

4-1-2019

An Exploration of Schooling Perceptions of Dual-Enrollment Students: A Qualitative Research Study

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Recommended Citation

Milliorn-Feller, Helen Louise, "An Exploration of Schooling Perceptions of Dual-Enrollment Students: A Qualitative Research Study" (2019). *Doctor of Education (EdD)*. 132.
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AN EXPLORATION INTO SCHOOLING PERCEPTIONS
OF DUAL- ENROLLMENT STUDENTS:
A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY

by

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Presented to the Faculty of the
Doctor of Educational Leadership Department
George Fox University
in partial fulfillment for the degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

April 1, 2019



GEORGE FOX
UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

"AN EXPLORATION OF SCHOOLING PERCEPTIONS OF DUAL- ENROLLMENT STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY," a Doctoral research project prepared by HELEN MILLIORN-FELLER in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study sought to discover two Mexican-American students' perceptions of their experiences as dually-enrolled charter high school students. The study took place in the Central Valley of California at a dual-enrollment high school located on a community college campus. The participants in this study were in the tenth or eleventh grades at the time of the study, and each participant had experienced education in an outlying school district prior to attending the dual-enrollment high school. Additionally, at the time of the study, each of the participants had completed two or three college classes. For this study, the information gathered was re-storied to capture the nuances of the participants' views on their journey from leaving a more traditional comprehensive high school setting to choosing to attend a charter high school which put emphasis on students' ability to complete high school and college courses concurrently. Data from this study was organized to demonstrate attention to chronological details and sequential events which revealed problems, actions, resolutions, and/or the memories of the students. Three significant themes were identified during the analysis process for this study: (a) The influence of environment on schooling beliefs; (b) The impact of personal relationships, both older students and teachers; and (c) The power of a student's voice to be heard. Implications from this study suggest the participants' stories, perspectives, and perceptions are valuable and may offer methods or strategies for helping similar students become successful at a high school emphasizing dual enrollment. This study suggested there are aspects of school and the relationships connected to a school site that influence the thinking of students and their understanding of secondary and postsecondary schooling benefits.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The process of earning a doctoral degree means embarking on an arduous journey with one's family, friends, colleagues, and cohort members. Without a doubt, the honor of obtaining a doctoral degree results from one's intellectual trek through the peaks and valleys of taking classes and writing a dissertation.

My successful voyage would not have happened without the support of my husband, Mark Feller, who never said no to my desires to study and learn. He willingly managed our family life solo, said yes to whatever help I needed, and paid the tuition bills without looking at the total owed. I know my studies made him crazy at times as I commandeered the dining room table for all my projects, papers, textbooks, notes, and more, but despite the disaster he would often find our house in on the weekends, he never really complained, and he even asked what I was writing or reading about from time to time. The space he gave me to grow as an educator means more than I can put into words: I love you Mark, and I thank you for always standing with me as I pursued my educational goals!

My children, Alexandra and Holden also deserve a shout-out, as they both spent two weeks of their summer for three years at George Fox University. They also lived some of their teenage years with a mom who often pondered many of the challenges and ills of the education system to the detriment of being available to help with their homework. Alexandra and Holden, I hope you know my dedication to learning comes from my deep desire to make the world of education more equitable for you, your friends, and every student being educated today. Big hugs of gratitude to both of you for your extreme patience, every extra dish you washed, and all the clothing items you folded. The driving force behind my quest for a doctoral degree has always been the two of you and my wish that you live in a world where every young person

attends a school deeply invested in the academic success of its students. Alexandra and Holden your aspiration to learn and achieve continues to push me and makes me a very proud mama!

My mother-in-law, Natalie Feller, also gave me the strength to push forward when my journey felt arduous. Her never-ending prayers and her willingness to always help me care for my children allowed me to work on my papers and this dissertation without worry. Mom, no words can be enough to express my gratitude to you for all you have done for me. I have deep admiration for you both as an educator yourself and as grandmother to both Alexandra and Holden.

My Auntie Sue and Uncle Mike who took me and my kids in for two weeks each summer. All the dinners I did not have to make and the outings you lovingly offered my children were truly a blessing. Being a part of your summer and having your belief in my ability to achieve, what at many times seemed to be almost impossible, helped me push through each of those two weeks of intensive summer classes. I look forward to more summers of spending time with you both, without having to do any homework or print any papers!

My cohort members, especially The Coffee Cottage ladies, you all made this an expedition I will never forget. Of course, my doctoral excursion would never have started if not for Sarah Pennington, who gave me the final push to enroll in this program. She has stuck by my side as my best friend and colleague cheerleader throughout the journey. This trip was so much richer because we traveled through the process together.

To my dissertation chair and committee, thank you for all the feedback and gentle nudges to get it done and then get it right! That advice made this dissertation possible. I am a better researcher, thinker, and writer because of the time each of you invested in me and my dissertation.

To John Kelly, who put his heart and soul into creating a school with the philosophy of helping all, and I mean all young people, find their way to higher education. I would have never returned to K-12 education had it not been for your belief in me as a “change-maker” educator. This dissertation is my tribute to you because you were and have always been right, students just need a place to be loved, respected, nurtured, and encouraged; and then the learning just happens. Under this philosophy, which you instilled into the heart of our charter school, students blossom into these amazing young people who are ready to take on postsecondary education and then the world.

Lastly, to the students who spent and still spend their days with me at school, this dissertation is dedicated to all of you for inspiring me, leaving me speechless and in awe of your achievements, and for all the days we laughed together, cried together, celebrated together, and of course learned together. Never stop learning and reaching for the stars! The future is truly yours for the taking!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As an educator in the state of California for the past twenty-three years, my experiences vary from teaching at middle schools in Northern California to teaching at community colleges, high schools, private universities, and even homeschooling my own daughter in the Central Valley of California. For the last twenty years, I worked for school districts in Tulare County; and more specifically, for the last ten years, I have taught at a dual-enrollment charter high school that I helped establish. At this school, I work as the lead teacher and serve as a member of the leadership team. My experiences as an educator include working with students who live in challenging situations, struggle to learn, need to acquire the English language, and/or have special learning needs. But despite all the issues faced, my students have a strong desire to attend college and dream of a career in a variety of fields from culinary arts to medicine to science to technology to education and so many more.

According to the TownCharts website, which reported the 2017 American Community Survey Data (Tulare County, 2018), Tulare County represents a geographic region with some stark statistics. Table 1 highlights those numbers.

Table 1

Tulare County Demographics, Economy, and Education Data

Categories	Statistic
Population Total as of 2017	464,769
Median Age	30.4 years old
Earnings \$20,000 to \$49,999	32%
Very Low Income Limit (family of 4)	\$29,950
People in Poverty	127,130
Total Employed	52%
Not in Labor Force	42%
Unemployment Rate	6%
Less than High School (by age 25 or older)	27%
High School Diploma (by age 25 or older)	25%
Bachelor degree (by age 25 or older)	14%
High School Dropout Rate	32%
Birth Rates	15-19 year olds 4.1%
	20-24 year olds 27.4%

Income levels, poverty rates, unemployment, education, and birth rate statistics offered in Table 1 depict a general picture of the most serious barriers Tulare County students, who dream of a college education, might encounter during childhood and adolescence. For example, 32% of the people living in Tulare County earn an income considered, by the state of California, to be very low (Olmstead, 2018). Similarly, the statistics in Table 1 reflect a county with only 25% of the population earning a high school diploma by the age of 25 and with only 52% of the total population being employed. In addition, approximately one third to one fourth of students in Tulare County live in a household where one or more adult may not have a high school diploma and/or may have less than a high school education. The reality of these numbers impacts Tulare County students' school experiences. These statistics also suggest the potential challenges dual-enrollment high school students in Tulare County may cope with while trying to meet the expectation of completing both high school and college courses.

Due to my twenty years of working with students in Tulare County, these statistics connect to personal faces and represent students' stories. Moreover, as a classroom teacher, I have first-hand knowledge regarding the realities such statistics represent for Tulare County students seeking an education at a high school with dual enrollment. The heart of pursuing this qualitative research study developed from the information shared over the years by students and parents regarding the struggles many faced to obtain not only a high school diploma but the challenges life presents when seeking any level of higher education after high school, much less a baccalaureate degree.

Year after year, the stories of students who attempt to obtain a high school diploma and a college degree cause me to pause as I read such bleak statistics. I experience a deep need to question everything I know about education, and I want to know what type of academic awareness or supports Tulare County students need to successfully overcome the various obstacles plaguing some of them in their daily lives? Certainly, the lack of education and limited economic resources add more barriers for students to overcome as they attempt to move through high school and onto college-level coursework with the hope of attaining a baccalaureate degree. One parent offered this thinking about barriers,

You know, Mrs. Helen, there are many different kinds of poverty. There's physical poverty like my boys are experiencing, but that type of poverty comes and goes. There's work ethic poverty, and there's poverty of the mind. Physical poverty does not stop a person from succeeding, but if your mind is poor, meaning you don't believe you can learn or accomplish anything in school or your teachers or school think you are lacking in motivation or smarts, well, that type of poverty...that type of poverty stops you from succeeding in life. I may not have many things to give my boys, and we may not always

have things like electricity, but my boys are rich because they know if they work hard and take advantage of their schooling and what you are offering at your [dual-enrollment] high school, they will succeed in life, I know it. (UPHS Parent, Fall 2017)

These words indicate a profound understanding of poverty and its effects on students' educational journeys. But these words also point to the importance of students developing a mindset of being academically aware and ready to take advantage of the education being offered, of the supports available, and being cognizant of what it means to participate in the schooling available at said dual-enrollment high school. This mother's thinking continues to intrigue me. I often wonder about the students' understanding or self-perceptions of their academic readiness and how they meet the rigorous demands of being a dually-enrolled high schooler where, as young as fourteen, students, who live in a wide range of circumstances are expected to successfully complete both high school level and college level classes.

Purpose of the Research

This qualitative research study explored the stories and perceptions of two Mexican-American students with regards to what it meant to take college classes as a dual-enrollment high school student. As dual-enrolled students, the expectation is for students to enroll in high school and college level courses concurrently. This type of schooling model is designed for students who demonstrate strong academic skills (California state test scores), depth of subject area knowledge (grades in core classes: English, mathematics, history, and science), and/or awareness of the academic skills needed to earn the types of grades college admissions officers expect to see on a transcript (learned through conversations with students prior to submitting a concurrent enrollment form).

However, even though dual-enrollment high schools expect all students to be enrolled in both high school and college classes, not all students who enter high school at grade nine (age 13-14) are ready to take college classes. Some students even struggle to adhere to the standard high school norms expected of students, such as being on time, bringing supplies to class, completing nightly homework, actively participating in class, and even staying on task while in a class. Also, not all students are able to articulate what it means to be ready to take a college class.

In general, students who fall outside the profile of being academically prepared as a high school student are often labeled by the education system as being academically at risk or at risk of dropping out of their neighborhood comprehensive high school. At a high school employing dual enrollment, students who lack the needed academic readiness skills are often labeled as not being a good fit for the dual-enrollment model. Thus, through this qualitative research study, I sought to understand how two students described and defined what it meant to be ready for the academic challenges of being both a high school and college student concurrently.

Background Information

During any given year, small groups of students from various outlying towns decide to enroll themselves in a dual-enrollment high school on one of the local community college campuses in California. Often the choice of attending a dual-enrollment high school means traveling to school on a public city and/or county bus in the morning and afternoon. The students, who come from distant towns, experience a school commute ranging from thirty minutes to one and one-half hours. Each year students arrive with the goal of attaining an education which will lead them to acceptance into the college of their dreams. Their desire for a better life and a different type of schooling experience, as well as their eagerness to learn, often amazes the school's faculty and staff.

The dual-enrollment high school, where students for this study attend, has faculty members who believe in the thinking of educators such as Victor Rios (2016). In his Ted Talk, “Help the Kids the Education System Ignores,” Rios suggested teachers see their students as “at promise.” However, dreams, hope, and teachers with an “at-promise” mindset may be only one aspect of support students need in order to be a high school and college student simultaneously.

With the emphasis on college-and-career readiness skills, American high schools have experimented with various early college, middle college, and dual-enrollment college models in order to better prepare students for postsecondary schooling (What Works Clearinghouse, 2017). All of these models vary tremendously in design, number of units students take, academic areas in which college courses are offered, and year (9, 10, 11, or 12) of eligibility for high school students to enroll in college classes. However, the models all offer high school students the chance to complete college course work and earn transferable college credits while still in high school. Current research supports and demonstrates degrees of success regarding the university preparedness offered to students through the dual-enrollment secondary education model. Struhl and Vargas (2012) found students enrolled in Texas’ dual-enrollment high schools had a higher chance of succeeding when completing a college degree than students not in dual-enrollment high schools. Also, Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, and Bailey (2007) reported, that dual-enrollment programs are collaborative efforts between high schools and colleges allowing mostly juniors and seniors to enroll in college courses. While most dual-enrollment programs are relatively new and the data assessing their effectiveness continues to be analyzed, some of the early findings reported suggest giving high school students the opportunity to participate in college courses while still in high school is a strategy for “promoting student access to and persistence in postsecondary education” (Karp et al., 2007, p. 6). This evidence encourages high

schools to use the dual-enrollment model, but a number of questions remain regarding what happens to students who chose to attend a dual-enrollment high school. For example, how do students know they are ready to take a college class? And what types of support do students think they need to complete both high school and college courses?

McDonald and Farrell (2012) considered some of these questions; they found early college high school students (ECHS) needed to be ready in three areas to acclimate to the expectations of university-level work and life: academic preparedness, social preparedness, and personal preparedness. The McDonald and Farrell (2012) study of the early college model also suggested that when compared to comprehensive high school models, early college high school programs, which offer support in all areas of preparedness, help students with their scholarly development and also ready students for the rigors of university work. These initial findings suggest a need for more research to explain what academic and/or college readiness looks like from a student's perspective as well as how to design a program/curricula to help prepare students in the needed areas of preparedness for postsecondary education. McDonald and Farrell (2012) stated, "The more personalized curricula options customized to meet students' specific academic needs" the abler students are to adjust to the demands of the university (p. 241). This research supports the dual-enrollment model because its design specifically works to support the needs of students striving to become ready to take college courses.

The Use of Ethnic Labels

In the state of California, Government Code Section 8310.5 requires schools to collect demographic data as to the ancestry or ethnic origin of students. Each major Asian and Pacific Islander group has a specific category for ethnicity and a variety of choices for race. Asian students have ten choices for race and Pacific Islander students have five choices for race. But

for students who come from Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Central or South America or any other Spanish culture or origin, these students only have two choices for both ethnicity and race. The ancestry or ethnic origin remains Hispanic or Latino. There is no race category for students who select their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino.

The federal government views Hispanic/Latino as an ethnicity, not a race (California Department of Education). Even though other groups of students are able to select both an ethnicity and a race, this is not available for students who select Hispanic or Latino as their ethnicity because, “The ED [Education Department] d[oes] not require aggregate reporting of race information for the Hispanic population due to the burden and cost of adding more data elements to information systems” (California Department of Education).

Due to this type of required reporting, students who come from any of the Spanish-culture countries or regions listed earlier are referred to as either Hispanic or Latino in the data collected by the state of California. Also, since California is following the direction of the federal government, one can surmise other states’ schooling systems may follow the same requirements when gathering ethnicity/race for its students.

The research used in this study, which is from California and other states, reflects the limitations of how ethnicity and race are reported for students who select Hispanic/Latino. The choice of using the two labels in this research study is not due to a lack of sensitivity, but a reality of how information is gathered and then reported by other researchers, who are simply using the labels provided by the federal government and their state. In order to respect the work of the researchers whose studies I have cited in the literature section of this dissertation, I used the same labels, either Hispanic or Latino/a, the researchers used in their studies.

However, when the two participants for my study were asked about their ethnicity/race, both stated Mexican-American, and both participants wondered why they could only select Hispanic or Latino on school-related documents. Because their mother's family and father's family came from Mexico, the participants both identified themselves as Mexican-Americans, Mexican for their family members who came from Mexico, and American because each participant was born and raised in the United States of America. Neither participant identified with the general ethnicity terms used to collect data in California, but both participants knew they needed to select either Hispanic or Latino when asked by the school system. Also, neither participant could distinguish the difference between the labels of Hispanic or Latino, but the participants knew it was what they consistently marked on school-related documents and state testing forms. Thus, to remain sensitive to the participants, when referring to their ethnicity/race I used the label of Mexican-American because both participants stated this as their ethnicity/race.

Statement of the Purpose

This qualitative research study explored the experiences and perceptions of two high school age participants enrolled in a dual-enrollment high school. Both participants happened to be Mexican-American half-brothers who moved from a rural, economically impoverished and educationally limited environment to a rigorous, dual-enrollment high school which requires its students to take college courses and earn college credits while still attending high school. The participants enrolled at the dual-enrollment high school because they believed this type of schooling would help them have better access to college courses. The participants also decided to attend this charter high school because of the preparation and support it would provide them as they enrolled in and completed transferable college courses.

In order to understand the participants' perspectives, I gathered data through personal interviews for this qualitative research study. The personal interviews investigated the participants' own perceptions, observations, and understanding of their educational experiences, both before and during their attendance at a dually-enrolled high school. I listened to stories about their experiences both preparing to take and while taking college classes as a high school student. The results of the study may lead to a better understanding of the perspectives of similar students or offer insights regarding how to more effectively support students who might be navigating a similar educational journey where meeting the rigorous demands of college coursework is expected of high school students.

Research Questions

- *Research Question #1:* What was it like for the participants to move from a rural comprehensive high school to a dual-enrollment high school on a community college campus?
- *Research Questions #2:* As dual-enrollment students, how did the participants know they were ready to take college courses? What types of academic skills did the participants think they needed to complete the college class?
- *Research Questions #3:* What were the participants' perceptions regarding the advice which helped/did not help them when they considered taking a college class? What strategies helped/did not help the participants complete a college course?

Key Terms

The following key terms are used throughout the study and are defined in order for the reader to better understand this research study:

A-G Courses - The A-G / College Entrance Requirements are a sequence of 15 high school courses students must complete (with a grade of C or better) to be minimally eligible for admission to the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) (A-G Courses, n.d.).

Comprehensive (traditional) High School - A comprehensive school is a secondary school that is a state school and does not select its intake on the basis of academic achievement or aptitude, in contrast to the selective school system, where admission is restricted on the basis of selection criteria (Grubb & Lazerson, 2004).

Dual Enrollment - an accelerated program which allows students to take college courses while in high school. Dual enrollment is thought to be an inexpensive way for students to acquire college credits while still in high school because in some states these classes are offered to students free of charge. In the state of California, dual-enrollment classes are free for high school students (An, 2013).

Early College High School - this type of high school integrates high school courses and college courses to create an accelerated program, allowing students to earn a high school diploma and up to 60 transferable units and/or an associate's degree in four years as opposed to six years (Kruger, 2006).

College Readiness- defined by the degree to which previous educational and personal experiences have equipped students for the demands of the course work they will encounter, qualify for, and succeed at when taking entry-level, credit-bearing college courses that lead to earning a baccalaureate degree (Conley, 2008).

Concurrent Enrollment Form- a form students fill out and submit to their high school counselor who in turn submits the form to the community college. The community college uses this form to

remove registration restrictions for high school students. The concurrent enrollment form informs both the high school and the community college of classes the high school student plans to take, the number of units planned for that particular semester, and verifies the student has received permission from the high school and his/her parents to take college courses concurrently with high school classes (NACEP, n.d.).

Limitations and Delimitations

My educator experience consists of over twenty years of classroom teaching and represents teaching jobs in all levels of education from elementary to graduate students, but the most relevant teaching experience related to this qualitative research study includes teaching and leading a dual-enrollment high school for the past ten years. The dual-enrollment high school enrolls students who have attended both rural and suburban middle schools, public and private K-8 schools, and/or junior high schools. All of the students attending the dual-enrollment high school live within the geographic boundaries of Tulare County.

Additionally, I am employed as an adjunct faculty member at a local community college, which works in partnership with the dual-enrollment high school. The high school is also housed on a community college campus. I am also employed as an adjunct faculty member for Fresno Pacific University (FPU) as an instructor for the Education 604 Values of Education induction course in the teacher education program as well as an instructor of the Education 702 Teacher's Mission/Vision course for the masters in teaching program.

Another aspect of my teaching experience includes being a founding faculty member of the dual-enrollment charter high school, and the only teacher presently working on staff who has taught at the school since it opened in 2009. Moreover, I am the recipient of the student and parent *Teacher of the Year Award* for the 2009-2010 and the 2017-2018 school year. In addition,

I was selected as the 2014 *Teacher of the Year* for the Tulare County Office of Education. One of the many roles I maintain on campus includes being the lead teacher, which means knowing almost all the families and students by name, managing the student activities, and the club council, coaching teachers, implementing curriculum, and providing support to both the principal and the academic counselor. Further, I serve as the liaison for the faculty and staff to the parent support organization. I work intentionally through this organization to build relationships with many of the families. Due to the close-knit nature of the school, I have taught multiple siblings and cousins of families who have enrolled their children in the dual-enrollment high school since 2009. The interconnected role I hold at the school presents some specific limitations and delimitations.

Limitations. The limitations of this study reflect some aspects or constraints beyond my control but which may affect the outcome of the study (Simon & Goes, 2013). The design of the study, which is qualitative, presents most of the limitations. For example, one limitation of a qualitative study is related to validity and reliability in that qualitative studies take place in natural settings which make the studies difficult to replicate due to the unique nature of qualitative studies (Wiersma, 2000).

Qualitative studies are time-consuming because of how the data is gathered and analyzed. For example, I gathered data through interviews, which means I spent long periods of time to speak with each participant and then used coding to analyze each transcript. The timeline for completing my study consisted of about eight months. This short timeline meant the data gathered was subjective to what the participants shared given the time I had to interview each one and delve into the information offered (Chetty, 2016). Additionally, the participants traveled an hour and ten minutes using public transportation to and from the dual enrollment high school

which represented a limitation as their time to meet me to interview was limited to after school or on the weekends. The participants did at times stay in the same city as the dual-enrollment high school with their aunt or with another family from the high school, but this option was not always consistent, which also limited the time I could spend interviewing the participants.

Another limitation was my role as the researcher because I have the potential to influence the research in a way that might negatively impact the outcome of the study (Ayres, 2019). Thus, to reduce the impact of this limitation, I gathered data and analyzed it in a way that removed the variability of researcher bias as much as possible. For example, with regards to researcher bias, I attempted to minimize confirmation bias by reevaluating the information given by the participants and by trying to challenge my preexisting assumptions (Sarniak, 2015). The questions each participant answered were presented as open-ended and general questions. I then asked more specific questions which was one way I attempted to remove question bias (Sarniak, 2015). I also asked the participants to review the transcripts of their interview, and they were invited to read the analysis developed from their interviews; this again was to help aid in removing researcher bias. Regardless of my best efforts to be objective and remove myself from the data gathered, researcher bias remains a limitation of the study.

Further, for this qualitative research study, I used open-ended questions which the participants answered during the interview sessions. The interviews resulted in rich stories about the participants' experiences at the dual-enrollment high school, but the information is subjective and not verifiable, which is considered a limitation (Ayres, 2019; Chetty, 2016).

Moreover, due to the short timeline of the study, the number of participants involved was limited. The study used a non-probability sample, which is a sampling technique where the samples (participants) are gathered or chosen in a process that does not give all individuals in the

population an equal chance of being selected for the study (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2015).

The sampling process and sampling size is a limitation as not every student at the dual-enrollment high school had the chance to be a participant in the study. Only two participants were interviewed, because I had limited time to collect information about the participants' perceptions, observations, and understanding of their educational experiences both before and during their attendance at a dual-enrollment high school. The small sample size means the findings are not generalizable to all dual-enrolled students, which is a limitation of this qualitative study (Simon & Goes, 2013). However, despite these limitations, and those inherent to qualitative studies, and my study in particular, the research still matters because of the rich insights gained through the analysis. While the results of my research may not be generalizable, they may be transferable to other students who are similar to the participants in this study.

Delimitations. Throughout the process of designing and implementing this research study, I made specific decisions to determine the scope of my study, and these choices represent the delimitations of my study (Simon & Goes, 2013). The dual-enrollment high school model of education offers many areas to potentially study, but for my dissertation, I decided to focus on an aspect I was most curious about: how students adjusted to a more rigorous high school and what students thought it meant to be ready to take college classes while in high school. Even this idea offered many avenues of study, which led me to narrow my focus to the three components of being a high school student who is concurrently enrolled in college classes. My qualitative research study focused on three aspects. First, the shift the participants made from a comprehensive high school model to a dual-enrollment model. Second, the participants' awareness of their own readiness to take college classes. Lastly, the participants' perceptions of the advice that did and the advice that did not help them when they each considered taking a

college class, as well as, the advice that helped or did not help them complete the college courses.

Another delimitation can be found in the population for this study (Simon & Goes, 2013). While multiple dual-enrollment high schools exist within a fifty-mile radius of my city, the study only used participants from one dual-enrollment high school. Also, the dual-enrollment high school consists of over two hundred students who come from a wide range of ethnicities and races. The participants for this study were chosen primarily because they had experienced two forms of schooling: comprehensive and dual-enrollment. However, the two male participants, who each stated their ethnicity/race was Mexican-American, also happened to be a part of the largest group of students at the school, as reported to the California Department of Education: Hispanic/Latino students (California Department of Education). Hence, while the study focuses on the transition the two participants made, the study also considers the schooling factors for Hispanic/Latino students as revealed in the literature review. Furthermore, due to the short timeline for completing my study, I decided to narrow the study to only two participants. Additionally, I decided to focus on two students who were also half-brothers because while they shared similar family experiences, they had different schooling experiences. This decision was made for practical reasons, such as the time constraint of my study. I chose to use a non-probability sample, which was both a limitation and a delimitation of my study. This sampling technique gathered or chose the sample (participants) through a process which did not give all the individuals in the population an equal chance of being selected for the study (Etikan et al., 2015).

Finally, a delimitation for my study can be found in the method of collecting data. I used personal interviews as the method for collecting information. While this data collection method

allowed me to gather a significant amount of detailed information and stories, I was only able to analyze the information and stories the participants shared as they answered the interview questions, which were also part of my design (Creswell, 2013). The process of interviewing and collecting stories based on the participants' experiences was also time-consuming. As a result of the limited time frame for the study, I interviewed each participant individually and then one time with the two participants together. Each of these choices shaped my research study and represented some of the study's delimitations. While I narrowed my topic, focus, participants, and methodology for gathering data, the results of the study may still be transferable to other students who are similar to the participants in this study.

Bracketing

At times, a close relationship can develop between the researcher and the research topic, as well as the researcher and the participants. In reality, this may happen before and during the process of a qualitative research study; hence, "Bracketing is a method [used] to mitigate the potential deleterious effects of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research and thereby increase the rigor of the project" (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 81). This qualitative research study analyzed high school students and their perceptions of their own awareness of being academically ready to take both high school and college courses concurrently. Since the participants for my study attended the school where I work, my knowledge of the school system, what attributes students need to be ready to take college classes, and my ten years of experience as a teacher at this dual-enrollment high school means I have knowledge, bias, and even assumptions, that can influence my perception of the information gathered and analyzed for this study. Additionally, I spent more than a year researching and learning about students who decide to attend a dual-enrollment high school. I researched graduation rates, college-going rates, and

the struggles or reasons behind why students, who the state of California identifies as Hispanic/Latino, often do not seem to make the transition to college at the same rates as other groups of California students. My personal experiences and knowledge of these topics could not be fully set aside as I conducted my qualitative study. By understanding the process of bracketing, I worked to “shelve” as much as possible my prior knowledge, assumptions, and biases with regards to dual-enrollment high schools and the students who attend said schools.

My acknowledgement of what I know about my topic of study and my extended time working in the field of dual enrollment with high school students, specifically led me to the process of bracketing, which helped create a distance between myself and the assumptions connected to the current theories about Hispanic/Latino students and high school/college completion rates. Through the bracketing process, I sought to establish myself as a nonparticipating observer who remained conscious of the experiences existing in the world of dual-enrollment education and the life of the participants in the study (Bertelsen, 2005).

By researching why bracketing is necessary when doing qualitative research, I have come to understand that “bracketing typically refers to an investigator’s identification of vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions, and hunches that could influence how he or she views the study’s data” (Fischer, 2009, p. 583). Thus, I accept I do have a vested interest in this research as I would like to think or be able to state dual-enrollment high schools help Hispanic/Latino students overcome the challenges which currently exist for this student group as explained in my literature review. I also must explain my own assumption that other types of schooling, such as comprehensive high schools, do not offer enough support for students similar to the participants I interviewed for my qualitative study. While I would like to hear the students say they are successful in their pursuit of a high school diploma (see Appendix A for

high school diploma requirements) and college degree attainment because of their choice to attend a dual-enrollment school, I had to release that type of thinking during the interview and data analysis/theme formation process. I desired to review the data objectively only for the ideas and information participants stated. Additionally, bracketing remains a continual process used throughout the research and analysis portion of the study.

As I conducted this qualitative research study, I strived to use bracketing to suspend or hold presuppositions, biases, assumptions, theories, or previous experiences in order to view the information shared by the participants as authentically as possible (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Thus, it remained important to be honest and vigilant regarding my own perspective, my pre-existing thoughts and beliefs. I engaged in the self-reflective process through the use of a researcher's notebook, which offered the opportunity for me to document when my thinking reflected my own assumptions or biases. The use of these notations helped me recognize and set aside or re-set aside, my prior knowledge, thinking, biases, and assumptions (Tufford & Newman, 2010). By understanding the tensions between my beliefs, past experiences, current knowledge, and the value placed on the dual-enrollment high school model, I made every effort to attend to the participants' accounts with an objective, open mind, and my findings and results reflect my effort to remain as neutral as possible throughout the study.

Summary

Dual enrollment and early college high schools continue to offer students an accelerated secondary model of schooling that potentially sets students on the pathway to earn both a high school diploma and either an associate's degree and/or the sixty transferable units needed to transfer to a university or college. The success of these secondary schooling models is predicated on the assumption that students are academically ready for the rigor of taking high school and

college classes concurrently. This qualitative research study explored the experiences and perceptions of two male Mexican-American half-brother participants who moved from a rural, economically-impooverished and educationally-limited environment to a rigorous, dual-enrollment high school which requires students to take college courses and earn college credits while still attending high school.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Multiple forces presently push and pull the educational ideal of college attendance by all students in the United States. The complexity of the global community suggests the need for flexible and versatile workers who can adjust and adapt quickly to employment changes. This global reality means high school students have an even greater need for postsecondary education. Therefore, college education drives much of how secondary schools educate. The work world students enter now also requires a more complex secondary education and it often expects students to earn a postsecondary degree. Despite this knowledge, the K-12 system leaves too many students academically unready for postsecondary education as about “half of all high school graduates [are actually] highly qualified for admission to a 4-year institution (An, 2013, p. 410). In fact, Greene and Forster (2003) in their research reported, “Only 70% of all students in public high schools graduate, and only 32% of all students leave high school qualified to attend four-year colleges” (p. 3). Editors Hauser and Koenig (2011) also reported the United States national high school graduation rates are approximately 70 percent overall and 50 percent for minorities. Chapter two of Hauser and Koenig’s (2011) book also explained the widespread agreement on the serious problem high school dropouts represent for this country; specifically, the research documented the individual and societal costs associated with not earning a high school diploma.

Research related to high school graduation rates suggests a concern about the need to ensure that students graduate from high school. As Hauser and Koenig (2011) explained, the factors causing students to drop out are the same factors causing people not to do well in other aspects of their lives. Attributes such as low achievement and low motivation both contribute to low performance in school and later lead to an individual’s inability to adequately function in

society. Academic preparedness and motivation may only represent a small portion of the aspects considered when examining the issue of dropouts in this country, but as the research also suggested these factors do impact college readiness (Hauser & Koenig, 2011). If a student struggles to compete academically in high school, then when starting college, she/he may not persist. To compound this reality, the cost of a four-year degree continues to skyrocket, making the goal of obtaining a bachelor's degree seem almost impossible for many students and certainly challenging for students from under-represented and economically-disadvantaged groups (Greene & Forster, 2003).

When 21st century educators closely examine what impacts academic success, the need to design additional ways to help smooth the transition between high school and college becomes more critical as all students are currently expected to be college ready when graduating from high school. The different models of dual enrollment (a model where students are enrolled in high school and college courses concurrently) seem to offer a method to obtain this goal. Barnett and Fay (2010) asserted compared to their peers, dual-enrollment students were 12% more likely to enter college within seven months of graduation and between 16% to 21% were more likely to earn a bachelor's degree than students not in a dual-enrollment program. That being said, the construct of college readiness requires more unpacking for teachers to better understand how to help additional students move into their postsecondary education seamlessly and perhaps even complete their baccalaureate degree at a faster pace. To meet this objective, educators need a clear understanding of the academic, social, and personal/emotional college readiness attributes necessary for high school students, especially those who come from all academic abilities, ethnicities, and socio-economic groups. Similarly, understanding students' perceptions of their own college readiness and how their secondary school experiences prepared them to take college

courses while in high school may also provide a window into helping future students navigate the challenges of becoming college ready.

Dual Enrollment

As America continues to progress in the digital age of the 21st century, the need for education attainment is significant in the lives of students who are completing their high school education and hoping to move on to college and earn a baccalaureate degree. Thus, the historic perspective of dual enrollment becomes important to understand. Additionally, the dual-enrollment model offers an educational methodology which seems to prepare more students for college and which, over time, should help increase the number of students who obtain a baccalaureate degree.

United States President Barack Obama, during his term in office, suggested for the country to compete globally the American education system must find ways to prepare more students for the rigors of higher education, which, in turn, will prepare more students to compete at a global level. Specifically, the report entitled, “The Every Student Succeeds Act: A Progress Report on Elementary and Secondary Education,” was published by the Executive Office of the President (2015), and stated:

Every student deserves a world-class education. We have some of the best schools and best universities in the world – but too often our students are not prepared to compete in the global economy...we must ensure that we are doing a better job helping all our students master critical thinking, adaptability, collaboration, problem solving and creativity – skills that go beyond the basics. (para 4)

Conley’s (2007b) article explains the complexity and challenges of preparing students to be college ready. This educational feat is especially daunting for Latino students who leave

education at rates significantly higher than their white counterparts. In 2008, about “41 million adults ages 20 and older, or 18% of that age group, had not obtained at least a high school diploma” (Fry, 2010). Furthermore, Fry (2010) reported Hispanic adults ages 20 and older had a 41% drop-out rate which was significant because, by comparison of the same age group during the same time period, only 14% of white students, 23% of Black students and 15% of Asian students dropped out of high school. Therefore, Latino students represented the largest underachieving group of students in the nation’s high schools at that time (Fry, 2010). Secondary institutions are seeking ways to help all students acquire the needed academic knowledge to, not only graduate from high school but to also move onto postsecondary institutions successfully. Hooker and Brand (2010) suggested the challenge to obtain the strategies and skills to make the transition from high school to college remained a struggle for many students. These authors indicated today’s students need to manage an increasing number of social and emotional issues, such as homelessness, self-regulation, hunger, time management, and the ability to accept critical feedback. According to Garcia (2001), the obstacles and/or barriers were more pronounced for Hispanic students who faced the challenges listed above and also coped with other obstacles, such as needing to care for younger siblings or being required to live at home.

Dual enrollment and the definition of college readiness. Conley (2007a) stated the current definition of college readiness includes: “[the] level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree” (p. 5). In his research article, Conley (2007a) also explained, similar to the research completed by Hooker and Brand (2010), that college readiness is complex and colleges expect students to be more than academically ready. Conley’s (2007a) work implied students needed cognitive knowledge, academic behaviors, and

content knowledge, which, in reality, represented only a few of the needed skills students must master in order to be ready for college. Thus, K-12 institutions and high schools in particular should consider offering students courses to ensure their readiness to succeed at the postsecondary level. High school students need a schooling experience which includes emotional support, behavior strategies for learning, and academically rigorous courses. These types of course offerings are especially important for Hispanic students who, as Garcia (2001) explained, seemed to struggle with making the transition to postsecondary education.

Furthermore, Conley (2007a) defined success at an institution of higher learning as one of, “completing entry-level courses with a level of understanding and proficiency that makes it possible for the student to be eligible to take the next course in the sequence or the next level course in the subject area” (p. 5). Dual-enrollment programs offer high school students the opportunity to grow academically, cognitively, and emotionally/socially, which according to the current research represents what students need in order to be ready for college. In her article, Kanny (2015) suggested students who participated in a dual-enrollment high school thought the benefits included exposure to college expectations, developing an understanding of the hidden curriculum, and having a sense of independence and freedom. As a model to help prepare students for higher education, dual-enrollment high schools may help prepare students for postsecondary schooling in ways the nation’s traditional comprehensive high school model does not (Swanson, 2010). Dual-enrollment high schools offer a closer model to what the college experience is like, which means this model of education has the potential to meet the needs of Latino students who have been traditionally perceived as non-college bound students (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013).

Future population developments. Amaro-Jimenez and Hungerford-Kresser (2013) stated by the middle of the 21st century Latino students age 18-24 will be underrepresented by 500,000 students in the nation's colleges. The reality of such a high number of students not moving into institutions of higher learning presents a concern for educators and society in general. It also underscores the need for dual-enrollment programs where students can experience an environment intended to help underachieving students gather the required skills to be considered college-ready (Garcia, 2001; Hispanic Higher Education Research Collective, 2007). Dual-enrollment programs can offer strategies and scaffold academic rigor to help all students, especially Latino students, who need to overcome barriers such as language literacy, cultural struggles, and family expectations such as living at home. Amaro-Jiménez and Hungerford-Kresser (2013) explained all of these factors impeded Latino students' matriculation to postsecondary institutions and hindered their ability to earn a baccalaureate degree.

In general, high school educators understand current and future students' need and depend on their college education to move them into jobs and professions, which will give them the opportunity to meet their lifestyle expectations. This is especially true for Latinas/os who represent the least likely racial and ethnic groups to graduate from college with a baccalaureate degree (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009). Hooker and Brand (2010) reported in order to ensure all students make the transition to college successfully, the K-12 education system may need to consider a different way to educate students in grades 9-12.

Dual-enrollment programs offer one viable solution to President Obama's (2015) charge to make sure all students master the skills needed to be ready to move on to and succeed at an institution of higher learning. Researcher An (2013) defined dual-enrollment programs as an accelerated learning model which allows students to take college courses while in high school.

Swanson's (2010) earlier research, found similar results as An (2013) research which suggested the dual-enrollment model was a way to increase a students' likelihood of persisting through the college courses needed to earn a baccalaureate. Additionally, Swanson (2010) stated dual-enrollment programs exist in 71% of high schools in the United States. In dual-enrollment programs where students earn 20 or more college credits as high school students, they were 28% more likely to persist through their second year of college. The research completed by Amaro-Jimenez and Hungerford-Kresser (2013) stated high schools with a dual-enrollment component, or additive framework, have the potential to better prepare Latino students for postsecondary education.

Dual enrollment: A historical perspective. From a historical perspective, the United States has been concerned about having an educated populace as early as the 1600s, when New England families considered a quality education to be necessary for their sons. Boys were sent to preparatory schools which prepared them for what is known today as the Ivy League colleges (Spring, 2015). The history of education and the concern for having an educated nation can also be attributed to 1837 Massachusetts' Education Secretary, Horace Mann, who believed education was the great equalizer in American society (Spring, 2015). While an education-historian might argue education has always been a concern in America, most educational researchers also indicate the public became deeply concerned about the quality of education American students were receiving in the country's public schools and colleges when the federal government released the report: *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform Report* (The National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983). At one of the first meetings with the Commission, "President Reagan noted there are few areas of American life as important to our society, to our people, and to our families as our schools and colleges" (The National

Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 9). In essence the Commission (1983) warned, “If only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets, we must dedicate ourselves to the reform of our educational system for the benefit of all—old and young alike, affluent and poor, majority and minority” (Hanushek, Jamison, Jamison, & Woessmann, 2008, p. 62). The writers of this report understood learning or education is an indispensable investment required for the information age and beyond (The National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983).

Out of the *A Nation at Risk Report* (1983) came a challenge to reform the nation’s educational system, at the high school and postsecondary levels, over time one movement developed to give students exposure to college curriculum and work expectations; it eventually became known as the dual-enrollment or early college model. In the middle of the 1980s, after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, Krueger (2006) found states such as Minnesota and New York had established methods for students in high school to be dual enrolled in college courses. In the 1990s, more states such as Utah and Washington joined the dual-enrollment movement. In 2010-2011, the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP) reported most states offered some form of dual enrollment. During 2010-2011, 1.4 million high school students nationwide completed over 2 million college courses from postsecondary institutions, which represented 10% of the nation’s high school students (NACEP, n.d.). According to the What Works Clearinghouse (2017) dual-enrollment programs nationally were:

Designed to boost college access and degree attainment, especially for students typically underrepresented in higher education. Dual-enrollment programs support college credit accumulation and degree attainment via at least three mechanisms. First, allowing high school students to experience college-level courses helps them prepare for the social and

academic requirements of college while having the additional supports available to high school students; this may reduce the need for developmental coursework. Second, students who accumulate college credits early and consistently are more likely to attain a college degree. Third, many dual-enrollment programs offer discounted or free tuition, which reduces the overall cost of college and may increase the number of low socioeconomic status students who can attend and complete college. (p. 1)

The implementation of the dual-enrollment model nationally translates to more students entering colleges and universities better prepared to handle higher education expectations.

Moreover, the benefits of dual enrollment demonstrate how high schools, as educational institutes, can raise their standards and better prepare students for postsecondary education. Krueger's (2006) research found, on average, students earning college credits prior to high school graduation reduced their time-to-degree, and these same students increased their likelihood of graduating from college with a degree.

In their research, Cowan and Goldhaber (2015) demonstrated how dual-enrollment programs increased the difficulty of the high school curriculum, offered college courses without the cost of tuition, and incentivized students to take college courses as a method to enter college through a transfer agreement. When interviewed, the Latino students in Kanny's (2015) study explained their exposure to college courses while in high school helped them "hone the necessary skills and coping strategies to be successful in college" (p. 59). Although dual-enrollment programs are a relatively recent educational solution to helping students become ready for the rigors of college, research indicated dual-enrollment models prepare students, help ease the financial burden, and simplify the transition between high school and college (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015; Krueger, 2006; What Works Clearinghouse, 2017).

Every student goes to college. The United States has created a culture and expectation of college accessibility for all citizens, and this expectation has pushed more students to strive to obtain a baccalaureate degree. In fact, Symonds, Schwartz, and Ferguson (2011) described the commonly held idea that education beyond high school was a method to follow to achieve the American dream. As more and more students seek admittance to an institution of higher learning, Barnes and Slate's (2013) article explains the educational community has become more aware of the challenges students face as they attempt to bridge the gap between high school and college. The dual-enrollment high school model being used across America seems to meet the need of bridging this gap by preparing more students for postsecondary education. This small taste or sampling of college helped all students, as young as fourteen, learn the expectations of college professors, understand the rigorous work included in a college course, and gain the needed social skills to become college ready (Barnes & Slate, 2013; Barnes, Slate, & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010; Kanny, 2015). Furthermore, Cowan and Goldhaber's (2015) research revealed students in dual-enrollment programs, "were more likely to earn an associate degree and enroll in college the year following high school" (p. 426). In essence, these authors and researchers found dual-enrollment programs were preparing students for college.

Dual enrollment and baccalaureate achievement. In the 1995-1996 school year, researchers Bailey, Hughes, and Karp (2002) reported 37% of the students who entered a postsecondary institution dropped out two years later without a degree, and by the year 2000, which should have been the graduation year for students who entered college in the fall of 1996, only 33 percent earned a bachelor's degree. Because education is the key to success in the 21st century economy, the failure of students to complete the necessary college courses to earn a degree has gained the attention of educational researchers, the government, and the public.

Unfortunately, too many students do not successfully make the transition from high school to college (Conley, 2007b). Furthermore, Krueger (2006) reported this statement from economist Neeta Fogg: “Failure to complete high school is almost equivalent to economic suicide” (p. 6). Not only does lacking a high school diploma limit the economic success of an individual, but the difficulties high school dropouts face eventually become a problem society as a whole pay for since attaining a high school diploma creates an educated workforce. Conley’s (2007b) article demonstrates how students struggle for a variety of reasons when entering postsecondary institutions. Due to lack of experience in high school, students stumbled academically in college because of the faster pace of classes, the level of analysis needed, and the extensive amount of reading and writing required. Similar to the later work of Conley (2007b), Bailey, Hughes, and Karp (2002) explained the impact of secondary schooling on postsecondary schooling using national longitudinal data which followed students through high school and beyond. These researchers stated the greatest predictor of earning a bachelor’s degree was the academic challenge of the students’ high school classes (Bailey et al., 2002). For students to enter college, ready to persist and graduate with a bachelor’s degree, research suggests secondary institutions need to raise the academic intensity and expose students to the rigorous demands of college courses.

The number of professions requiring postsecondary degrees and the number of social and economic benefits of having a college degree has created a greater urgency for high schools to offer classes and experiences to prepare students for institutions of higher learning (Hooker & Brand, 2010). Additionally, Le, Mariano, and Faxon-Mills (2016) raised a concern regarding the number of first-generation students who do not earn college degrees. Without a baccalaureate degree, “first-generation students face less access to lucrative professions, more unemployment,

and a lower standard of living” (p. 262). Their study also revealed having a college degree offered health benefits, higher levels of life satisfaction, longer life expectancy, more attentiveness to volunteer work, and deeper commitments to civic duty (Le et al., 2016). As stated by the Hispanic Higher Education Research Collective (2007), a college degree today equals a higher or better quality of life and this notion remains equally vital for Hispanic students who are the largest, youngest, and fastest growing minority group in the nation; they make up 13% of the U.S. total population and 22% of the K-12 student enrollment. From an economic point of view, the Hispanic Higher Education Research Collective (2007) indicated one of every two people entering the workforce is Hispanic, which indicates a need for the educational system to establish educational methods and programs in order to help Hispanic students gain the strategies and skills needed to succeed at the postsecondary level.

The vital importance of college readiness becomes crucial in light of Moore, Slate, Edmonson, Combs, Bustamante, and Onwuegbuzie’s (2010) research, which found two-thirds of the students who graduate from the nation’s high schools do not meet the minimum requirements to apply to a four-year college. In contrast to this reality, their research also found 73% of the fastest growing industries in the 21st century required some form of postsecondary education. Thus, for the United States to remain globally competitive, the research suggests students need to graduate and move on to postsecondary schooling and then enter the workforce.

Bailey et al. (2002) found dual-enrollment models not only provided an answer to the problem of being college ready, but dual-enrollment programs offered high school students access and exposure to the complexities of college coursework normally not available at traditional high schools. Conley’s (2007b) article and Kanny’s (2015) research also offered similar information as Bailey et al.’s (2002) earlier research, which found high schools were not

preparing students to be college ready. An's (2013) research demonstrated "students who participated in dual enrollment, on average, performed better in college than students who did not participate in dual enrollment" (p. 421). Hence, dual-enrollment programs may offer the academic support and the academic intensity that high school students need to successfully enter postsecondary institutions.

Pretlow and Wathington (2014) stated part of the push for ensuring students are college ready came from President Obama's (2009) "American Graduation Initiative" which recommended the nation's secondary educators find a way, by 2016, to increase high school students' access to college-level classes. Yet, Moore et al. (2010) ascertained two-thirds of the students who graduated from high school have not completed the minimum requirements needed to apply to a four-year college or university. By understanding the national emphasis on college education and the number of students who are academically underprepared to achieve this goal, the need to close the gap between what is expected in high school and college becomes evident (Conley, 2007b). The early research suggested dual-enrollment programs might offer a method for closing this gap (Krueger, 2006). Pretlow and Wathington (2014) indicated dual-enrollment programs ask high school students to take courses at 2-year or 4-year institutions, which means students who take advantage of this opportunity meet high school graduation requirements and earn college credits at the same time. Research completed by An (2013) reported:

Dual enrollment is an inexpensive way for students to earn college credit, as participation in some states [e.g., California] is free. Because dual enrollees are exposed to college materials...social scientists consider dual enrollment as a way to better [prepare] students for the rigors of college coursework. (p. 408)

In addition, the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships' (NACEP) website reported that, since the 2002-2003 school year, dual-enrollment programs have increased in the number of programs available in America and the number of students attending a dual-enrollment program. Research completed by Fink, Jenkins, and Yanagiura (2017) found from "1995 to 2015, fall enrollments of students 17 or younger at public four-year institutions grew from 72,000 to 220,000, while at community colleges these numbers grew from 163,000 to 745,000" (p. 3). By the same token, dual-enrollment programs existed in some form in forty-six states and most two-year institutions enrolled high school students in college-level courses (Pretlow & Wathington, 2013).

Dual-enrollment programs serve a wide range of students across the United States. Ganzert (2014) recommended exposure to dual-enrollment programs, as these programs may better prepare students to sustain and maintain coursework throughout their college classes and even on to graduation. According to Matthiessen's (2018) article, a report by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center stated that in the last twenty years at least 31 million students have enrolled in college and dropped out, meaning these students did not receive a degree; only 60 percent of students who started a four-year college in 2008 graduated with a degree six years later. These findings imply the need for a dual-enrollment model as a method to potentially help more students persist through their postsecondary education in order to earn a baccalaureate degree.

Dual enrollment also benefited students of all socio-economic statuses (Moore et al., 2010). This type of program offered opportunities for high school and college administrators to form partnerships to better prepare high school students for the academic challenges found in college courses (An, 2013). Students in dual-enrollment programs, regardless of socioeconomic

status, experienced the reality of college rather than remain unsure regarding the pathway to higher education. Struhl and Vargas (2012) explained finishing a college course through a dual-enrollment program resulted in a positive association with college enrollment, persistence, and completion. The dual-enrollment model suggests the possibility of offering high school students both a high school diploma and the collegiate academic skills needed to matriculate to a postsecondary institution.

College and Underachieving, Underrepresented Students

Many families in America today believe their children need a college degree in order to achieve or live an economically stable and intellectually meaningful life. This attitude, according to Schhneider, Martinez, and Ownes (2006), remained true for parents regardless of cultural background, social standing, or economic level; and the nation's students hold the same high aspirations for attaining a college degree. Hooker and Brand (2010) ascertained, while students have a desire or a dream of completing a college education, too many students, (1.3 million annually), drop out of high school and do not even achieve the goal of a high school diploma, much less a college degree. Over the course of a lifetime, a person with a college degree earns approximately one million dollars more in income than someone without a college degree (Hooker & Brand, 2010). On the negative side, economic consequences for the nation become readily clear if over a million students annually do not matriculate through high school and onto a postsecondary institution. That number represents one million citizens each earning approximately one million dollars less during their lifetime. It does not take a mathematician or economist to understand the serious reality for the nation's economy if that amount of income continues to be lost. According to Lopez (2009), this truth is even starker when one considers his

research for the Pew Center. He found 89% of Latino/a young people stated college education was important, but only 48% said they planned to earn a college degree (Lopez, 2009).

Amaro-Jiménez and Hungerford-Kresser's (2013) research explained in the United States Latina/os "not only leave the [education] system at higher rates than their mainstream counterparts, but they also remain the most underachieving group in the nation" (p. 1).

Additionally, researchers believe that 41% of the Hispanic population in America does not have a high school diploma (Amaro-Jiménez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013). In his research for the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, Garcia (2001) reported in 1992 a group of 100,000 Hispanic ninth graders entered high school in California, but only 60% or 60,000 graduated from a California high school four years later. Whereas in the same time period and with the same number of students, "nearly 80 percent of White and Asian 9th graders received high school diplomas" (Garcia, 2001, p. 15). Furthermore, Garcia (2001) explained in the United States that Hispanics age 25-29 earn about 10 baccalaureate degrees per 100 Hispanic students. However, the national average of degree attainment for non-minorities age 25-29 is around 28 baccalaureate degrees per 100 people (Garcia, 2001). Thus, Hispanic students are about one-third as likely to obtain a postsecondary degree when compared to other student groups. The consequences of these statistics result in Hispanic workers being disproportionately underrepresented in professional fields that require a bachelor's degree (Garcia, 2001).

Moreover, Crisp, Taggart, and Nora (2015) suggested that based on the 2010 Census, in the next 50 years, Latina/os will make up about half of the total population growth in the United States, "making them one fourth of the total population by 2050" (p. 249). While college graduation rates have increased some for Hispanic students over the past four decades, as a group, Hispanic students remained behind their same age peers in baccalaureate attainment.

Specifically, Crips et al. (2015) stated as of 2011 Latino students made up about “17% of the nation’s college students, but only 9% of the of the bachelor’s degrees were awarded to Latinos” (p. 250). Postsecondary institutions are least successful at retaining and graduating Latino students when compared to other student groups (Crisp et al., 2015).

When examining the totality of this information, Hispanics, as explained by Amaro-Jiménez and Hungerford-Kresser (2013), drop out of high school at higher rates than non-Hispanics. Research completed by Garcia (2011) found less than ten percent of Hispanics earn a college degree, as stated in the study. This information raises concerns among those in the field of education because Crisp et al. (2015) demonstrated in their research about half the population in fifty years will be Hispanic. The combined data of these researchers suggest the educational reality for Latino students presents a potential risk to the workforce because a significant portion of the nation’s population is, and will be, under-educated; this means fewer trained and educated workers.

Despite the amount of positive change produced over the years as a result of initiatives by United States presidents and in response to *A Nation at Risk* (1983), researchers, who continue to study the improvements and changes regarding how the education system affects various student groups, determined the improvements were simply not enough. In fact, Gandara (2009) explained the changes were very limited in their ability to change the educational trajectory of students who were and are still generally viewed as underachieving or underperforming. Despite the changes in our educational system, Garcia (2001), Oseguera, Locks, and Vega (2009), and Gandara (2009) observed similar results from their respective studies: Latino students were still the least likely group of students to complete a baccalaureate degree. Gandara (2009) also suggested Latino students need to make the shift towards obtaining higher numbers of degrees

for the nation's economy to grow during the 21st century. Thus, high school programs must offer a rigorous curriculum with the needed academic supports, academic and social-emotional counseling, and the students need supportive peer groups. Ultimately high schools need to include a clear bridge to support students as they move from high school to college.

Similarly, Santos and Sáenz's (2014) research stated the significant increase in the Latina/os student population means more students need to do well in the nation's secondary schooling systems, move successfully into postsecondary institutions, and earn a baccalaureate degree. Ultimately, this upward mobility for Latina/os students in the education system remains in the nation's best interest economically. The research suggested a "perfect storm" for the United States because while Latina/os represent the fastest growing population group in the country, Latina/os also represent the group of students who demonstrate the largest gaps in their literacy and numeracy (Santos & Sáenz, 2014). It stands to reason the largest growing population must also be the population educational institutions need to educate, retain, and move to the next level of education successfully. Unfortunately, Santos and Sáenz's (2014) research explained the education system remains stagnant in many ways with regards to improving education for Latina/o students. Yet, for the United States to remain economically strong, "institutions of [higher education] remain an engine of social mobility" that Latina/o students need to access in larger numbers to avoid the economic disaster research predicts the nation may face in the next 50 years (Santos & Sáenz, 2014, p. 414).

On the contrary, Gandara's (2009) research showed a solution does exist and public policy is needed to recognize the interconnectedness of home, school, and community with regards to the academic achievement of Latino students. Gandara (2009) also stated educational policy must address and improve various aspects of the education system. Some of the most

significant changes should take place with early intervention through home literacy, quality preschool programs for all students, schools for children based on need, as opposed to a student's home address, consistent access to quality healthcare, exceptional teachers who understand the strength of knowing multiple languages, college preparation programs with academic counseling and peer mentors, and significant financial assistance to cover college tuition costs.

Shifts in the business of how the country “does school” moves the effort forward enough to improve graduation rates from secondary schools. These shifts also promote a secure and smooth transition to postsecondary institutions for Latino students. Researchers such as Gandara (2009) have concentrated their efforts on understanding the complexities behind why Latino students lagged behind their same age counterparts in schools. Numerous research findings from a variety of sources (Amaro-Jiménez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Crisp et al., 2015; Gandara, 2009; Garcia, 2001; Hispanic Higher Education Research Collective, 2007; Schneider et al., 2006) have the perspective that change needs to happen in the current schooling models, housing practices, language literacy, early childhood education, college preparation in secondary schools, and financial support for students while they are in college.

To close the educational gap experienced by Hispanic students, the Hispanic Higher Education Research Collective (H3ERC), in their 2007 research agenda, recommends improving secondary and postsecondary institutions by making a greater financial investment. As of 2009, the H3ERC (2007) states Hispanics have a “17.6% high school dropout rate compared to 5.2% for white students,” (p. 3) which is discouraging. However, the H3ERC (2007) has a “Big Goal” (p. 5) that by 2025 60% of Hispanics will be earning bachelor's degrees. This goal is possible if the educational practices such as offering more rigorous high school classes to help smooth the

transition between the end of high school and the start of postsecondary schooling become common practice (Hispanic Higher Education Research Collective, 2007).

For the country to see baccalaureate attainment growth, specifically for Hispanic students, the H3ERC (2007) states colleges need to triple the number of Latino students entering postsecondary institutions and earning degrees. When compared to the other student groups, only nine percent of Latino students earn degrees, which puts them near the bottom of all student groups earning degrees (Crisp et al., 2015). As discussed earlier in this literature review, dual-enrollment programs have many of the attributes in place that researchers state Hispanic students need from their high school experience to be college ready. Specifically, The Higher Education Research Collective (2007) states the dual-enrollment model for high school offers the type of educational supports needed if the nation is to achieve the goal of having 60% of Hispanic students earning a college degree by 2025.

When looking at the achievement of Hispanic students and their same-age peers, the research by previously-identified authors demonstrates an achievement gap in the nation's schooling system. Chapa, Galvan-De Leon, Solis, and Mundy (2014) found students who participated in a dual-enrollment program were more prepared to handle the rigorous reading expectations in college. However, in addition to schooling problems which limited access to postsecondary institutions, research also showed that 29% of Latino children lived in poverty compared to 15% of white children (Gandara, 2009). The negative effect of poverty on educational achievement is well documented. Yet the consequence of this economic reality was the most frequently stated reason Latino students gave for not pursuing their academic aspirations: the financial pressure to help support their families was too great (Chapa et al., 2014). Hispanic students faced many obstacles when considering their path to earning a

baccalaureate degree, and it seemed the dual-enrollment high school model may offer the support Hispanic students need to move from high school and into college (Struhl & Vargas, 2012).

Latino students and their voice. The economic reality of schooling for Hispanic students in the United States may raise an alarm among educational researchers, leaders, and economists alike. The statistics, when viewed in totality, present a bleak picture regarding Hispanic student success in the nation's education system (Lopez, 2009). However, Lopez's (2009) research explained the numbers may not represent the entire picture because when surveyed, Latino students revealed their belief in the power of education and its value in their lives. In fact, Latino students stated their belief that earning a college degree is valuable and necessary to succeed in America. For example, 88% of Hispanics believed earning a college degree was important to move up the social ladder. This response was higher than the general public's response, which was 74%. Also, 60% of native-born Latinos stated they planned to go to college and earn a degree after high school (Lopez, 2009). Based on these responses, it would seem as if the "Latino educational crisis" as explained by Gandara (2009) may not be as critical as she presented. However, that would be a false belief because, despite the responses made, Lopez's (2009) research reported that only 33% of Latinos enrolled in a degree-bearing program. What remains puzzling to educational researchers is why only half of the Latino students who say they plan to enter college and earn a degree, actually do so.

Research completed by González and Ballysingh (2012) documented this conundrum as to why the degree completion gap between Latino students and white students continued to widen. They found more Latinos were entering college, more stated they were better prepared to handle the rigor of college courses, and more believed a college degree was needed to move forward in the nation's economy (González & Ballysingh, 2012). However, Latinos are not

graduating from postsecondary institutions in numbers to match their stated belief in the importance of a college degree. Thus, if secondary and postsecondary institutions can understand the factors needed to ensure the retention of Hispanic students, as researched by Gandara (2009), then more students might persist through college to earn a baccalaureate degree.

In their research, Oseguera et al. (2009) found four factors institutions needed to address in order for Latino students to persist through postsecondary education. First, the economic costs of education and the financial strain placed on families must be addressed and a clear pathway to managing the financial cost of college should be developed. Second, the organizational structures of college institutions needed to be broken down, and students needed mentors to navigate the complexities of the steps necessary to earn a college degree. Third, Latino students needed psychological support in order to believe or think of themselves as being college material. Fourth, the sociological component of college, the creation of community, and the sense of belonging to the college community was crucial for Latino students' persistence. Oseguera et al. (2009) argued that understanding these factors and providing educational experiences/structures to address these four areas helped Latino students adjust to college life, which improved their retention rates and translated to more Latino students earning a college degree. As the research suggests, higher rates of degree attainment will benefit the nation's economy.

An's (2015) research on academic motivation and college degree attainment supported the work of Oseguera et al. (2009), as he too suggested there were more factors to college degree acquisition than just being academically prepared. The ability to adhere to the social conventions of college, the ability to maintain intrinsic motivation, and the ability to sustain academic engagement all played a significant role in whether or not a student could handle the rigors of college life, and helped determine if a student persisted to a baccalaureate degree (An, 2015).

The research of An (2015) and Oseguera et al. (2009) shed light on the disconnect between why high numbers of Latino students stated their desire to pursue a college education, but yet only half were actually able to stay in college and persist through the multifaceted demands of obtaining a baccalaureate degree.

Perhaps then, the missing piece to the puzzle as to why Hispanic students are not closing the college degree attainment gap lies with the preparation they receive during their secondary schooling years (9-12), as Nunez (2014) article reports only 52 of 100 Latino students who enter the education system at age five earn a high school diploma. Nunez (2014) argues for the need to apply an intersectionality model when considering the complexities behind the high number of Latino students exiting the education system. Her work includes cultivating “sociocritical literacy” in college outreach programs for Latino students in order to help them identify the “challenging areas of practice that could affect their postsecondary educational opportunity” (Nunez, 2014, p. 90). By using Nunez’s (2014) model for outreach programs, students learned to critically explore their perspectives on school and college, consider the extent to which the university served students from different groups, and determine how the views of the university aligned to their own perceptions and experiences.

Additionally, Nunez’s (2014) article suggests Latino students need to build trusting relationships with instructors and rethink their own personal narratives about education to move them towards a more community-oriented view of university life and education (Nunez, 2014). Through this program, Latino students start to view themselves on a university campus. The students involved with this program applied to and attended universities at higher rates, expanded their postsecondary possibilities, and positioned themselves to challenge and transform community inequities. This article suggests a method to help Latino students move from talking

about going to college and earning a degree to actually understanding the complexities of college and its impact on their own lives and the lives of people in their community. As a result, the article demonstrates how these students were empowered to persist and earn a baccalaureate degree (Nunez, 2014).

Nunez's (2014) article supports the idea that the current structure for secondary education is antiquated. If the nation is to move more students successfully through the postsecondary schooling system, more innovation and creative solutions need to be developed. This is especially true for Latino and other students who are traditionally underrepresented. McDonald and Farrell's (2012) research examined an early college model (dual enrollment) that targeted minority and low socioeconomic students and had an accelerated curriculum where high school and college resources and materials were assimilated. The students in this program, which included Hispanic students, found their needs academically, socially, and emotionally supported. This belief translated to students viewing themselves as being college ready in ways traditional high school students did not experience. Secondary schools, such as the one studied by McDonald and Farrell (2012), addressed the unique needs of Latino students as described by Gandara's (2009) research, which encouraged Latino students to use additional support to persevere through their postsecondary education.

By easing the separation, transition, and incorporation process for students, specifically Latino students, the chance to succeed at the postsecondary level improves. Jones (2014) demonstrated students who persist in higher education did so because at the secondary level they "participated in college level work, learned to navigate the processes of college admissions and class selection, and acclimated to the college environment and expectations" (p. 35). Thus, in order to move more Hispanic students into postsecondary education and on to their bachelor's

degree, their specific needs as learners must be recognized, and met, by both secondary and postsecondary institutions.

Conclusion

The pursuit of a college degree is almost an accomplishment as deeply steeped in the America psyche as the idea of achieving the American dream. This is as it should be since the economic and global demands of the 21st century make it clear the American workforce needs to obtain a baccalaureate degree (Hispanic Higher Education Research Collective, 2007). Yet the structure and functionality of the current American secondary school system is simply archaic and in need of, what some would say, radical change (Jones, 2014). Regardless of the nation's stance on the validity of reports such as the National Commission of Excellence in Education's (1983) *A Nation at Risk* or the push from the Executive Office of the President (2015) to see large numbers of students obtain a college degree, one fact remains on the minds of the public: the need for all students to be college ready. Educational researchers seem to agree that more college readiness strategies and skills need to be addressed at the secondary level in order for all students to persist through postsecondary institutions.

For Latino students, many challenges remain. There is a need for exposure to college, strategies to understand the hidden curriculum, and the identification of clear ways to obtain financial support. In addition, Latino students need to experience a sense of belonging, learn how to make the transition to college, and persist through postsecondary institutions (Kanny, 2015). These factors might explain why only 9% of Latino students aged 18-24-years-old currently earn a college degree (Crisp et al., 2015). Based on the growth of this specific population of students, the low degree attainment number must increase or the country faces impending economic disaster (Gandara, 2009). Thus, secondary and postsecondary institutions must collaborate to

find concrete models, which emphasize academic and college readiness, and move more students, specifically Hispanic students, successfully through their institutions. Dual enrollment is a potential model which could ensure the nation increases high school graduates, and college-educated, baccalaureate degree-holding adults.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methods I used to conduct this qualitative research study. The chapter includes details about the purpose of the study, the participants, the research design, the data collection process, and how I safeguarded the participants who were under the age of 18 when the study took place. Additionally, the chapter describes the research ethics and potential contributions of the research.

Qualitative research helps human beings understand the world in which they live. Some scientists describe qualitative research as being exploratory because the research hopes to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations of the participants in the study regarding the events, situations, and/or actions which take place in a natural setting. The research can even be described as naturalistic inquiry (Tonon de Toscano, 2015). Researchers use qualitative methods to answer a given research problem or topic from the perspective of the participants involved or connected to the problem or topic in some way. Qualitative research is effective in obtaining “culturally specific information about the values, opinions, and social contexts of particular populations” (Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005, p. 1). Qualitative research also allows for rich descriptions to be gathered from participants, which in turn give the researcher an opportunity to analyze or attempt to understand the “why” of an experience.

Statement of the Purpose

This qualitative research study explored the experiences and perceptions of two high school age participants enrolled in a dual-enrollment high school. Both participants happened to be Mexican-American half-brothers who moved from a rural, economically impoverished and educationally limited environment to a rigorous, dual-enrollment high school which requires its

students to take college courses and earn college credits while also completing the requirements for earning a high school diploma (see Appendix A) to take college courses and earn college credits while still attending high school. A dual-enrollment high school is designed to boost college access and college degree attainment, especially for students typically underrepresented in higher education (Oseguera et al., 2009). Both of the participants in this study came from the ethnicity/race the state of California defines as Hispanic or Latino. Based on the research reviewed, Latino/a schooling in the United States has been characterized for a long time by “high dropout rates and low college completion rates” (Lopez, 2009, p. 1).

Setting and Participants

The research study took place in the Central Valley of California at a dual-enrollment high school housed on a local community college campus. The participants chosen for this study consisted of one 10th grade and one 11th grade male student. The participants also happened to be half-brothers and they traveled over an hour each way using public transportation to attend the local dual-enrollment high school on the community college campus. Each participant was primarily chosen because he had experienced education in a rural school district prior to attending the dual-enrollment high school. Additionally, both participants defined their ethnicity/race as Mexican-American, even though the state of California lists their ethnicity/race as “Hispanic or Latino” (California Department of Education). Both participants also met the descriptions in the literature of being educationally at risk of dropping out, potentially a low-achiever, of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity/race, having low socioeconomic status, living in poverty, and being a first-generation college student (Amaro-Jiménez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2015; Gandara, 2009; Garcia, 2001; Hispanic Higher Education Research Collective, 2007; Lopez, 2009; Schneider, Martinez, & Ownes, 2006). At the time of

the study, each of the two participants had completed one and a half years of schooling at the dual-enrollment high school and both participants had completed a few college courses while also being enrolled in high school courses.

Sampling

The study used a non-probability sample. The sampling process chosen meant not all the students at the dual-enrollment high school or even all the students classified by the state of California as being Hispanic/Latino had an equal chance of being selected for the study (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2015). While not every individual in the population was given an equal chance of participating in the study, the participants chosen had both experienced a comprehensive model of schooling, attended the dual-enrollment high school, and were classified by the state of California as being Hispanic or Latino. Moreover, the participants met many of the attributes such as living in poverty, poor schooling experiences, and being at risk for dropping out of school. Research in the literature review suggested these three characteristics led to a lack of persistence when students were enrolled in their postsecondary schooling to earn a college degree (Garcia, 2001). I also followed the concept of purposeful sampling as the participants were primarily selected because each one offered me a chance to understand the impact of dual enrollment on their schooling decisions both as high school and as college students (Creswell, 2013).

Furthermore, each participant chosen participated in two interviews during the month of January 2019, one done individually and one done together with both participants present. Each participant had the opportunity to answer questions which were intended to help me understand how being at a dual-enrollment high school potentially eased/did not ease the transition between high school and college, how it helped/did not help the participants learn how to navigate the

process of college admissions, and explain how the participants acclimated/did not acclimate to the college environment and expectations (Jones, 2014). While the sample size was small, qualitative research often uses fewer participants because the research needs to offer the opportunity to obtain enough data to sufficiently address the research questions (Tonon de Toscano, 2015). These two participants addressed my questions and provided the data needed to analyze and offer possible answers to the research questions.

Research Questions

- *Research Question #1:* What was it like for the participants to move from a rural comprehensive high school to a dual-enrollment high school on a community college campus?
- *Research Questions #2:* As dual-enrollment students, how did the participants know they were ready to take college courses? What types of academic skills did the participants think they needed to complete the college class?
- *Research Questions #3:* What were the participants' perceptions regarding the advice which helped/did not help them when they considered taking a college class? What strategies helped/did not help the participants complete a college course?

Research Design

For this research study, I chose qualitative research because this methodology represented a way of understanding the social world of the participants. I used interviews to learn about how the participants made sense of their experiences, perspectives, and histories (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). I thought qualitative research would give me the most insight into how students at a dual-enrollment high school perceived their transition from a traditional type of schooling model to a dual-enrollment model. It also helped me learn more about their own academic readiness to take

a college class, as well as what advice was and was not helpful when the participants prepared to meet the expectations of a college class.

By design, qualitative studies allow researchers to discover themes among the stories shared (Creswell, 2013). I collected data by conducting personal open-ended interviews with each of the participants and recorded my own observations and reflections in a notebook. The questions for the interviews were modeled after McDonald and Farrell's (2012) study about the experiences of students who attended an early college high school (see Appendix B).

For each interview, I recorded the session and sent the digital file to be professionally transcribed so I would have a written transcript for each interview. The interview transcripts and my observations and notes made up my data set for the study. My use of in-depth interviews gave me the optimal method for collecting data on the participants' histories, perspectives, and experiences with regards to the dual-enrollment model of education (Turner, 2010). Qualitative research studies seek to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspective of the local population, as it provides the human side of the complexities of an issue or problem; the data I collected and analyzed offered me that perspective and understanding (Creswell, 2013).

Once my research proposal was approved, I submitted and obtained approval to conduct my study from the George Fox Institutional Review Board (see Appendix C). I conducted my research during the month of January 2019. For this research study, I interviewed each participant on the weekends, one time individually and one time together, in the main office of the dual-enrollment high school where the students were most at home discussing their schooling experiences and perspectives. While the student was in the building, the door of the office remained open. The office was quiet and the environment secure for the audio recordings. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was recorded with the use of a hand-held digital

recorder. While each of the questions listed on the interview question sheet (see Appendix D) were asked, there was also an unstructured conversation during the interview process where the participants spontaneously shared information or told a story (Turner, 2010). Each interview file was uploaded to my computer and then sent to “Gotranscript” for professional transcription.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis consists of preparing, organizing, and thinking about the data. The researcher then examines the data in order to consider themes which become apparent through the process of coding (Creswell, 2013). Further, data analysis for qualitative research is considered an iterative process from the start of data collection through the entire research process and until the data is represented in tables, figures, or discussion points. The focus of qualitative analysis is with the meaning presented through the data (O’Connor & Gibson, 2003).

In essence, qualitative research focuses on meaning. I followed the general analysis procedures as explained by Creswell (2013). First, I read through each interview, documenting significant phrases, ideas, stories, and quotes that helped my understanding of the participants’ educational journey. Next, I reviewed my researcher notes from each interview. A coding process was then used with each interview transcript which established a systematic method for examining the information given by each participant. This coding process helped establish categories to conceptualize the data and find themes and patterns. Hence, I created codes to reflect each time a participant offered information that seemed to answer one of my research questions; I assigned each main research question a separate code. From these codes, I determined the themes that seemed to develop from the common ideas shared during the interview process (Creswell, 2013).

In order to ensure I had gleaned all the information available from the data collected, I attempted to follow saturation protocol for each theme. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), saturation should happen when all data is examined and nothing new comes through for a theme or pattern. However, due to the small sample size used for this study, I cannot state with complete confidence I reached data saturation. That being said, Fusch and Ness (2015) also stated interviews are one method for reaching data saturation as multiple participants are asked the same questions, which is the method I followed for this study. While I believe I was able to collect a good amount of data, the reality is I only interviewed two participants.

Researcher Bias and Bracketing

A close relationship can develop between the researcher and the research topic. In reality, this may happen before and during the process of the qualitative research study; hence, “Bracketing is a method [used] to mitigate the potential deleterious effects of unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research and thereby increase the rigor of the project” (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 81). This qualitative research study analyzed high school students and their academic awareness as both high school and college students at the school where I teach. My knowledge of the school system, what attributes students need to be ready to take college classes, and my ten years of experience as a teacher at this dual-enrollment high school means I have the knowledge, bias, and assumptions, that influence my perception of the information gathered and analyzed for this study. My personal experiences and knowledge of these topics could not be fully set aside as I conducted my qualitative research study. By understanding the process of bracketing, I worked to “shelve” as much as possible my prior knowledge, assumptions, and bias with regards to dual-enrollment high schools and the students who attend said schools.

My acknowledgment of what I know about my topic of study and my extended time working in the field of dual enrollment with high school students led me to the process of bracketing. Bracketing helped me create a distance between myself and the assumptions connected to the current theories about Hispanic/Latino students and high school/college completion rates. Through the bracketing process, I sought to establish myself as a nonparticipating observer who remained conscious of the experiences existing in the world of dual-enrollment education and the life of the participants in the study (Bertelsen, 2005).

Through my investigation regarding the necessity of bracketing when doing qualitative research, I have come to understand “bracketing typically refers to an investigator’s identification of vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions, and hunches that could influence how he or she views the study’s data” (Fischer, 2009, p. 583). Thus, I accept I do have a vested interest in this research as I would like to think dual-enrollment high schools help Hispanic/Latino students overcome the challenges schooling currently represents, as I have learned anecdotally through my experiences and my research surrounding this topic. I also must disclose my own assumption that other types of schooling, such as comprehensive high schools, do not do enough for students similar to the participants I interviewed for my qualitative study. While I desired to hear the participants say they have been successful in their pursuit of a high school diploma and college degree attainment because of their choice to attend a dual-enrollment school, I had to let go of that way of thinking during the interview and data analysis process. I needed to review the data objectively for the themes and ideas that emerged from what the participants’ stated. As well, I needed to remember bracketing is a continual process used throughout the research and analysis portion of the study.

As I conducted this qualitative research study, I attempted to use bracketing to suspend or hold my presuppositions, biases, assumptions, theories, and previous experiences in order to view the information shared by the participants as authentically as possible (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Thus, it remained important to be honest and vigilant regarding my own perspective, my pre-existing thoughts, assumptions, bias, and beliefs. I engaged in the self-reflective process through the use of a researcher's notebook, which offered the opportunity for me to document when my thinking reflected my own assumptions or bias. The use of these notations helped me recognize and continually set aside my prior knowledge, thinking, and assumptions (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 81). By understanding the tensions between my beliefs, past experiences, current knowledge, and the value placed on the dual-enrollment high school model, I made every effort to attend to the participants' accounts with an objective, open mind, and my findings and results reflected my effort to remain as neutral as possible throughout the study.

Role of the Researcher

I am a graduate student working to complete my doctoral degree in education, and this dissertation represents the final component to degree completion. I am also an educator who has twenty years of experience working with students living in Tulare County, one of the most impoverished counties in the state of California (Tulare County, California Education, Demographic, & Economy Data, 2018). My time living and working in the Central Valley of California has raised my awareness of what my literature review suggests is a crisis in educating Hispanic/Latino students, who represent the largest group of students in schools today (Gandara, 2009). As a socially conscious educator, I continue to feel pressure to understand why some of my students move seamlessly into postsecondary schooling, while other students seem to disappear after high school only to reappear later as an employee at a local business. I cannot

help but wonder what happened to their goal of earning a bachelor's degree. It is for this reason I wanted to research the topic and understand better how I could work towards a solution.

The participants in this study attend the dual-enrollment high school where I teach. They are representative of a population of students least likely to earn a baccalaureate degree (Osequera, et al., 2009). As a founding faculty member and as the lead teacher, I question whether or not this model of education, which provides high school students with exposure to and experience with college expectations, helped to make higher education attainable. I purposefully chose to interview two participants who represented the population of students (Hispanic/Latino/a) I spent the last year reading about in the literature because I wanted to understand their thinking about how the dual-enrollment high school was or was not helping them prepare for college. Thus, I have a vested interest in this research as I sought to understand and gain insight into how the participants, my students, perceived the experience of attending a dual-enrollment high school. I wanted to know how their experiences influenced/did not influence their thinking with regards to going to college and their preparation prior to taking a college class. I also wanted to discover how their experiences of taking college classes might have impacted their thinking about going to college after high school.

Research Ethics

Since the participants in this study were under the age of eighteen, I obtained informed consent by providing each participant and his mother with a letter that included the purpose of my study, that participation in the study was voluntary, the sponsoring institution, and my contact information (see Appendix E). The form also contained signature lines for the parent, participant, and myself as the researcher. The well-being of the research participants remained my utmost priority, and their comfort and safety stayed at the forefront of my thinking each time

we met (Mack et al., 2005). In addition, I verbally informed the participants and their mother of their right to refuse to participate or terminate participation at any time, something I also explained prior to each interview. Furthermore, I explained how I would maintain confidentiality. Each participant asked if he could choose a pseudonym to represent himself for the study. As the participants were under the age of eighteen when the interviews took place, I attempted to be very cognizant of the participants' safety and well-being during the research process, and I made sure the participants knew they had the freedom to terminate participation in the research study at any time. Moreover, I tried to make it clear the participants could refuse to answer any question that challenged or made them feel uncomfortable.

For good measure and to offer additional assurances to the participants, I also promised to maintain confidentiality throughout my dissertation by using general descriptions of the participants that did not include identifiers such as their given names, the name of their school, the name of the participants' hometown, and any other identifier that would reveal the participants' identities. To demonstrate my commitment to protecting the anonymity of the participants, I have not included any information in my research study or in the information used to present the research to other people that would reveal the participants' identities. In the chapters that remain, I used the pseudonyms the participants chose for themselves at the beginning of the study.

Finally, I reduced the risk of harming the participants in my research study by articulating the time investment for the participants each time we planned to meet for the interviews. I have stored each interview transcript in my research binder which is kept with my researcher's notes in a secured cabinet. All digital files of the interviews are stored on a digital device with a secure password. As per standard practice, any files, papers, and data that stated the participants' names

will remain securely archived for up to three years after I conclude my dissertation defense. At the end of three years, I will personally dispose of all confidential files, papers, and data by shredding any hard copies and by deleting all digital files.

Research Study Timeline

The following was the timeline for this research study:

- October 2018 -- Proposal meeting and acceptance of my research study proposal by my George Fox University Dissertation Committee
- December 2018 -- Submission and approval of my George Fox University Institutional Review Board form
- January 2019 -- Conduct one interview with each participant and conduct one interview with the participants together. Collect researcher notes and observations
- January 2019 -- Code and analyze data for themes
- February/March 2019 -- Final rewrites of chapters one, two, and three, write chapters four and five; submit the document to my dissertation committee, make changes as recommended, and submit to an editor for grammar/conventions, and APA format help
- April 2019 -- Oral defense and complete requested revisions

Potential Contributions to the Literature

The issue of preparing students for college has been studied for many years. The idea of how to better prepare students for postsecondary education has also been studied in various ways over time. In fact, Clarence Hamill wrote “The University and Preparedness” for the Journal of Education in 1916 where he argued the importance of insuring that students were academically prepared for the challenges presented in university courses.

Additionally, a fair number of research studies exist to highlight the value of dual-enrollment and/or early college programs which help students become better prepared for their transition from the K-12 system to the university system. Studies also reported on why under-represented groups of students were not attending college and how the dual-enrollment model may be a positive strategy for increasing college access for these students. Based on my ten years of experience at a dual-enrollment high school, I found value and truth in the research discussed in the literature reviewed for this study. However, I found one article that described a research study which specifically asked high school students what aspects of their Dual Enrollment High School (DEHS) program helped them succeed in their college courses, and what were the students' perceptions of their college readiness. I found no studies that directly reviewed the idea of gathering students' perceptions of how their past schooling impacted their academic and college readiness, nor any which inquired about students' perceptions of how their dual-enrollment high school prepared them to take college classes concurrently with their high school classes. However, that is not to say these studies do not exist, but simply that I did not find any during the research phase to develop the literature review.

By talking with two male Mexican-American participants who have experienced different types of schooling (comprehensive, rural, and dual enrollment), I am adding to the existing body of literature by highlighting how the two participants perceived their experiences moving from a comprehensive model of secondary education to a dual-enrollment model of education. My completed study will add to the literature base with regards to student perceptions of being ready to take college classes and types of advice or support that helped or did not help them complete their first few college classes as high school students. By hearing directly from the voices of the

participants, other educators may encounter ideas for how to help their students who demonstrate similar attributes as the participants in this research study.

Summary

Qualitative research is often described as a naturalistic and interpretive approach to research that views the perspectives and accounts of the research participants as a starting point (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Fusch and Ness (2015) described qualitative data as rich and thick: rich in the quality of information a researcher can gather and thick in the quantity of data a researcher can collect. The research I conducted to understand the schooling perceptions of two participants used a qualitative research approach to gather data through interviewing the participants, which I think is both “rich and thick” (Fusch & Ness, 2015). This process of gathering data through the qualitative research model produced rich descriptions of the participants' experiences at the dual-enrollment high school. Overall, through this research study, I developed and conveyed the stories told by the participants of their experiences as high school students concurrently enrolled in college classes.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This qualitative research study explored the experiences and perceptions of two male Mexican-American half-brother participants who were attending a dual-enrolled high school. The two participants moved from a rural, economically impoverished and educationally limited environment to a rigorous, dual-enrollment high school on a community college campus. The dual-enrolled high school requires students to take college courses and earn college credits while attending high school. I explored the participants' experiences as they made the transition to an academically rigorous school, the process of understanding or knowing when they were ready to take college classes, and what helped them, the advice or support they received, as they adjusted to a model of schooling where they were expected to take high school and college courses concurrently. The participants also shared about the influence of their home-life, growing up in extreme poverty, and what it was like to move between "two worlds," the world of their home in another city, and the world of a college preparatory school/staying in the town of the dual-enrollment high school. They did this by sharing their stories during the interviews which were both structured and unstructured (Turner, 2010). Each interview took the participants through a series of questions (see Appendix D) which I created and modeled after the research of McDonald and Farrell (2012) (see Appendix B) who also interviewed students about their experiences as dual-enrolled high school students.

For this qualitative research study, I personally interviewed the two participants twice during January of 2019. At the conclusion of each interview, I followed the analysis procedures explained in Creswell (2013). I first read through each interview marking and notating significant phrases, ideas, stories, and specific quotes that contributed to my thinking about the educational journey of these two participants. I then reviewed my notes and created codes to

further analyze the data given by the participants during each interview. I used these codes to separate when the participants offered information about their transition experiences, schooling moments while at the dual-enrolled high school, and what advice or support helped them or did not help them navigate and successfully complete college courses. The codes allowed me to more clearly conceptualize the themes and patterns that emerged from the interviews. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to explain what the analyzed data revealed in the themes and patterns that emerged from the data.

Description of Participants

The participants in this qualitative study were chosen due to their schooling experience at both a traditional (comprehensive) school and their experience at a dual-enrollment high school. The participants chosen for this study are also a part of the student group referred to in California as Hispanic. Additionally, “although Latina/os represent 17% of the nation’s 18- to 24-year-old college student population, only 9% of 4-year degrees are currently earned by Latina/os” (Crisp et al., 2015, p. 250). Both participants were also classified as living in extreme poverty, according to information gathered in 2017 by American Community Survey Data (Tulare County, 2018). According to my review in March of 2019, the California School Dashboard (2018) states the dual-enrollment high school where I work and conducted my research serves a student population where 44.2% of the students are classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged and 45.8% of the population is classified as Hispanic, the participants interested me because not only did they experience two different types of schooling models, but each one meets the criteria for the two classifications stated on the California School Dashboard (2018): Socioeconomically disadvantaged and being Hispanic/Latino. Almost half of the students I work with each year are in these same two categories. The two participants chosen for the research

study, therefore, are worthy of exploration, as the information gleaned from their interviews may offer insights regarding how to serve students with similar experiences and descriptors.

The following sub-sections describes each participant, their home life, some of their past schooling experiences, the process of transitioning to the dual-enrollment high school, and what each participant has done in the last year and a half since they started in the fall of 2017 at the dual-enrollment high school.

Participant one: Edgar. Edgar is an academically gifted 16-year-old 11th grader who was born and raised in the Central Valley of California. He lives with his mother, brother, sister, and his mother's boyfriend, who he refers to as his stepdad. Edgar has lived in his hometown all of his life. At one point, his mother owned a very successful business and made a substantial living, but due to the economic downturns in California and poor financial choices, his mother lost everything, including their family home. Edgar has spent much of his childhood living in less than ideal conditions, but his family has persevered through a range of challenges from homelessness, hunger, job loss, incarceration, and foster care. (Edgar and his siblings were placed in the foster system.) Despite his history, Edgar is optimistic and believes he can change his future and the future of his family by studying, working hard, and being the first one to go to college.

Edgar has attended various schools in the town's school district, with his last school being the high school where he played football and successfully completed all of his ninth grade courses with a grade of 'C' or better. Even though he was homeless part of that year and missed a significant number of days to help his mother move their things from one housing location to another, he still managed to pass all of his classes. Edgar viewed his 9th-grade year as being one of his successes. In the spring of 2017, when Edgar interviewed for permission to attend the

dual-enrollment high school for the fall of 2017, the academic counselor informed Edgar and his mother that even though he had good grades in his ninth grade classes, only two of the nine classes his hometown high school assigned him would count as part of the 15 A-G courses (minimum amount) he would need to take by the end of his senior year to be college eligible for California Universities (A-G Courses, n.d.). Most ninth graders take three to five A-G courses. Edgar had no idea he was not in all college preparatory classes.

At the recommendation of his brother's eighth grade mentor, Edgar decided to change high schools. In the fall of 2017, he enrolled at the dual-enrollment high school. When asked about his first impressions, he said he believed he was in a movie. The way students dressed, what they talked about, their families and houses, the atmosphere in the classroom, the mutual respect between students and teachers, and the genuine desire of students to learn was something he had only observed in movies. He had no personal experience with this type of schooling environment. Due to the contrast in learning environments, he truly struggled with how different everything was and the only way he could explain it to his family was to compare it to a movie. After a little over a year, he now says his school life seems normal and his home life is the movie. Thus, Edgar stated when he is at home it feels as if he is in limbo waiting for his life to continue which happens when he gets back to the dual-enrolled high school and everything its environment represents.

Because Edgar lives in one of the outlying towns, he travels for one hour and ten minutes each way to attend this high school, which is on the community college campus in the largest city in Tulare County. Also, during the 2017-2018 school year, he lived in a house with his family that did not have electricity. His only access to electric power was when there was money for a generator to run, but that meant only having access to one or two working extension cords

at any one time. Even though all of his class work required access to the Internet, Edgar did not have access at home. Therefore, on many days he stayed at school until five or six o'clock in the evening to complete his school work. This meant many of his days lasted for twelve to fourteen hours, from the time he left his house in the morning to when he returned in the evening.

However, there were days when returning home was not possible due to a school or social activity/event or even the need to have access to electricity and the Internet. On these days, Edgar stayed in town with a family connected to the dual-enrollment high school. This family offered Edgar a place to stay whenever he needed it, and their home gave him the opportunity to see a lifestyle different from his family.

During the fall of 2018, Edgar secured his first part-time job at a retail store working ten to fifteen hours a week. Due to this job, Edgar had the opportunity to open a bank account and learn to use a debit/visa card. The job also allowed Edgar to help his mom pay for some of the items she normally struggled to afford for her three children. Even though Edgar's stepdad works periodically as a diesel mechanic, his mother has been unable to find work for many years, and her income consists of a small welfare check and food stamps. Throughout his first year at the dual-enrollment high school, sometimes as many as eleven people lived in Edgar's house in order to help lower the amount of rent his mom had to pay each month.

In December 2018, Edgar's biological father passed away. While he had not been active in Edgar's life for many years, the loss of his father was very emotional and impacted his ability to complete fall semester final exams for his high school classes. He is currently halfway through his 11th-grade year. Edgar has maintained strong grades, and he has become involved in a variety of activities such as school plays, academic teams, high school tutoring, elementary school mentoring, and the high school leadership team. At the end of spring semester 2019, he

will have completed 20 transferable college units. He is on track to graduate from the dual-enrollment high school in May 2020, with approximately 50 units of transferable college courses and a projected GPA of over 3.6.

Participant two: Michael. Michael is a kind-hearted 15-year-old 10th grader who was also born and raised in the Central Valley of California. He is Edgar's younger half-brother, and he lives with Edgar, his sister, his mother, and his mother's boyfriend. Michael's biological dad was released from jail within the past year, and he has contacted Michael a few times. However, Michael's dad is not able to spend the kind of time Michael hoped he would once he was released from jail. Michael has also lived in the same town his whole life. When it comes to his childhood, Michael does not remember his original family home or his mother's successful business; he was very young when things fell apart financially for his family. In fact, Michael shared he does not remember much stability with regards to housing and money throughout his childhood. While his family is more stable now, he worries each month, wondering if his mother will be able to pay the bills and if he will be able to stay in his rented house. Michael remembers how hard it was when he did not know where to go after school each day. Despite everything he has experienced and the challenges his family has faced, he is very close to his mother and credits her for holding the family together, even in the darkest moments.

Michael attended different elementary schools, depending on where his mother found housing. During his last year in his hometown schools, he was in 8th-grade at the local middle school. This was not a good year for Michael. He frequently missed school, was often in trouble, and did everything he could to avoid being in class. He emphatically states no one on the middle school staff was ever kind or nice to him. Michael felt no one understood how hard his life was

and how the expectations of school seemed irrelevant in light of the fact that on any given day he did not know if he had a home to go to after school.

Despite Michael's belief no one at his middle school ever cared about him, the counselor recommended Michael for a mentor program. Michael's mentor, Mr. Johns, introduced him to the idea of going to the dual-enrollment high school in another town, and he brought Michael to the dual-enrollment high school for a campus tour. Michael admits he thought Mr. Johns was "trippin'" when he started telling him about a school where students take high school and college classes at the same time. He openly acknowledged to Mr. Johns he would never be accepted because of his prior history of being "a bad kid and a bad student." Michael admitted that he was getting mostly F grades and spent most of his eighth grade in "IS" or in-house suspension. Michael says he filled out the application, because Mr. Johns would not take no for an answer, but he knew there was little chance a school such as the one Mr. Johns described would take him.

Michael remembers the day he was interviewed for the dual-enrollment high school. The two teachers talked to him about his middle school classes and about his dreams regarding college and career. Michael said he found it hard to believe when they did not say anything about all of his "mess-ups." Instead, they talked about his potential. The college had classes in culinary arts, which enticed Michael who dreamed of being a chef. The teachers said the high school would be a fresh start. Michael began thinking maybe this school could be different. When the teachers invited him to join the dual-enrollment high school, he knew he wanted to attend even though there would be some challenges. He knew it would be academically hard and traveling for one hour and ten minutes each way would be time-consuming. However, when Michael wanted to stay in town for a school dance the same family who gave Edgar a place to stay also

gave Michael a place to stay in their home. He would sometimes refer to this house as his school house.

In the fall of 2017 during, his 9th-grade year, Michael admitted to “messaging around” in class, disclosing that his negative behavior and resistance to engage were a problem. A year later, he can see what a challenge he was, especially for the teacher who truly “had his back.” Michael talked about other negative behaviors: sometimes trying to miss the bus so he could be late for his PE or English class, purposely coming back late from lunch to miss math class, and he would claim he was too tired to dance in his folklorico dance class after lunch. But the worst thing he did was try to ditch the teacher who was tutoring him after school. He shared how she waited outside his last class each day so he would attend his tutoring session. While it is something they laugh about now, Michael believes the teacher made a difference because she never became upset, but instead acted like what was happening was perfectly normal. The tutor had a snack ready and talked to him about the school work he needed to do that day as if what was happening was a normal part of the school routine.

Michael did not take any college classes his ninth grade year because he was not academically ready, nor was he mature enough for that level of responsibility. During the fall of 2018 as a 10th-grade student, Michael explained he came into this own academically and made major changes in his own thinking about the role of school in his life and what school involvement could do for him. He now believes that school is the one way he can create the lifestyle he wants, one where he will not have to worry about money, a house, or even food. He said being a chef is not a dream, it is what he will make happen. In his ninth-grade year of high school, Michael learned no one can make another person study or want to do well in school. In the fall of 2018, Michael took his first two college classes and earned ‘A’ grades in both. His

GPA went from a 2.73 his ninth grade year to a 3.76 the fall of his 10th-grade year. For spring semester 2019, Michael stated he is taking three college classes, with one being an introductory class in Culinary Arts. Even though he is the only high school student in the class, Michael said he is not intimidated because he knows what he wants out of life, to be a chef. He explained it is easy to work hard in the class it is his future, and the teacher is a working chef with a catering company. Michael has already volunteered to help him with events, just for the experience he will receive. When he is in the Culinary Arts class, Michael said everything goes well, and he knows, without a doubt, being a chef is in his future.

Thematic Overview

The two participants shared their personal stories of moving from their comprehensive school system to a dual-enrollment education model. This qualitative study focused on exploring what the participants experienced as they made the transition, what they experienced while preparing themselves to take college classes, and what helped or did not help them during their year of transition. Through the process of data analysis, I identified the following themes: (a) The influence of environment on schooling beliefs, (b) The impact of personal relationships with both older students and teachers, and (c) The power of a student's voice to be heard. This section highlights the participants' stories as they relate to these three themes.

Theme One: The Influence of Environment on Schooling Beliefs

At different points during the interviews, the participants explained how the environment at the dual-enrolled high school influenced their thinking about school. They also stated how being in a different schooling environment made them think more about their future. Their current high school which provided dual-enrollment courses impacted their schooling values and perspectives on a variety of levels.

Michael. At his new high school, Michael stated he immediately realized he had to act differently than he did at his previous school because his new classmates actually listened to their teachers and to each other. In addition, they did the work assigned in class. According to Michael, this was a major difference because at his comprehensive school students yelled at each other, cussed at the teachers, and “messed around.” Michael explained at his old school, “you could misbehave, cuss at [the teachers] and they wouldn’t care or even get you in trouble for it. I could mess around the whole class period and not do any work” (Michael, 1-20-19). Michael explained the opposite was happening at the dual-enrolled high school. He stated,

Here it was like, I had to stay focused and on top of my work. Those first months were really challenging, like when I had to write essays. I did not want to do them or any work at all, but now I like doing my work. (Michael, 1-20-19)

At first, he did not know what to do because he had never really done work in class, taken notes, used a computer, or worked collaboratively with other students. Yet, at this high school, that was the expectation, and students did not act kindly to students who wasted theirs and others’ class time. Michael even remembered one student telling him that class time was for learning and working, and after school was for “messaging around.” Specifically, Michael stated, “And he meant it. I needed to get serious, do my work, or the kids would not like me” (Michael, 1-20-19).

Michael explained how the first semester he felt very much out of his comfort zone. Even though his comprehensive school was not the best schooling environment, Michael said at least he knew “the rules” or how to act at school. From his perspective, those “rules” meant,

When I first started at [the dual-enrollment high school], I would come to class, talk with my friends, laugh, mess around, not really listen to the teacher, and if the teacher made me I would get out a pencil and paper to do work, but I didn’t really try that much or

even pay attention. I didn't really even care if the teacher sent me out of class to I.S. (in house suspension). That was just how we did things at my old school. That was normal.

(Michael, 1-20-19)

He quickly learned none of those "rules" applied at the dual-enrolled high school. Because he had never really stayed in class or had done any work during middle school, what he needed to do at his new high school was very hard. Michael shared he had a very hard time doing the work, staying focused in class, and trying his best because what was easy for his classmates such as taking notes while the teacher was talking, or even the smallest task such finding a handout in his backpack was challenging for him. So much so, he often went home that first semester and went straight to bed because he was so exhausted from all the thinking and learning expectations he experienced at the dual-enrolled high school. Michael remembered the first time someone asked him what it was like to go to his new school, and he said, "Well, those students are really dedicated to learning and they are serious about learning in class" (Michael, 1-26-19).

A year later, Michael remembered that comment and laughed because now he describes himself in the same way, as a student who wants to learn because he sees that college is his future. Michael expressed how his first year at the dual-enrolled high school the environment was different and more positive. In addition, teachers frequently offered to help him with the work he did not understand, and even older students came to his hometown to help him study for his classes once a week. Michael said,

I realized I really cannot fail, no matter what happens there is always hope. That's the biggest difference, and it makes me be more dedicated to school because it is all I have. And, now I have my family [his friends] with me always helping me, that's what this school is, a family who cares and helps. (Michael, 1-20-19)

Michael reflected on his own growth over the past year. Before this school, he never thought he would graduate from high school, but now he knows he is going to college to be a chef, and regardless of how long it takes him each day to get to and from his dual-enrollment high school, everything about the environment created by the school is “totally worth it!” (Michael, 1-20-18).

Edgar. In his hometown high school, Edgar said he did things to better the moment, and he never really looked into the future. He never thought about college, and even though he had heard his teachers talk about it, college always sounded scary and something he would never be able to achieve. Edgar said he never saw college as a part of his future, nor did he even think about it. In fact, he described his first days at the dual-enrolled high school as

Weird. It was weird because it’s all about planning and it’s all about getting ready for college which is the future and we didn’t do that at my old school. It was more like I just thought about that day. It was pretty weird. (Edgar, 1-20-19)

From Edgar’s perspective, the students and the school in general think mostly about the future, getting ready for college, and actually taking college classes. He thought all the time spent planning for the future was strange because he had never experienced an environment where students were living their future by taking college classes. Edgar also thought the classrooms were very different at the dual-enrolled high school; he equated the first few weeks as something he can only describe as a movie, and he felt as if he was living in a movie himself. Edgar explained,

I noticed a big difference in the students in the classroom. The students were a lot more cooperative, and teachers gave lessons about what they were learning, not about how to behave in class. Class time wasn’t wasted because students were misbehaving or being so

unwilling to participate. At [the dual-enrollment school] it was more of a learning environment. (Edgar, 1-20-19)

Edgar also noticed how many students participated in class and worked during group activities. The students were not “messaging around or making the whole class wait for one or two students to get on task” (Edgar, 1-20-19). Edgar said the environment was all about learning, and he could not believe how much the teachers could teach in a class period, much less how much he learned.

In his old school, Edgar saw the world as including his people, which meant gangs, fights, being the not-so-wealthy, and I “didn’t [think] that having a rich per-se lifestyle was a possibility for me” (Edgar, 1-20-19). That was who he was, that was his group and everything he did in school reflected Edgar’s reputation and “his name.” When Edgar came to the school focused on dual enrollment, he said it was hard. Specifically,

It was not just overwhelming it was so different. I was used to doing things based on whether or not people would look at me, like I wouldn’t raise my hand to answer a question because that was not cool. I had to worry about my reputation and what I would look like in other people’s eyes. It was stressful because [at the dual-enrollment high school] no one seemed to care about what other people thought. If a teacher asked a question everyone raised a hand to answer. That was so strange to me I wasn’t used to students willingly participating in class. (Edgar, 1-20-19)

Additionally, he realized not only was college attainable in his future, but it was also something he could begin right away in the spring semester of 2018. When Edgar started at the dual-enrollment high school, he planned to stick to himself and do his own thing. He did not plan to make friends or get involved; he thought he would just stay to himself. But soon, Edgar started experiencing the positivity and excitement over what students were learning. He then lowered his

guard, which resulted in being more comfortable in his classes, with his teachers, and other students. Edgar said he realized, “All right, I can’t beat them, so I’ll join them” (Edgar, 1-20-19).

In his old school, Edgar said going to school was mandatory, something to just get through each year, but “here I realized that my dreams can become a reality. That’s what really changed me” (Edgar, 1-20-19). In fact, Edgar stated, “My lifestyle [at my old school] was to survive and having to do things to survive, and sometimes doing things I shouldn’t to survive. I did not think about anything beyond finishing high school” (Edgar, 1-20-19). Due to the environment at his old school, he believed it was just as realistic for him to end up in jail or dead as it was that he would graduate from high school. However, a year after coming to the dual-enrolled high school, Edgar explained how hard it was to believe the way he used to think about his life and school! There was no one moment where Edgar realized his thinking about his life and future changed; instead, he thought it developed more gradually over time. He explained,

It wasn’t just the classes. It was all that I was involved in, so all the clubs, the leadership team, and the friendships that made me feel safe to go out of my comfort zone to do things I had never done before. Even when it feels hard or emotionally I think I can’t do this, I still think I have so many people on my side I realize I can do this [I can be a college student]. (Edgar, 1-20-19)

Because he observed everyone on campus, started studying with other students, and listened to teachers talk about taking college classes, he realized in this environment and at this school, dreams can become a reality. Being in that environment, Edgar believed “is what really changed me” (Edgar, 1-20-19).

Theme Two: The Impact of Personal Relationships with both Older Students and Teachers.

Throughout the interviews, participants talked about relationships with teachers and older students with regards to how building those connections made a difference in their thinking as it related to college and their future in general. While Edgar is Michael's older brother, he did not speak of him during the interviews as being one of the students who influenced him. It is difficult to think Edgar did not help, support, or influence Michael, as that is a normal part of an older sibling's role, but Michael did not directly refer to his older brother as a part of what helped him adjust to the dual-enrollment high school. Thus, the focus of this section reflects what the participants stated during their interviews.

Michael. "As soon as I heard college classes, I was like no way, I can't do that, but then I thought I'd give it a try, and I fell in love with the school" (Michael, 1-20-19). Michael explained he "fell in love" because of the people he met who believed in him. Even when he was acting out and doing things (such as intentionally being late) which indicated he would not make it at the dual-enrolled high school, his teachers remained positive and kept nudging him to make different choices behaviorally. He said, as much as he tried to opt out of work, the teachers and the friends he met would not let him opt out of work and fail his classes. As he looked back on that first year, he thinks he did not believe he could do the work or meet the learning expectations. Nor did he think he was smart enough because he watched all the other students complete the work with ease. Yet, despite this self-doubt, Michael said the teachers, especially his math teacher and the lead teacher kept offering and giving him help. At first, he said he did not want help because he was fine with low grades and barely passing classes since that was all he knew. But his new friends did not want to "mess around" after school. Instead, they wanted to go to tutoring where

they could receive the help they needed in order, to improve their grades. Michael said he did not want to be left out, so he went to tutoring and started accepting the help being offered by both his teachers and the student tutors. Thinking back, Michael said he believed the assistance he received made a difference because he started getting better grades and had his homework done before class each day. “I was honestly surprised, but I realized the teachers really did care and the extra help really did make the information I was learning understandable” (Michael, 1-26-19).

Also, Michael attributes his shift in thinking about school to the “hometown tutoring squad,” which was a group of older students from the dual-enrolled high school who traveled after school with the lead teacher to tutor students in Michael’s hometown. Their willingness to help him with his homework shifted Michael's perspective on his ability to complete the work. Michael stated he can now see how much work it took for others to help prepare him to handle the academic rigor of dual-enrolled classes. He could not believe older students from the high school would give up their free time after school to come to his town just to tutor him and other boys. Michael said, “I remember looking around the study room and thinking, dang, these students are seriously wanting to help us, and the teacher means it when she says we are here to help you get your academic work done” (Michael, 1-20-19). Furthermore, Michael explained,

My favorite tutor was a senior, and she was so positive with me. She taught me all these tricks for remembering the Greek and Latin roots, and she never one time put me down or said I was dumb. She was so patient and just kept helping me until I understood. But what was even better was at school she talked to me and checked on how I did on a test or assignment, and she was so happy and proud of me when I did well. (Michael, 1-20-19, 1-26-19)

This tutor's influence and attitude made Michael want to learn, and what began as a tutor-tutoree relationship turned into a friendship that Michael said helped him believe he really could take college classes and get good grades at the dual-enrollment high school. He said,

“We still talk even though she is in college now, and when she comes to town we always hang out. The first thing she asks me is about my classes and when I tell her how good I am doing, she gets so excited for me. It is weird, but it makes me feel so good.” (Michael, 1-26-19)

Edgar. Edgar stated he realized right away the students' had an unspoken expectation to be true to themselves and pursue their own dreams, whatever that might be, and everyone supported each other's aspirations, and “no one thought another person's dream was weird.” Edgar said that idea was totally different from his hometown high school, where appearances and friend choices determined one's likeability. “Here [at the dual-enrolled high school] you have a support system of friends who just want to see you succeed” (Edgar, 1-20-19). At first it was hard for Edgar to believe the students genuinely wanted to be his friend because he saw the friendship bonds similar to those that were portrayed in movies. These genuine friendships were not something that happened at his hometown high school where friendships were strategic and created for safety and survival. Edgar explained his first impression of friendships at the dual-enrollment high school:

I went to students' houses and their parents would be like, ‘Hey Edgar's back.’ Everyone wanted to know...how my classes were going, and they would want to know how I was doing. And that was so weird because that never happened to me in my hometown. It was so different that at first, I did not understand it. (Edgar, 1-20-19)

When Edgar first came to the dual-enrolled high school, students were genuinely excited to meet him and welcome him. Their enthusiasm for school and making newcomers feel welcomed seemed so different that Edgar said he thought their behavior was strange, and he would just stick to himself and do what he wanted for himself. “I didn’t think I would make any friends because everyone was so different from how I was. I thought I would just be on my own,” Edgar assumed he would not change, so that meant, to him, that he would not make any friends.

A year later, he laughs at that thinking, because now he is one of those students who is positive, who wants a new student to feel comfortable, and believes he can achieve anything he sets his mind to achieve. Edgar recalled,

“My friends from last year, the seniors, they gave me the reassurance that it is okay. You do not have to be scared, college classes are not as hard as you think. One even signed up with me when I took my first college class, just so I would not be alone.” (Edgar, 1-20-19)

Edgar stated the dedication of older students to seeing his success happen is “what makes the dual-enrollment high school the whole package” (Edgar, 1-20-19). Edgar explained that making friends at the dual-enrollment high school has challenged him to step out of his comfort zone and push himself to be the best he can be in his classes, during school activities, and in his new friendships. This attitude and outlook on life Edgar said is very different than what he experienced in his hometown high school. Specifically, Edgar said this about the influence of relationships between students and with the teachers:

Nobody ever straight up told me this, but the way they acted and how safe I felt acting around them, it was like I was being told, ‘Don’t be afraid to go all in.’ If I’m doing a project for something like I have to build a poster, ‘Don’t do the minimum. Don’t be

afraid to go all out, to give 110%.' Even though people are going to be like, 'Edgar. What a nerd. What are you doing?' I learned it's fun and you get a good grade, and that makes it worth it. (Edgar 1-20-19)

After attending the dual-enrollment high school for a year and a half, Edgar stated he appreciates the new lifestyle he has and the friends he has made who have supported him through everything. At first, he did not think anyone understood how hard it was for him because everything was so different. Being at the dual-enrollment high school was like a dream or a movie, and when he was at home, it was the tough reality of life, worrying about money, food, rent, and not having electricity. No one really knew how hard he had to work to just keep up. But the friends he made were continually persistent about helping him and being his friend, and that is when he realized these were his true friends. "Life is still life. Life is hard. That made me realize that everybody is just human. Everybody has problems, but here, at this school, we work through them together, no one is left out or forgotten" (Edgar, 1-20-19). For Edgar, he says it was these realizations and friends who helped him shift his thinking about planning for tomorrow, thinking about college, and believing he could have a lifestyle where food, housing, and money were not something to worry about consistently.

Theme Three: The Power of a Student's Voice to be Heard.

At different points during the three interviews, the participants explained how much voice they had at the dual-enrolled high school. They explained how much their voice and the voice of other students influenced or can influence what happens at school. Both participants expressed how different they felt when they realized they actually had a say in their own learning.

Michael. "Mindset revolution. Boom!" explained Michael (1-20-19). School was something being done to him in his hometown schools, but when he came to the dual-enrolled high school, he had what he called "a mindset revolution." Now school and what happened at school was up to him, and he was in charge of his life and his schooling. Michael explained this idea empowered him as a learner. The older students, especially senior tutors Lou and Vick, explained to Michael during his first year at the dual-enrolled high school that he had a voice in what happened to him, what high school and college classes he took, how he treated and was treated in class, and how well he did as a dual-enrolled student. Michael recalled:

Basically, Lou and Vick said attitude is a choice and how much or how far I go at the dual-enrolled high school depended on how much I exercised my voice. Because they explained, I had the power to decide my future by either taking advantage of everything the teachers and other students offered me regarding my getting help with my class work or not. You can take as many or as few college classes that you want. Just get your twenty college units done and listen to the counselor and lead teacher. They will always listen, and they definitely have your back. (Michael, 1-26-19)

Michael said he came to understand that no one can make him do anything. He learned the first year he was in charge of his own learning, and the more he learned the better his future would

be, so asking for help meant using his voice to better his future, which was what he decided to do. Michael further explained about his 10th-grade year, “This year I’m more dedicated to school, and I realized school is all I have going for myself, so I have to really pursue my dream. I can’t waste time; I need to put in my full effort.” (Michael, 1-20-19)

Michael thought taking charge of his own life at school, also meant using his voice to help make decisions surrounding school life. For example, he has had the chance to vote on a theme for a particular dance. He has always voted because he now knows his voice, and his vote matters. Michael explained how older students taught him actions and words matter, which was not something he ever thought about at his old school; he was just in it for himself then. Now, he feels a responsibility to “pay forward,” the attitude of positivity and of helping other students take control of their lives and learn similar things to what he has learned this year. For example, he explained when he arrives to school early, sometimes he does his homework. But other times he looks for a student who is alone, and then takes the time to talk with the student about how the student is doing. If the opportunity arises, he shares about his experiences at the dual-enrolled high school because he hopes new students will come to understand what he already knows, that having a voice in one’s learning does matter, but actually exercising that voice, is what truly makes the difference. The difference between these two ideas is what he calls, “the mindset revolution” (Michael, 1-20-19).

Edgar. Edgar came to the dual-enrollment high school with this mindset, “I really [had] to do things for myself. I didn’t mind being alone. I was just going to be by myself and I was going to be doing me” (Edgar, 1-20-19). But, over the course of his first year at the dual-enrolled school, his perspective shifted because of the influence of older students. He also realized to work at the straight ‘A’ level he needed a different strategy than merely going with the flow of

things. He needed help getting organized, which meant he needed to ask for help, and he could not remain an island unto himself.

This experience was different for Edgar, who had never found school to be challenging. He remembered how he simply needed to show up at his comprehensive high school and finish whatever work was being asked of him right before the bell would ring for class. However, at the dual-enrollment high school, that strategy for completing work did not lead to strong grades. Edgar found himself forgetting assignments, or being so behind he did not think he would ever catch up. He shared:

I realized I wouldn't be able to get what I wanted [straight 'A' grades] if I kept doing things my old way. So I asked the lead teacher for help, and she taught me a way to make lists and how to calendar long-term assignments. It was the first time I really used my voice to get something I wanted with regards to my own learning. (Edgar, 1-20-19)

Edgar explained how at the dual-enrolled high school, he learned if he worked hard and became involved he had a big voice in what happened at school. As a result, he applied and was accepted to the leadership team, which is one place where he has had the opportunity to give input on school activities such as spirit days, dances, and rallies.

Even in his classes, Edgar shared how some of the teachers give students a voice in what they want to learn. For example, he shared how his English teacher asked the class what they wanted to learn about the concept of culture and everyone submitted ideas. Each week the teacher presented lessons on topics students picked during the first week of class. He stated this is in contrast to his comprehensive high school, where he stated he felt voiceless. Their school was mandatory, and his impression was that no one inquired what students wanted or thought.

Similar to Michael, Edgar shared the importance of every student knowing he/she matters. As a school leader this year, he worried when he heard students say things such as, “Why vote for something, I am just one person, my vote doesn’t really matter” (Edgar, 1-20-19). He speculated that not every student had the experience he and his brother had with the older students who said, “Attitude is a choice and how much or how far [anyone] go[es] at the dual-enrolled high school depended on how much [he/she] exercised [his/her] voice (Michael, 1-26-19). Edgar stressed the importance of helping every student learn the power of their own voice because from his perspective, one vote, or one student’s voice matters. Edgar thought he learned through the older students all last year, that using his voice was more than just requesting classes or asking for help on his school work. He believed the older students helped him understand part of his power as one person happened when he showed up and participated. At this dual-enrollment high school, “you can have a big voice” (Edgar, 1-20-19). While he thinks the school can only do so much, Edgar learned that he can also influence his classmates to exercise their voice at school just like he was taught by the seniors who graduated in the spring of 2018. Edgar stressed, “Every student needs to have the mindset of ‘I can do anything I want to do, and I can be anyone I want to be.’” That is the power of this school because the students and teachers both support students who pursue their dreams, and everyone sees each other as “just equally the same” (Edgar, 1-20-19, 1-26-19).

Summary

Each participant shared a unique perspective on their experiences while transitioning to and being a student at the dual-enrollment high school. While they came from the same family, each participant discussed his own journey from his hometown comprehensive school to the dual-enrolled high school. Both participants told their own story, which consisted of challenges

and successes. Even though the two participants traveled to school together each day, they each developed their own friends and made “their own name.” Additionally, while the participants acknowledge each other at school, they do not “hang out” together or “travel” in the same social circles. While it would be very difficult to argue the two brothers did not influence each other, neither one mentioned the other as being a part of their support system, perhaps this was simply due to the questions each participant was asked or maybe the support they received from each other is just assumed. Regardless, the participants both recognized how empowering it is to have a voice in what happened to them at school.

The participants described a wide range of experiences, both within the walls of the schools and outside with the friends they each made. Their stories included a shift in thinking, due to the change in environments experienced at the dual-enrolled school when compared to the comprehensive school. The participants discussed the influence of older students with regards to attitude and participation in the school itself. In addition, the participants talked about teachers who never gave up on them and offered helpful advice and strategies when requested by the participants. Furthermore, the participants talked about how the power of a student’s voice impacted their transition to the dual-enrolled school. They shared the responsibility they each feel to help other students understand what they can each do now to influence their future. Both participants understand from their friendships with other students that attitude matters and it influences the ability of each person to exercise his/her own voice.

The essence of these experiences that the participants shared revolved around the influence of their school environment. School environment influenced their thinking about: (a) school and its impact on their future, (b) personal relationships, both those developed with older

students and with the teachers who offered assistance and feedback, and (c) the power of learning to use one's voice to impact an organization, both one's own learning and one's future.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative research study was conducted to understand the experiences and perceptions of two Mexican-American, half-brother participants who made the transition from a comprehensive school to a dual-enrollment high school. The participants were interviewed to gain insight into their perceptions regarding their experiences transitioning to a dual-enrollment high school, the process of becoming ready to take college classes, and what advice or help benefited or did not benefit them as they each made the transition from one schooling model to another. Through the process of analyzing the data, the following three themes emerged: (a) The influence of environment on schooling beliefs, (b) The impact of personal relationships with both older students and teachers, and (c) The power of a student's voice to be heard. This chapter offers the findings which address the research questions posed in Chapter 1, considers the potential implications, and provides recommendations for practice and for further research.

Discussion of Findings

By interviewing each participant, I collected information concerning the participants' experiences and insights as they made the transition from a comprehensive (traditional) school model to a dual-enrollment charter high school model. The interviews also provided information surrounding the process of learning and/or understanding what is needed to successfully complete a college class, and the participants shared what advice and/or support they used or did not use as they each made the adjustment to the dual-enrollment high school.

After reviewing the literature surrounding the topic of dual enrollment and its connection to students from the largest student group in California, Hispanics/Latinos/as, the interest for my qualitative study developed in part due to information I learned through the literature review process, and in part because I was curious about what students experienced when they made the

decision to leave a comprehensive schooling model to attend a dual-enrollment schooling model. Additionally, my idea for this qualitative study was influenced by the research study and findings completed by McDonald and Farrell (2012) who studied students at an Early College High School (ECHS), a school with a hybrid program where students took both high school and college classes. These researchers used focus groups to interview students about their perceptions of this program. McDonald and Farrell wanted to hear about this type of schooling from the voices of students who had been in the program. The research explored three constructs of college readiness and different themes and subthemes. The study's findings indicated, "The ECHS experience supported students' acclimation to college-level work" (McDonald & Farrell, 2012, p. 217). The McDonald and Farrell study also provided me with examples of the open-ended questions used by the researchers. From their questions, I was able to adapt my own questions. Based on the information in their findings and suggestions for further research, I thought, similar to their work, I also might learn valuable information from my participants' perspective regarding what it was like to transition from one type of schooling model to another, what it was like to be a student at a dual-enrollment high school, and what helped or did not help when taking a college course.

Furthermore, background for my qualitative research study also drew from Kanny's (2015) study which examined the benefits and disadvantages for students who had previously been enrolled in dual-enrollment courses. Kanny (2015) acknowledged that the value of dual-enrollment participation has been well established with respect to college performance and completion, but she used her research to consider "how and why these postsecondary outcomes tend to occur" (Kanny, 2015, p. 59). Similar to Kanny's work and her recommendation for more qualitative research on students' perspective regarding how dual-enrollment students perceive

their experiences, I developed my qualitative research study to examine participants' perceptions of transitioning to a dual-enrollment high school, succeeding through one or more college course(s), and what advice helped or did not help participants make the transition from a comprehensive schooling model to a dual-enrollment model.

The participants' stories from this study revealed there were challenges to acknowledge as students made this daunting transition. There were also markers used by the participants to determine when they were ready to take a college class. In addition, participants discussed the conditions under which they decided to add a college course to their semester class schedule. Finally, they shared what advice or help was supportive and what was not.

Research question one: What was it like for the participants to move from a rural comprehensive high school to a dual-enrollment high school on a community college campus? The simple answer was that the transition was challenging, very challenging. But in some ways, the word “challenging” does not begin to explain the complexities of what participants experienced by changing schools and changing models of secondary education. Just traveling on public transportation for one hour and ten minutes each way made going to a different school hard. The participants in my study needed to wake up five days a week at 5:00am to catch the 6:00 am morning bus in order to be on the community college campus by 7:15am. If the participants over-slept and had to take a later bus, then they would arrive 15-30 minutes late for their first period classes. Rather than being upset about having to come so early to school, the participants stated they used the additional time in the morning to study or complete homework. To receive additional help or to participate in after-school activities, participants stayed on campus until 5:45pm to catch the public bus back home. This bus drops them off near their home around 7:15pm. The time alone, twelve to thirteen hours a day (and that

was only if the participants did not have a college class in the evening) five days a week was a tough schedule to maintain for 185 school days. The impact of living so far away from their school was significant for the participants. Since the participants did not have the economic means to be driven to school, transportation was an additional challenge faced by the participants each day which was unlike many of their peers (Crisp et al., 2015). When asked if either participant would return to their hometown high school to avoid this long commute, both stated they absolutely would not because they each believed they had a family at their dual-enrollment high school who supported them and “we could not give that up!” (Michael & Edgar, 1-26-19). Even though they were gone from their home dawn to dusk, the dual-enrollment high school was and is “totally worth it!” (Michael & Edgar, 1-26-19).

Even though Michael and Edgar were positive about their experiences, the dual-enrollment high school took both participants out of their comfort zone academically and socially. According to the Hispanic Higher Education Research Collective (2007), the psychosocial factors such as participating in high school activities and understanding classroom expectations play a role in how Hispanic students perform during their secondary education years. Certainly, Michael expressed how all the rules he knew about school did not apply when he entered a dual-enrollment classroom. Michael explained,

I felt out of my comfort zone. This was a good school and I couldn't mess around, cuss in class, or talk back to the teachers, which was pretty much what normally happened during a class period at my old school. The rules at [the dual-enrollment high school] were all about respect, and the students wanted to do their work. When I first came I wasn't used to being respectful to teachers and all the work was so hard. I just wasn't used to it.

(Michael, 1-20-19)

The amount of attention and focus each class required exhausted him during his first semester because he had never been expected to be so deeply engaged in course work at his hometown school. Michael's observations and experiences confirmed some of the research about the challenges students may face when choosing a more rigorous learning environment.

Edgar stated he also noticed a difference in how cooperative the students were and how much time was dedicated to teaching and learning in his new school. He thought he learned more in one week at the dual-enrollment high school than he learned in a few weeks attending his hometown high school. Edgar said,

Here the teachers teach. They do not lecture about behavior expectations every class period. So I was able to be more active in the classroom, and I noticed I was learning more because the teachers were able to teach us more information during the class period. It was really different for me. (Edgar, 1-20-19)

In her research, Gandara (2009) suggested one of the key aspects to ensuring more Latinos make it through secondary schools and onto postsecondary institutions is the recruitment of highly-qualified and effective teachers. Edgar's comments reflected the type of classroom teachers and environment Gandara (2009) believed Latino students need to experience in order to succeed at higher rates in the educational system.

Edgar stated he was also amazed at the amount of participation in their classrooms because at his hometown high school only one or two students raised their hand to answer a teacher's question. At this new school, hands went up all around him when a teacher asked a question. This type of classroom interaction was perceived as being harder and at times stressful because it was not like his other school where each class only had one or two "smart students." At the dual-enrolled high school, all the students were assumed to be smart, and they gave

answers that seemed more intellectual than anything Edgar could think of or say in class. He stated,

I was very intimidated during the first few months at the school. It was very difficult. I was totally out of my comfort zone. Everything seems so easy for my classmates, and I was like wait, slow down, I don't understand! It was so stressful. (Edgar, 1-20-19)

An's (2013) research suggested this type of pre-college classroom preparation is important for college success because it pushes students to expect more from their learning environments. It also pushes students to think more critically, which is a significant college skill, students in high school need to acquire.

Both Edgar and Michael expressed no one really understood how different school was or how hard it was for them. Edgar specifically stated,

I don't think anyone understood the only thing I knew about this lifestyle and this type of schooling I learned by watching movies. I kept thinking I was in a dream. It was not a dream. It was a reality, a hard academic reality. (Edgar, 1-20-19)

Edgar reflected during the first few months when he looked around during class, it seemed like everyone understood what needed to be done except him. They were moving forward with the work, while Edgar would look at the assignment and think to himself, "Whoa, slow down everyone, this is hard. Do you all know how hard this work is for me?" (1-20-19). Michael stated beside the difficult coursework, the environment of the school, including the attitudes of the students, was all so foreign and it made it difficult to understand and keep up during class. For both Michael and Edgar, these academic challenges were significant aspects of their schooling reality. In fact, Oseguera et al. (2009) found one of the barriers impacting Latina/o students from making the transition to college classrooms smoothly related to "poor college preparation and

difficulty making the academic and social adjustments” to more rigorous classroom expectations (p. 24).

Both participants agreed the dual-enrollment high school was too different to compare to their old schools. At the time of the interviews, the participants said they were still making memories and experiencing high school in many ways similar to their friends in their hometown, but the focus of their current school was different. Edgar explained:

Here the tradition is hardcore investing in academics, but at my old school it was all about football and sports; learning and academics was not the focus. I mean, I guess it was a school so learning mattered, but not to the students. Here [at the dual-enrollment school] the students stay focused on school and college. (Edgar, 1-26-19)

The participants also talked about moving between two worlds, the world of home and the world of school in another town. Edgar shared at home “stuff” happens, but whatever happens whether they lack electricity or his phone plans stops work, these realities remain normal because that represents the environment in which he has been raised. His home presented many daily struggles, such as not having something as common as Internet or not having something as simple as toilet paper. But this type of domestic turmoil seemed normal because his family lives, for the most part, day to day. beyond the world of home, there is the world of school, and the home the boys stay at a couple of nights a week due to them taking evening college classes. Edgar stated and Michael agreed, “The lifestyle is better, [where we stay in town]. I’m not going to lie” (Edgar, 1-26-19). Through the dual-enrollment high school chosen by the participants and the support of the family they stay with each week, Edgar and his brother believe they can have a better lifestyle. They feel confident their sacrifice for a better education now will lead to the type of college degree that will provide each of them with the amount of

money needed to live comfortably. They each believe their dreams remain achievable. An (2013) suggested students who self-select a dual-enrollment program persist and perform better academically, even when the academic content is challenging. While the transition has been hard, and it remains a challenge, both participants believe the struggles have been worth it. “I appreciate everything. My whole new lifestyle, I appreciate it because I know it will lead to better things in life” (Edgar, 1-20-19).

Research question two: As dual-enrollment students, how did the participants know they were ready to take college courses? What types of academic skills did the participants think they needed to complete the college class? The participants had different answers for when they realized it was time to take a college class, but both participants were able to identify the skills they needed to complete a college class.

Michael explained he was not allowed to take any college classes his ninth grade year because he was not passing Algebra I, but he also stated he was not ready that year. When Michael started his 10th-grade year, he signed up for two college classes, Spanish I and Dance 55. He described the college classes as being similar to his high school classes. However, Michael reported the expectations in college classes were higher, and he had to “act like an adult” because in the college classes everything was up to him. The responsibility to pay attention, do the work, and push himself remained all on him, no one was going to remind him of the work he needed to do for his classes. Michael’s changed attitude towards school, learning, and the potential of taking college classes relates to Swanson’s (2010) research which revealed “dual enrollment participation influences behavioral or attitudinal changes in high school students” (p. 44). At the end of his ninth grade year, Michael felt his readiness for college classes existed because he was able to keep up his grades and complete the work needed for his high

school classes. He connected all of the learning he did during his ninth grade year, such as learning to take notes, keeping track of his work, being able to understand the instruction, and work in his core classes, as the kinds of skills he needed to be ready for a college class.

Specifically, Michael said,

I knew I was ready for a college class because I was keeping up with my work and my grades were good. I know it was a good thing I didn't take a college class as a freshman because I was too immature. I probably would have ditched. (Michael, 1-20-19)

As Michael's reflection indicate, and as Bailey et al. (2002) suggested students need to feel academically prepared prior to taking a college class

Edgar was not as specific about how he determined when he was ready to take a college class. He recalled how at his old high school teachers scared him when they blamed the home town high school for not adequately preparing them for the academic rigor of college. Edgar partially believed since he too had attended that same high school, he would also not be able to take and pass a college class. As a result, he was very nervous about taking a college class.

Bailey et al. (2002) stated one of the barriers stopping students from successfully transitioning to college results from feeling academically underprepared or simply unprepared for higher education. Certainly, Edgar's concerns are reflected in this research. At the same time, Edgar also shared he "flew through [his hometown] school." He stated that nothing he had been asked to complete in his hometown high school classes was really that challenging for him during his ninth grade year.

For Edgar, the transition to a dual-enrollment high school was challenging. The workload was not only more, but the depth of thinking required so much more study time. Furthermore, Edgar found the attention to detail demanded much more of him, both intellectually and

organizationally. He did not expect this. Edgar's worries reflected information Moore et al. (2010) reported in their research that "many high school graduates fall short of being prepared to be successful in postsecondary education (p. 818). Edgar shared the concern about his own lack of preparedness to manage a high school and college course load when he said,

One night I got out all my homework that needed to be done that night, and I swear the pile was like three feet tall. I did not know what to do, and I was scared because if I couldn't keep this work organized, I couldn't do a college class. (Edgar, 1-26-19)

However, the research by Struhl and Vargas (2012) found when a student takes even one college class while in high school, it has the potential to increase a student's chance at attending college and successfully graduating. As the lead teacher, who had first interviewed Edgar with the school counselor, I was aware of this research, as was the school counselor. We knew Edgar needed to take and successfully complete one college class during the spring semester of his sophomore year. Both of us believed he could handle a two-unit class on music recording because Edgar liked music. In addition, the counselor's son had taken the class so the instructor and the workload were a known factor. As it turned out, the college music course was a good first class for Edgar because the instructor expected students to complete 90% of the work while in the music lab. Unbeknownst to Edgar, and as a part of the strategy to help ensure Edgar's success in his first academic class, the counselor asked one of Edgar's senior friends to talk with Edgar about taking the music class together. Both the counselor and myself (the lead teacher) believed if Edgar had a trusted friend in the class, he would do just fine in the college class, and the nervousness and self-doubt he was experiencing would dissipate. That first class became the catalyst for boosting Edgar's belief in himself as a college student, which the research by Struhl and Vargas (2012) also found to be true for students; the success of that first college class was

significant. In fact, Edgar not only liked the class better than his senior friend, but he also became her tutor, and I “laugh now because she wanted to take this class, and I got the better grade!” (Edgar, 1-26-19). In his own reflection, Edgar shared his first college class happened because of one of his senior friends, Lou, convinced him to take the class with her.

Since that class, Edgar has completed Spanish I and II, History 17, Recording Arts 1, and as of this writing, he is also taking Geography 2 and Anthropology 10. While Edgar stated the college classes were “not a breeze,” he liked the challenge and can see how these classes are preparing him to leave in a year for a four-year university. Currently, Point Loma Nazarene University remains his first choice in colleges. Conley (2007a) supported Edgar’s thinking as it pointed to how students become college ready. Conley (2007a) reported:

The student is prepared to get the most out of the college experience due to a thorough understanding of the culture and structure of postsecondary education and the ways of knowing and intellectual norms that prevail in this academic and social environment. The student has both the mindset and disposition necessary to enable this to happen. (p. 6)

Although each of the participants discerned he was ready to take a college class in different ways, the participants agreed on the skills needed to be successful in a college class: maturity, organization, responsibility, time-management, and a serious attitude that college work is important. Both participants found studying on a consistent basis was absolutely necessary. These attributes represent some of the main skills participants stated were necessary in order to successfully complete a college class. Conley (2007a) stated participants such as the ones included in this study were “college-ready [because they were] able to understand what [was] expected in a college course, [they could] cope with the content knowledge...presented, and [they could] take away...the key intellectual lessons...” (p. 5). Moreover, Conley (2007a) also

supported the participant's understanding of what skills were needed for a student to succeed in a college level course. The participants acknowledged they needed many skills in place to be ready to take a college class such as time management, organization, study strategies, and an understanding of how to advocate for themselves in a college class.

Research question three: What were the participants' perceptions regarding the advice which helped/did not help when they considered taking a college class, and what strategies helped/did not help the participants complete a college course?

While neither participant stated he did not use the advice given or had advice he did not find helpful, the participants developed a clear understanding of the expectations and fundamental skills needed to take and successfully pass a college class.

Michael stated, "You can't fail if you ask for help, because that means you are trying and they will see that" (Michael, 1-20-19). He also stated being mature and prepared mattered in college classes because "acting like a little kid or messing around" was not accepted. Also, Michael shared how the processes set up to build relationships between students and teachers at the dual-enrollment high school helped him mentally prepare for taking a college class. Schhneider et al. (2006) stressed the need for Hispanic students to build strong relationships with their teachers, as their research demonstrated that poor relationships with teachers undermined Hispanic students' academic success. Participant Michael further explained teachers at the dual-enrollment high school made him practice communicating with them. He was required to see them during their "office hours," which were the days when teachers were in the study hall room offering help on their class' work. He explained this helped him because "when I took my first college class, I was a little bit nervous about asking my professor a question, but really it wasn't that different than asking my English teacher or math teacher for help" (Michael, 1-20-19).

Edgar had a different insight into the advice he received and used during his first few college classes. For one, he made friends with many of the top-performing seniors who were completing the last ten units of the sixty transferable classes needed before graduation. Edgar listened and observed them as they did homework for college classes, he talked with them about the workload of various classes, and even spent nights with them studying at a local restaurant. While Edgar explained no one directly gave him advice, he realized his normal “fly-by method” for completing work would be a problem when he took college classes. Edgar had never taken notes, made flash cards, or spent a week working on an essay. Instead, he “busted out work right before class started,” reviewed a few ideas from class, and as if it was magic, passed all his classes in his hometown high with grades that would indicate he was an accomplished learner. Edgar’s exposure to the depth of learning older students were doing and the conversations about the material they were learning may have been the best observational-advice he received. Similar to what Edgar described in his experiences with the seniors, Amaro-Jiménez and Hungerford-Kresser (2013) found that mentors who build rapport with students helped to “demystify” college, which in turn gave high school students more confidence to try college work. Edgar shared he also learned through his observations of older students that, “time management and having a set schedule was really important. I couldn’t be a ‘go-with-the-flow’ kind of guy anymore” (Edgar, 1-20-19). He explained, through watching the seniors, “I came to understand the importance of really knowing information, not facts and dates, but the application of the information.” This is what Edgar found really interesting and it led to him to dig deeper into his classes. The desire to understand and know created a situation for Edgar where he sought information about note-taking, calendaring long term assignments, and studying techniques for mid-term exams.

Edgar stated, “The one piece of advice I value the most is don’t underestimate the class, ever” (Edgar, 1-20-19). He stated from his senior friends he learned that “the teachers just wanted me to have the knowledge, that is what they want of all their students. The professors want students to understand the information. I try to keep this in my mind, which is something else my senior friends told me” (Edgar, 1-20-19). His friends also reassured him about college professors because they said the college professors like students who like to learn, and “this made me feel better because I am a student who likes to learn!” (Edgar, 1-20-19). All Edgar’s observations were made through his friendships with older students, and his willingness to ask these more experienced learners helped him make the transition to college classes.

Finally, Edgar shared one comment that, while it is not a piece of advice, it became something he learned to challenge. Edgar said, “Don’t tell [students] they can’t do something. Whether or not the student does well in the class academically or fails, experience is experience, and we all need experience” (Edgar, 1-20-19). Edgar’s insight aligns with Kanny’s (2015) research because whether or not the students in her study earned a passing or failing grade the students explained they learned from the experience the college class offered them.

Implications

While this qualitative research study cannot be generalized to similar students, it does explore the perceptions of dual-enrolled students because of the rich insights gained through the analysis. Therefore, the results of this study may be transferable. Although not directly stated, the analyzed data suggests how the two participants have transitioned and adapted, and from their perspective, have succeeded at the dual-enrollment high school. The discussion continues with recommendations for how to support students who may have similar characteristics.

Environment. From the participants' perspective, being at a dual-enrollment high school benefited them and their family as the integration of college classes within the high school model gave both of the participants' opportunities to study subjects not offered at their hometown high school. The dual-enrollment high school changed how each of the participants envision their future, which once did not include college. However, now both participants see a pathway to moving themselves, and their family, out of extreme poverty. The participants found a shift in their mindset about college because of the environment created by the dual-enrolled students and the teachers who stood steadfastly with them as they acclimated to the more rigorous learning environment and intense focus of taking college classes.

The data analysis also revealed the significance of environment on shaping and shifting the thinking of the participants. While each participant knew something about college, most of their knowledge equated to what they had watched on television or viewed in a movie. In their research, Amaro-Jiménez and Hungerford-Kresser (2013) found for more Latina/o students to make the transition to college, students needed to be in an environment that promoted a college-going culture. Information the participants offered acknowledged the importance of this research. The participants in this study explained that college was not a reality for either of them until both attended a school where college life was central to the day and permeated every conversation. The participants said much of the talk they had heard in their hometown either confirmed college was not going to be a part of their reality because "their group" ended up in jail or dead, or college was not attainable because even their teachers said they were not prepared when they went to college after attending their hometown high school.

From the participants' perspectives, it takes more than talk about college to get a student ready to go to college. It takes an environment that, from their perspective is "college-esque."

The participants knew about college, even if their only connection to it was through television and the movies. However, the participants also noted, college did not become a reality until they actually experienced it each day on a college campus. In addition, their peers were positive about their college classes, the workload, the professors, and how “doable” college classes could be, even for high school students. The observations of the participants suggested what Kanny (2015) found in her work, that students needed to experience and be in the environment of college to actually be prepared to participate in a college course and/or college life.

Role models/mentors. Participants in this study suggested students who attend a dual-enrollment high school, not only offer insight into the impact of a dual-enrolled model on the lives of students, but the students themselves become important role models for their fellow students. They also stated part of their ability to adapt to the dual-enrollment high school came from the mentor-like relationships built between themselves and older students. The research completed by Amaro-Jiménez and Hungerford-Kresser (2013) also found mentoring relationships between students who had experience in college with students who had not yet taken a college class mattered and positively influenced students to take the risk of enrolling in a college course.

From the perspective of the participants, these types of relationships, which surround college culture, give younger students role models and voices of wisdom. The participants believed the deep connections they had with the older students, the influence of those relationships, and the ongoing support, beyond the walls of the school, mattered as they adapted to school life at the dual-enrollment high school. In fact, Gandara’s (2009) research found that developing supportive peer groups was one possible method to help prepare more Latino students for college. Furthermore, a critical feature of programs working to bridge the gap

between K-12 education and colleges and universities for Latino students is about teaching students to build supportive networks which help them develop the confidence needed to successfully complete college courses (Gandara, 2009). The participants explained how their role models, and the relationships that moved from tutor-tutoree to friendships, influenced and continued to influence their thinking with regards to the role college will play in their future. Dual-enrolled schools may even consider purposely partnering older students with younger or new students, when they take their first college class, especially when the new students are similar in some ways to the participants.

Failure is not an option. The participants identified another factor that influenced them. By having a positive attitude, everything became possible with hard work and dedication. Michael specifically stated, “All the extra help there is [from the teachers and the older student tutors], you can’t fail, you really can’t fail because there is always hope. If you ask for help you are going to get it” (1-20-19). The value placed on creating a positive environment where hope can always be found and failing is simply “not allowed” impacted the importance of school for the participants. Along with the value of finding success through dedication and hard work, the participants found the bonds of family and belonging as part of what helped them shift their thinking about secondary and postsecondary schooling. The research completed by An (2015) suggested similar ideas to what the participants shared during their interviews in that dual enrollment offers a transitional period for students to learn the “rules and behaviors of what it means to be a college student” (p. 102). Furthermore, the participants also described a change or transformation within themselves in regards to being able to see themselves as college students. In An’s (2015) research, this too is significant because students similar to the participants are not only shifting from being high school students to being college students, but students are learning

to navigate a new social system when entering the college realm. The participants believed the difference in schooling environments and the influence of peer mentors or role models mattered. Their sense was that other students needed to experience the difference in order to make the mental shift of believing they too can succeed in college courses or become a college student.

School culture. An additional implication to consider came from the participants' descriptions of school culture and the general college mentality of the student body. The participants could not describe it or particularly name it, but they both stated that initially, the only connection they made between themselves and the dual-enrollment schooling culture was that it felt as if they were in a movie. The experiences and primary observations the two participants made about the dual-enrollment high school was rooted in, what they could only articulate from their knowledge of fictional worlds and what they had watched in movies. The reality of the vast difference between what the participants had experienced in a comprehensive school prior to coming to the dual-enrolled high school should not be overlooked because what may seem like normal school life to teachers, supporting adults, and some students at a dual-enrollment high school was, literally, foreign to the participants. The two types of schooling experiences had an impact on the participants' appreciation regarding what being a dual-enrollee offered for them and their future, this too may be something else for high schools to consider when developing a college-bound mindset with students who are similar to the participants in this study.

The impact of school culture, and the connections to other students and even supporting teachers and adults, created within the participants a desire to change or shift perspectives. However, this type of change does not happen overnight. Both participants talked about how their friends from their previous school continually wanted to hang out or "mess around" after

school, but their new friends at the dual-enrollment high school would balk at the idea of “ditching tutoring” to mess around. Michael specifically commented on this when explaining how he asked his new friends to hangout after school, and their answer would be “we can hang out in tutoring.” At first, Michael thought this was weird, because who hangs out to finish homework? However, over time Michael realized he was missing out on getting help by wasting his own time after school. With regards to his own change, Michael explained, “I’m in a good environment and my new friends, they’re all about school. So now I go to study and work with them on homework. Yeah, I am one of them now, because I think hanging out is studying” (1-20-19). This comment supports the research agenda created by the Hispanic Higher Education Research Collective (H3ERC) (2007), which suggests the psychosocial factors such as “interacting with students who are like-minded in high school” may have carry-over effects for higher education (p. 7). From the participants' point of view, the influence of peers at their dual-enrollment high school helped them make the shift to placing a higher value on school and doing well in both their high school and college classes.

Time for self-reflection. Finally, the participants suggested students should be given time to think about and reflect on the amount of change happening to them as they transitioned to a dual-enrollment high school. Student reflection can impact their belief in themselves so they can adapt and make college their reality. In many ways, these participants reflected the type of student Victor Rios (2015, November) shared about in his Ted Talk. Students’ lives outside of school are complicated, so sometimes they do not fit into the mold of school, and at times find it difficult to connect to their teachers or the adults who are trying to support them. Participants in this study acknowledged that moving schools was hard, so hard they did not know how to explain the stress they felt to the adults who were genuinely trying to help them. Edgar explained

it by saying it was like he and his brother spoke one language and everyone else spoke another.

In Kanny's (2015) research, the students interviewed also stated their transition from being a high school student to suddenly being a college student was challenging. They found it hard to explain because the expectations were so different and seldom straightforward.

Given the need for student self-reflection, one way high schools might support their students is to offer their dual enrolled students time to talk and consider the similarities and differences between the two educational experiences happening simultaneously. From the participants' perspective, this additional support and space to work through the complexities of being both a high school and college student could be a valuable component of the dual-enrollment model.

Moreover, the participants said they made many mistakes in those first few months because they did not understand the culture of the school. When they arrived, the participants applied their knowledge of school to their new school. Behaviors such as "messaging around" in class, coming in tardy from lunch, not having homework completed were all a normal part of what happened at their old school. However, the participants quickly learned these types of behaviors were not only unacceptable, but the students at the dual-enrollment high school rarely wasted class time when given work to do by their teachers. Additionally, the participants quickly learned the norms such as being to class on time, having all homework completed and ready to turn in to the teacher at the start of class, and that class time was work time, not "messaging around" time as Michael stated, "Dang these students are serious about learning!" (Michael, 1-20-19). As the research discussed in the literature review, Gacia (2001) found some of the barriers stopping Hispanics from experiencing success in college stems from a lack of understanding the academic expectations and behaviors. Certainly Michael's and Edgar's first

few months support these findings. Students who attend a dual enrollment high school or plan to attend a university after high school, need to know the “rules” or understand the “social expectations” associated with being said schooling level.

The participants also noted the difference in interaction between themselves and the adults who were trying to hold them accountable at the dual-enrollment high school. Participants felt the smaller environment led to more caring and supportive teachers and other adults. In their research, McDonald and Farrell (2012) also found the smaller learning community allowed for more “built-in academic and social support” which helped students become academically successful (p. 240). At their previous school, participants stated detentions and in house suspensions were common when the school rules were not followed or homework was not completed. However, at the dual-enrollment high school the focus was more on a reflection of their behavior, the outcome, and visualizing the result of a more positive choice. This thinking time, from the perspective of the participants, gave them the space to reflect on their choices and make their own decisions to change or handle a situation differently. Both participants stated this made them feel more in charge and more like a college student. Their comments are consistent with student perspectives in, Kanny’s (2015) research where they too appreciated more freedom and responsibility over their lives when taking college courses.

While not every day went well for the two participants, the adults who stepped in focused on positive changes being made. Even at their worst moments, some adults simply ignored the “bad” behaviors. The participants said they practically memorized advice from the adults in their lives. An example of guidance given was to reflect on a choice and decide if it moved them positively towards their goals or away from their goals. Depending on the answer, the adult helped them consider the optimal choice for the next time. Both participants started to laugh at

recalling this, but they also said coming to a dual-enrolled school required so much mental energy they did not always think through their choices in those early months. Even now the mantra of considering how a choice might impact them runs through their heads, especially when they consider whether to do their homework or skip it. By thinking and reflecting, on a method for working through the challenges facing a dual-enrollee, it might also be a way to help students who are similar to the participants, make a mental transition needed to take and successfully complete a college class.

Although this qualitative study only interviewed two students, which is a limitation of the study, the information participants provided represents their lived experiences at the dual-enrollment high school. Their stories, perspectives, and perceptions are valuable and may even be transferable because the information gathered through interviewing the participants may offer methods or strategies for helping other students, similar to the participants, become successful at a school emphasizing dual enrollment for high school age students.

Recommendations for Further Research, Policy, and Practice

While the research study had the limitation of interviewing two participants who are Mexican-American half-brothers, the lived experiences shared by the participants suggests areas where further research can be done. Additionally, the information shared by the participants also suggests some possibilities in policy change. Lastly, the shared stories may offer educators' ideas for potential changes to practice when working with students who are similar to the ones in this study.

Research. Further research needs to be implemented in order to discover more about what positively and negatively influences the experiences students have in small dual-enrollment high schools. Additional research, may help more educators understand the complexities students

face when transitioning from a comprehensive schooling model to a dual-enrollment model. It would also be interesting to learn how other students managed the transition from an educationally limited and socio-disadvantaged environment to a schooling environment where college and thinking about the future are embedded in the school culture. As the research presented in the literature review suggests, too few (nine percent) of students who are similar to the participants in this study make it to college and earn a bachelor's degree (Crisp et al., 2015). More research could be done to understand how mentoring relationships, school culture, and a no-fail attitude could be incorporated into secondary educational institutions. Perhaps more students might experience a similar shift in thinking as the students in this study who explained their experiences during their first year and a half at a dual-enrollment program. Overall, the Hispanic Higher Education Research Collective (2007) in their research agenda stated there are many psychosocial factors that need to be investigated through research. Among others, these include interaction with other students, actions and decisions of like-minded friends in high school, and the influences of social and family support systems. However, these few ideas, of many, played a significant role in the transition participants made. More research could be done at comprehensive high schools and dual-enrollment high schools in order for educators to learn additional ways to help students visualize themselves as college students, living what the participants in this study referred to as being "in a movie."

Policy and Practice. Although this qualitative study included only two participants, the data analyzed from the interviews suggested there were aspects of school and the relationships connected to a school site that influence the thinking of students. The type of relationships between older and younger students and how to develop them would be valuable to consider when creating policy for or designing a dual enrollment high school. Schools that use a dual-

enrollment learning model can use research to develop a practice of systematically mentoring younger students in way that allows the students to develop to their potential learning capacity. Moreover, mentoring relationships may help alleviate the challenges students, who are similar to the participants in this study, may face as they make the transition to become a dual enrollee.

Furthermore, practices identified in this study with a small dual-enrolled high school could also be used in a comprehensive high school that offers a few dual-enrolled classes on their high school campus. It would be interesting to learn how students who attend a comprehensive high school and take a dual-enrolled class adapted to the expectations and different modes of instruction. Practice and policy that can integrate academics and building relationships centered on developing a college mindset with students similar to the ones in this study has the potential to offer growth for students who may enter school without a vision for college. Also, further research can be done to develop practices which help more educators understand how to support students who experience such challenges as simple geography (e.g., traveling one hour and ten minutes by bus to school).

Furthermore, schools working with students who are similar to the participants in this study need a program or a system to assess the potential barriers in the lives of their students which may limit their students from being successful such as having the needed technology i.e. Internet, completing work on time, understanding the assignments and work expectations, how to get students to and from the extra-curricular activities that are essential for building student relationships and connections to a school and its teachers. In addition, a high school could explore the possibility of older students developing deep relationships with younger or new students in order to improve educational outcomes for many students, especially Hispanic students who are a part of the fast-growing population in the United States (Santos & Sáenz,

2014). Another aspect of practice that comprehensive high schools could adopt is creating smaller populations within a large school to create the type of family-like bond between the older students and students who are similar to the participants in this study. This practice could create the type of school culture that changes a student's mindset about seeking a postsecondary education.

Finally, this type of research, practice, and policy may help educators better understand what students need to experience at all school sites so they can have what the participants called, "a mindset revolution, boom!" (Michael, 1-26-19). More research and even small changes in practice may help students, who as the literature review explains seem to fall away from school. While it may seem, due to the small size of this study, to be "going out on a limb," educators need to know more about some of the nation's most challenging students. As the literature and this research study revealed, students similar to the participants in this study need the opportunity to make a shift in their thinking from seeing their future as a choice between death and jail to a future where a college degree is earned, job security exists, and a lifestyle where items such as money, food, and even electricity are no longer a worry. The Hispanic Higher Education Research Collective (2007) stated Hispanics are the largest, youngest, and fastest growing minority group in the nation, thus not only does moving this group of students through the K-12 system become an educational imperative, but their academic success also represents an economic necessity for the United States economy.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the schooling perceptions of two male Mexican-American participants who made a shift from a comprehensive model of education to a dual-enrollment model of education. While the participants shared experiences and perspectives on

their transition, the complexities and the depth of the changes these two young men experienced extend beyond the pages of this dissertation. The two participants recognized that in order for change to truly happen for themselves and other students who are in similar situations talk or lectures is not enough. In fact, from their perspective, for other students to make the same types of changes they did, it means a complete change in lifestyle and environment. Edgar explained it this way,

I don't think anybody really understands how much I have changed. The lifestyle I come from can only be explained by connecting it to gangster movies. The drive-by shootings, close friends that I personally knew killed at a young age, friends getting jumped and being in the hospital for weeks, having to do things to survive, and having to do things you shouldn't have to do to survive. To actually survive, that was my lifestyle and that was my life. Then, I came to the dual enrollment high school with college and my whole world changed 180 degrees. I do care about school and generally want to learn, but that was always an afterthought considering everything else that was happening in my life. But, at this school, I had friends who actually wanted to learn too, who focused deeply on education who were and still are there for me. There are so many differences like the kids here have money and all these different things that had never been a part of my life. Like, in their houses, they don't talk about how to collect enough cans to pay the electricity bill or think about which clothes to wash because only one load of laundry can be done for the whole family, things like that. It was hard, really hard [for me to take in all the changes]. (Edgar, 1-20-19)

The participants, in particular, Edgar, emphasized how the change in environment, the activities, the classes, the friendships he developed helped him make the shift from one type of view on life

(he states without the dual-enrollment high school he would be in jail or dead) to understanding how education can truly change his future. He said, “I appreciate everything. My whole new lifestyle. I appreciate it because I now know if I really work for what I want my future does not have to be the lifestyle I have grown up with, it can be different” (Edgar, 1-20-19).

The literature for this dissertation suggests what is currently happening in secondary education is leaving too many Hispanic students without the academic skills needed to successfully make the transition from high school to college (Gandara, 2009; Garcia, 2001). The participants in this study indirectly suggest the problem cannot be solved by just changing what is taught in the classroom. For students, who are similar to the participants, to successfully move through high school and onto college, the participants never talked about changing the curriculum or looking at statistics; instead, they suggested it means creating a system where their voices, and who they are as students, as individuals, matter. Edgar stated the one thing that really influenced him was the constant sense from teachers and his older friends that he mattered, “...we need to give every single student the reassurance that everyone matters. I know we do this, but I don’t think all the students get that sometimes, but each student needs to know their voice is being heard and it matters” (Edgar, 1-20-19). While both participants understand a school can only do so much, they also each stated the system of schooling they came from was so impersonal it seemed as if no one cared what happened to them. Michael in particular shared his feelings about this reality, “the teachers at my old school did not care what I did, but at this school the teachers came in early to help me, one teacher would wait for me after-school so I would go to tutoring. I knew the teachers cared because they kept asking if they could help me, even when I didn’t act the best or even say I needed help” (Michael, 1-20-19).

What the participants helped me understand about themselves, their experiences, and perhaps what may be happening with other students, and how the system of education might change came down to this idea from Edgar who said, “Maybe at the end of the day, it is about moving forward and the more we know, the more we can move forward. There is no one way to live or there’s no one way that’s better than the another because at the end of the day experience is experience and that is why you have to go for it” (Edgar, 1-26-19).

The more questions I ask, or anyone asks, the more we will all learn and come to understand regarding what is happening in the lives of the students in our classrooms. We need “more experience” to create a schooling environment where the students receive the type of assurances and level of care the participants stated mattered so much to them. One of the messages that continues to resonate with me surrounds the participants desire for connection to their teachers, to their peers, and to having their voice heard. The participants suggest a deep need exists for educators to connect personally with their students, all of their students, which means that perhaps the age of the factory model for schooling needs to end.

While this study only consists of two participants, their voices and thoughts about how the change in environment, the personal investment of the teachers and older students, and the close family-like environment made a difference and helped these two Mexican-American students make, from their perspective, a radical change in their schooling and their future plans. Perhaps if other secondary schools could facilitate changes to create a schooling environment that allowed students and teachers to be more deeply connected, other students might experience the “180-degree change” that Edgar states happened to him when he left the comprehensive model of schooling and came to a dual-enrollment model of schooling, which both Edgar and

Michael, despite the challenges and long distance of travel, stated enthusiastically “is totally worth it” (Edgar & Michael, 1-26-19).

Regardless of what the future brings, this qualitative research study offered me a chance to understand the impact of this dual-enrollment high school on the lives of Edgar and Michael and learn how the change in schooling models shifted their thinking and their family’s thinking. Edgar explained, “It is weird how much the dual-enrolled high school has just changed our mindset and is changing how we appreciate life. Just understanding everything didn’t only change me and my brother because we are attending here, but it changed my whole family” (Edgar, 1-20-19). That should be the focus of schooling, helping students, all students, and their families find their future, and their success through education.

Researcher’s Personal Note

So much more could be written about the thinking and ideas shared by these two young men. The complex influence of their past, the constant moving between two different worlds, the struggle and worry about being able to meet everyone’s expectations, and the genuine toll of maintaining twelve to fourteen hour days when being only fifteen and sixteen years old could all be deeply examined. But what I learned, which I think many of my colleagues would agree with, is relationships and connections with students matter the most. If a student is hungry give them food, if they need a ride to a dance then find them a ride, and they need someone to believe in them, especially when they do not believe in themselves, then they need the adults in their lives to be their cheerleaders. We all want a magic bullet in education to help make sure more students who are similar to Edgar and Michael make it through the education system successfully, but no magic bullet exists.

No magic theory or method will solve all the complex issues students who are similar to the participants in this study face each day in the schooling system. Perhaps what can be considered or worked on by myself and my fellow colleagues may be changing the impersonal institution that school often represents to so many students who feel it pushes hordes of young people through its grade levels, classes, and then out its doors. Instead, education, schools in particular, need to be places, as Edgar said, where “your voice matters.” Students need to experience a deep sense of belonging and spend time with adults who not only care about their subject matter, but who deeply invest in the lives of young people to the degree that teachers and fellow students are viewed as family. Relationships and connections matter. When that happens, students will not drop out or be ignored because who would let their little brother or sister be left out or ignored? No one would. That is the level of commitment, I think the participants in this study are suggesting is needed today, that the education system should ensure each student experiences a sense of belonging, mattering, and believing his/her voice is listened to and heard by the educators running the school site.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

High School Graduation Requirements

Subject	Credit
English: English 9, English 10/English 10 Honors, English 11, and English 12/Expository Reading and Writing	40
History/Social Science:	30
World History and Cultures	10
United States History	10
American Government, Civics (<i>semester</i>)	5
Economics (<i>semester</i>)	5
Mathematics: <i>All students must pass Algebra or an approved sequence of courses covering the Algebra standards (Ed. Code 51224.5) in grades 7-12. *Recommended</i>	30
Algebra I*, Geometry*, Algebra II*, and Pre-Calculus	
Science (<i>Students need a 1 year of a life science and 1 year of a physical science</i>) <i>*Required</i>	25
Physical-Earth Science/Chemistry* (<i>students must pick 1</i>)	10
Biological Science*	10
Anatomy/Physiology	10
Health (<i>semester</i>)*	5
Physical Education	20
Foreign Language	20
Fine Arts	10
Electives	55
Total to Graduate	230
College Unit/Credit (<i>required on top of total units for High School courses</i>)	20

Appendix B

Questions for my interviews were adapted from McDonald and Farrell's (2012) study titled, "Out of the Mouths of Babes: Early College High School Students' Transformational Learning Experiences." Below are the questions McDonald and Farrell (2012) used with their participants:

- What is the main reason you decided to attend Dual Enrollment High School (DEHS)?
- Please share what you believe to be the most valuable aspect, class, activity, and/or experience you gained from your time at DEHS?
- What are the academic skills you learned at DEHS that prepared you (your son/daughter) for college?
- How have the teachers and staff at DEHS prepared you for the course work expectations at your university/college?
- How do you feel DEHS has prepared you for the social experiences or pressures of college?
- In what ways has or did DEHS provide you with a social foundation?
- How has DEHS helped you emotionally prepare for college?
- What did you fear most about college?
- If there was one thing you would like to add or change about DEHS to better prepare you emotionally, socially, or academically for college, what would it be?
- How does attaining a college degree support your future goals?

Appendix C

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY HSRC INITIAL REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Page 8

Title: An Exploration into Schooling Perceptions of Dual Enrollment Students

Principal Researcher(s): Helen L. Milliom-Feller

Date application completed: December 3, 2018

(The researcher needs to complete the above information on this page)

For Committee Use Only

COMMITTEE FINDING:

[M (1) The proposed research makes adequate provision for safeguarding the health and dignity of the subjects and is therefore approved..

[2 (2) Due to the assessment of risk being questionable or being subject to change, the research must be periodically reviewed by the HSRC on a basis throughout the course of the research or until otherwise notified. This requires resubmission of this form, with updated information, for each periodic review.

C] (3) The proposed research evidences some unnecessary risk to participants and therefore must be revised to remedy the following specific area(s) on non-compliance:

[2 (4) The proposed research contains serious and potentially damaging risks to subjects and is therefore not approved.

Coxo

12/14/18

Chair or designated member Date

Appendix DInterview Questions for Student Participants

Background/Prior Schooling

1. What is the main reason for deciding to attend the dual-enrollment high school?
2. What was it like to move from your comprehensive high school to a dual-enrollment charter high school?
3. Can you describe what it was like the first month or so at the dual-enrollment high school?
4. What did you worry about or fear when deciding to come to the dual-enrollment high school?

Academic Preparedness and Self-Perceptions

1. What are the academic skills needed to be prepared to take a college course?
2. What are the academic skills you learned at the dual-enrollment high school that helped prepare you for taking college courses?
3. Can you describe what it means to you to be academically prepared to take college courses?
4. In what ways have the teachers and staff helped prepare you for the course work expectations in your college classes?

Strategies and Advice Regarding College Courses

1. What do you think helped you become ready to take college courses?
2. What do you believe was the most valuable strategy, piece or advice, class, activity, and/or experience that prepared you for the expectations of a college course? What was the least valuable?
3. What strategies or advice helped you become socially ready to take college courses?

4. What strategies or advice helped you become emotionally ready to handle the pressure associated with taking college classes?
5. Is there something you would like to see added or changed at dual-enrollment high school that you believe would have better prepared you academically, socially, and/or emotionally when taking college classes?

College Courses and Future

1. How does taking college classes while still in high school support your future goals?

Appendix E

Letter of Consent for Participating Students

An Exploration of Schooling Perceptions of Dual-Enrollment Students

A Qualitative Research Study

Dear Parent and Student,

My name is Helen Milliorn-Feller and I am a student in the Doctor of Instructional Design and Development program at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I am also the lead teacher at a charter school in the Central Valley of California. As a requirement of my program, I will be conducting research and have chosen to examine the perceptions of students understanding regarding academic preparedness and college readiness.

Your student is invited to engage in an interview regarding his/her experiences as a high school student in a dual-enrollment program. The questions are open-ended and relate to your student's experiences at a charter school on a community college campus where your student is both a high school and college student. I hope the findings from the information gathered through the interviews will reveal the various attributes of what academic preparedness and college readiness look like from a student's perspective.

The risks associated with this research are minimal. The interview questions are general in nature and not personal. Therefore, the interviews should not create any discomfort for your student. Nevertheless, please be aware participation in this research study is completely voluntary, not connected to any high school or college course, grades, nor does it impact your student's participation in any school related-activities, and your student may decline to continue with the interview at any time, as well as your student may decline to answer any question at his/her discretion.

The results of this study will only be used for research purposes, which may include presentations at a professional conference and/or academic publications. Personal interviews will be audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Information will be analyzed and presented in an anonymous manner and no individual will be personally identified, either by name or by schooling details. I will keep any personal information and identities confidential.

All research materials (i.e., audio-recordings, transcriptions, and signed consent forms) will be locked in a separate, secure location for a period of no less than three years. I will be the only individual who will have access to these materials. After three years, I will personally destroy all relevant materials and delete the audio recordings.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this project. If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at (559) 901-8485, or my advisor at George Fox University, Dr. Scot Headley, at (503) 554-2836.

If you understand the use of this research and agree to participate, please sign below.

Participant signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher signature: _____ Date: _____