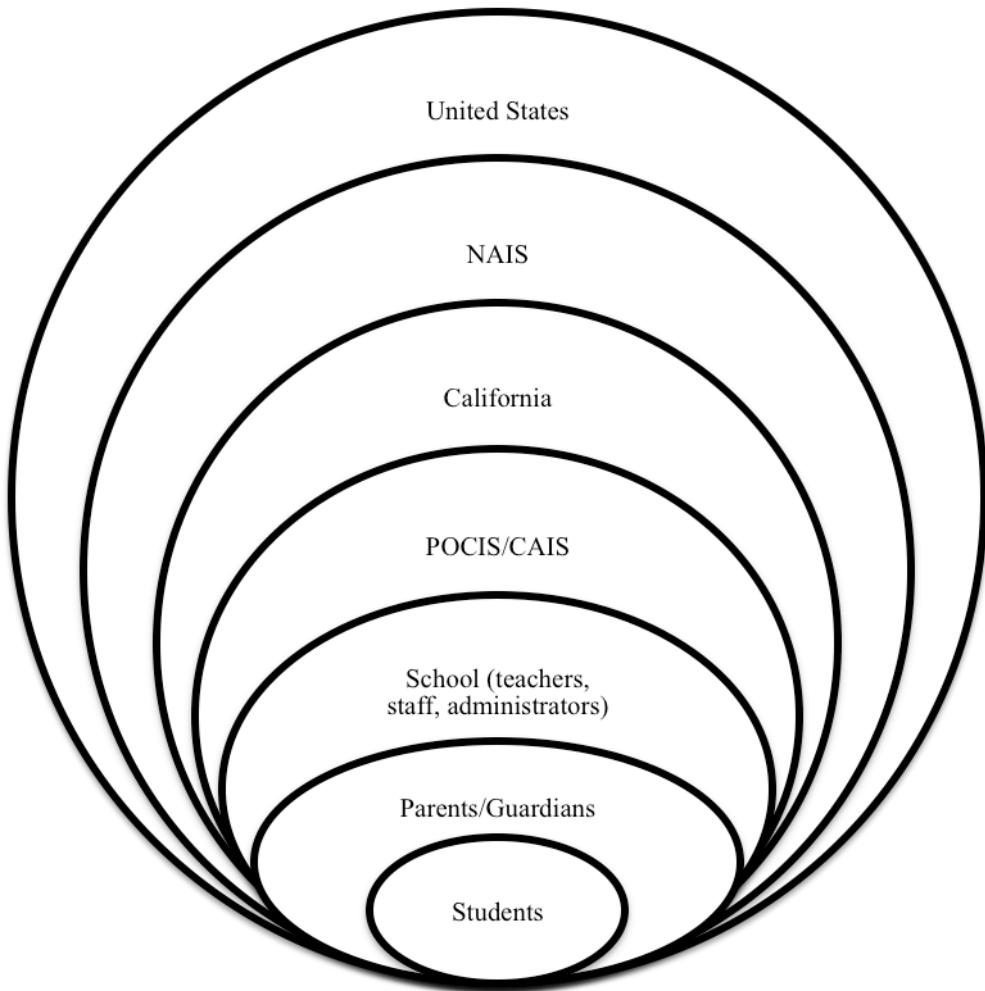


Figure 10. A complex nested system.

Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that racism is an indelible part of our society and asserts that CRT is a necessary and useful frame to affect positive change benefitting communities of color (p. 113). In the “post-racial” world in which we live, many people believe the segregation that plagues our society (in welfare lines, colleges, companies on Wall St., neighborhoods across the U.S., and prisons) is a result of our just and equal meritocracy based on the Founding Fathers’ dedication to ideals such as liberalism, individualism, and equality (Bonilla, 2010). Not only is the present hierarchy based on white supremacy, the idea of a meritocracy is also a myth (Alexander, 2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Peggy McIntosh, 1988). This

is rationalization at work. Rationalization releases individuals from the burden of confronting social injustices because it implies a higher power that simply made the world this way. If we live in a society devoid of racism, then the conditions under which the majority of people of color in this country live must be attributed to the “cultural racism frame” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p. 32) and their own “culture of poverty” (Bonilla, 2010; Alexander, 2010).

Injustices within the educational system continue to exist due to institutional racism and de-facto segregation (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Campano, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Nieto, 2002; Tatum, 2007; Wise, 2010). When educators maintain the myth of a “post-racial” society and the virtues of colorblindness, this negatively affects every teacher and student, white or of color, by perpetuating racism, passive and overt, and by not acknowledging the ways in which the social construction of race has had very real consequences along racial and ethnic lines (Arrington, Hall, & Stevenson, 2003, Bonillo-Silva, 2010; Tatum, 2007). The vast majority of white Americans claim to be “color-blind” and assert that the United States is a post-racial nation (Alexander, 2010; Bonillo-Silva, 2010; Feagin, 2003; Wise, 2010). This denial divests school leaders and teachers of any responsibility to examine their own policies and practices that may perpetuate a stratified society along racial lines (Bonillo-Silva, 2010).

By inviting in the voices and perspectives of underrepresented students of color, such as Latin@ youth, perhaps a sense of crisis and urgency will be driven by those on the inside. The hope is that all people in learning communities are emotionally, psychologically, and socially healthy enough to apply the cognitive tools and the character formation we strive to foster in order to be pro-social.

Four (4) of the six (6) female identified students expressed a sense of regret in their response to a question regarding the impact their elite schooling has had on their family relations. Bris said,

It's sort of crazy making...like, I'm fighting against it [white culture], but I also now see that if I want to be successful and be in a position where I can actually change things in society, then I actually have to adopt white culture. So, there are problems in society that have to change, but in order for me to be let in the door, I have to embrace all the things that are wrong with society. Like, it's all about winning and being first and being the best. It's not about community. And, I want more community, you know? That's how I was raised. But here, at Tunnel High and in the world, I'm taught to be the best... so I can have the best. It can be very confusing.

In the end, what the students called for was more empathy. A sense that people in their community actually wanted to see them and understand them. Mateo spoke to this at the focus group, and it really resonated with the other students and adult participants:

They [white students] don't see us as human beings. I wish they would just have more empathy for us. I have empathy for them. While I will never be rich or live in the hills of Marin, I can and do imagine what it is to live in the hills. I don't think they think of me like that. I take the bus from Richmond everyday, to get to school, go to practice, do my homework...by then it's past nine (9:00 pm). My mom is single mom, I know she works harder than me and I help her with the chores and then I do it all over again. I wish they [white peers] could at least try to see. And - they just don't.

## **Implications**

Schools must resist the temptation to make diversity efforts that focus on celebrating cultural manifestations that are deemed distinct from what is considered white, or "American." It is possible to make distinctions that do require an examination of other cultures as exotic or different...that is the backdrop of cultural hegemony. Students encourage schools to hire Latin@*s* and other people of color so that they can serve as culturally sensitive and knowledgeable liaisons between the home and the family. This will contribute to a sense of trust

and partnership as well as communicate that schools see there are distinct needs for many Latin@ students.

The EL's in this study emphasized the importance of coaching and mentoring. Joel, from Hill School, described his choice to join Hill School because he wanted to play on a “winning team.” He identified Hill School as a winning team because the systems that school had in place that demonstrated an authentic commitment to diversity, equity, and justice. During Joel's interviews, the head of school made clear that Hill School valued “investing in people.” Coming from the East Coast, Joel expecting “much more lavish accommodations like on the East Coast. We don't have a lot of space here. When I looked at what they were investing in, it was people and ideas. This will get you a lot further than things that decay. At the end of the day, our students are the product that we most care about it.”

The EL's in this study clarified that their individual school needs to be emphatic and unwavering in its mission and vision of equity and diversity. Equity is absolutely intertwined with justice. Justice is the *actual rendering of what is due or fair to another to promote their fulfillment*. Emphasizing justice moves the conversation from the acknowledgment that “racism is wrong” and “diversity is good,” to acting justly. While knowing the right thing to do is the prerequisite for actually doing it, knowing does not compel doing. We might understand where there is incompleteness and suffering in the world as we study it, but promoting justice requires that we do something about what we know; to complete what is incomplete, to bring relief where there is suffering. The word “justice” then is not just a buzzword or the result of political correctness, but reflects a richer understanding of our purpose as human beings on this planet.

Educators have to both explicitly and implicitly tackle these problems; many independent schools are not universally inclusive, not yet. In order for sustainable and meaningful change to take place, we have to be willing to really hear the lived experiences of the children. In the focus group discussion, Joel shared, “An important reason why Hill School is a great place to work is because we are open to questions, taking risks, diving in, and doing some research. We have to challenge our assumptions and collect qualitative and quantitative data.” In order for families of color to see independent schools as authentic partners, schools need to take their time and not abandon strategies after one or two years. Ted, from City School notes, “One year at one public school fair is not going to build a lasting relationship with those communities. We need to be in a lot more places, spaced over time so they can trust us as a brand and an institution.”

The researcher created Figure 11 to demonstrate the various parts to be examined with a critical lens. The visual created by the researcher was informed by Daniel Kim’s notion of systems thinking.

# Systems Thinking

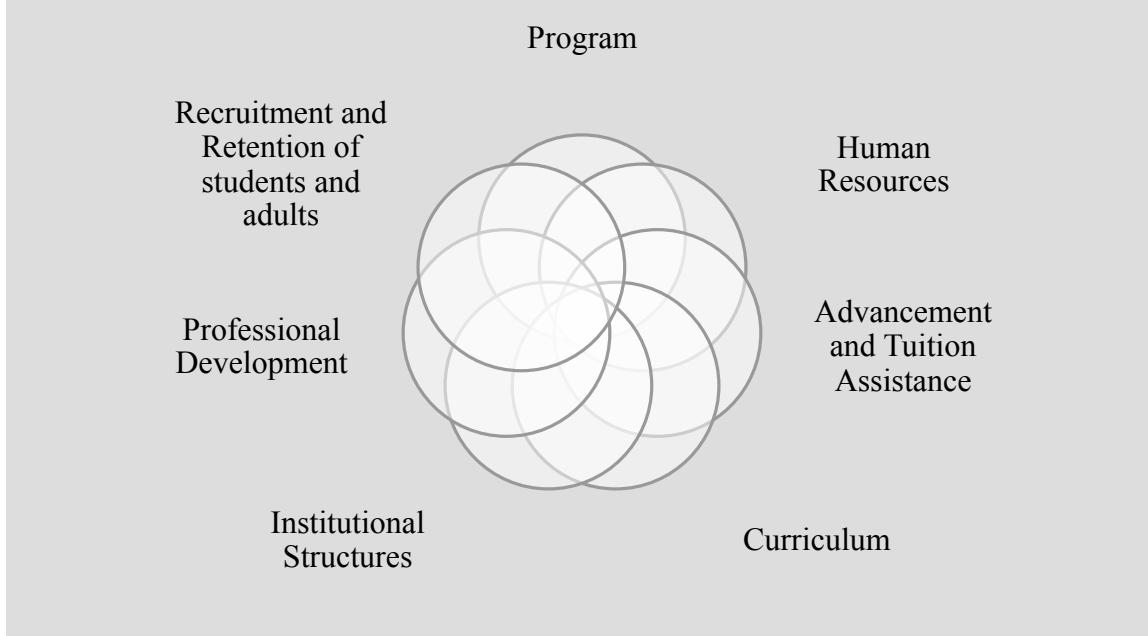


Figure 11. Systems Thinking

As schools examine their institutional structures, policies, and practices, they must simultaneously engage in an inclusive process of goal identification, creating a timeline for the goals that have been set, and articulating who is accountable for addressing those goals. Schools must be realistic, neither rushing the process nor waiting until everyone is ready to address what can often be scary for many. Trust needs time to be established.

An important aspect of this work is also including parents in the school community.

Lastly, but most importantly, students must have a significant voice in the process.

In order for equity initiatives to bring about cultural transformation within schools, the “work” and the intentional dialogues must be led by skilled adults (not simply adults of color) and be woven into the fabric of the curriculum of all students. The leadership must have a high

level of emotional intelligence. When interviewing at Hill School, Joel asked a simple question to a small team of two, “How do they play together?” Joel shared,

They actually had a response. They actually had a relationship. In education, you have to be about people and relationships. We have to keep each other healthy and challenged. At my old job, it took me four weeks to have lunch with someone. I was on my own island for weeks at a time and that is unacceptable when you are trying to build community.

When all members of the school community engage in identity exploration and conversation about privilege, it becomes clear that all voices matter and all people have work to do to make schools truly inclusive. The researcher developed Figure 12 and Figure 13 to demonstrate examples of institutional commitment and models for accountability that can serve to improve the educative experiences not only for Latin@s and other underrepresented people, but all students. The researcher developed these visuals to represent implications and recommendations as informed by research and interviews with EL's.

## Institutional Commitment

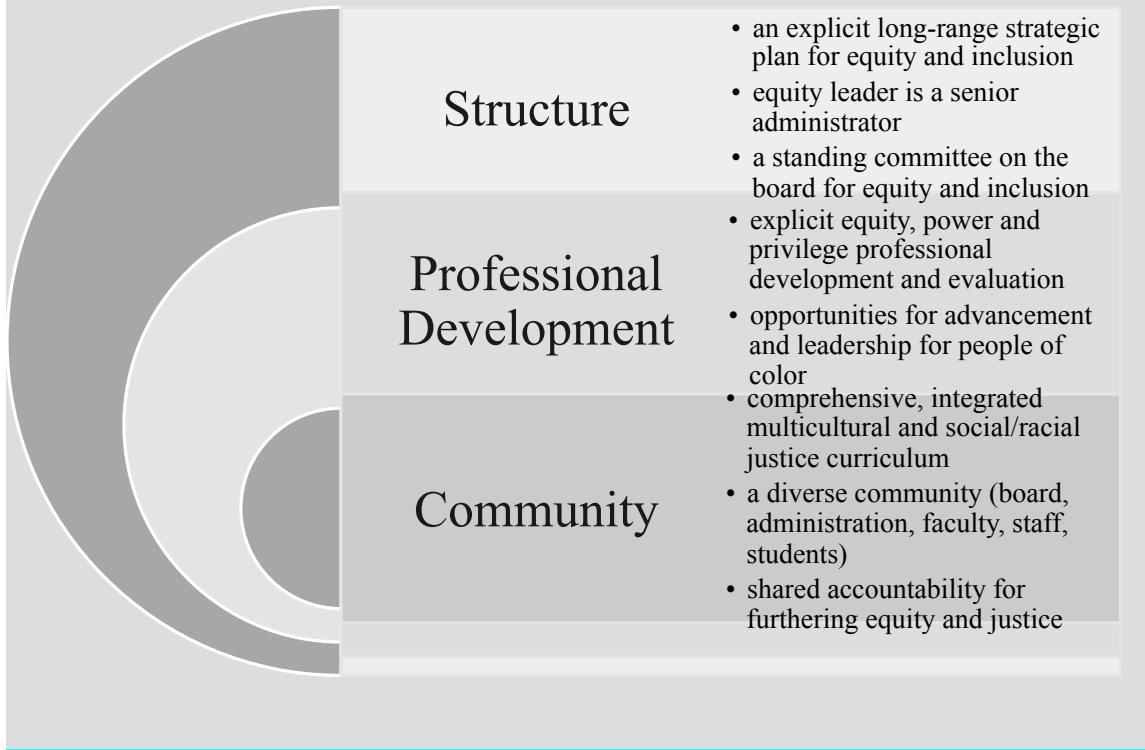


Figure 12. Examples of institutional commitment

## Models for Responsibility and Accountability



- Diversity Director
- Head of School
- Division Director
- Dean of Faculty
- Academic Dean
- Trustees

Those responsible for overseeing initiatives need to be conversant with the concept of aversive oppression and other forms of conscious and unconscious bias.

Figure 13. Organizational systems of accountability

Bay Area independent schools must offer meaningful cultural competency development for their board of trustees, provide bias awareness training for all those overseeing the hiring process in the school, hire and retain a critical mass of adults of color, make an ongoing commitment to fostering cultural proficiency within the entire adult the community, include cultural competency in formal evaluations for all employees, provide professional development and emotional support to adults of color, ensure that white faculty have professional development opportunities to foster greater cultural competence, and, most importantly, engage in a critical examination of institutional structures and policies that may inadvertently be promoting white supremacy.

## **Student Recommendations**

More than anything, students called for more “minority” students and more adults of color. It was extremely important for most of the students to not feel as if they were responsible for “educating” people about “Latin@s” or “Mexicans.” Students reflected on the importance of their affinity club experiences, because it was there that they did not feel alone. The students who attended WPC, POCC, and POCIS events recalled those as pivotal moments. They experienced a sense of empowerment and were able to see they were a part of a larger system and had agency to be a part of the collective change. The students stressed that teachers (both white and of color) should encourage more students to attend and provide on campus opportunities like these.

Students also made a distinction between generally admitting students of color and specifically admitting students of color to enhance athletics. This was most pronounced by the students at City School, Southern Prep, and Old School. Even Ted, the EL from City School, shared this concern. This particular concern did not come with any of the students from the other three (3) schools.

The students also urged the schools to be more mindful of socio-economic challenges and stressed that though they are grateful for the financial aid, that aid did not help them navigate the huge cultural gap between themselves and their peers from distinct economic strata.

Students also want the school to offer multiple, on-going service learning projects in other parts of the Bay Area, not simply international locations. Almost all of the student participants were heavily involved in reaching out to the immediate and larger community by tutoring, establishing non-profit organizations, volunteering in their “old neighborhood public schools,” and traveling to other parts of the world to perform service. It was also very important

for Latin@ students to see that their white counterparts understood that “poor or oppressed people” were not all in “Africa or Mexico.” At the same time, some students worried that service learning activities in the San Francisco Mission, Concord, or East Oakland would confirm stereotypes and reflect negatively on the few students within the study and in independent schools.

Lastly, a notable recommendation was for schools to have numerous and diverse activities and resources for students of color, to support them and let them know they are not alone, demonstrating that the school endeavors for them to not simply “get through and leave”, but be successful and happy. All of the students recommended that schools offer more classes that explore race, racism, and the Latin@ condition. Moreover, all of the students believed these courses should not be optional, but instead be a part of the graduation requirements. All of the students suggested that explicit conversations occur in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade courses with highly trained teachers because “that is when students need to know that the school is aware and cares about these issues.”

### **Limitations**

This research only explored the experiences of twelve (12) self-identified Latin@ students from six (6) Bay Area independent schools. Future research should consider exploring how this immersion in white dominant elite culture impacts individual students’ families and home life. This was a relatively small sample size and future studies could include more schools and perhaps more students from each school. A larger sample size may have yielded varied results and may be considered in future studies. Also, as it proved challenging to make arrangements with all of the EL’s in one calendar year, the researcher interviewed and convened

a focus group with half of the participants in the 2013-2014 academic year and interviewed and with the other half in the 2014-2015 academic year.

### **Future research**

A future study could include the counter-stories of students, their families, and a notable adult in their school community. It is vital that we better understand the role of the family and home community for underrepresented students, as the majority of students come from normative white cultures. This researcher is interested in videotaping future interviews that would be developed into a documentary with a study guide for EL's across the nation. It would be enlightening to see how those same Latin@ students interpret their high school experiences upon graduating from college. Furthermore, a qualitative study that included other ethnic groups would be useful in identifying patterns and opportunities for growth. These projects could then contribute to the limited literature available on the experiences of students of color within predominantly white independent schools.

Providing space to dig deep and to question allows for movement and growth. After the two in-depth interviews and the focus group, Bris wrote the following:

The fact that I've done this study gives me a lot of hope. My perception of the U.S. became much more informed and I now look at everything with a critical lens. Now, I consistently question ideas like why Tunnel High does not have more Latin@ members in the community, or why every advertisement I see is of a light-skinned person, no matter what race they are. Between my new definition of a good U.S. citizen and the fact that I want to make some sort of positive difference in my life, I've realized that I am becoming, and will continue to be, an active ally in the fight against racism and other forms of oppression.

Given this response, the researcher suggests that a future study could be participatory action research where students and EL's frame an inquiry for systemic change. It is vital that youth are a part of the needed change. Students and adults of color in independent schools are bridge builders that use their voices and experiences to build bridges between parents and

schools, communities and schools, student to student, teacher to student, parent to student.

These participants have honed their skills at making stories, words, and experiences more palatable and manageable for those for whom the stories are told in unfamiliar tongues.

Given what this researcher has discovered – and that there is a remaining gap in the research – there are many potential directions for future research. Follow-up studies can explore the implications of intersectionality. As Latin@ students are not a monolithic group with like experiences across the board, it is important to better understand how variables such as gender and gender expression, socio-economic class, phenotype, sexual orientation, immigration status, and language influence experiences in independent schools.

This research study explored the experiences of Latin@ students in light of CRT. Critical race theory is a large umbrella and the researcher aimed to use the Latin@ experience as a case study to examine the impact of institutional racism on this sub-set of the population. A future study could more specifically locate these experiences within Latin@ Literary Criticism. It is clear that there is vast heterogeneity with “Latin@s” and it is the shared experience within the normative white and racist U.S. that builds a solidarity between many Latin@ students, specifically within predominantly white private schools.

The researcher is committed to challenging the reasons why students want an education in the first place. It must be about more than simply graduating and going to college or THE college, or making money or buying a car; it must be about providing an “education that is healing to the uninformed, unknowing spirit...[meaningful knowledge] that can address the connection between what they are learning and their overall life experiences” (hooks, 2004, p. 19). When educators approach teaching in this way, they have the opportunity for transformation as well.

## Summary

The purpose of this research study was to bring the complex and rich stories of Latin@ student to the fore. The researcher hoped to call out some challenges faced by students and call in independent school leaders to examine how our institutions perpetuate race, racism and white privilege. The research study was guided by two central questions: “What formative experiences have the deepest impact on Latin@ students while attending Bay Area independent high schools, and how do these critical incidents inform their identity as Latin@s in U.S. society today?”

The stories expressed by the students underscored why CRT was an appropriate lens for this study. Critical theorists seek to “liberate” human beings and understand one’s lives as it is reflected in their personal narrative. Ann Berthoff (1987) speaks to Paulo Freire’s emphasis on voice in the foreword to *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*: “...at the heart of knowing is the idea that naming the world becomes a model for changing the world” (p. xii). The researcher was intentional about including student narrative as a means to bring to light potential structural forces that negatively impact Latin@ student experiences during formative years of identity formation. The CRT lens was useful in this study because it forces the eye to see that which it may be trained to actively un-see. This study also adhered closely to the CRT tenet of intersectionality (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). Although race and racism are highly influential in this society in its current iteration, the researcher understands that we are so much more complex than one of our immutable characteristics, which also happens to be a social construction.

Latin@ people are rapidly becoming the largest student population in the United States, and already are so in California. Independent schools in the NAIS network have long been committed to increasing the numbers of students of color in their schools, but it is unclear

whether or not there is a desire to transform the systems within those schools. Independent schools are committed to increasing representation in their schools because research shows that having both windows and mirrors are vital to a well-rounded education that prepares students for the twenty-first century. When students are only exposed to “windows,” it becomes challenging to develop a healthy and complete sense of who they are and who they want to be if they are not exposed to a diversity of possibilities. As such, students’ only options are to replicate media produced caricatures and stereotypes or represent the mainstream, dominant culture center.

Though NAIS and independent schools have expressed the desire to diversify and make schools more inclusive for those students and families who have been historically underrepresented, a thorough and systematic exploration of the experiences of Latin@ students has not been made available to teachers and educational leaders. In general, the literature reviewed pointed to a void in the research, hindering us from more fully embracing the distinct and complex experiences of these underrepresented students of color. If independent schools are committed to admitting Latin@s and other students of color, it is important that school leaders closely examine the various ways ethnicity and race may impact the personal and academic development of not only these students, but of all students.

Teachers and school leaders have not developed a strong social justice lens and do not know how to effectively lead multicultural, organizational change. Because the majority of teachers in the United States continue to overwhelmingly identify as “white” (more than ninety percent) and a growing number of school age children identify as “of color”, there is a dearth of school leaders able to effectively respond to diversity. It is clear that although all school staff and faculty can be integral in affecting change within a school, division heads and principals are most capable of transforming a school culture through the implementation of policy, a thorough

critique of the curriculum and pedagogical practices, as well as strengthening the capacity for all members of the school community to see, name, and act upon oppression in the interest of a more just and equitable school and world.

In order to alter the way in which the privileged, the disenfranchised, and everyone in between interacts, schooling must enable students to think and reflect on their world (Meier, 1995): *Why is it this way? Who made it this way? Who maintains it? Who benefits from it?* Paulo Freire urges the oppressed to see that their world, their reality, is the way that it is because people made it that way. The fact that some fail and others succeed - the fact that some individuals have more options than others -- is not a coincidence (Freire, 1970). Students must have the tools to critically analyze all material or produce material that may not coincide with what is presently fashioned and promulgated in order to alter the status quo to a more equitable distribution of power. Schooling is connected to this power because learned skills allow access to knowledge and knowledge allows access to power.

Schools can and should provide an education that is representative of student culture in order to create an environment that honors and fully includes all cultures, past and present, in order to counter implicit forms of white supremacy operative even when white students are absent or marginal. The editors of *Holler If You Hear Me* directly speak on teacher agency: "If society cannot be changed under any circumstances, if there is nothing to be done, not even small and humble gestures toward something better, well, that about ends our conversation" (Michie, 1994).

In an interview with the late Howard Zinn, he urges teachers to challenge the status quo and focus lessons on civil disobedience. Teachers must take a moral stand, and not be afraid to say something is right or wrong without imposing those beliefs on students. We must model

activism in the classroom. "True solidarity is found only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality in its praxis. To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce" (Freire, 1970).

I will end with a poem by a Hopi elder from Oraibi, Arizona that inspires me...

"You have been telling the people that this is the Eleventh Hour, now you must go back and tell the people that this is the Hour. And there are things to be considered . . .

Where are you living?

What are you doing?

What are your relationships?

Are you in right relation?

Where is your water?

Know your garden.

It is time to speak your Truth.

Create your community.

Be good to each other.

And do not look outside yourself for the leader."

Then he clasped his hands together, smiled, and said, "This could be a good time!"

"There is a river flowing now very fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid. They will try to hold on to the shore. They will feel they are torn apart and will suffer greatly.

"Know the river has its destination. The elders say we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes open, and our heads above water. And I say, see who is in

there with you and celebrate. At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally, Least of all ourselves. For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey comes to a halt.

"The time for the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves! Banish the word struggle from your attitude and your vocabulary. All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.

"We are the ones we've been waiting for."

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix A

### **NAIS Principles of Good Practice re: Equity and Justice**

*(Approved by the NAIS board of trustees in November 2012)*

**Preamble:** The following principles provide common ground for interaction between independent school professionals and their many constituents (parents, students, colleagues at other schools, and the public). The NAIS Principles of Good Practice for member schools define high standards and ethical behavior in key areas of school operations to guide schools in becoming the best education communities they can be, to embed the expectation of professionalism, and to further our sector's core values of transparency, excellence, and inclusivity. Accordingly, membership in NAIS is contingent upon agreement to abide by "the spirit" of the PGPs.

**Overview:** NAIS schools value the representation and full engagement of individuals whose differences include – but are not limited to – age, ethnicity, family makeup, gender, learning style, physical ability, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. NAIS welcomes and celebrates the diversity of our member schools; we expect member schools to create and sustain diverse, inclusive, equitable, and just communities that are safe and welcoming for all; we recognize to do so requires commitment, reflection, deliberate planning and action, and ongoing accountability. The following NAIS Principles of Good Practice for Equity and Justice provide the foundation for such an independent school community.

#### **Principles of Good Practice:**

1. The school establishes the foundations for its commitment to equity and justice in its defining documents (mission, core value, and/or philosophy statements).

2. The school respects, affirms, and protects the dignity and worth of each member of its community.
3. The board of trustees and the head of school articulate strategic goals and objectives that promote diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice in the life of the school.
4. The school develops meaningful requirements for cross-cultural competency and provides training and support for all members of its community, including the board of trustees, parents, students, and all school personnel.
5. The board of trustees and the head of school keep the school accountable for living its mission by periodically monitoring and assessing school culture and ongoing efforts in admission, hiring, retention, financial aid, and curriculum development.
6. The school works deliberately to ensure that the board of trustees, administration, faculty, staff, and student body reflect the diversity that is present in the rapidly changing and increasingly diverse school-age population in our country.
7. The head of school ensures that diversity initiatives are coordinated and led by a designated individual who is a member of one of the school leadership teams, with the training, authority, and support needed to influence key areas of policy development, decision-making, budget, and management.
8. The school uses inclusive language in all written, electronic, and oral communication.
9. The school adopts a nondiscrimination statement applicable to the administration of all of its programs and policies, in full compliance with local, state, and federal law. That said, the school makes the law the floor, not the ceiling, for establishing itself as a diverse, inclusive, safe, and welcoming community for all students, staff, and families.

## Appendix B

### Letter to Head of School

January 30, 2014

Dear School leader,

I hope you are well and I appreciate your consideration of this important project. I am currently working on my dissertation and could really use your support and cooperation. Below find two versions of the study (short and long). I will send you release forms once your school confirms that it will participate.

I can't tell you how important your help is in making this happen this year. With Tom's illness and a new job at PDS, I am only now able to turn my attention to this. I hope to conduct the interviews in February and will make my schedule work for the two students from your school. For your convenience, I have included more details about this research study below.

In partnership,

Lizette Ortega Dolan  
Middle School Head  
Park Day School

**Problem Statement:** Students and adults of color, primarily Latin@ students, continue to be underrepresented within NAIS independent schools (NAIS, 2013). Though many independent schools have allocated resources to services directly supporting an ethnically diverse community, it is unclear how Latin@s experience schooling.

#### **The Purpose Statement:**

This study seeks to better understand the experiences of self-identified upper school Latin@ students enrolled in California Bay Area POCIS member schools. Another purpose of this research project is to hear Latin@ student perceptions of school programs focused on diversity and inclusion, as well as learn what characteristics of the school environment both augment and detract from students' of color socially positive and academically sound experiences. Finally, this researcher will partner with the participating students to make recommendations to school leaders as they continue to explore school structures, policies, and practices that contribute to positive student experiences.

## **The Research Question(s):**

This research study will be guided by two central questions: ‘What formative experiences have the deepest impact on Latin@s while attending Bay Area independent high schools, and how do these critical incidents inform their identity as people of color in U.S. society?’

If educators are to better understand the experiences of self-identified Latino@ students in independent schools, the following sub-questions will elicit data from participating students and equity leaders:

1. How do the racial and ethnic backgrounds of self-identified Latin@ students affect their perception of critical school experiences within predominantly white POCIS member schools?

2. What tools or opportunities, if any, have the participating schools provided the students so that they may develop critical consciousness along with the capacity to act as agents against oppressive elements in their lives?

3. In what ways, if any, do your schools explicitly and deliberately challenge the dominant white culture of power and/or celebrate non-majority cultures with the hope of raising critical social consciousness?

4. To what extent do you see yourself as an agent of change in your school community and/or to what extent do you see yourself as a mirror of the status quo?

## **Summary of Methods:**

This qualitative research study is situated in the critical theory frame and aims to advocate for Latin@ students by placing student narratives at the center of this study. This research study will explore how the race and ethnicity of self-identified twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) grade Latin@ students impact their educative experiences within six (6) upper (grades nine through twelve) independent schools in Northern California’s Bay Area. The researcher will interview two (2) twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) grade students who self-identify as Latin@ and one (1) equity leader from each participating school. The researcher will conduct one (1) individual open-ended interviews (lasting one hour) with the two students from each school, one (1) semi-structured interview with each equity leader at each school site, and one (1) two (2)-hour focus group discussion with as many participants as possible (on a mutually agreed upon date time, and location).

The identity of each participating school and each student will remain confidential. Any identifiable information will be removed or altered to maintain the anonymity of the schools and all of the participants. Though the interviews will be recorded (video-taped), the data files will be kept in a secure location and will be destroyed when transcriptions have been complete and this research study has been completed. Each participating school will receive a copy of the study and each student will receive a choice between a \$10 gift card to Starbucks or itunes.

**Significance:**

This study seeks to contribute to the limited research regarding the experiences of Latino@ students within independent schools in Northern California. As students of color continue to be significantly underrepresented and not exposed to an ethnically diverse student and adult population in independent schools, this study will provide educators and school leadership information for considering their school climates, institutional support systems for ethnic minority students, professional expectations of cultural competence, and systems of recruitment and hiring.

## Appendix C

### Head of School/Division Head Release Form

Dear School Leader,

My name is Lizette Ortega Dolan and I am a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) candidate at Saint Mary's College of California and the Middle School Head at Park Day School in Oakland, California. **I am asking for your permission to conduct research for my study at your school.** The title of my research study is "Engaging Wild (Latino@) Tongues in Independent Schools".<sup>1</sup> Though many independent schools have allocated resources to services directly supporting an ethnically diverse community, it is unclear how Latin@s experience schooling. This study seeks to better understand the experiences of self-identified upper school Latin@ students enrolled in California Bay Area POCIS member schools. Another purpose of this research project is to hear Latin@ student perceptions of school programs focused on diversity and inclusion, as well as learn what characteristics of the school environment both augment and detract from Latin@ students' socially positive and academically sound experiences. Finally, I will partner with the participating students to make recommendations to school leaders as they continue to explore school structures, policies, and practices that contribute to positive student experiences.

I am also asking that your equity leader help me identify possible self-identified 12th grade Latin@ students who can participate in the study. I hope your equity leader can assist me by securing dates, times, and quiet locations for my interviews with each student participant. The study will consist of one (1) individual interviews (lasting one hour) with the two students from your school, one (1) one (1) hour interview with your equity leader, and a two (2)-hour focus group discussion with as many participants from the six (6) schools as possible (on a mutually agreed upon date, time, and location). The interview meetings will not interfere with students' class time or other school-related activities.

I assure you that if you choose to participate, all responses will remain anonymous. I will assign each school and participant a pseudonym. Names or any other identifiable information of the School or participants will not be included in any of my notes or the final report. I will use aggregate data only when reporting on the results of the research. I will not report what I learn about any one person. I will only write about the combined responses of groups of people. With participant permission, interviews will be audio and/or visually recorded so that I may accurately transcribe them. The audio/visual recording may be stopped at any time during the interview. All material will be kept in a password-protected file accessible only to me. Notes will be taken during the meetings to be reviewed later. Hard copies of the data gathered will be stored in a secure file cabinet in my private home office and electronic copies will be stored on my personal computer at my home. Back-up copies that are stored on data storage devices, such as thumb

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<sup>1</sup> "Latin@" is spelled using the "at" symbol to replace the letter "a" or "o." Pizarro, Montoya, Nañez, Chavez, & Bermudez are Latin@ educators who formed Maestr@s, a group contending that the Spanish language is a manifestation of male dominance. Maestr@s coined the use of the term to redefine and gender-neutralize it.

drives or CDs, will also be stored in a secure file cabinet at my home. Data will be destroyed once transcripts of the interviews have been made. Signed consent forms will be kept separate from the study data.

Students' grades and academic standing will not be impacted by a student's decision to participate, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time. I will ask about students' experiences as self-identified Latin@ students enrolled in Bay Area POCIS member schools. I am aware that topics involving race, privilege, diversity and identity are loaded and can cause discomfort or pain to some. As such, I will assure research participants that their experiences will not be reported to school officials or anyone else without permission unless the information given proves to be harmful to themselves or others. I am required by law to help the participant if the participant or someone else can be hurt from a particular situation. If at any time the participant should become distressed and need to speak with someone other than me I can refer her/him to the school counselor. The school's name will remain anonymous and the school will receive a unique identifier. The school will receive a copy of the study when it is complete.

Consent for participating in this study is entirely voluntary. Your signature below grants me permission to audio/visual-record my interviews with the two (2) participating students and equity leader at your school site. It also allows for your school to participate in this research project. Should you have any questions or concerns at any point during the duration of my study, please feel free to contact me at [lizette.dolan@parkdayschool.org](mailto:lizette.dolan@parkdayschool.org) or 415-370-8834. You can also contact my dissertation chair, Dean Elias at 925-938-3593 or [delias@stmarys-ca.edu](mailto:delias@stmarys-ca.edu). Thank you in advance for your assistance with my research.

Most Sincerely,

Lizette Ortega Dolan  
Park Day School  
Middle School Director  
360-42<sup>nd</sup> Street  
Oakland, CA. 94609

You affirm that you have read and agree with the above information.

Name of School Leader (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of School Leader \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Informed Consent Form (Parent/Guardian)

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Lizette Ortega Dolan and I am a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) candidate at Saint Mary's College of California and the Middle School Head at Park Day School in Oakland, California. I am a first-generation Latin@ who has primarily attended and worked in independent schools. Having graduated from Saint Ignatius College Preparatory, the University of California at Berkeley and Harvard Graduate School of Education, I understand what it means to navigate elite educational environments. **I am asking for your permission to conduct research for my study with your son/daughter.** The title of my study is "Engaging Wild (Latino@) Tongues in Independent Schools".<sup>1</sup> This study seeks to better understand the experiences of self-identified Latin@ students in Bay Area POCIS member schools.

The study will consist of one (1) individual open-ended interviews (lasting one hour) and a two (2)-hour focus group discussion with as many student participants as possible (on a mutually agreed upon date, time, and location). The interview meetings will not interfere with class time or other school-related activities and will take place at your child's school.

Your child's participation is voluntary and s/he may choose to withdraw at any time or choose not to answer every question. Grades and academic standing will not be impacted by your child's decision to participate, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time. I assure you that if s/he chooses to participate, her/his responses will remain anonymous. I will assign each student a pseudonym and any other identifiable information will not be included in any of my notes or the final report. With your permission, interviews will be audio and/or visually recorded so that I may accurately transcribe them. The audio/visual recording may be stopped at any time during the interview. Data (audio and visual recordings) will be destroyed once transcripts of the interviews have been made.

I will ask about students' experiences as self-identified Latin@ students enrolled in Bay Area POCIS member schools. I am aware that topics involving race, privilege, diversity and identity are loaded and can cause discomfort or pain to some. As such, I will assure research participants that their experiences will not be reported to school officials or anyone else without permission unless the information given proves to be harmful to themselves or others. Research participants' experiences will not be reported to school officials or anyone else without permission unless the information given proves to be harmful to themselves or others. I am required by law to help the participant if the participant or someone else can be hurt from a particular situation. If at any time the participant should become distressed and need to speak with someone other than me I can refer her/him to the school counselor.

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<sup>1</sup> "Latin@" is spelled using the ampersand to replace the letter "a" or "o." Pizarro, Montoya, Nañez, Chavez, & Bermudez are Latin@ educators who formed Maestr@s, a group contending that the Spanish language is a manifestation of male dominance. Maestr@s coined the use of the term to redefine and gender-neutralize it.

In gratitude for participating in my study, students will receive a \$10 gift card to their choice of either iTunes or Starbucks once the one-on-one interview is complete.

Consent for participating in this study is entirely voluntary. Your signature below indicates informed consent for understanding the purpose of the study, granting me permission to audio/visual-record my interview and focus group with your daughter/son and agreeing for her/him to participate in this research project. Should you have any questions or concerns at any point during the duration of my study, please feel free to contact me at lizette.dolan@parkdayschool.org or 415-370-8834. You can also contact my dissertation chair, Dean Elias at 925-938-3593 or delias@stmarys-ca.edu. Thank you in advance for your assistance with my research.

Most Sincerely,

Lizette Ortega Dolan  
Park Day School  
Middle School Director  
360-42nd. Street  
Oakland, CA. 94609

You affirm that you have read and agree with the above information for your child to participate in the study.

Name of Participant (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

You affirm that you approve of having the interview and focus group recorded (audio and visual).

Name of Participant (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix E**

### **Parent/Guardian Informed Consent Forms (Spanish)**

Estimados padres:

Me llamo Lizette Ortega Dolan, candidata a punto de recibir un doctorado en educación (Ed.D) por la universidad de Saint Mary de California. Además, soy la directora de la escuela secundaria Park Day en Oakland, California. Soy la primera generación Latin@ que ha acudido y trabajado fundamentalmente en escuelas independientes. Soy graduanda de Saint Ignatius College Preparatory, la Universidad de California en Berkeley, y de la facultad de Educación de la Universidad de Harvard.

El título de mi trabajo es “Engaging Wild Latino Tongues in Independent Schools” (Lenguas desenfrenadas e insinuantes en escuelas privadas). Este trabajo trata de comprender un entendimiento mejor de las experiencias de los llamados auto-identificado Latinos, matriculados en las escuelas superiores del area de la Bahía en California, que pertenecen al group POCIS. Otro propósito de este trabajo de investigación es escuchar las percepciones estudiantiles Latin0s de los programas escolares centrados en la diversidad y la inclusión de los mismos, además de conocer cuáles son las características del entorno escolar, tanto en aumento como en disminución de las experiencias academicas y positivas de los estudiantes latinos. Por último, me asociaré con los estudiantes participantes para hacer recomendaciones a sus respectivos líderes escolares según vayan explorando estructuras escolares, programas y prácticas que contribuyan de forma positiva la experiencia estudiantil.

Ruego permiso para que me autoricen a que su hijo/a participe en mi studio. Este proyecto consistirá de un (1) entrevista individuales abiertas, que durarán una hora, y una discusión en grupo de dos (2) horas con participación máxima de estudiantes (día de mutuo acuerdo, tiempo y lugar). Las entrevistas no interferirán en absoluto con sus clases diarias u otras actividades escolares. La participación de su hijo/a es voluntaria y podrá retirarse en cualquier momento o incluso no contestar a todas las preguntas formuladas. Tanto sus calificaciones como rendimiento académico no se verán afectados por la decisión de su hijo/a a participar, no participar, o retirarse del estudio si así lo eligiera en cualquier momento del proceso.

Les aseguro que si su hijo/a elige ser parte de este proyecto, sus respuestas se mantendrán anónimas. Asignaré a cada estudiante un nombre falso y información identificativa no se incluirán en ninguna de mis notas o incluso del informe final. Se tomarán notas durante las reuniones para ser revisadas a posteriori. Con su permiso, las entrevistas serán realizadas con grabación audio y/o visual para poder transcribirlas con precisión. La grabación audio/visual se interrumpirá en ciertos momentos de la entrevista. Las copias impresas de los datos recogidos serán almacenados en un archivo protegido en mi oficina de casa y las copias electrónicas serán almacenadas en mi computadora personal en casa. Las copias de seguridad que se guarden en

dispositivos de almacenamiento de datos como unidad de disco USB o CD, también se almacenarán en un arhivador seguro en mi casa. Los datos se destruirán a los cinco años de haber obtenido mi grado doctoral, a no ser que tenga permiso para seguir manteniéndolos para fines académicos.

Los riesgos de este estudio son mínimos. Formularé preguntas sobre las experiencias de los estudiantes que se auto-identifican Latinos en escuela superior, y matriculados en escuelas afiliadas a POCIS en el área de la Bahía. Las experiencias de los participantes en esta investigación no serán reveladas a los oficiales de la escuela o a cualquier otra persona sin permiso a menos que la información aportada sea perjudicial para ellos mismos u otros. Estoy obligada por ley a ayudar al participante si este u otra persona corren el riesgo de estar perjudicados por alguna situación en particular. Si en algún momento determinado el participante se abogia y necesita hablar con alguien que no sea yo, puedo recomendarlo a los servicios de asesoramiento apropiados.

Aunque haré hincapié a todos los participantes del grupo que los comentarios hechos durante las sesiones de grupo de enfoque deben mantenerse confidencial, es posible que los participantes repitan algunos comentarios fuera del grupo en algún momento en el futuro. Por lo tanto, animo a su hijo/a a que se expresen con total libertad. Sin embargo, les recordaré que sean conscientes de mis límites en cuanto a la protección de confidencialidad se refiere. Como agradecimiento por su participación en mi estudio, los estudiantes recibirán una tarjeta regalo de \$10 dólares de su elección, de iTunes o de Starbucks.

El consentimiento para participar en este estudio es completamente voluntario. Su firma en este documento indica el consentimiento informado para la comprensión del propósito de este estudio, dandome permiso para la grabación audio/visual de mi entrevista y grupo de enfoque con su hijo/a y estando de acuerdo a que él o ella participe en este trabajo de investigación. Si tiene alguna pregunta al respecto en cualquier momento durante el proceso de mi estudio, ruego se ponga en contacto [lizette.dolan@parkdayschool.org](mailto:lizette.dolan@parkdayschool.org) o al teléfono 415-370-8834. También puede contactar con el presidente de mi disertación, Dean Elias al teléfono 925-938-3593, [delias@stmarys-ca.edu](mailto:delias@stmarys-ca.edu). Muchas gracias de antemano por colaborar en mi investigación.

Suya afectisima,

Lizette Ortega Dolan  
Park Day School; Directora de la escuela secundaria  
360-42nd. Street  
Oakland, CA. 94609

Con su firma, usted me confirma que ha leido y está de acuerdo con la información presentada en este documento.

Nombre del estudiante (Mayúsculas) \_\_\_\_\_

Firma de parent/madre \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

Con su firma, usted me confirma que esta de acuerdo con el uso de grabadoras durante las entrevistas y grupos focal.

Nombre del estudiante (Mayúsculas) \_\_\_\_\_

Firma de parent/madre \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F

### Agreement and Informed Consent Form for Equity Leader

Dear Equity Leader,

My name is Lizette Ortega Dolan and I am a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) candidate at Saint Mary's College of California and the Middle School Head at Park Day School in Oakland, California. **I am asking for your permission to assist me in my research study and/or participate in my research study at your school.** The title of my research study is "Engaging Wild (Latino@) Tongues in Independent Schools".<sup>1</sup> Though many independent schools have allocated resources to services directly supporting an ethnically diverse community, it is unclear how Latin@s experience schooling. This study seeks to better understand the experiences of self-identified upper school Latin@ students in Bay Area POCIS member schools. Another purpose of this research project is to hear Latin@ student perceptions of school programs focused on diversity and inclusion, as well as learn what characteristics of the school environment both augment and detract from Latin@ students' socially positive and academically sound experiences. Finally, I will partner with the participating students to make recommendations to school leaders as they continue to explore school structures, policies, and practices that contribute to positive student experiences.

I hope you will help me by identifying two (2) self-identified 12th grade Latin@ students who have been at the school for at least 4 consecutive years. Please give this potential group of participants and their parent/guardians the consent and assent forms. From the group who complete the forms, please identify two (2) students for me to interview. Diversity of language, gender identity, and ethnicity is preferred. I appreciate your help securing a date, time, and quiet location for the interviews with each student participant. Ideally, interviews will not interfere with the students' academic or school related activity schedule. The student portion of the study will consist of one (1) individual open-ended interview (lasting one hour) with the two students from your school, a one (1) hour interview with you, and one (1) two (2)-hour focus group discussion with as many participants from the six (6) schools as possible (on a mutually agreed upon date, time, and location). I will organize the focus group at a POCIS gold member school. I will provide pizza and drinks and invite you to participate.

You affirm that you have read and agree with the above information.

Name of Participant (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

The study will also include one (1) semi-structured interview with you, the equity leader, at your school. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time or choose

<sup>1</sup> "Latin@" is spelled using the ampersand to replace the letter "a" or "o." Pizarro, Montoya, Nañez, Chavez, & Bermudez are Latin@ educators who formed Maestr@s, a group contending that the Spanish language is a manifestation of male dominance. Maestr@s coined the use of the term to redefine and gender-neutralize it.

not to answer every question. I assure you that if you choose to participate, your responses will remain anonymous. I will assign you (and each student) a pseudonym and any other identifiable information will not be included in any of my notes or the final report. All of my data will be kept in a password-protected file accessible only to me. Signed consent forms will be kept separate from the study data. I will not report what I learn about any one person. I will only write about the combined responses of groups of people. Notes will be taken during the meetings to be reviewed later. Interviews will be audio and/or visually recorded so that I may accurately transcribe them. You may have the audio/visual recording stopped at any time during the interview. Hard copies of the data gathered will be stored in a secure file cabinet in my private home office and electronic copies will be stored on my personal computer at my home. Back-up copies that are stored on data storage devices, such as thumb drives or CDs, will also be stored in a secure file cabinet at my home. Data will be destroyed once transcripts of the interviews have been made.

I will ask you about your work experience leading racial equity efforts at this Bay Area POCIS school. I am aware that topics involving race, privilege, diversity and identity are loaded and can cause discomfort or pain to some. As such, I assure you that your insights and experiences will not be reported to school officials or anyone else without your permission. Your name will remain anonymous and the school will receive a copy of the study when it is complete. I will ask you to describe the services, programs, and curriculum the school now has in place to support Latino@ students.

My research questions include:

1. How do the racial and ethnic backgrounds of self-identified Latin@ students affect their perception of critical school experiences within predominantly white POCIS member schools?
2. What tools or opportunities, if any, have the participating schools provided the students so that they may develop critical consciousness along with the capacity to act as agents against oppressive elements in their lives?
3. In what ways, if any, do your schools explicitly and deliberately challenge the dominant white culture of power and/or celebrate non-majority cultures with the hope of raising critical social consciousness?
4. To what extent do you see yourself as an agent of change in your school community and/or to what extent do you see yourself as a mirror of the status quo?

The school's name will remain anonymous and the school will receive a unique identifier. The school will receive a copy of the study when it is complete.

Consent for participating in this study is entirely voluntary. Your signature below indicates informed consent for understanding the purpose of the study, granting me permission to audio/visual-record my interview and focus group with you and agreeing to participate in this research project.

Should you have any questions or concerns at any point during the duration of my study, please feel free to contact me at [lizette.dolan@parkdayschool.org](mailto:lizette.dolan@parkdayschool.org) or 415-370-8834. You can also

contact my dissertation chair, Dean Elias at 925-938-3593 or [delias@stmarys-ca.edu](mailto:delias@stmarys-ca.edu). Thank you in advance for your assistance with my research.

Most Sincerely,

Lizette Ortega Dolan  
Park Day School  
Middle School Director  
360-42nd. Street  
Oakland, CA. 94609

You affirm that you have read and agree with the above information to participate in the study.

Name of Participant (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

You affirm that you approve of having the interview and focus group recorded (audio and visual).

Name of Participant (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G

### Student Participant Assent Form

Dear Student,

My name is Lizette Ortega Dolan and I am a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) candidate at Saint Mary's College of California and the Middle School Head at Park Day School in Oakland, California. **I am asking for your assent to participate in my research study at your school.** The title of my research study is "Engaging Wild (Latino@) Tongues in Independent Schools"<sup>1</sup>. This study seeks to better understand the experiences of self-identified Latin@ students in Bay Area POCIS member schools. Another purpose of this research project is to hear Latin@ student perceptions of school programs focused on diversity and inclusion, as well as learn what characteristics of the school environment both augment and detract from Latin@ students' socially positive and academically sound experiences. Finally, I will partner with the participating students to make recommendations to school leaders as they continue to explore school structures, policies, and practices that contribute to positive student experiences.

The study will consist of one (1) individual interview (lasting one hour) with you at your school and a two (2)-hour focus group discussion with as many other student participants as possible (on a mutually agreed upon date, time, and location). The interview meetings will not interfere with class time or other school-related activities. Pizza and drinks will be provided at the focus group meeting. In gratitude for participating in my study, you will receive a \$10 gift card to your choice of either iTunes or Starbucks after the one-on-one interview is complete.

Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time or choose not to answer every question. Grades and academic standing will not be impacted by your decision to participate, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time. I assure you that if you choose to participate, your responses will remain anonymous. I will assign you a pseudonym and any identifiable information will be removed from my notes and final report. I will not report what I learn about any one person. I will only write about the combined responses of groups of people. Notes will be taken during the meetings to be reviewed later. With your permission, interviews will be audio and/or visually recorded so that I may accurately transcribe them. You may have the audio/visual recording stopped at any time during the interview. Hard copies of the data gathered will be stored in a secure file cabinet in my private home office and electronic copies will be stored on a password-protected personal computer at my home. Back-up copies that are stored on data storage devices, such as thumb drives or CDs, will also be stored in a secure file cabinet at my home. Data will be destroyed once transcripts of the interviews have been made.

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<sup>1</sup> "Latin@" is spelled using the ampersand to replace the letter "a" or "o." Pizarro, Montoya, Nañez, Chavez, & Bermudez are Latin@ educators who formed Maestr@s, a group contending that the Spanish language is a manifestation of male dominance. Maestr@s coined the use of the term to redefine and gender-neutralize it.

Students' grades and academic standing will not be impacted by a student's decision to participate, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time. I will ask you about your experiences as a self-identified Latin@ student in a Bay Area POCIS member school. I am aware that topics involving race, privilege, diversity and identity are loaded and can cause discomfort or pain to some. As such, I will assure research participants that their experiences will not be reported to school officials or anyone else without permission unless the information given proves to be harmful to themselves or others. Your experiences will not be reported to school officials or anyone else without your permission unless the information given proves to be harmful to yourself or others. I am required by law to help you if you or someone else can be hurt from a particular situation. If at any time you should become distressed and need to speak with someone other than me I can refer you to your school's equity leader. Even though I will emphasize to all focus group participants that comments made during the focus group session should be kept confidential, it is possible that participants may repeat comments outside the group at some point in the future. Therefore, I encourage you to be open as you can, but remain aware of my limits in protecting confidentiality.

Consent for participating in this study is entirely voluntary. Your signature below indicates informed assent for understanding the purpose of the study, granting me permission to audio/visual-record my interviews with you and the focus group, and agreeing to participate in this research project. Should you have any questions or concerns at any point during the duration of this study, please feel free to contact me at [lizette.dolan@parkdayschool.org](mailto:lizette.dolan@parkdayschool.org) or 415-370-8834. You can also contact my dissertation chair, Dean Elias at 925-938-3593 or [delias@stmarys-ca.edu](mailto:delias@stmarys-ca.edu). Thank you in advance for your assistance with my research.

Most Sincerely,

Lizette Ortega Dolan  
Park Day School  
Middle School Director

You affirm that you have read and agree with the above information to participate in the study.

Name of Participant (Printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

You affirm that you approve of having the interview recorded (audio and visual).

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX H**

### **Open-ended guided questions for the students**

1. How do the racial and ethnic backgrounds of self-identified Latin@ students affect their perception of critical school experiences within predominantly white POCIS member schools?

- a. Tell me about yourself and your family.
- b. How did you end up at this school? How do you like it?
- c. Describe your home neighborhood? How similar or different is it from your school environment?
- d. How do you identify ethnically and/or racially? What has contributed to your understanding of your ethnic/racial identity?
- e. How do you define “diversity”, “inclusion”, and “racism”?
- f. How do “diversity”, “inclusion”, and “racism” personally affect you?

2. What tools or opportunities, if any, have the participating schools provided the students so that they may develop critical consciousness along with the capacity to act as agents against oppressive elements in their lives?

- a. How do “diversity”, “inclusion”, and “racism” play out at your school? Can you describe your school in light of racial/ethnic diversity?
- b. What curriculum, programs, and services related to diversity and inclusion does your school offer? What do you think of them? How are these programs perceived by other students?
- c. Tell me about your friendships and your relationships with your peers in this school.

d. Tell me about your relationships with the faculty, staff, and/or administrators at this school.

3. In what ways, if any, do your schools explicitly and deliberately challenge the dominant white culture of power and/or celebrate non-majority cultures with the hope of raising critical social consciousness?

- a. How comfortable are you telling a school adult about a racial conflict/incident?
- b. How would you describe your school in regards to inclusion and being welcoming to all students?
- c. What messages have you learned from this school regarding people of color? Latin@s?

4. To what extent do you see yourself as an agent of change in your school community. To what extent do you see yourself as a mirror of the status quo?

## **Appendix I**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Equity Leaders**

1. Introduction questions:
  - a. How did you get started in education?
  - b. How did you find yourself doing equity work? What prepared you for this work?  
What do you like about this work?
  - c. What is your job description? What do you like/dislike about being an equity leader?  
Do you have any examples?
2. How do the racial and ethnic backgrounds of self-identified Latin@ students affect their perception of critical school experiences within predominantly white POCIS member schools?
3. What tools or opportunities, if any, have the participating schools provided the students so that they may develop critical consciousness along with the capacity to act as agents against oppressive elements in their lives?
  - a. Does your school have a mission/commitment statement regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion? What is your school's mission or commitment statement regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion?
4. In what ways, if any, do your schools explicitly and deliberately challenge the dominant white culture of power and/or celebrate non-majority cultures with the hope of raising critical social consciousness?

- a. Does your school have a policy regarding professional development regarding cultural competence, issues of racism, and multicultural issues?
- b. What professional development opportunities does your school provide, if any, as it related to racial/ethnic diversity and equity? What, if any, professional expectations regarding racial equity and diversity exist?

5. To what extent do you see yourself as an agent of change in your school community and/or to what extent do you see yourself as a mirror of the status quo?