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The Orientation Curriculum in a Community College: An Interpretive Approach

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INTERPRETIVE APPROACH

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by

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on curriculum used in a community college orientation program classroom where most of the students were Hispanic. Curriculum for the purpose of student orientation has become an essential tool for increasing student retention rates at institutions of higher education (Hendel, 2007; National Research Council Publications, 2009). While the objectives of orientation courses and their curricula have been documented, not much is known about how these objectives unfold in classrooms, particularly in classrooms serving Hispanic students.

Qualitative inquiry was the basis for my study. I relied on an ethnographic approach to conduct research that involved gathering data by observing the routine ways in which people make sense of their everyday life (Spindler & Spindler, 1987). Given that I was interested in what and how a professor and students produced as a local version of an orientation course curriculum, how they enacted the curriculum in practice, and with what outcomes, qualitative inquiry using an ethnographic approach was appropriate for my study.

To gain an understanding of the meaning imposed on curriculum in a particular classroom, I examined the three layers that constituted the curriculum in total: the formal curriculum, the enacted curriculum, and the experienced curriculum (Glatthorn, Boschee & Whitehead, 2005; Mendez, 2006; Page, 1991). What the curriculum says should be taught and how it gets taught in the classroom along with what the student hears, learns, and creates are almost always very different things (Sizer, 1999).

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CHAPTER ONE: THE CURRICULUM OF ORIENTATION

1.1 Introduction

This study focuses on curriculum used in an orientation program classroom where most of the students are Hispanic[1]. Curriculum for the purpose of student orientation has become an essential tool for increasing student retention rates at institutions of higher education (Hendel, 2007; National Research Council Publications, 2009). While the objectives of orientation courses and their curricula have been documented, not much is known about how these objectives unfold in classrooms, particularly in classrooms serving Hispanic students. This study analyzes and describes what a curriculum for orientation looks like, how it is enacted, and of what benefit it is to the students it is meant to serve.

1.2 Orientation Programs in Response to College Retention Issues

Since the mid twentieth century, the number and diversity of students attending colleges and universities have greatly increased (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup & Kuh, 2008). Decades ago, undergraduates were mostly from homogeneous backgrounds with an established social order, shared values, and an understanding of what it meant to be an undergraduate student on a college campus; however, today's students are diverse in every conceivable way (Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup & Kuh, 2008).

Although student retention research has proliferated since the mid 1960s, Berger and Lyon (2005) referred to the 1990s as the "era of the emergence of persistence" (p. 25) as retention of students came to the forefront of educational issues. While student retention

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[1] While much of the literature uses Hispanic to describe persons of U.S. Hispanic culture, others prefer the use of Latino. Both words are representative of the Hispanic culture.

research informed the objectives of curriculum used in orientation courses, much of this research began at a time when the college student population was predominately Caucasian (Lascher, 2009). Additional research has indicated that students of color, in comparison to nonminority students, perceived college environments as being less supportive (Allen, 1992; Lascher, 2009; Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle, 1986; Rendón, 1994).

A high number of university students drop out before completing their education for a variety of reasons (Barefoot, 2004; Davig & Spain, 2004; Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup & Kuh, 2008; Rooney, 2012). Generally, factors include student background characteristics, precollege academic experiences, structural characteristics of institutions such as mission, size, and selectivity, and interactions with faculty and staff (Braxton, 2000; Lascher, 2009; Rendón & Munoz, 2011; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1993). In particular, a high percentage of Hispanic students are unprepared to succeed in college environments (Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup & Kuh, 2008, Rooney, 2012).

In response to student retention issues, numerous universities and community colleges have implemented orientation programs and curriculum used in orientation courses with objectives for helping incoming freshmen successfully transition into the physical, social, and academic environments of higher education (Bean, 2005; Davig & Spain, 2004; Fidler, 1991; Gordon, 1989; Hendel, 2007; National Research Council Publications, 2009; Rendón, 1994, 2002). Increasingly, interventions include what are commonly known as: University 101 orientation courses, freshmen survey or seminar courses, survival courses, student success courses, and study skills courses. Research has shown that these orientation programs improve student retention from the freshman to sophomore year (Davig & Spain, 2004; Fidler & Hunter, 1989; Fidler, 1991; Micceri & Wajeeh, 1999; National Research Council Publications, 2009;

Ness, Rhodes & Rhodes, 1989). While results are positive for freshman to sophomore year retention, retention through graduation is less conclusive (Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle, 1986; Wolf-Wendel, Tuttle & Keller-Wolff, 1999; Micceri & Wajeeh, 1999).

1.2.1 Why Analyze the Curriculum?

Given that the objectives emerging from retention research have been incorporated into curriculum used in orientation courses, it is important that this type of curriculum be analyzed. To understand and improve curriculum, one must first know what the curriculum is (Ratcliff, 1997). According to Apple and Taxel (1987), success in curriculum is often defined as meeting the objectives set down. Thinking about curriculum is a complicated undertaking, one which should not only be concerned with setting out objectives, but more so with getting knowledge across to students (Apple and Taxel, 1987). Understanding the knowledge created by curriculum entails an inspection of the various layers that make up curriculum. As Gaff (1997) acknowledged, curriculum consists of what is offered by the educational institution, taught by faculty, and learned by the students. What curriculum is, what it ultimately becomes, and how it is experienced defines what curriculum is in its entirety (Sizer, 1999).

Curriculum unfolds in classrooms that are socially and culturally organized environments (Erickson, 1985), and therefore where curriculum begins and what it becomes can differ significantly (Sizer, 1999). It is in the environment of the classroom where formal and informal systems intertwine to create a localized version of the enacted curriculum (Erickson, 1985). It is in the classroom where curriculum is constructed by the perspectives of the teacher and the learner, both of whom are central to the educational process (Erickson, 1985; Sizer, 1999). Ultimately, it is how curriculum is experienced by the student that shapes what is learned. The experienced curriculum is a construct of what the student understands, learns, and retains from

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the formal curriculum and the enacted curriculum (Glatthorn, Boschee & Whitehead, 2005; Sizer, 1999).

1.3 Historical Emergence of College Student Orientation

Orientation education and its curriculum, as we know it today, is mostly absent from early educational literature (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Given that the goal of early colonial education was to serve a homogeneous group of students, mostly wealthy Caucasian, Protestant males, there was no need to consider the issue of orientation in higher education (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Furmann, 1997; Harada, 1994; Levine & Nidiffer, 1997; Marsh & Willis, 2006). Higher education during colonial times was expensive and impractical for the vast majority of society (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Furmann, 1997; Harada, 1994). The colonial college's mission was to teach basic classical knowledge and useful intellectual skills mostly to students who were the elite of colonial society (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Furmann, 1997; Harada, 1994; Levine & Nidiffer, 1997; Marsh & Willis, 2006). This trend persisted well into the mid-nineteenth century (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

By the mid-nineteenth century, a need for professionally trained men emerged and increasingly diverse male students were being educated for vocations in law and public life. Colleges began to rapidly expand during the mid to late nineteenth century. Men of all denominations and ages were being admitted in higher numbers and curricula were going through dramatic changes (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Marsh & Willis, 2006). While colleges continued to mostly cater to the elite of society, an increasingly diverse student body of men began to emerge at universities.

The tremendous growth in popular journalism as well as the rapid advance of railroads was helping transform U.S. society from isolated self-contained communities to an urban

industrial nation (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Marsh & Willis, 2006). Not only did these changes bring about the nationalization of curriculum in K-12 education, they also brought to the forefront debates about what schools should be teaching America's students. From the 1820s and into the 1830s, college enrollments began to grow significantly and between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, hundreds of colleges were founded (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

During the late nineteenth century, the idea that the masses could benefit from education began to take hold. Opportunities for increased student diversity on college campuses were emerging. Women's colleges, such as Vassar founded in 1861 and Wellesley founded in 1875 (Hurada, 1994), created greater opportunities for women to attend college. Between 1860 and 1900, the U.S. population doubled, mostly because of large numbers of immigrants. Additional opportunities for student body diversity grew as land grant universities, through the Morrill Act of 1862, made education more accessible to a wider student population. Land grant institutions and state universities offered courses preparing students for specific vocations such as agriculture, education, and public service. Military training and physical education were also required at land grant institutions. Black colleges were founded following the Civil War, but they were limited in what they were allowed to teach and mostly provided a secondary basic education. The second Morrill Act of 1890 mandated that it would not support states that discriminated against the admission of African Americans and who failed to provide separate but equal educational facilities.

Interestingly, while the mid to late nineteenth century was a period when the number of universities and colleges was growing, in 1890, a mere 6 to 7 percent of the secondary school age population actually attended secondary school (Kliebard, 2004). Of that 6 to 7 percent, 75

percent went on to college. Therefore, while student diversity was growing, their numbers were not necessarily large enough to signal a need for orientation.

By the early twentieth century, the nation had become industrialized and increasingly urban (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Some campuses remained selective in who they allowed into their institutions. Students from elite families were given preferential treatment (Berger & Lyon, 2005). These institutions began to define themselves as elitists. Many less selective colleges, including community colleges, arose at this time to serve students who might not otherwise have been given access to a postsecondary education (Berger & Lyon, 2005). By the end of World War II, there were 500 community colleges with 250,000 students enrolled, and within 10 years the enrollment figure had doubled (Hurada, 1994). Community colleges served a diverse student body, and during this time enrollments soared (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

Government policy after the Great Depression and World-War II brought about additional and rapid growth in college enrollments. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (informally called the GI bill) contained provisions for educating returning soldiers for the civilian job market. The GI bill had an immense effect on college enrollments. Additionally, in the late 1940s and 1950s, demand for greater minority access to a college education surfaced. The Civil Rights movement in the 1960s resulted in additional educational opportunities for African Americans and other minorities (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

Growth was further heightened when the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 provided funding to United States educational institutions at all levels (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The NDEA provided funding for students through federal student loan programs and graduate fellowships in the sciences and engineering. Funding was also provided for teacher education. Curriculum development in the sciences, math, and foreign languages was

supported by a surge of federal funding. Additionally, funding for educational institution capital construction was provided.

Universities were faced with an influx of minorities onto college campuses spurred by the GI Bill and the Civil Rights movement (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Many universities either were unprepared for the increasingly diverse student body or unwilling to create supportive environments for students of color (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Retention rates were particularly low for minority students, especially given that many had not been provided with adequate educational preparation due to inequities in school systems throughout America (Berger & Lyon, 2005). While at one time higher education was mostly for the elite of society, students from diverse economic backgrounds were increasingly attending college. State and federal funding allowed middle and lower income class students to attend college, but many of them were also educationally unprepared. The new breed of college student struggled to not only meet academic expectations, but also the social norms of being in college (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

1.3.1 Accountability and Retention Rates

The first documented study of retention rates by John McNeely was published by the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Office of Education in 1938 (Berger & Lyon, 2005). The retention of students was considered a primary indication of the successfulness of an institution of higher education (McNeely, 1938). During the depression years, the federal government engaged in cooperative research with institutes of higher education as it sought ways to afford gainful and socially desirable employment to college graduates (McNeely, 1938). This led to McNeely's extensive 1937 study which examined the extent of attrition, average time to degree completion, prevalent attrition points, impact of various factors such as gender, age at entrance, work, the size of the institution, and reasons for departure (Berger & Lyon, 2005;

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McNeely, 1938). McNeely's study laid the groundwork for comprehensive studies that would become common some thirty years later, greatly influencing curricula used in orientation programs.

During the 1960s, the criteria set out by McNeely (1938) was again needed to guide the perceived success of higher education as students began to express dissatisfaction with the political and functional aspects of campus life (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Student unrest resulted in increased activism and campus rebellion. Additionally, the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War added to the dissent and a demand for higher education accountability (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Students attending colleges and universities had changed over time. They were no longer attended by the few chosen, generally homogenous, privileged individuals of yesteryear (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Student retention became a major issue as accountability for providing opportunities to diverse students who were demanding access to higher education increased (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

Orientation education and its curriculum emerged as a result of concerns about student retention. As educational opportunities became available to a population who traditionally did not seek or have access to higher education, research related to student retention became an issue of increasing importance (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Additionally, the demand for accountability related to student retention spurred the growth of retention research (Berger & Lyon, 2005), which subsequently led to an increase of college orientation programs (Hendel, 2007; National Research Council Publications, 2009).

1.3.2 Early College Orientation Programs

The first orientation seminar implemented for college credit occurred at Reed College in 1911 (National Research Council Publications, 2009). In its early development, it was a

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curriculum implemented under the general education category (Harada, 1994). By 1926, there were over 100 courses resembling orientation courses in the general education category with 42 focusing on guidance, 16 teaching how to learn, and 34 containing aspects of contemporary civilization (Harada, 1994). While curriculum for orientation began to expand as early as 1926, and, although increasing economic and religious diversity existed on college campuses, students were still mostly Caucasian males.

In 1972, the University of South Carolina began a University 101 orientation course (Murphy, 1989). The goal was to improve retention by focusing on survival skills which included an examination of the value of going to college, creation of a peer support group, exploration of academic majors, improvement of academic skills, identification and use of campus resources, and review of personal issues such as sexuality and drug use (Murphy, 1989). By 1985, this type of seminar was the one most often adopted at the larger public institutions of higher education (Gordon, 1989; Murphy, 1989).

Variations of curriculum content and format may be present across the curriculum used in orientation classrooms; however, some important features of earlier models addressing such issues as student adjustment needs, introduction to specific majors, career exploration, the purpose of college, and general orientation are still present today (Gordon, 1989; National Research Council Publications, 2009). Many of today's orientation courses are seen as "skills" courses where specific knowledge about study habits, career goals, and coping strategies for meeting the demands of being a university student are taught (Gordon, 1989; Zeidenberg, Jenkins & Calcagno, 2007). While many orientation courses use a curriculum that seeks to help students learn about the university environment, learn about careers, and adjust academically,

additional non-academic life skills objectives are also included which promote positive sexual, mental, and physical health.

1.4 Where the Influences of Curriculum Reform has Led Us

In summary, the foremost battle over curriculum reform occurred between 1893 and 1958, beginning at the pre-college levels of primary and secondary educational issues where it moved out of the rural areas to become a national preoccupation (Kliebard, 2004). As society changed, so did the purpose of education; opportunities for attaining a college education increased. The GI Bill in 1944 created postsecondary opportunities for returning military, and the passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 was a vehicle used by the federal government for massive entry into curriculum matters (Kliebard, 2004). NDEA included support for loans to college students, the improvement of science, mathematics, and foreign language instruction in elementary and secondary schools, graduate fellowships, foreign language and area studies, and vocational-technical training (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). All of these changes created opportunities for greater student diversity.

As a consequence, education and the curriculum that defines it have gone through many changes which may be seen in terms of philosophy, policy, practice, intent, content, or consequences (Bean, 2005; Gaff, 1997). The history of curriculum is one in which the most persuasive of cultural values and beliefs have achieved legitimization into the national discourse (Kliebard, 2004). Reflected in educational program curricula are the norms, values, and behavior of local culture influenced by the larger societal culture. Today as throughout history, an educational institution's curriculum implicitly represents the philosophy and aims of society, and is often expressed explicitly within orientation coursework.

1.5 Theoretical Perspectives on Student Retention

1.5.1 General Retention Research

Student retention research has directly informed curricula used in orientation programs and courses. Curricula objectives were designed as a means of facilitating student adjustment to the college environment and the demands of being a college student. Knowledge of student retention research is important to understanding how and why orientation programs and its curricula have evolved. While existing research does not describe what orientation objectives look like as they unfold in an orientation classroom, much research exists that justifies the objectives themselves. Acknowledging and examining student retention research is critical to understanding the inclusion of objectives in the curriculum that is the focal point of this study.

By the mid 1970s, enrollments in higher education exceeded 11 million (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Additionally, university and community college students had become increasingly diversified (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Retention was becoming an issue of concern across a wider range of university and community college campuses (Berger & Lyon, 2005). As a result, advances in the study of retention began to emerge and proliferate (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Research on student retention brought to the forefront a possible connection between the college environment and student academic success (Astin & Oseguera, 2005; Bean, 2005; Bean & Eaton, 2000; Berger, 2000; Braxton, 2000; Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon 2004; Kuh & Love, 2000; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1993; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). Building on these perceived connections, curriculum for orientation as it was implemented at university and college levels emphasized an approach that increasingly focused on a relationship between the individual and the community (Harada, 1994).

In 1971, Spady published a review of empirical literature that focused on dropout issues during the 1960s. Much of Spady's (1971) and other existing research on retention began to focus on the interaction between student attributes and the university environment. Spady (1971) identified five student variables that contributed to social integration: academic potential, normative congruence, grade performance, intellectual development, and friendship support, all of which increased a student's likelihood of retention and attainment of a college degree.

One of the most well known models was developed by Vincent Tinto. Tinto built on Spady's research and introduced the interactionalist theory of student departure (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Tinto's (1993) interactionalist theory stated that the decision to depart was affected by the student's characteristics and their initial commitment to the institution and to graduation. Tinto (1993) believed that students who were committed to the goal of getting an education would persist. Those who were not sufficiently committed to the goal of getting an education or to the institution would depart. He posited that students who failed to integrate into the university environment would fail to persist and graduate. He also understood that universities could take action to help students transition into the university environment (Tinto, 1987, 1988, 1993).

According to Tinto (1988), upon entering a university environment, the degree of change a student must go through depends on how different their home or community life was from that of the university culture. Their past life may not have prepared them for the new life. A student with college educated parents, for example, would have a different experience with transitioning than a student from a family without a college education. It would be expected that poorer students, minority students, and older students would have a more difficult time negotiating the transition stage.

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Tinto (1993) identified that for minority student integration to occur, there must be a critical mass of underrepresented student groups to create a vital campus subculture. Additionally, he believed that students who belonged to a subculture group, existing on the periphery of the mainstream institutional culture, would be the least effective in successfully integrating and persisting in higher education. These students would not formally be made aware of what the appropriate behaviors and norms were for incorporation into the university environment. The student's response to the stresses of fitting into this new environment would determine if they stayed or left.

Tinto's (1993) framework of student persistence in higher education identified a number of critical variables that impacted student persistence. He described two institutional domains of students' experience: the academic system and the social system. The academic system relates to academic performance and interaction with faculty and staff. The social system domain relates to extracurricular activities and peer group interactions. Students who successfully navigate through the separation stage and the transition stage are faced with incorporating into the college community. They are not provided with formal rituals and ceremonies as they transition from one stage into another. Membership into fraternities, sororities, and other extracurricular activities can help with incorporation, but many beginning students do not participate in these groups. Repetitive contact with other members of the institution can lead to complete integration. Students can choose to incorporate or choose not to incorporate. They can choose to adopt values and behaviors that are not necessarily in line with the values and behaviors they learned at home or they can choose to not fully integrate into the university community (Tinto, 1988).

Other factors attributed to influencing student persistence were student involvement in institutional activities, including academic activities (Astin & Oseguera, 2005). Additionally, student precollege characteristics were found to greatly affect retention through graduation (Astin & Oseguera, 2005). Students who had good grades in high school, came from affluent intact families who were well educated, and who had a propensity to become involved in student activities were most likely to persist educationally (Astin & Oseguera, 2005).

The twentieth century brought about new theoretical perspectives on how to appeal to and retain students of ever-increasing diversity (Berger & Lyon, 2005). During the 1990s, retention studies began to emerge that focused on different types of students from varying racial and ethnic backgrounds, first-generation college students, and nontraditionally aged students (Berger & Lyon, 2005). Much of what we understand about student retention was borne from the studies occurring during this timeframe.

Tierney (1992) found that Tinto's model was dysfunctional because it required that individuals from one culture undergo a "ritual" in another culture, namely, the dominant university culture. He understood that earlier research had tended to focus on the individual rather than recognizing the importance of the collective identities of individuals within cultural groups. Tierney (1992) agreed with Tinto's findings that when a student integrates into the university environment, it is more likely the student will persist and graduate; however, he did not agree with Tinto's over-reliance on an integrative framework. Tierney (1992) noted that social integrationists believe that all individuals, regardless of culture, must undergo the "rite of passage" and adapt to the system in order to integrate into their environment and become fully developed in society. This belief makes conformity the responsibility of the individual (Tierney, 1992). Additionally, Tierney (1992) determined that a model of integration that did not seek to

understand who is to be integrated and how it should occur, and failed to recognize categorical differences based on race, class, and gender.

According to Tierney (1992), the dominant culture in American society is reflected in American universities and colleges, and that dominant culture is Anglo Saxon. When a student of a different culture enters an Anglo Saxon college campus, they undergo a disruptive cultural experience because they are experiencing a culture different from their own and not because they are experiencing a "rite of passage." As Tierney (1992) notes, this primarily stems from a legacy wherein universities and colleges were designed to educate mostly Anglo Saxon males from the middle and upper class society.

Continuing research looked closely at student culture in relation to the college campus culture and its effect on student persistence. Berger (2000) advanced that student access to the cultural capital of an institution influenced retention. Persistence, according to Berger (2000), reflected congruence between a student's cultural capital and the institution's level of cultural capital.

Kuh and Love (2000) elaborated on a cultural perspective in student departure decisions. They posited that a student's decision to depart was mediated through a process of cultural meaning. Kuh and Love (2000) found that the further away a student's culture was from the dominant institutional culture, the less likely it was that a student would persist. They advocated a strong acclimation into the dominant culture or sociocultural connections to affinity groups as a means of overcoming cultural incongruence.

Braxton (2000), after empirically testing Tinto's theoretical model, put forth that social integration, not academic integration, was the key to understanding student departure. Bean and Eaton (2000) and Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) further theorized that student entry

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characteristics such as beliefs and values influenced interactions within an institutional

environment, which in turn affected motivation, academic and social integration, and persistence.

Bean (2005) found that students were less likely to leave when they understood the

academic expectations of being in college. Two sets of attitudes were identified by Bean (2005)

as being essential to retention: attitude about attachment to the institution and about being a

student. Fitting into an institutional environment and feeling a sense of commitment toward that

institution were both closely associated with intent to stay. To fit in meant being similar to other

members of a group and having a sense of belonging. Feeling good about being a student and

the value of an education were also found to improve a student's intent to stay. Ultimately, Bean

(2005) argued that the further away students were culturally from the institutional culture, the

greater the need for additional programs to help them adjust to life on campus.

1.5.2 Retention Research Specific to the Latino[2] / Hispanic Student

Increased diversity on university campuses has created orientation course expectations

that differ from past years (Johnson, 2000). This is especially clear in regard to Hispanic student

populations, who increasingly enroll in colleges and universities and are faced with cultural

disruption. In response to their growing presence in higher education, several scholars initiated

research on their retention stemming from studies related to nontraditional students and focuses

on specific groups.

According to Oseguera, Locks and Vega (2008), traditional retention literature places the

responsibility on the student for successful integration into a campus environment. Universities

that have high numbers of Hispanic students transitioning into university environments are faced

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[2] "Latino" is often used to refer to anyone of Latin American origin or ancestry and includes Brazilians.

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with additional issues because of cultural disparities. Specifically, many of the objectives specific to Hispanic student retention seek to create an environment conducive to creating a sense of belonging (Appel, Cartwright, Smith & Wolf, 1996; Lascher, 2009; Zurita, 2005). Retention research has shown that institutional factors such as curriculum and pedagogy greatly affect Hispanic students' sense of belonging, which ultimately affects Hispanic student success (Appel, Cartwright, Smith & Wolf, 1996; Lascher, 2009; Zurita, 2005).

Institution related issues are those issues that can make it more difficult for Hispanic students to fit into the university culture (Lascher, 2009; Zurita, 2005), and include pedagogy and curriculum. A large number of Hispanic students who attend college are first generation college students. They do not have the family experience of what it means to attend college and they see the university environment as extremely foreign (Engle, Bermeo & O'Brien, 2007; Lascher, 2009; Zurita, 2005). The parents of first generation college students are often unaware of the skills needed for navigating through the university environment, and are therefore unable to guide their children. For the Hispanic student, additional stress is tied to the difference between the home culture and the university culture. This all adds to the difficultly of Hispanic students acculturating into the university environment (Engle, Bermeo & O'Brien, 2007; Lascher, 2009; Zurita, 2005).

Hurtado and Carter (1997) noted that integration can have a different meaning for historically marginalized student groups. Acculturation often means diminishing ethnic differences and adopting the values of the dominant college environment. According to Hurtado and Carter (1997), models of integration fail to make a clear distinction between conformity and integration. Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that minority students can become a part of the campus environment without having to acculturate to the majority students' values. In other

words, students can become integrated not because they share the same values and views of the student majority, but because they are able to form specific affiliations that help them navigate through the campus environment.

For Hispanic students, the ease of separation and the maintaining of family relationships are essential to their transition into college. Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that a strong separation assumption was not upheld as a necessary condition for successful transition into college. Rather, the ability for Hispanic students to be interdependent with their families rather than completely independent is necessary and essential (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

First year orientation courses and associated curricula are currently offered at over 90% of American colleges and universities (Barefoot, 2002). Surprisingly, however, empirical research on curriculum used for orientation is limited. One strand of literature on the topic is conceptual and is mostly concerned with describing how curriculum for orientation programs should be modeled (Murphy, 1989; Perigo & Upcraft, 1989; Gordon, 1989; Abraham & Wagnon, 1992; Barefoot, 2000). A second strand is empirical and for the most part evaluative. Within this strand, there are two lines of work. One is constituted by a body of published survey evaluations seeking to assess program success as defined by student satisfaction with the orientation course experience (Hanley & Olsen, 1996; Wolf-Wendel, Tuttle & Keller-Wolff, 1999; Micceri & Wajeeh, 1999). A second line of work is comprised of survey research seeking to establish a nexus between retention and orientation programs (Hollins, 2009; Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup & Kuh, 2008; Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle, 1986; Micceri & Wajeeh, 1999; Williford, Chapman & Kahrig, 2001). Yet, while the conceptual and empirical literature offer a general understanding of the effect of curriculum on orientation programs, the work does not address how curriculum for orientation unfolds in practice, and how those directly engaged in such course of study experience it.

For the most part, the scarce body of literature on the topic attempts to establish a link between orientation program courses and university persistence (Barefoot, 2004; Davig & Spain, 2004; Green & Miller, 1998; Hollins, 2009; Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup & Kuh, 2008; Micceri & Wajeeh, 1999). While certain studies have reported that orientation courses might have been shown to increase enrollment into the sophomore year (Davig & Spain, 2004; Green & Miller,

1998; Hollins, 2009; Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup & Kuh, 2008; Micceri & Wajeeh, 1999),

persistence to graduation as a result of participation has not been sufficiently established (Bean,

2005; Busby, Gammel & Jeffcoat, 2002; Hollins, 2009; Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle, 1986;

Wolf-Wendel, Tuttle & Keller-Wolff, 1999). For instance, in studies where an increased

graduation rate of orientation course attendees has occurred, a variety of other factors are shown

to have also contributed to the increased rates. These factors, while not the only attributable

factors, include such things as race, secondary school achievement, academic aptitude, and

family educational context (Astin & Oseguera, 2005; Bean, 2005; Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup &

Kuh, 2008; Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle, 1986). Thus, given the inconclusive nature of such

research, it is unclear how much of an influence the curriculum used in orientation courses might

have on increased retention to graduation (Bean, 2005; Busby, Gammel & Jeffcoat, 2002;

Hollins, 2009; Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle, 1986; Wolf-Wendel, Tuttle & Keller-Wolff,

1999).

  Yet, because the literature mainly focuses on whether and if orientation courses produce

student retention, little attention has been paid to the various elements constituting orientation

programs such as the curriculum. As a result, the knowledge that curriculum used in orientation

courses imparts, how such curriculum is enacted, and what kinds of educational experiences

curriculum for orientation affords students remains largely obscured. The existing research is

concerned with determining whether orientation programs are successful or not. If empirical

research is to establish how, when, and who orientation programs benefit, descriptive studies

investigating the curriculum used in orientation courses are essential.

  Although an attempt to establish a causal link between orientation programs and retention

has been made, more studies focusing on how particular student populations benefit from the

curriculum used in the program courses is needed. Minority students in general and Hispanic students in particular, continue to drop out of college at alarming rates. Little is known about how the curriculum might nurture or foil their academic futures. While some hypothesize that the components of academic and social involvement inherent in orientation course curriculum promote student success (Davig & Spain, 2004; Hanley & Olsen, 1996; Hollins, 2009; Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup & Kuh, 2008; Micceri & Wajeeh, 1999; Tinto, 1987, 1993, 2005; Wolf-Wendel, Tuttle & Keller-Wolff, 1999; Williford, Chapman & Kahrig, 2001), it is unclear what is in the curricula, and how and which student populations most benefit from them. Missing is research that analyzes how written objectives of the curriculum unfold and create knowledge.

Curriculum for orientation is regularly used in programs targeting students "at risk" of dropping out. Hispanic students who are often first generation college students fall into this category (Measuring up, 2008). While orientation programs have proliferated at colleges across the country, the gap between Anglo students and Hispanic students earning bachelor's degrees has not diminished (Measuring up, 2008; Rooney, 2012). Despite minority student growth in university attendance, Hispanics are among the least likely to complete their bachelor's degree (Fry, 2005; Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup & Kuh, 2008; Lascher, 2009; Rooney, 2012, Zurita, 2005). Such gaps raise important questions about the nature of curriculum used in orientation program courses and their relevance to the educational needs of minority populations. The omission in the literature is significant. Nuanced studies describing orientation curricula might clarify the elements that can contribute or hinder minority student academic success. Given that Hispanic students' undergraduate experience may differ from that of Caucasian students (Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Munoz, 2011), studies focusing on how Hispanic students' experience orientation curricula are needed.

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2.2 Conceptual Literature-Design and Purpose

In general, the conceptual literature advances particular conceptions of how curriculum for orientation should be designed and what the general objectives should be for orientation courses where such curriculum is used. Additionally, conceptions about how orientation education should be provided vary and this literature identifies differing models and goals. Though models may be conceived differently, a review of this literature evinces the similarities of pursuits incorporated into the curriculum even when programmatic issues such as course duration, instructor training, types of courses, and the focus of individual programs might differ from one model to the other.

2.2.1 Orientation Models

Several models of orientation programs currently exist. Murphy (1989) identifies five major models of orientation programs with varying curriculum objectives that exist in U.S. institutions of higher education: 1) The Model; 2) The Academic Model; 3) The Professional Model; 4) The Curricular Model; and, 5) The Eclectic Model. In general, these models or a combination of any of them are offered across various campuses in the nation.

The Model is the University 101 course typically offered with the goal of improving retention by focusing on "survival skills" and exercises to help freshmen feel more at home on campus. The curriculum in these courses often includes an examination of the value of going to college, peer support groups, assistance selecting an academic major, improvement of academic skills, introduction to campus resources, and discussion of personal issues such as sexuality. Special sections targeting specific subpopulations are sometimes created. Specific groups that might be targeted include handicapped students, women, minorities, and students deemed as being academically underprepared.

The Academic Model focuses on intellectual content. Communication and critical thinking skills are emphasized. Course topics range from the study of great books to discussion of current political or social issues. This type of course might be found at highly selective private universities where entering students have the academic skills necessary to participate at a higher intellectual level. These courses may be reflective of individual faculty members' individual areas of academic or personal interest.

The Professional Model serves as an introduction to a professional field. The focus is to prepare students for the demands of a major or discipline and a profession. This model assumes that the quicker a student builds a professional self-image, the more likely the student will stay in college. This is a career oriented model which presents to students the basic concepts and vocabulary of various professions. Additionally, students are introduced to successful practitioners in the field. This type of course is often taught within professional schools or specific disciplines, such as engineering, health sciences, business, law, or education.

The Curricular Model may include professionals from both student affairs and academic affairs combining their efforts to create a curriculum for improving the freshman educational experience. It is comprised of several mentoring components and includes a community of resources. One component is the living/learning program. Under this program, students live in residential settings in close proximity to faculty and classrooms.

The Eclectic Model draws on components of the previous four models. Because of this, the syllabi of these courses vary greatly. But, the curriculum for this model generally include some of the same activities as the other models such as library trips, career and planning lessons, student-to-student and faculty-to student interaction, life skills and value examination, mentoring opportunities, and other activities to acquaint new college students with the university

environment. The key components of the five orientation models identified by Murphy (1989)

are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Key Components of Various Orientation Models

Model	Content Emphasis	Delivery Method	Curriculum Materials	Target Student
The Success/ Survival / Orientation	Values, peer supports groups, academic strategies	Active engagement	Textbook, handouts	Underprepared freshmen
Academic	Intellect, communication	Reading, discussion	Great books, political and social issue articles	Intellects
Professional	Basic profession concepts, vocabulary	Experiencing of profession requirements	Handouts, guest speakers, visits to various offices	Young academically prepared students
Curricular	Mentoring	Community, possible living/ learning program	Materials from various offices on campus, textbook	Underprepared freshmen students living on campus
Eclectic	Library trips, value examination, career planning, student to student, student to faculty interaction Mixture from previous models	Active engagement	Textbook, handouts	Underprepared freshmen students

2.2.2 Orientation Objectives

Though orientation programs are diverse, as Barefoot (2000) contends, general

orientation program curricula tends to pursue similar objectives: 1) increase of student

interaction; 2) increase of faculty to student interaction; 3) increase of student involvement on

campus; 4) a linking of curriculum with student experiences outside of class; 5) increase of

academic expectations; and, 6) assistance for students who are academically unprepared for

college. These objectives were general to all orientation curricula including classes attended by

large numbers of minority students.

Moreover, Abraham and Wagnon (1992) describe three imperatives that such curriculum needs to take into account. First, orientation programs and curricula should help to relieve students' anxieties. Secondly, they should help create a sense of belonging for the students enrolled in the course. Lastly, the identity and confidence of each student should be addressed by conveying a message of success. Abraham and Wagnon (1992) posited that these imperatives are often implicit in all models. These types of imperatives have been determined to be of benefit to first generation students which includes many Hispanic students (Appel, Cartwright, Smith & Wolf, 1996; Lascher, 2009; Zurita, 2005).

Depending on the overall program objectives, orientation program courses can be offered in a range of formats that vary in length and timing (National Research Council Publications, 2009; Perigo & Upcraft, 1989). They may be offered as pre-enrollment programs, during the summer before the fall semester, or as first semester courses (Priego & Upcraft, 1989). Orientation program courses can occur over a few days (Abraham & Wagnon, 1992; Miller, Dyer & Nadler, 2002), a few weeks, or as a regular semester long course. Moreover, some modalities that exist include freshmen survey courses, freshman seminar, survival, and student success courses, and freshmen orientation and study skills courses. (Abraham & Wagnon, 1992; Banich, 1988; Dunphy, Miller, Woodruff & Nelson, 1987; Rendón, 2002).

The teaching experience and expertise of the instructors implementing the curriculum in the orientation courses varies from one university to another (Banich, 1988; Miller, Dyer & Nadler, 2002; Dunphy, Miller, Woodruff & Nelson, 1987). Orientation course curriculum may be taught by professors or college deans while others may be taught by staff (Gordon, 1989; Abraham & Wagnon, 1992; Miller, Dyer & Nadler, 2002). Sometimes faculty will volunteer to teach orientation courses (Micceri & Wajeeh, 1999). Micceri and Wajeeh (1999) identify

orientation course instructors as coming from student services and administrative staff units, in addition to rank faculty from academic departments.

Gordon (1989) identified a variety of curricular orientation program plans across universities. Given the range of orientation program models, its curriculum varies. For instance, some argue that the curriculum should include lessons for acquiring knowledge on the history, nature, and purpose of higher education and how it relates to the individual student; or, it should include an examination of students' goals, acquiring knowledge on how to be productive citizens, career choices, and personal and academic values (Gordon, 1989). Others, like Tinto, (1987, 1993), Miller, Dyer and Nadler (2002), and Jeweler (1989), advocate that an orientation course curriculum should focus on sharpening basic academic skills, peer and university community interaction, and expose students to the university environment to familiarize them with university life and procedures. Upcraft and Gardner (1989) define freshmen success as more than merely earning the credits necessary to graduate. They characterize student success as the achievement of academic and intellectual competence, ability to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, development of an identity, ability to make career and life-style choices, maintenance of personal health and wellness, and development of an integrated philosophy of life.

In sum, the conceptual literature advances useful descriptions of what orientation programs should and could be and what goals should and could be pursued by the curriculum used in orientation courses. Nevertheless, this body of literature does not detail how the curriculum unfolds in the classroom and whether and how the particular challenges that might surface are experienced by classroom participants, nor if the goals are appropriate for the students served. Drawing from the limited understanding that the conceptual literature on

curriculum for orientation and its courses offer, I explore how particular classroom participants, in a particular setting, translate a specific version of a curriculum for orientation into practice and with what academic outcomes and consequences.

2.3 Case Studies - Empirical / Evaluative Literature

The empirical literature is mostly evaluative, and is comprised of reports that assess whether the orientation course was successfully implemented without assessing the actual knowledge created by the curriculum for orientation. More specifically, such literature attempts to determine the extent to which orientation courses meet the course orientation objectives and attempt to show a positive correlation between orientation program course attendance, academic performance, student integration into the campus environment, and persistence from the freshman year to the sophomore year (Davig & Spain, 2004; Fidler & Hunter, 1989; Fidler, 1991; Micceri & Wajeeh, 1999; Ness, Rhodes & Rhodes, 1989). Paradoxically, other survey studies found that enrollment in orientation courses does not significantly increase the students' completion of university studies through graduation (Pascarella, Terenzini & Wolfle, 1986; Wolf-Wendel, Tuttle & Keller-Wolff, 1999; Macceri & Wajeeh 1999). Together, the findings of the reviewed studies appear to be inconclusive.

Hanley and Olsen (1996) conducted a multi-survey study of a University 100 course. The objective of the University 100 course curriculum was to introduce the students to a college education, to enhance their understanding of the university's place in society, and to encourage them to make good use of their college experience. The curriculum included lessons on the history and mission of higher education, curriculum issues, faculty's and students' rights, roles, and responsibilities, and career planning. Additionally, a self-instructed library component was completed outside of class time.

On the first administered evaluation survey, course enrollees' responses to the question of how they experienced the University 100 course curriculum were collected and analyzed. Most of the students indicated that the curriculum was successful in preparing them to deal with university-level academics and educational processes. Most of the descriptive words that the students used about the course or faculty members were positive. Additionally, many of the students reported using the campus resources which they had learned about first in the University 100 class. As a result of orientation, most students said they had gained knowledge about university resources and were more knowledgeable with regard to how to use those resources. Given student responses to the survey questions, it appeared that the students had a positive opinion about the curriculum, and that they had gained knowledge that would help them to be successful in their pursuit of a college education.

A second component of the study included an evaluative body of student survey responses. Students were asked to rank how well certain objectives were met. Next, they were asked to rank how well the objectives were met related to the effectiveness of the course resources. Finally, they ranked how well the curriculum contributed to the preparation of students for university studies. The data was analyzed using statistical analysis. Responses, as reported by Hanley and Olsen (1996), indicated the students agreed that the curriculum objectives were met. Additionally, questions related to the stimulation of students' thinking about the uses of a college education, issues related to academic freedom, and an understanding of the role of education in society were all positively rated. The resources were found to be effective both within and external to the classroom. The students rated the library component as having helped them to be better prepared for their college experience. Overall, students rated the curriculum as effective in meeting its objectives. Hanley and Olsen (2006) recognized that,

although this evaluation was important because it sought feedback from the students who participated in the course, it left some questions unanswered. They identified three key elements of the orientation program as being important to future research: how the curriculum is taught, what is taught, and what is learned by the students.

Conducting evaluation research, Macceri and Wajeeh (1999) administered two survey studies in a freshman seminar class. They noted the curriculum objectives of the orientation program as being: 1) an introduction of higher education history and structure; 2) information to students on the university's history, mission, rules, regulations, organization, and student opportunities; 3) the promotion of assimilation and adjustment into the university; 4) exposure of students to university resources; 5) development of a functional set of study skills, as well as adaptive, coping, and survival skills; 6) development of a support network and introduction to other students; and, 7) a challenge to students to become fully involved in the university environment. The seminar curriculum was used as a means of meeting the stated objectives.

For the first study, open-ended questions were included in the survey completed by the seminar participants. An analysis of the course evaluation survey responses was conducted to assess if the curriculum objectives had been achieved. The results indicated the majority of students strongly agreed that the overall course experience had a positive influence on their transition into the university environment. Most of the students indicated that they enjoyed the presentations on career counseling and health issues. They also stated they enjoyed the out-of-class activities such as trips to the library, sports events, and campus tours. They expressed an appreciation for the friendliness of the instructors. They positively rated in-class topics that included discussions on learning styles, values, and diversity. The study results showed that students generally enjoyed these types of courses.

The second study involved a comparison of the graduation rates, retention, and GPA scores of the university orientation course enrollees compared to non-enrollees. The results indicated positive short-term retention rates. For example, a significantly higher number of the fall orientation course enrollees returned for the spring semester and subsequently for the following fall semester. Additionally, short-term GPA scores were found to be significantly higher for course enrollees. Differences in graduation rates between enrollees and non-enrollees were less significant.

Similarly, Wolf-Wendel, Tuttle, and Keller-Wolff (1999) conducted an assessment of a summer transition program. The transition program had been implemented in response to retention issues brought about by an open admission policy. According to Rooney (2012), students at colleges that practice open admissions are less likely to return for a second year or complete their degrees. Therefore the goal of the curriculum used in the summer orientation program was to enhance the academic and social transition of students to college. The assessment included three components: 1) grade point average (GPA) and retention data analysis (compared to a comparison group); 2) self-efficacy measures (in relation to a comparison group); and, 3) focus group results on the qualitative effects of the summer program.

Survey data was gathered for the years 1995-1997 from students who were enrolled in the summer transition program which included an orientation course. Students completed academic, social, and career self efficacy surveys pre and post involvement in the program. Additionally, students completed a Likert-scale satisfaction survey on the last day of the summer class. Many of the students acknowledged that the program had facilitated their transition from high school to college. They reported a better sense of what college work would entail. Even so, the data revealed that participation did not have a significant impact on student GPA or retention rates.

2.4 Conclusion

Overall, evaluation research indicates that most students in certain institutions who enroll in orientation courses feel better able to adjust to the campus environment. Additionally, while the evaluation research reviewed shows positive short-term retention results, a study done by Williford, Chapman and Kahrig (2001) indicated that increased long-term retention through graduation could also be positively affected by participation in an orientation program course. The study investigated the relationship between participation, academic performance, student retention, and student graduation in a semester-long orientation course through data collected 1986 through 1995. They compared enrollees' GPAs and retention rate after the first year. Additionally, they compared five and six year graduation rates between participants and nonparticipants. The study showed that, in general, first year students who took the orientation course had higher year-end GPA scores than students who did not take the orientation course. Additionally, persistence to sophomore year and graduation was higher for students who participated in the orientation course.

Less optimistic about the import of orientation programs, courses, and curricula on long-term retention, the study focusing on the effects of orientation experiences on persistence by Pascarella, Terenzini and Wolfle (1986) indicated that orientation programs failed to have a significant direct effect on persistence to graduation. Any positive effect on persistence attributed to orientation programs was found to be indirect. Questionnaire results were collected prior to, during, and subsequent to the 1976-77 academic years. The institution where the research took place had an overall orientation program goal of facilitating the successful transition of new freshmen from high school into the university environment. Three underlying objectives were developed for meeting program goals: 1) development of academic and

educational awareness; 2) development of an awareness of available institutional resources and services; and, 3) development of identification with the institution.

The study results indicated a positive effect on social interaction. The social interaction indirectly created a positive influence on institutional commitment. Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfle (1986) believed that the indirect influence that the orientation program had on institutional commitment subsequently led to an indirect increase in student persistence to degree completion. This study provided insight into how orientation programs directly influence social interaction, which in turn could possibly indirectly influence persistence to graduation.

In general, the literature on orientation program curriculum is mostly conceptual, and the scarce empirical work is mostly concerned with evaluation, and thus relies exclusively on survey data. As a result, the existing research does not describe an orientation course curriculum as it is enacted and the knowledge that is imparted in those classrooms. To address this gap, this research will analyze and describe how the curriculum unfolds in a classroom and the knowledge that is subsequently created. Evaluation surveys evidence that students believe they benefit in positive ways from orientation courses; however, as Hanley and Olsen (1996) acknowledged, how a course is taught, what is taught or what is learned by the students is not documented or examined in detail.

Given the literature focus, little is known about how faculty or students, specifically Hispanic students, experience an orientation course education. Although some studies suggest that orientation courses positively influence student success, what might contribute to student success is unknown. Yet, while the students indicated they were satisfied, we do not know if the identified objectives improved the students' prospect for completing their university education.

This research study will further examine the contribution curriculum for orientation makes to Hispanic student success.

2.5 What Lies Ahead

Moving away from a focus that solely seeks to determine success or failure of official programmatic goals, I ask what curriculum for orientation is, how faculty and students (who in this classroom are mostly Hispanic) experience it, and with what outcomes to classroom knowledge and students' academic futures. Although orientation courses can be found to be either a positive or negative experience for students, the reviewed research presents a limited understanding of how such experiences are produced, what knowledge students gain, and whether and how their academic futures are impacted.

Given that orientation course curriculum, what it teaches and how it is enacted has not been sufficiently documented and analyzed, in this study, I set out to understand what curriculum for orientation is in practice. I spent a semester inside an orientation course classroom at a community college as I sought to observe the knowledge that was jointly created (Page, 1991) as formal curriculum for orientation unfolded and merged with enacted and experienced curriculum. I sought to understand how the formal curriculum for orientation, used in this classroom, was negotiated by the instructor and the students as it became a curriculum in its totality.

2.6 Research Questions

Consequently, given that more studies are needed to understand what orientation programs are and what their curriculum might afford students, this study takes on a different approach. Through detailed documentation of how a curriculum for orientation is practiced in everyday classroom interaction, I seek to understand what knowledge such course of study

teaches, how the curriculum is enacted, and what its meaning is for Hispanic students' academic futures. Approaching the topic in this way will shed light into the mostly unknown realm of orientation programs, their curricula and outcomes. Such an approach is useful to understand how, why, and in what context orientation program curriculum might foster or hinder Hispanic university student persistence and retention.

CHAPTER THREE: INTERPRETIVE METHODS IN CURRICULUM ANALYSIS

3.1 Introduction

This study seeks to understand, from the participants' perspectives, how an orientation course curriculum unfolds as it is lived (Geertz, 1973). Qualitative inquiry is appropriate for gathering and analyzing data that are essential to grounded theory (Spradley, 1980). Given that qualitative research is the basis for my study, I rely on an ethnographic approach which emphasizes the study of peoples' experiences within their own cultural context (Erickson, 1985; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Spindler & Spindler, 1987).

Ethnographers conduct research that involves gathering data by observing the routine ways in which people make sense of their everyday life (Spindler & Spindler, 1987). Fieldwork entails observations, immersion in the field situation, and interviews (Spindler & Spindler, 1987). It requires gathering data by being in the classroom on a daily basis and letting events unfold as they would in a typical class. By observing in the classroom, on a regular daily basis, the observer becomes a part of the everydayness of the classroom.

Data collection in ethnography strives for "thick description" of culture (Geertz, 1973, p. 6). Culture is a context that, when thickly described, provides an understanding of what is common without overlooking what is unique to a culture (Geertz, 1973). In this case study, a thick description is used to portray what is real to the participant, in their own terms, thereby accurately depicting the meaning they attribute to it. It is not enough to methodically describe behaviors and actions (Spindler & Spindler, 1987). Instead, the underlying meaning of the actions within the context in which they occur must be made evident (Spindler & Spindler, 1987).

The ethnographer is faced with a complexity that arises out of collected data, which must be understood and then described in such a way that the data becomes meaningful (Geertz, 1973; Spindler & Spindler, 1987). According to Geertz (1973):

> There are three characteristics of ethnographic description: 1) it is interpretive; 2) what it is interpretive of is the flow of social discourse; and 3) the interpreting involved consists in trying to rescue the 'said' of such discourse from its perishing occasions and fix it in perusable terms. (p. 20)

Eventually, the ethnographer is faced with the task of data interpretation (Spindler & Spindler, 1987). The interpretive nature of ethnographic research exposes the happenings of everyday life through systematic documentation of ordinary practices, rendering an understanding of social phenomena (Erickson, 1985; Klein & Myers, 1999; Walsham, 1995). Thus, in this case study, an interpretive ethnographic methodology is applicable to capture the social meanings constructed and attributed by participants to a curriculum as it is implemented.

Interpretive researchers attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings that participants assign to them (Rowland, 2005). An interpretive ethnographic methodology is a research approach that defines reality as a social construction (Klein & Myers, 1999; Walsham, 1995). Social construction comes through language, consciousness, and shared meanings (Klein & Myers, 1999). Interpretive research does not set out to test a hypothesis. Instead, interpretive research aims to produce an understanding of the social context under which reality is created (Walsham, 1995). This research approach assumes that the world and reality are interpreted by people in the context of historical and social practices (Rowland, 2005).

An interpretive ethnographic approach involves the study of social phenomena in its natural settings. Naturalistic approaches are applicable to ethnographic methods because they

seek to access the meanings that guide people's behavior in their native context (Geertz, 1973).

They seek to understand cultural norms, beliefs, social structures, and other cultural analytical

patterns while attempting to minimally affect the behavior of the participants. Naturalism

involves being as unobtrusive as possible to what is being studied (Geertz, 1973; Hammersley &

Atkinson, 1995).

In an interpretive ethnographic study, people are portrayed as constructing the social

world through their interpretations of it and their actions, which are a result of those

interpretations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Klein & Myers, 1999; Spindler & Spindler,

1987; Walsham, 1995). The primary aim of an ethnographic approach is to describe what

happens in a society or culture, how the participants involved see their own actions and those of

others, and the contexts in which the action takes place (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, Klein &

Myers, 1999; Spindler & Spindler, 1987; Walsham, 1995). Given that people continually

construct and reconstruct their behavior based on their interpretations of the situations they are in

(Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), I am interested in what and how a professor and students

produce as a local version of an orientation course curriculum, how they enact the curriculum in

practice, and with what outcomes.

According to Erickson (1985), classrooms are a product of their social situation, and I

therefore analyze the wider social influences of the environment in which the students live their

lives. Examples of wider social influences include family economic and cultural background,

ages of students, and the overall community college environment and community in which it

exists. Wider social influences can manifest themselves in specific values, attitudes or social

norms and contribute to how classroom participants respond to the enactment of the curriculum.

The wider arena of influence affects how the narrower circumstance of curriculum in a local

setting, such as a classroom, is experienced (Erickson, 1985). In order to understand the meaning

of what is occurring in a classroom, I must first identify who the students are and how they

connect the meaning created in the classroom with their values, attitudes and the social norms

under which they exist.

Although I inquire about the local meanings in an orientation course classroom and

assume that classroom life is particular to a given context, there may be aspects that are similar

to other orientation course classrooms. This resonates with Geertz's (1973) assertion that,

"Where an interpretation comes from does not determine where it can be impelled to go. Small

facts speak to large issues" (p. 23). The knowledge gained from this study is particular to the

environment from which it comes, but at the same time it seeks to find that which is generic to

all human behavior (Geertz, 1973).

3.2 Research Approach

For this study, I use a case study approach, which is warranted when a study focuses on

a single unit, such as an individual, group, institution, or a specific community (Ary, Jacobs,

Razavieh & Sorensen, 2006; Erickson, 1985; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The timeframe

for this case study is approximately 18 months. A case study approach is relevant for an in-

depth analysis of phenomena of which we know very little. It is appropriate when the results of

research call for a holistic account of a phenomenon that consists of analyzing a single complex

social unit with multiple variables of potential importance (Erickson, 1985). A case study is

ideal for conveying the details of a contextual analysis of specific events or conditions and their

relationships (Soy, 1997).

I am engaging in an in-depth study of the interaction between curriculum and its participants as it takes place in a community college classroom. Very little is known about the details of this type of interaction. While the results that emerge from a case study do not propose to yield generalizations to theory, there is much that can be learned from a particular case study (Erickson, 1985; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Case study research has the potential of conveying understanding of a complex issue and can strengthen previous research (Soy, 1997).

3.3 Sample

My sample consisted of a classroom at a Southwestern Community College (SCC).[3] I attempted entry into five different college classrooms where I might observe the curriculum I was interested in studying. All of the locations were conveniently located. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), pragmatic considerations are an important component for narrowing down setting choices. Ethnographers often must accommodate ease of access and limited resources and choose a setting geographically close to where they are based (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

I secured permission for entry into one classroom and this is where observations occurred. This occurred because I knew someone who was a co-worker of the instructor and she asked the instructor if he would be willing to allow me into his classroom. Although there was an instructor at another location willing to allow me into his classroom, administrative decision makers were unwilling to allow it. I was denied permission into all other requested settings.

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[3] All names of places are pseudonyms.

The instructor, where observations occurred, was open and willing to participate and the curriculum was suitable for my research. Upon receiving permission for access, I completed the appropriate institutional review board (IRB) processes. While I sought entry at a location of convenience, my selection was purposeful as I was interested in curriculum that was used for orientating Hispanic students into a college environment.

It is not unusual for an ethnographer to conduct a study at only one setting (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). A single setting is appropriate when generalization is not a primary concern of the research and a particular situation is the focus of the study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). In this in-depth case study, while generalizations might emerge, the focus is on curriculum at a community college in a particular classroom experienced by a particular set of participants.

Additionally, my sample included the orientation course curriculum documents, the instructor and course coordinator who shared in the curriculum implementation, and the students who attended the orientation class. I include the words used in conversations, in the exchange of ideas, and negotiation of meaning, as important elements of my sample. Each component of the study added to the understanding of how a curriculum used for orientation was enacted and experienced in a classroom at SCC.

3.4 Data Collection Strategies

For data collection, I employed the conventional strategies of an ethnographic approach: participant observation, interviews, and the collection of documents. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) identify ethnography as "collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research" (p. 1). I examined the formal curriculum by becoming familiar with the written documentation, such as the textbook, syllabus, and course description.

I engaged in classroom observations, gathering data as the students and teacher negotiated the meaning of an orientation course curriculum (Erickson, 1985). I interviewed the students, orientation course coordinator, and the instructor.

I engaged in data collection activities which included document accumulation, classroom observations, and participant interviews. Gathering data through multiple sources and techniques is a key strength of the case study method (Soy, 1997). Using multiple sources of data allowed for the triangulation of evidence (Tellis, 1997). In the context of data collection, triangulation can substantiate the data gathered from other sources (Tellis, 1997). The data from one source can be used to validate the data gathered from another. Triangulation increases the reliability of the data and the process of gathering it (Tellis, 1997). Triangulation helped me make sense of the data I gathered.

I collected data throughout the fall semester of 2010. For classroom observations, I followed a schedule of three fifty-minute class meetings each week so that I could observe the curriculum as the instructor and the students experienced it. I interviewed participants throughout the semester, including the instructor and course coordinator, to gain an understanding of what the curriculum meant to them. These interviews lasted from one and one-half to two and one-half hours each. I also interviewed twenty-four student participants in order to gain an understanding of what they were experiencing in the classroom told to me in their own words. Each student interview lasted approximately forty to fifty minutes. During the spring and summer of 2011, I conducted an in-depth analysis of the data collected.

I identified three layers of the curriculum: the formal curriculum was the written documentation that identified the objectives and goals, the enacted curriculum was the curriculum that unfolded in the classroom, and the experienced curriculum was the curriculum as

experienced by the participants (Glatthorn, Boschee & Whitehead, 2005; Mendez, 2006; Page, 1991, Sizer, 1999). Each of these layers provided an understanding and definition of the particular version of curriculum for orientation that existed at a Southwestern Community College (SCC). I analyzed and described each layer as it related to the curriculum produced in the classroom. Rather than attempting to determine whether classroom participants met the learning goals established in the formal curriculum, I set out to document and analyze the particular version of orientation education that participants in a contextualized classroom experienced.

3.4.1 Participant Observation

My objective was to gather data as I observed first-hand the physical aspects, people, activities, and unfolding curriculum in the classroom. Participant observation allows for direct observation of the phenomena under study. Acquiring knowledge about what is occurring in a particular setting by participating in that setting is an important resource for case study data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) As such, a researcher participates, in varying degrees, in the events being studied (Tellis, 1997). Participant observation afforded a means to understanding the connection between the formal and the enacted curriculum as I analyzed its everyday delivery.

The implications of written curriculum cannot be fully comprehended without documentation of how it is realized as it is enacted. Mendez (2006) claims that a local version of knowledge is produced by classroom participants that differs from the mandated or prescribed formal curriculum. Ethnographers are characteristically interested in the details of life in classrooms, the meaning made by school participants, and the influence of local circumstances

(Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). My observations provided a rich source of data that was used to describe the particular reality of curriculum as it was experienced in an SCC classroom.

I gathered and recorded data from classroom observations throughout the semester. I sat off to the side of the room where I could see both the instructor and the students because my intent was to observe their interaction. While observation in a classroom is inherently a form of participation, I tried to observe unobtrusively while not distracting the class or calling attention to myself. Additionally, I participated by working through some of the self-assessments along with the students.

Audio recording allowed me to listen, observe, and give more attention to the classroom activity. I gave attention to what was being said; I worked through the handout exercises and assessments to understand what was being experienced. After each class session, I made an audio recording, in which I reflected on what had occurred in the classroom. I transcribed the audio recordings to aid in my review of the data, and I created spreadsheets and categorized the data.

I engaged in various levels of observation, as identified by Spradley (1980). The first was broad "descriptive" observation (p. 33), where I attempted to gain an overview of the social situation occurring in the classroom. This allowed me to focus on some of the physical attributes of the classroom and the students attending the class. I paid attention to where the instructor situated himself as he lectured, where the students sat, and how they segregated themselves into groups. I focused on what was said, the way participants acted, and the artifacts used (Geertz, 1973). After analyzing my initial field reports, I narrowed my observation activities by selectively focusing my observations.

When I first entered the classroom, it looked like any other college class with students and an instructor. Much of the physical structure, chalkboards and desks were familiar to a typical classroom. It was not until several classes that I could see that there were differences. Some of what appeared to be familiar on the surface became strange, and what appeared to be strange became familiar (Spindler & Spindler, 1985). Analytical patterns began to emerge and I gained a clearer understanding of the context under which events occurred. For example, it was strange that in an orientation class, there was not a lot of back and forth discussion between the instructor and the students. This is just one example of a pattern that emerged initiating further analytical examination. By focusing my observations, I began to seek answers to specific questions about noted classroom events and practices.

3.5 Interviews

Interviews with the instructor and students provided a rich source of data. As I interviewed students, I gathered data that helped me strengthen my understanding of cultural meanings and test my developing cultural inferences. Behavior, speech, and artifacts are sources of data that are not infallible when making inferences, but together they can lead to an adequate cultural description (Spradley, 1980). Interviews are one of the most important sources of data for case study research (Tellis, 1997).

According to Tellis (1997), there are several forms of interviews that can be used: open-ended, focused, or structured. In an open-ended interview, the person being interviewed is asked to provide an open opinion on events or facts. This type of interview can be used to corroborate previously gathered data. A focused interview is an interview of a short duration with questions that focus on case study protocol. The structured interview is particularly useful when a formal survey is required. For this case study, I relied on open-ended interviews which were conducive

to gathering data about individual perspectives and bringing clarity to data gathered from other sources.

3.5.1 Student Interviews

I relied on interviews with students to probe my understanding of how the curriculum in the orientation course was experienced by them. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), humans acquire knowledge about the social world in the course of participating in it. Therefore, hearing the participants' sense of their social world is an important resource for the ethnographer. Interviewing can provide important data and a rich body of information about events and perspectives (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Ultimately, I attempted to see, through their lens, what the curriculum meant to them, what it had afforded them, and the value of the knowledge produced in this particular orientation classroom. As such, all orientation course participants were potential interviewees.

There were several issues I addressed with the students during interviews. Importantly, I wanted to know what they thought about the material being taught and the way it was being taught and what parts of the curriculum they thought were valuable. The interviews were important to the research process because the responses helped me understand more about students' experiences in the orientation course.

I asked students about their goals and aspirations to gain insight into why they were attending the community college and the goals they ultimately hoped to reach. I wanted to know about their academic backgrounds to better understand if they began at the community college because they were academically unprepared to attend a four-year university or if they were attending because it cost less or for some other reason. Quite possibly, there were programs offered at the community college not offered elsewhere. They may have had a previous family

member or acquaintance that influenced their choice. There were any number of reasons why a student would choose to attend this community college.

Additionally, it was important for me to know a little about their backgrounds. I asked students if they were raised in the community or had recently arrived to help me understand if a student had to make a cultural adjustment to the area. For example, a twenty-something Caucasian woman, who was new to the area, told me she hated the area and wanted to leave as soon as possible. She was the only Caucasian female in the class. She was there because her husband was a soldier at a nearby military base. This was a student the instructor identified as not needing the class. While this student was doing well in the class, she was adjusting to an area with a large Hispanic population and likely a different geography and climate. She was, culturally, the minority in this particular class. The enacted curriculum possibly had a different meaning for her than it had for other students. I was interested in learning about her individualized understanding of the curriculum. I did not know if her understanding would be different of the same as other students. Not only was she the only Caucasian female in the class, she was new to the area, and I had noted that the instructor had singled her out as not needing the class because she was already a "good" student.

Student interviews were structured to accommodate the students' scheduling needs while also allowing for the collection of relevant data. I interviewed all students who agreed to be interviewed, which resulted in interviews of twenty-four out of the twenty-six students enrolled in the class. Interviews took forty to fifty minutes each to allow adequate time to gather the rich data that interviews can provide. Most interviews occurred immediately after class because it was a time that was convenient for students and me. Other interviews were scheduled at mutually convenient times. The interviews took place at the community college. All of the

students spoke English and all interviews were done in English, although Spanish was the first language for a few. Because I was audio recording the interviews, I was able to focus on what the students said and how they said it. Following each interview, I audio recorded my reflection of the interview. All audio recordings were later transcribed into written documentation.

3.5.2 Instructor Interviews

I was interested in understanding the perspectives of the instructor and program personnel involved in the orientation course curriculum. Therefore, I interviewed the orientation coordinator, Ms. Morgan[4], and the instructor, Mr. Paz. Both had been involved in the review and implementation of the curriculum for many years. They were both seasoned instructors of orientation courses.

I interviewed Ms. Morgan once midway through the semester. She was responsible for the final decision on what the course objectives were and how they were to be met. She also taught an orientation course section during the semester in which my study occurred. I interviewed Ms. Morgan because I wanted to understand the overall context of the orientation program. I asked who she believed the students were, what she thought they needed to gain from the curriculum being used for orientation, what she saw as the overall goal of the curriculum, what the challenges of implementing and meeting the objectives were, and with what success the goals were being met.

I interviewed Mr. Paz twice, once before I began in-class observations and once at the end of the semester. I wanted to gain a perspective of how he saw his role in the classroom and what he understood about the students taking his class. I sought to understand how he intended to

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[4] All names of people are pseudonyms.

translate the curriculum goals into classroom lessons given what he knew about the students. At the end of the semester, I was interested in knowing if he thought the curriculum objectives had been met.

3.6 Collection of Documents

In order to identify the planned objectives and goals that prescribed how curriculum was to unfold, I looked first at the formal curriculum as it was laid out in the written documentation of the orientation course. I defined the formal curriculum as the written documentation that identified the objectives and goals. The course description, syllabi, and textbook helped determine what counted as knowledge according to the written documentation. Written documents were an integral part of everyday classroom life and provided important clues for my understanding of the phenomena under study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

I also collected institutional documents that were retrieved from the college website, which included not only the course description but also information on the student demographics and a portrait of the community college environment. The student demographics provided information on student ethnic background, average student age, number attending each campus, retention rates from first year to second year, and students' areas of study. The community college portrait included information on the institutional mission, locations, physical structure components, and services provided. This data was significant to my understanding of the wider context in which the orientation class existed.

Further, I collected program-specific documents, such as the syllabus, classroom handouts, and the textbook. A two-part syllabus was prepared, wherein Part I was entitled the course syllabus and Part II was the official syllabus authored by Ms. Morgan, who oversaw the orientation course program at five of the community college campuses. Both parts were given

to students. Mr. Paz's syllabus contained other details about the class, including the classroom rules, assignments, and learning objectives.

Mr. Paz gave an abundance of handouts to students. The handouts emphasized the scheduled lesson or contained class participation exercises. Many of the handouts were copies of material contained in the textbook. As explained by Mr. Paz, some of the students did not want to mark up their books so they could sell their books after the semester ended and so he made copies of several exercises and assessments from the book and handed them out. The textbook was closely tied to the topic the instructor was presenting on any given day. The chapters contained strategies for strengthening academic skill performance. Additionally, each chapter emphasized personal habits needed to become a successful student. Throughout the textbook, positive personal habits were tied to academic success.

3.7 Data Analysis

I documented what I observed, analyzed the data collected, and attempted to provide a thick description of what an orientation education was in practice, how students and instructors experienced it, and with what consequences. As I engaged in the process of analysis, I attempted to unravel the complexities of meaning embedded in the data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh & Sorensen, 2006). Throughout each stage of the study, I engaged in a reflective process to make sense of emerging cultural analytical patterns and discontinuities as I attempted to understand the particular meanings behind participants' enactment of curriculum used for orientation (Spradley, 1980).

More specifically, I began the formal process of data interpretation by searching for cultural themes. Cultural themes are defined as the cultural behaviors believed to be true, explicit or implied, that are approved or promoted in society (Spradley, 1980). I looked for general

analytical patterns by identifying recurring behavioral events. I did this by continuously examining all sources of data and searching for associations between observation field notes and interviews.

A theme analysis is important to the interpretation of data because cultural themes connect and influence relationships within cultural domains (Spradley, 1980). According to Spradley (1980), cultural domains are categories of meanings. For example, a person in a classroom is no longer just another person, but instead a particular kind of person who now falls under the cultural category of student (Spradley, 1980). As I identified a broad list of cultural domain categories, I developed contrast questions by looking for differences between the domains (Spradley, 1980). I used componential analysis to organize and narrow my analysis. Spradley (1980) identifies componential analysis as being the systematic process of searching for components of meanings, which is done by searching for contrasts, sorting them out, and grouping them into a paradigm chart. In my case, the paradigm chart evolved into spreadsheets of information. The spreadsheets revealed the questions that needed to be asked and helped me make meaning of the data collected (Spradley, 1980).

The detailed documentation of social phenomena in ethnographic approaches afford its practitioners with the possibility of producing theory that can be applied to the re-conceptualization of problems and the articulation of solutions to certain questions of practice (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995). In this case, the potential for gaining a deeper understanding of the curriculum of an orientation course as it was actually delivered and the knowledge constructed, as well as, a deeper understanding of how students experienced such knowledge, was of critical importance. More students would benefit from efficacious programs that are

modeled after empirical research that documents what curriculum for orientation means to students. Such programs may help determine how curriculum for orientation could be improved.

3.8 Subjectivity / Reflexivity

Subjectivity was always present in my research. Personal experience cannot be eliminated from an account (Maxwell, 1992). I, therefore, attempted to be attentive to its existence and manage it throughout the research process. I was aware of the bias that subjectivity can create. According to Peshkin, (1988) a person's subjectivity is like a garment and it cannot be removed. So rather than assuming I could remove it, I identified areas where I knew it existed and reflected on areas that were revealed to me as I engaged in the research.

As a first generation Hispanic student who almost did not make it to college and who struggled once beginning, I know how challenging it can be to successfully complete a college education. I tend to connect with others who have struggled but are determined to be successful in spite of their struggles. Several of the students attending the community college where the study occurred were struggling with family issues, finances, and an uncertain future—similar to what I had experienced as a college student. Many were dealing with issues over and beyond just being a college student. Although I had a great deal of empathy for some of these students, I did not want to assume I knew what they needed. I did not want to put additional credence on what students with backgrounds similar to mine had to say or how they reacted to classroom events. I recognized that there was diversity within the student body, and the degree of their struggles varied, so I needed to avoid letting my subjectivity control my interpretations.

Additionally, I am an older student, and there were several older students in the class. As I listened to the lectures, especially the ones related to life skills covering topics ranging from sexual diseases to financing a new car or a house, it was easy for me to assume that the lessons

would be a waste of time for the older students. I attempted to manage my subjectivity by asking questions about these types of lessons of all students regardless of their age. I needed to be open to how each student experienced what was being taught regardless of my preconceived notions based on their age.

On the other hand, I have children in college and they are at an age where I see them as sometimes being irresponsible. As I listened to the instructor sometimes scolding the students, I was certain some of them needed the scolding, especially the younger students. I was aware of this subjectivity and recognized that my reaction to the scolding was of lesser importance than the students' reactions.

Additionally, the instructor and I are about the same age and I appreciated his allowing me into the classroom. He shared with me that he had endured hardship growing up, but was successful in spite of it. What I saw as strength of character was appealing to me. All of this made me feel trepidation about writing something that might offend him. I imagine this is a common concern to ethnographers who have been granted access into a study site. This was probably the most difficult aspect of subjectivity for me to manage. Using pseudonyms to identify the places where my research took place and for the names of research participants helped me to manage this conflict.

Although the influence of the researcher on the study participants can be problematic (Maxwell, 1992), I was aware of the need to be reflective about subjectivity. According to Peshkin (1988), subjectivity operates during the entire process of research and the ideal is to achieve objectivity about subjectivity. He advocates an enhanced awareness of one's own subjectivity resulting in a formal, systematic monitoring of self. As such, and as is recommended by Peshkin, knowing that removing subjectivity is impossible, I sought to manage

and keep it from overwhelming my research as I progressed through collecting, analyzing, and documenting my data.

3.9 Reactivity

Maxwell (2005) defines reactivity as the influence a researcher has on the setting or individuals being studied. Completely eliminating reactivity from research is impossible (Hammersley and Adkinson, 1995). Although completely removing reactivity was not possible, I attempted to limit its occurrence by becoming a part of the everydayness of classroom life. I was in the classroom each time it met and I consciously made an effort to unobtrusively observe.

The managing of reactivity also requires reflexivity. Reflexivity, on the other hand, has to do with the act or process of reflecting. Reflexivity is required for the researcher to be able to expose possible biases in their own position and make them transparent in their research (Maxwell, 2005). Reflexivity helps the researcher acknowledge and manage biases related to the phenomenon under study. The researcher's experience and interpretation of data forms the basis of ethnographic analysis (Maxwell, 2005).

To meet the objectives of reactivity and reflexivity, I recorded what occurred in the classroom throughout the semester. This provided an accurate account of classroom activity and I therefore did not have to solely rely on an interpretation of what I remembered. I was able to revisit what I had recorded by replaying the recordings. After each class, I reflected and recorded my overview of the classroom events. Additionally, I recorded all interviews. After each interview, I reflected and recorded my initial reaction to the interview. I transcribed all recordings. I reflected again on what occurred in the classroom and during the interviews by listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts. All of my recordings afforded me the

opportunity to deliberate on my reactivity, reflect, and consider my interpretations as I strove for authentication.

3.10 Validity

3.10.1 Introduction to Validity

Maxwell (2005) defines validity as the "correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account" (p. 106). Validity does not imply the existence of an absolute truth; rather, it provides alternative explanations for the phenomena being studied against which a conclusion can be tested (Maxwell, 2005). Validity in qualitative research is a goal (Maxwell, 2005). Furthermore, validity is not reached through the use of a particular method; instead, it pertains to the conclusions reached given a particular context for a particular purpose (Maxwell, 1992).

Qualitative researchers are observers and interpreters existing within the world of what is being observed and interpreted (Maxwell, 1992). It is always possible for someone with a different perspective to develop a different and equally valid account of observed phenomena (Maxwell, 1992). Validity is relative because it is not possible for an account to be independent of any particular perspective (Maxwell, 1992). As such, validity in qualitative research does not depend on absolute truth or reality, but only on the recognition that there exist ways of assessing accounts and there are inferences that can be drawn from those accounts (Maxwell, 1992). This is especially important to this case study which focuses on a particular context for a particular purpose.

There are multiple threats to validity, creating the potential for proving a conclusion wrong (Maxwell, 2005). Qualitative researchers, unlike quantitative researchers, deal with threats to validity after research has begun (Maxwell, 2005). While quantitative researchers

attempt to build validity controls into their research design, qualitative researchers collect

research evidence throughout the research process to confirm that an alternative hypothesis is

unlikely. In qualitative research, it is evidence and not methods that make threats implausible

(Maxwell, 2005).

Therefore, in this case study, I identified strategies to gather evidence for ruling out

threats. Throughout the research process, I reflected on how my conclusions might be wrong. I

considered alternative interpretations. I analyzed the data collected to determine if it supported

or challenged my interpretations of what was occurring.

I rely on Maxwell's (1992) five broad categories of understanding and five corresponding

types of validity for evidence collecting. While validity in qualitative research is not reached

through the use of particular methods, there should be a grounding of accounts in some particular

community and perspective (Maxwell, 1992). Maxwell provides categories of validity for the

purpose of explicating how qualitative researchers think about validity. In this study, Maxwell's

categories of validity were used to provide a grounding of accounts given the community in

which the study occurred and the perspective of the study participants.

3.10.2 Descriptive Validity

Qualitative researchers concern themselves with the factual accuracy of their account.

What is said and done is to be accurately portrayed (Maxwell, 1992). A recorded word is

evidence of a word being used. Activities are presented as a physical or behavioral event rather

than in terms of the meanings that they have for participants. In this case study, I record and

transcribe word for word. Qualitative researchers concern themselves with descriptive validity

of what has been seen, heard, touched, smelled, and so on (Maxwell, 1992). By recording and

transcribing what was heard and documenting what was seen, I provide factual evidence of my case study account.

3.10.3 Interpretive Validity

Qualitative researchers are also concerned with objects, events, and behaviors and what they mean to the people engaged in and with them (Maxwell, 1992). The threats to interpretive validity are significantly different from those to descriptive validity, and this aspect of understanding is central to interpretive research (Maxwell, 1992). Accounts of meaning must be based initially on the conceptual framework and in the language of the people whose meaning is in question (Maxwell, 1992). I ground my interpretive accounts by documenting and including quotes from the instructor and the students as evidence of what was said in the language it was spoken. According to Maxwell (1992), interpretive accounts are grounded in the language of the people studied and rely as much as possible on their own words. The accuracy thus depends on the perspective of the individual included in the account. Interpretive validity is inferred from the words and actions of participants in the situation being studied (Maxwell, 1992).

3.10.4 Theoretical Validity

Theoretical validity addresses the theoretical constructions that a researcher brings to or develops during a study (Maxwell, 1992). It goes beyond description or interpretation. Theoretical understanding refers to an account's function as an explanation, as well as a description or interpretation of the phenomena (Maxwell, 1992). Theoretical validity refers to an account's validity as a theory of some phenomenon (Maxwell, 1992). First are the concepts or categories that the theory employs and then the relationship thought to exist among the concepts (Maxwell, 1992). As an example, Maxwell, labels a student throwing an eraser as an act of resistance and connects this act to the repressive behavior or values of the teacher, or social

structure of the school, or class relationships in the U.S society. It isn't enough that only a description of curriculum or an interpretation of how the curriculum was experienced emerges from my study. While both are relevant, theoretical constructions must and will be developed from the phenomenon I am studying.

3.10.5 Generalizability

Generalizability relates to the degree in which an account of a particular situation can extend to wider populations (Maxwell, 1992). While results are specific to a particular study, such analyses can translate findings across contexts because of the added insightfulness that ethnography provides and the development of theory that can be extended to other similar cases (Maxwell, 2005). In qualitative research, there are two levels of generalizability (Maxwell, 1992). The first is the generalizability within a community, group, or an institution. The other is generalizability to the wider populations. Qualitative researchers rarely make explicit claims about generalizability of their accounts to wider populations. I do not claim the results that emerge from this case study will yield generalizations. Rather, I conceive that there is much to be learned about the phenomena being studied.

3.10.6 Evaluative Validity

According to Maxwell (1992), evaluative validity involves the application of a framework that expresses a judgment about the objects of study. Evaluative validity is not as central to qualitative research as are descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity. Like generalizability, qualitative researchers rarely claim to evaluate the things they study (Maxwell, 1992). Using the earlier example, Maxwell points out that evaluating whether the student threw the eraser was legitimate or justified does not depend on the methods used to ascertain that it happened. Nor does it decide what interpretive or theoretical sense to make of the occurrence.

In this case study, I do not focus on whether what occurred was legitimate or justified, only that it occurred.

3.11 Theoretical Applications

3.11.1 The Layers of Jointly Constructed Curriculum

Curriculum can be defined as an "interrelated set of plans and experiences that a student undertakes under the guidance of the school" (Marsh & Willis, 2006). According to Sizer (1999), curriculum is the formal claim of what we want to teach students. It provides the objectives, goals, and the lesson plans for achieving what we value in society. To the world outside of the classroom, it is the course of study (Sizer, 1999). It provides expectations of what students will know when they complete a course of study.

Additionally, curriculum consists of tiles of meaning that people impose into its definition, thereby producing a particular version of curriculum within the confines of a classroom. As such, to gain an understanding of the meaning imposed on curriculum in a particular classroom, I examine three layers of meaning that constitute the curriculum in total: the formal curriculum, the enacted curriculum, and the experienced curriculum (Glatthorn, Boschee & Whitehead, 2005; Mendez, 2006; Page, 1991).

What the curriculum says should be taught and how it gets taught in the classroom, along with what the student hears, learns, and creates from the knowledge are almost always very different things (Sizer, 1999). This concept of a multi-layered process through which curriculum becomes jointly constructed provided a framework for my study. The written documents of curriculum, what I define as being the formal curriculum, contained the objectives, the list of what should be taught, and what students should be able to do. The formal curriculum was translated and enacted in classrooms, and in the process it became transformed (Sizer, 1999).

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Given that formal curriculum thus transforms into a localized version of curriculum (Erickson, 1985), all layers needed to be examined to gain an understanding of the theoretical construction of the localized version.

Classroom observations allow a researcher to see firsthand the transformation of formal curriculum into enacted curriculum. It is within the classroom where the formal curriculum is transformed by the everyday interface of students, teachers, knowledge, and environment to create an observable and documentable version of enacted curriculum (Sizer, 1999). According to Page (1987), investigating the enacted curriculum involves "observing what classroom participants in a classroom do and asking what they know that makes their actions understandable" (p. 449).

The act of classroom teaching is done by individuals operating in mostly private places behind closed classroom doors (Sizer, 1999). Instructors select, concentrate, and translate, through their own lens, various aspects of the formal curriculum (Sizer, 1999). The instructor and others involved in the implementation of the curriculum in this study had their own versions of who the students in the classroom were, what they needed to learn, and how best to accomplish the objectives and goals of the curriculum. It is through their lenses that they interpreted the curriculum.

What the student hears, understands, and remembers further defines what curriculum is and what is becomes (Sizer, 1999). While teachers also have expectations of what students should learn and retain, the knowledge attained by individual students varies widely and rarely meets expectations (Sizer, 1999). According to Sizer (1999), students recall, use, value, and remember within the context of that which they have individually been engaged. Each student in

my study experienced the curriculum in their own way and only they can verify how and what the experience was for each of them.

What a curriculum is on paper, what it becomes in the classroom, and what it means to participants is a socially constructed manifestation of the interaction between instructor, student, and the socially constructed institution (Erickson, 1985; Page, 1991; Sizer, 1999; Spindler & Spindler, 1985). The enactment of formal curriculum is influenced by the perspectives of what it means to be an instructor or a student in a particular classroom (Erickson, 1985). As instructors transmit the formal curriculum to students, the curriculum becomes jointly constructed (Page, 1991) by students' responses, reactions, and sometimes counter-definitions (Page, 1988). In this study, the curriculum was jointly constructed by the participants. According to Page (1988), each participant in curriculum construction brings a perspective influenced by the perspectives of others with whom they interact. Their perspectives are not created but are reflective of broader historical and sociocultural understandings (Page, 1988). In other words, students react to the teacher's interpretation within a socially constructed environment which in turn informs the instructor's response (Metz, 1978). Curriculum is thus given meaning because of the interaction between instructors, students, materials, and assignments (Erickson, 1985; Page, 1991; Sizer, 1999; Spindler & Spindler, 1985).

3.11.2 Cultural Places

Schools and classrooms are cultural places and the curriculum used in a classroom is culturally constructed. Cultural analysis is a key component of my case study. Cultural analysis entails the uncovering and exposing of the theoretical structures that inform participant acts and the underlying meaning of what was said (Geertz, 1973). Occurring within a classroom is a cultural production that involves the instructor, students, and policy, all of which are elements

that together contribute to a particular version of curriculum. According to Page (1988), a classroom is a place where teachers' and students' definitions of their roles and of knowledge interact in particular institutional settings.

3.11.3 Concept of Participation Structure

I rely on the concept of participation structure to help me understand the rules for interaction in the classroom. Page (1987) defines the concept of participation structure as a type of social encounter. In classrooms, teachers determine the rules for participation and students respond. Implicit rules often emerge and teachers and students enact their reciprocal roles. According to Page (1987), teachers have the authority to direct, pose questions, and assess responses, and therefore retain control of classroom talk. Additionally, the teacher controls the topic to be taught, its meaning, and the pace of the lesson. Teachers have some key prerogatives that students do not have in classrooms.

Classrooms are places where issues of control have a subtle and pervasive influence (Glatthorn, Boschee & Whitehead, 2005). Issues of control have an overarching effect on classroom participation, and therefore this concept informed my understanding of many important aspects of participant behavior. According to Glatthorn, Boschee & Whitehead (2005),

> The classroom is a crowded place, where issues of control often become dominant. Control is achieved through the differential use of power; the teacher uses several kinds of power to control the selection of content, the methods of learning, movement in the classroom, and the flow of classroom discourse. Control also is achieved by the skillful use of accountability measures; teachers spend much time evaluating and giving evaluative feedback. In such a classroom,

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students unconsciously learn the skills and traits required by the larger society;

they learn how to be punctual, clean, docile, and conforming. They learn how to

stand in line, take their turn, and wait. (p. 23)

The responsibility for handing out evaluative feedback, in the form of grades, gives

instructors immense power in the classroom. Additionally, they have other powers typically

designated to a leadership role. Students in classrooms, such as the one in this study, respond

and give their own meaning to existing power structures. Although some students may rebel,

many will attempt to meet the accountability measures. While the knowledge that ultimately

gets created in the classroom is a result of a back and forth negotiation that occurs between

teachers and students, the roles of the participants are not equal (Page, 2003). Not only does the

instructor implicitly recognize and know the unequal power he or she has in the classroom, so do

the students.

Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2005) posit that students exhibit an especially

sensitive response to the accountability system at work in the classroom. Regardless of the

course and classroom objectives emphasized by the formal curriculum or the instructor, the

students assess the importance of classroom transactions in relation to how what they do in the

classroom will be assessed. The students in this study gave their own meaning to the

accountability system of the classroom through their reactions and behavior. Students construct

strategies for managing uncertainty and reducing risk; as Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead

(2005) characterize this dynamic by stating that students will give vague and limited answers to

minimize the risk of making public mistakes. Students learn to carefully participate, improving

their opportunity for gaining favor with the instructor, while treading lightly so as to not say nor

do the wrong thing.

While teachers have the power and authority in classrooms to subject students to their point of view (Page, 1991), students have the power to resist. Students can resist and reject the formal curriculum as well as the enacted curriculum. The curriculum construction that occurs within a classroom is influenced by existing power structures and is therefore important to my case study.

3.11.4 Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory

Rosenblatt's (1969) transactional theory of reading provided a framework for understanding the process of how participants negotiated the interpretation of curriculum in my study. Rosenblatt (1969) developed the theory as it related to the teaching of literature and first used this idea to understand how and why people read the same text and came away with very different understandings. According to Rosenblatt (1969), a transaction occurs between a particular individual and a particular environment. As it related to literature and reading, a transaction occurred between the reader and the text. A transaction is unlike an interaction where two separate factors act on or collide with one another, and instead is similar to an electric current set up between a negative and positive pole, each inert without the other (Rosenblatt, 1969). For Rosenblatt, a transaction was an interchange of ideas and responses influenced by individual context.

I was able to utilize this theory to gain a deeper understanding of the transactions that occurred between the instructor, the written documents, and the students, and the resulting negotiations that occurred with each transaction. As it related to reading, Rosenblatt (1969) posited:

> The transaction involving a reader and a printed text thus can be viewed as an
> event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular

moment in the life history of the reader. The transaction will involve not only the

past experience but also the present state and present interests or preoccupations

of the reader. (p. 45)

Transactional theory thus suggests that there is a negotiating relationship between reader

and text in which one mutually shapes the other. A reader, or in my case each curriculum

participant, assigns meaning to an interaction and in the process adds individualized meaning to

what the curriculum ultimately becomes. According to Rosenblatt (1969), meaning is assigned

based on attention to the residue of past experiences occurring in differing contexts, the

overtones of feeling, and the blending of attitude and mood. There is a reciprocal relationship

between reader and text in which each contributes to what the meaning of the text becomes.

As I developed cultural concepts, I sought not to replace existing theory, but to be

informed by it. Theories are not created wholly anew from each study, as each study can learn

from other studies and refine them to be applicable to new interpretive problems (Geertz, 1973).

While I rely on a number of theoretical ideas to inform my case study, I inquire into developing

grounded theory.   In general, the goal of research is to construct theories and with the help of

interpretive procedures understand the phenomena being studied (Haig, 1995).

3.12 Setting and Background

3.12.1 Historical Context of the Area

The area where SCC is located is rich with cultural history. Juan De Oñate passed through the area in 1598 and in the 1700s Mestizos[5] and Indians inhabited the area. In 1848, when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, the area, which belonged to Mexico at the time, became a part of what we now call the United States. According to Romo (2005), by 1884, four new railroad lines connected the city to the rest of the United States, bringing an influx of English-speaking Caucasians to the area. By 1910, the area was mostly comprised of persons of Mexican and Caucasian descent. The Spanish language was an important cultural part of the area when the English speaking Caucasians arrived. Today, competing cultures continue to exist in the area where Spanish was, and still is, as predominant a language as English.

In the 1880s, as Caucasians gained political and economic strength, racial tensions became evident with Caucasians and poorer Mexicans generally living in separate areas of the city (Romo, 2005). Differing economic statuses of Mexicans within the culture also created lines of division. In 1878, one of the most influential events was the opening of a military base. Over many years, the military presence continued to grow and contribute to existing cultural tensions.

The changing demographics and political structure of the area led to an explosion of tension in 1916 (Romo, 2005). This was a year considered one of the worst years in history for Caucasian-Mexican relations (Romo, 2005). That same year, a race riot in the city between Caucasians and Mexicans made national headlines. Tensions between Caucasians and Mexicans were high, and eventually the deep divide that existed between the two ethnic groups became

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[5] Mestizo refers to a person of mixed racial ancestry, especially of mixed European (Spanish) and Native American ancestry.

institutionalized and woven into the fabric of everyday life with Mexicans being treated as less than second class citizens (Romo, 2005).

Mexicans were considered inferior in status and rights in comparison with the Caucasians who were gaining political power. Between 1866 and 1875, Mexicans had been county clerks, judges, and holders of other political positions. From 1883-1993, only two Mexican Americans held the mayor's post and were otherwise mostly disenfranchised from city and county politics (Romo, 2005).

By 1917, crossing back and forth across the Mexican border required a passport and payment. It was at this point that the two cities on the border became two separate communities and the Mexican nationals who had previously freely travelled back and forth now had to fear legal consequences. During the same year, the U.S. Health Department began a program of bathing and delousing Mexicans with dangerous pesticides as they crossed the border to work in the city--an inherently humiliating and intimidating process endured for the sake of trying to earn a living (Romo, 2005).

While unrestrained back and forth travel across the border was no longer allowed, the need for cheap labor on one side and the need for work on the other was one reason for continued crossing of laborers from Mexico into the area. Manufacturing in the area expanded in the 1970s and 1980s and resulted in a rising entry of legal and illegal immigrant workers and commuter workers from Mexico in search of work. Many immigrants who crossed the border stayed in the area. Between 1970 and 2000, immigration and higher than average fertility rates created a rapid and large population growth in the area. The area became an environment of abundant low-wage labor. Today, low-skilled labor has saturated the area and continues to keep wages low. Climbing out of poverty is difficult even for those who can find work.

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The majority of the current population in the area is Hispanic and many people are fluent only in Spanish. From 2005-2009 almost 75% of the population ages 5 years and older spoke a language other than English at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). During this same period, it was found that at least 32% of Spanish speakers in the area had difficulty expressing themselves in English (U.S. Census Bureau). According to a case study[6] done between 2007 and 2008, this creates additional challenges for families and their children. The language barrier makes it more difficult for some to enter into the workforce. It is also harder for children from Spanish speaking homes to learn English. Parents who only speak Spanish tend to have attained a low level of education or cannot read and write English, limiting the academic support children receive at home.

The area continues to be an area of low educational attainment and high poverty, where a minority group makes up the majority of the population. Even while current predictions indicate continuing job growth in the area, many of the jobs are low-skill manufacturing and labor intensive with few benefits. Today, the area is one of the poorest among major cities and has become poorer relative to the rest of the country. The area faces many challenges due to the high percentage of residents who are living in poverty.

Low academic achievement is a major contributor to the high poverty rates of the area. Mexican immigrants represent the greatest share of uneducated residents. Most arrive without even a high school diploma. Poverty often passes on from one generation to the next. Poor student performance, high dropout rates, and a need to earn a living rather than pursue an education are obstacles that all area schools face.

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[6] Reference not cited as it would reveal name of area in which SCC is located

This historical background is important to the study because it provides a context for the area in which the participants live. The current environment of the area has been greatly influenced by its early beginnings. It is an area where language barriers, poverty, and educational attainment are challenges that continue to exist. It is an area where Mexicans of mostly lower economic status have been treated as a second class people. Students growing up in these environments struggle to overcome the obstacles of their environments. They grow up in families struggling to make a living and subsist in low income communities. The schools they attend are stressed with trying to overcome the results of students having grown up in these environments. All of these factors affect who the students are, what they bring with them, and how they experience the curriculum in this classroom.

3.12.2 Community Demographics

My study took place at a community college in Border City,[7] located on the border of the United States and Mexico. In 2010, Hispanics, mostly of Mexican descent, made up approximately 82% of the total county population of almost 900,000 (U.S. Census Quickfacts, 2012). Given that the city borders Mexico, Spanish is widely spoken in the area. The U.S. eCensus reported that between 2005 and 2009, as high as almost 75% of the population in the area spoke Spanish.

While the median income for the entire United States was $50,221 in 2009, the median income in this county was just over $36,000 (U.S. Census, 2010). In the same year, the number of individuals living below poverty level for the area was almost 24%, significantly higher than the national poverty level of 14.3%. While 68.6% of residents age 25 or older held a high school

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[7] Name of city is pseudonym.

diploma[8] in 2009, only about 18% held a bachelor's degree or higher. Education level of a population has a direct impact on the economic health of the community, and this is a city where income levels and educational attainment of the mostly Hispanic population is disconcerting as low educational attainment contributes to poverty. The area has had one of the highest poverty rates in the United States, and according to the 2010 census data the trend is ongoing.

This is troublesome because the Hispanic population is one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States. Yet, it continues to experience high rates of poverty, mostly due to their low educational achievement levels, even as they are becoming an increasingly important part of the U.S. economy. Hispanics tend to have the lowest levels of educational attainment of any racial or ethnic group, and lower educational levels affect economic success and health (Census information center, 2011). According to the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences (2010), a male high school graduate, which includes those earning a high school equivalency, earns a median income of $39,480 while a male with less than a high school education earns a median income of $28,020. A male with a bachelor's degree earns a median income or $62,440. For females, the median income at all levels is significantly less (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Taken together, these statistics demonstrate that the area surrounding Southwestern Community College's (SCC) location has endemic issues of ethnic tensions, language barriers, low academic attainment, and poverty, especially among Hispanic students; as such, the student population within the orientation courses at SCC represent many of the characteristics which concern researchers on gaps in retention and success for specific student groups.

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[8] High school diploma includes attainment of a high school equivalency degree.

3.12.3 Community College

This ethnographic case-study was conducted at Southwestern Community College (SCC), which is located in Border City. According to the community college website, SCC offers Associate of Arts, Associate of Applied Science, and Associate of Science degrees, along with various vocational certificates of completion. The college has seven campuses located throughout the large metropolitan area. At the time of my study, total student enrollment at all of the SCC campuses was roughly 25,000. Approximately 3,800 students were enrolled at the campus where I conducted my study. Hispanic students comprised 85.8% of the total student population while Caucasian students constituted 8.1%; 2.9% were designated as international students, and 3.3% were from other ethnic groups. SCC was designated a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) based on the large number of Hispanic students attending who depended on academic financial assistance[9].

According to the community college website, the average age of students is 27 years. Many adult students who work attend part-time while seeking new skills. Additionally, many of the students are first-generation college students. A high percentage of the students attending do not test at a college ready level in math, reading and writing.

According to their website, SCC is the largest grantor of Associate degrees to Hispanic students in the nation. Even so, SCC is concerned with the high number of students who leave the community college without earning a certificate or degree or transferring to continue their studies. The need to increase student retention has motivated colleges such as SCC to implement orientation courses with an emphasis on increasing student success.

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[9] A Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) is **defined as** a non-profit institution that has at least 25% Hispanic full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment with at least 50% of the students being needy.

According to a Pell Institute Report (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006), first generation[10] students who attend college are more likely to attend a community college than a four-year university. First generation college students make up 53% of the attending population at two-year community colleges, compared to 34% of entering students at four-year universities. Additionally, first generation college students are more likely to be older than average students, female, African American or Hispanic, have dependent children or come from lower-income families. All of these factors contribute to lower graduation rates and are prevalent at SCC.

At SCC prospective students take a placement test, and a large number of those students test into developmental, sometimes called remedial, courses in math, reading, or writing. Developmental courses are extra classes students must take before they can enroll in the curriculum requirements for a degree or vocational certificate. These courses add costs and increased time in school for students trying to attain a degree or certificate. Additionally, many students who take developmental courses fail at their first attempt and have to retake the class. A 2010 paper presented at the National Center for Post Secondary Research (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010) reported that less than 30% of students who place into the lowest levels of developmental math and reading complete their developmental education coursework. Additionally, fewer than 10% of students who are placed in the lowest level of developmental math successfully complete a college-level math course, and less than 30% of the students recommended to the highest level of developmental courses complete the course ((Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010).

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[10] First generation college students are students whose parents have not attended college and/or have not earned a college degree.

In 2004, SCC began an initiative to increase the percentage of students who successfully completed the developmental courses they took, thereby advancing from remedial to credit-bearing courses. The program also focused on enrolling students and helping them successfully complete gatekeeper courses. Gatekeeper courses are generally first level college courses in reading, writing, and math, although they can be any first level course in a degree program that a student must pass before progressing toward a degree. The initiative sought to increase student enrollment from one semester to the next and degrees and/or certificates attainment (College website). A key program strategy was getting students to take a test while they were yet in high school that provided information on their readiness for college early enough to allow academic intervention before they graduated.

As part of the initiative, the program included strategies to improve college readiness. SCC implemented collaboration programs with local high schools to better prepare graduates who planned on furthering their education immediately after high school. The program has successfully increased the number of the students who are prepared for college as evidenced by the higher placement test scores for this group of students. Unfortunately, many of the students who attend SCC do not attend immediately after graduating high school, and they continue to score low on placement tests. The orientation course using the curriculum in this study is one of the core courses students who are pursuing an academic degree are required to take after they meet developmental requirements.

3.12.4 Physical Space of Southwestern Community College (SCC)

SCC is a one-building campus that houses classrooms and offices and offers a wide range of services to students. It looks very much like a high school given that it is a one building unit. The school is located in a non-residential part of the city and is surrounded by a large desert area.

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Its exterior is made up of attractive desert colors that blend nicely with the natural terrain. The building is visible to vehicles traveling on a nearby interstate highway and is easily accessible from the interstate. Because the campus is surrounded by a large area of undeveloped land, it is somewhat separated from the stores, service stations, and other industrial and commercial buildings located nearby. The building appears to be relatively new and well maintained.

The building houses several offices that provide student services that one might expect to be centrally located at a larger "parent" facility. There are a Veterans' office, admissions, registration, and financial aid office, language skills and computer area, a bookstore and library, a career services office, a food court, a textile (fashion) lab, a police station and student classrooms—all located within the same building. The offices are situated along one side of a long hallway that winds from north to south. The classrooms are located along hallways that twist and turn off the main hallway. At the center of the building is an open space with high ceilings where students often gather. A well known restaurant offers breakfast and lunch sandwiches. There are several areas where students can sit and read, study, or socialize. They have a variety of sitting options, including tables and chairs, steps, and platforms with ledges. Displays, such as health fair tables, are often set up in this area. The library, bookstore, career services, and technology office are also located in this part of the building.

Staff and students could often be heard speaking both Spanish and English. Everywhere throughout the building you could see and hear the influence of the Mexican culture. It was a culturally warm environment with many students interacting comfortably while engaging in conversation in the central area of the building. Younger and older students could be seen sitting at tables, walking down the center corridor, and studying.

3.12.5 Physical Attributes of Classroom

The classroom where I studied curriculum was located at the end of a short hallway that led from a longer winding hallway. There were several other classrooms nearby. There was a door that was accessible from the outside of the building which led directly to the short hallway where the classroom was located. It was often locked during the early morning time period when the class was held, so students with early classes had to use one of two main entrances to enter the building.

The classroom looked comfortable, clean, and well maintained. The white walls looked newly painted. The wall farthest from the entrance had windows running from one end to the other. The room temperature was always comfortable, even on rainy days and in cold weather. The room was equipped with the standard technology typically found in many of today's tech smart classrooms. A laptop could be connected to a projector and internet access was available. There was a large projector screen that slid down at the push of a button, and this technology was used throughout the semester.

The classroom also contained standard classroom furniture, including desks, a podium, a table up front, and a chalkboard. It was not so different from that of many other classrooms. Given the physical layout, students could assume that the instructor would lecture from the front of the class. Upon entering the classroom, one knew that the instructor would use the podium, table, and chalkboard for classroom instruction.

Approximately 28 small desks filled the classroom. The desk sizes reminded me of the desks I sat in when attending elementary school. These desks had attached seats and opened on one side so the student could slide into a sitting position. The desks were lined up in columns with the last desk up against the back wall. Unless they were sitting in the seats closest to the

entrance, students had to walk to the front of the room to get to the aisle where their seat was located. There were three student seats against the wall and to the north of the entrance door. These were obviously extra desks because they were set apart from the main cluster of seats. I sat in one of the extra desks.

3.12.6 Students

The Hispanic student culture in relation to the culture of the community and the community college campus was one of cultural congruence. Most of the students in the orientation class were Hispanic, of Mexican descent, and from the area. While most of the students in the class were Hispanic, there were also a few African American male students, one Anglo female, and a few students of mixed ethnicity. The students who were not from the area and did not speak Spanish indicated they were comfortable in the community college environment.

In the classroom where observations occurred, most of the students were between the ages of 18 and 30. Some of the students were right out of high school while others were not. According to the instructor, older students tended to verbally question and challenge what was being taught more often than the younger students. In this classroom, regardless of age, it was the male students who attempted to challenge the lessons more often than the females.

Each student sat in the same seat every time the class met. Most of the males sat on one side of the classroom while all of the females sat on the other side. Students would typically walk in quietly and make their way to their seats. Students who knew each other interacted and a few of the male students were a little more boisterous than others, but not much.

3.12.7 Classroom Environment

In the classroom, students mostly spoke English, although a young male student and female student who knew each outside of the classroom spoke to each other in Spanish. A few of the male students appeared to know each other and I saw some of them congregate when class was not in session. Except for the two Spanish-speaking students and in-class organized activities, there was very little interaction between the females and the males during class time. Most of the students did not appear to know each other outside of the classroom.

Other than the absent interaction between the females and the males, the classroom environment was similar to a high school classroom. It was one where students were expected to listen while the instructor lectured. Students experienced an environment where classroom rules were expected to be followed. Early in the semester, it became evident that classroom rules such as tardiness would result in open scolding. There was not a great deal of back and forth interaction between the students and the instructor unless the instructor deemed it the right time for it to occur. Student contribution to the classroom environment was controlled by the instructor.

Once class began, students could expect that the instructor, Mr. Paz, would have a full agenda to get through during each class period. Mr. Paz was energetic and used various methods for keeping student attention. There would be self-assessments to complete, short lectures, overhead presentations, some group activities, and guest speakers. It was difficult for students to insert a verbal comment unless Mr. Paz invited them to do so. Mr. Paz would often not hear uninvited student comments as he proceeded with the lesson or he would ignore the attempted interruption. While the classroom lessons were fast paced and attention grabbing, during class

time, students were rarely given the opportunity to ask for clarification or to contribute an opinion.

3.12.8 The Instructor and Classroom Routines

The instructor, Mr. Paz, arrived every morning either a couple of minutes before class time or exactly on time. He would enter without greeting any of the students. He would walk straight to the table located at the front of the room and set his briefcase on the table along with any additional papers he might be carrying. He would start to organize his papers, pass around a sign-in sheet, and, most of the time, start lecturing at exactly 7:00 A.M. Some days he would begin by handing back assignments that he had graded.

As Mr. Paz's pattern for entering the classroom became apparent, it also became clear that he had a set way of doing things. While he was not someone who actively initiated social engagement with the students, his demeanor was not standoffish. He did not look unfriendly or intimidating. He was an academic counselor who taught this orientation class; in addition to his role as a counselor, he worked with students who sought his services on an individual basis. When approached, Mr. Paz responded in a helpful manner.

He did many of the typical things done in orientation classrooms of this type: He wrote on the board, used the overhead, lectured, had students engage in activities, and tried to keep student interest by appealing to all types of learning structures. He took students to the library and had guest speakers introduce various areas of expertise.

Mr. Paz taught from the front of the room. A blond wooden rectangular table, on which the instructor would place his paperwork and bag upon entering the classroom, was located front and center. There was a chair behind the table for the instructor to use as needed. To the right of the table was another platform on which the instructor would sometimes set up a projector. A

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blackboard ran the length of a large portion of the front wall. Mr. Paz frequently used the board to write on during his lectures.

Mr. Paz used the entire front of the classroom area when he lectured, moving back and forth from one end to the other and moving from behind the podium to the front of the podium as needed. He changed directions often, both physically and mentally. Frequently, Mr. Paz would continue to lecture as students were engaged in a written assessment, making it challenging for them to focus on the assessment and listen to him at the same time. It was not unusual, during one class period, for him to list things on the board, put something up on the projector, lecture as he passed out handouts and interject personal examples into the lesson topic.

In this classroom, Mr. Paz did most of the talking. He let me know that he was not the kind of instructor who liked to have students stand up and talk about "stuff." He explained that he knew there were always students who would take over the class with talking and he was not going to let that happen. Occasionally, he would acknowledge a student response or comment, but usually he continued with his lecture and ignored what was said. Mr. Paz regularly ignored a student's raised hand, and so students would sometimes yell out comments to try to get his attention. Even when this occurred, Mr. Paz would often not acknowledge the student making the comment. This became a classroom where students rarely exchanged their ideas or thoughts with the instructor.

Mr. Paz normally did not venture beyond the invisible line that tended to mark the end of the front area and the beginning of the desk area. He maintained a clear boundary between himself and the students. This was intentional, as he had told me during an interview that he was very careful not to cross boundaries. According to Mr. Paz, he did not curse in class, he expected respect and he treated students with respect. He let the students know that the main reason he

was there was to teach, and they were there to learn. He had a clear sense of the boundaries he upheld as a counselor and an instructor and the boundaries he expected students not to cross.

While Mr. Paz intentionally maintained a boundary between himself and the students, he also frequently scolded students in what some students referred to as a fatherly manner. While some students referred to his scolding as fatherly, others expressed a discomfort with the scolding. Although the scolding at times sounded harsh and uncomfortable, it was done frequently enough that it became a familiar occurrence. Mr. Paz also often told jokes. Additionally, Mr. Paz sometimes would, either intentionally or otherwise, express himself in a grammatically incorrect manner. When this occurred, it was sometimes intentional for the purpose of being funny. At other times, it wasn't clear if the grammatical errors were intentional or not.

Mr. Paz used various teaching tools to appeal to all learning types. He had students engage in completing assessments and participate in classroom activities. On a frequent basis, he went from lecturing on a lesson topic and inserting concepts from other lesson topics, to scolding, and telling personal stories or jokes. His tone of voice moved up and down in pitch depending on what point he was making. He moved around frequently, sitting, standing, and moving side to side. He provided visual, auditory, and kinesthetic[11] stimulation. He engaged students in classroom activities.

While the planned lessons tied to specific unit objectives, Mr. Paz frequently interjected life skill examples into whatever he was lecturing about. His specific examples were not to be found in the course description or syllabi, but the textbook included lessons on maturity,

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[11] Students learn by engaging in an activity rather than just by listening to a lecture.

emotional intelligence, self confidence, and taking responsibility, all of which Mr. Paz was conceivably trying to get across. Mr. Paz's frequent scolding often diluted the day's lesson focus and created confusion as to what the main objective of a particular lesson was meant to teach. Rather than lessons that delved deeply into one objective, the lessons became diluted by the inclusion of scolding and personal examples that were used to teach about life skills.

Scolding of the students occurred on a daily basis throughout the semester and therefore became a key teaching method used by Mr. Paz. It was integrated into almost every subject being discussed. The male students tended to exhibit their dislike or surprise of the scolding more than the females. A couple of male students might mutter something quietly to themselves, while others would say something loud enough for other students to decipher. The female students, on the other hand, tended to stay mostly quiet.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FORMAL CURRICULUM

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I document and analyze the formal curriculum used in an orientation course. As defined by Page (1991), formal curriculum is the explicit knowledge students are intended to acquire. The intended knowledge of the formal curriculum was rendered in the course description, syllabus, and the textbook. My analysis shows that the formal curriculum exhibited, within its various manifestations, promotion of ambitious objectives through its written documents. While promoting ambitious objectives, it was also confusing in its description of the lessons, exposing an underlying focus on life skills which would potentially overwhelm other objectives.

4.2 Written Documents

4.2.1 The Course Description

The catalog description from the community college course catalog advanced the SCC orientation course as providing students with ample skills to prepare them to be lifetime learners as it laid out what students could expect to gain from this course. They would be given tools for a successful transition into college, and could anticipate that they would expand their knowledge in specified areas that would personally and educationally benefit them for a lifetime of learning. The three objectives of academic strategies, life skills, and orientation were conveyed as a means of providing essential tools to students for making education meaningful. The description suggested that the course would provide students with a necessary array of skills to help them succeed. Students would be able to use these skills as a basis for continued learning. While many of the objectives were non-academic in nature, the course description pledged the learning of

knowledge that ultimately would lead to students' successful transition into the college environment. These ambitious objectives were stated in the course description as follows:

> Provide students with the foundation to successfully transition to the college learning environment. Students will expand their knowledge of academic strategies; develop successful learning habits; identify personal learning styles, personality types, and career choices; apply learning strategies in various academic fields; develop critical-thinking competencies; and enhance their use of computer technology. These skills will provide the basis for lifelong learning and for making education personally meaningful. (SCC 2010 Course Catalog)

The course description promoted a holistic approach to meeting orientation needs deemed as important by SCC to students' college transition. Other course documentation similarly included ambitious objectives and goals.

4.2.2 The Syllabus

There were two parts to the syllabus, one prepared by the class instructor and one prepared by the course coordinator. The course coordinator was responsible for the overall orientation program oversight. The instructor's part of the syllabus was entitled Southwest Community College course syllabus (SCC course syllabus). The syllabus prepared by the course coordinator was entitled Southwest Community College course syllabus, part II, official course description (official). Each of the students taking the orientation course received the two-part syllabus. The syllabus traditionally serves three main purposes: It lays out what the course is about, it informs students of course expectations, and it provides the rules, regulations, and operating procedures of the class. In a nutshell, it communicates the course objectives and planned format for achieving the stated objectives. The two-part syllabus used for this course

followed this traditional pattern. I describe the official part of the syllabus first because it focused on the curriculum's objectives and goals.

4.2.2 (A) Southwest Community College Official Course Syllabus (official)

The official syllabus revealed an ambitious curriculum containing mixed objectives. The official syllabus expanded on the objectives of the course catalog description and offered detailed information on how the curriculum would meet the ambitious objectives. The official syllabus was thorough in laying out the wide ranging and ambitious objectives and goals of the course. It listed what students could anticipate learning. It identified a curriculum with a multitude of learning components and the skills that students could expect to have gained upon the completion of the course. It was a curriculum with mixed objectives as it aimed for a holistic approach toward student orientation success.

The official syllabus began by offering the course description as it was presented in the course catalog. Next, it stated that students would master the course objectives through the completion of a research project, self-reflection activities, participation in classroom presentations, and other assignments. There were three goals listed under a course objectives heading, each dealing with a different aspect of learning.

Goal one introduced an ambitious academic performance component. It identified that students' transition to college would be facilitated with the inclusion of lessons for strengthening academic performance. Independent research, reading, and writing would be incorporated into each of five units in the course. Goal two focused on "how to" type lessons for enhancing students' study skills, critical thinking skills, and communication skills, all of which are common to orientation courses. Goal three implied this would be a class where opportunities for connection and mentoring would occur, both of which have been deemed as essential in

orientation courses for creating a sense of belonging (Tinto, 1987, 1993; Miller, Dyer & Nadler, 2002; Jeweler, 1989).

Next, the syllabus introduced five units, with each unit listing ambitious skills students were expected to learn and apply upon completion of the course. The units delineated a curriculum with a wide array of expectations. The curriculum's purpose was to impact students' physical, mental, and social proficiency. Follow-up by the instructor and the implementation of measurements for determining if students had met the ambitious stated objectives were implied in each of the units.

Unit I stated a focus on the application of effective academic strategies. Advanced skills for improving academic performance were emphasized. The expected competencies were lofty, and some were inherently difficult to measure. There were nine learning goals listed under this unit. When students completed this unit they were expected to exhibit a wide range of challenging skills. The learned skills included the demonstration of effective critical thinking, college reading and writing, problem-solving, test taking, and note-taking skills. Additionally, students were to complete a research-based project using internet-based research resources and computer technology. Unit I implied a follow-up to ensure these specific goals had been met.

Unit II stated a focus on factors that impact learning. The goals in this unit reflected intent to influence student behavior. The objectives implied that when students completed this unit their learning abilities would be impacted due to an ability to set achievable goals, use time management techniques, and demonstrate active listening skills and effective teamwork skills. While it was feasible that learning might be impacted to some degree, to what extent was an unknown.

Unit III stated a focus on how to become effective and efficient learners. While the three listed goals in this unit appeared achievable compared to other unit goals, the overall objective of becoming an effective and efficient learner as a result of having completed the goals was not so straightforwardly achievable. When students completed this unit they were expected to have identified their personal educational goals and requirements. Students were expected to be able to describe their personal learning styles. Additionally, they were to have investigated college resources and attended a library orientation. While these goals were relevant to orienting students to the college environment and creating knowledge about educational goals and learning styles, their relevance to becoming an effective and efficient learner was less evident.

Unit IV stated a focus on personal career plans. There were only three goals listed under this unit and two of them tied to career plans. Students who completed this unit were expected to be able to identify their preliminary career goals along with the education/training requirements for their chosen career. Students were to also complete a career interest inventory. While these two goals clearly could be identified with a career plan focus, the additional goal had little to do with career planning. This goal stated that students were to be able to demonstrate that they had learned and were able to participate in interpersonal communication skills with diverse populations. This one goal, while relevant and ambitious, would be challenging not only to teach, but especially to measure its achievement.

Unit V stated a focus on a personal wellness plan. The inclusion of life skills into any general education curriculum is of questionable value. This unit offered that it would challenge students to develop life skills related to healthy living and stress reduction. It included the completion of a personal wellness plan. The holistic component of the wellness plan indicated that assessments would take into account students' physical, mental, and social systems of beliefs

rather than simply individual components. Examining the whole of mind, body, and emotional components and developing a wellness plan was an ambitious undertaking. When students completed this unit, they were expected to exhibit learned skills by completing a holistic health assessment and practicing stress reduction.

The official syllabus was thorough in describing the curriculum objectives and goals, and it conveyed the idea of a potentially rigorous course. It provided a clear picture of what students could expect to gain from the course. It also emphasized the college preparatory nature of the curriculum. In fact, the skill set that the students were expected to achieve by the end of the semester suggested that students were going to be exposed to essential knowledge that could contribute to them becoming successful college students. I was able to identify a wide range of learning goals in the official syllabus that coincided with the varying objectives of curriculum for orientation used at other institutes of higher education.

4.2.2 (B) SCC Course Syllabus

Mr. Paz, the course instructor, prepared the SCC course syllabus for his class. It consisted of information about the course content and lessons. As the instructor, Mr. Paz would be delivering the curriculum goals and objectives through the lessons and while his syllabus indicated this, it mostly emphasized the student behavior he expected in this particular class. Mr. Paz's syllabus included his contact information, the required text, chapters that would be covered from the textbook, classroom rules, and lessons. A grading scale was included with the number of points needed to earn an A through F grade. Test grades, quizzes, and planned projects were allocated a total of 200 possible points.

Classroom rules are a normal component on a syllabus. Instructors have the power to make the rules in their classroom (Page, 1991) within the larger context of what society deems as

acceptable. They go over the classroom rules with students even when students have heard the rules before in various ways and in other classes. Students are repeatedly informed of the classroom rules. It is a familiar and expected process. According to Glatthorn, Boschee & Whitehead (2005), power structures are emphasized by instructors as a means of maintaining classroom control**.**

The SCC course syllabus contained the classroom rules. It oriented students to expected classroom behavior. The rules covered scholastic honesty, that tardiness greater than 10 minutes would not be tolerated; cell phones were to be turned off while in the classroom, and other required behaviors. The syllabus also stated that no children were allowed in the classroom.

While the syllabus emphasized classroom behavior, it additionally contained a semester calendar of class meeting dates along with the chapters that would be covered on specified dates. Lesson topic titles were not identified on the SCC course syllabus; instead, each lesson was identified as a textbook chapter number. For example, chapter one was to be covered on Jan 20 and 22 and so forth for all of the textbook chapters. Students had to go to the chapter in the textbook to identify what the lesson topic on any particular day was going to be. Upon opening the textbook, I could identify that chapter one was entitled "Be a Lifelong Learner." This made the syllabus nonspecific enough that it could possibly create confusion.

The two part syllabus contained all of what a student would expect to see on a syllabus. It described the course objectives and provided general information including classroom behavior requirements. The course objectives were ambitious and presented a curriculum that would include orientation, strategies to improve academic performance, and life skills which included lessons on healthy living. It was a formal curriculum with an assortment of objectives and goals and wide ranging lessons that offered an examination of the student's physical, mental, and social

systems of beliefs in the process of teaching skills deemed by the community college as essential to a student's successful transition to college.

4.2.3 The Textbook

The textbook, entitled *Peak Performance* was used in all of the orientation courses at SCC. It was used by the teacher and students in order to meet the course objectives. It included the formal lessons and revealed the scope of the curriculum. The textbook drove what was taught in the classroom. It presented the lesson materials using various formats within each chapter, including lots of bolded sub-headings with short easy-to-read paragraphs, simple graphs and tables, bulleted ideas, colorful pictures, and fill-in-the blank exercises and self-assessments. Thought-provoking quotes were included in the page margins. Additionally, at the end of each chapter, a synopsis of various careers was presented along with a profile of someone who was considered a peak performer.

As I analyzed the textbook, I identified lessons containing a focus on uncovering and replacing bad habits with "appropriate" habits leading to higher levels of performance. Becoming a student of high integrity and making moral choices was promoted as contributing to higher levels of performance. The textbook included a preface to the instructor where the author explained that his main focus for the textbook was on teaching responsibility and the consequences of choices and actions and how those choices and actions can affect others and the larger world. This was problematic, as the author's focus embedded in the textbook lessons differed from what had been stated in other course documents.

The textbook preface to the students reiterated and expanded on four main goals stated in the preface to the instructor. For example, expansion of a goal of becoming the best person you could be included comments about how good character, integrity, and ethics are the hallmarks of

successful leaders in business and in the community. While good character and ethics are generally considered good to have, I questioned the purpose of including this as a key component of the curriculum.

The student preface continued on to describe how to get started in a new school. A list of frequently asked questions and tasks to accomplish during the first week were included. Short paragraphs provided useful orientation information about how to register for classes, the grade point average grading system, adding or dropping classes, and possible outcomes to financial aid. Included were general required credit levels for playing sports. Additionally, the preface included a list of 50 strategies for success in school. These strategies were mostly common-sense strategies such as attending every class, being an active participant, and using note cards.

Problematic in all of the chapters was an elementariness of the common-sense strategies and an underlying focus on life skills. Students were continuously reminded that taking responsibility for bad decisions and making the right choices would lead to academic success. While orientation and academic strategies were included in various chapters, life skills were imbedded into all of the lesson topics and this was confusing.

The first chapter was a self-assessments chapter with many exercises to aid in self-discovery. This included the exposing of negative habits and striving to become a better person. There were several assessments to help students gain a better understanding of who they were. One of the first assessments was meant to determine if a student was a positive person. The chapter stated that having a positive attitude is important for self-management, which contributes to peak performance. Knowing oneself was introduced as an important step that would help a student move forward with tools for better learning.

Chapter two continued with a life skills theme. Chapter two presented the topic of emotional intelligence and maturity. It described objectives for the attainment of good character. Good character was listed as an essential quality for success in school, work, and life. The chapter included topics such as empathy and self-esteem. Seven positive attitudes of peak performers were listed. They included the attitudes of: flexibility by being open to new ideas, mindfulness by focusing on values of integrity and character, kindness, and civility, being responsible by taking an active role in school and work, supportiveness by encouraging and listening to show empathy and work well with others; confidence shown through a balanced perspective of personal strengths and limitations, following through on what is essential, and lastly, resourcefulness by using resources available, including surrounding oneself with positive influences, in order to achieve success.

Time management was the focus of chapter three. Described in chapter three were common-sense strategies such as not procrastinating and minimizing interruptions. An important component of this lesson involved evaluating how a student spent their time versus how they should spend their time through an exercise in evaluating and changing bad habits into good habits.

Chapter four discussed maximizing resources and included orientation lessons on campus resources available to students. It was confusing when about halfway through chapter four the focus shifted to keeping a budget and managing finances. An example of the elementariness of the strategies and the veering toward life skills was a money saving tip that encouraged students to stay healthy because illness was costly. Smoking was pointed out as being costly in terms of money spent on cigarettes and associated health issues. Further, yet another money saving strategy was to share living expenses with a roommate, while smoking was again discouraged as

something that would create greater difficulty in finding a roommate. Thus, the focus on maximizing resources within chapter four appeared to include a diverse mix of information and tips for students in accessing campus resources and managing their own resources, reinforcing the underlying combination of academic and life skills within the orientation course.

Chapters five through nine were related to improving academic performance. While listening and taking effective notes were the main lesson topics of chapter five, life skills were also emphasized. Wanting to be a better listener was identified as the first place to start. Common-sense strategies included relating the material to why you want to learn, observing other listeners--both good and bad listeners--and making a commitment to be a more attentive listener. Additionally, under reducing distractions, common-sense suggestions such as taking a sweater if it is cold in the classroom, carrying a water bottle, and refraining from doing other activities by sticking to a "to do" list and so forth were mentioned. Three relevant methods for note-taking were introduced in chapter five: the Cornell system, outlining, and mind maps. Also included were common-sense strategies for good note-taking, such as going to class, getting to class on time, sitting up front, and paying attention.

Relevant active reading strategies were introduced in chapter six. Preparing, previewing, predicting questions, processing information, and paraphrasing made up a five-part reading system. One of the greatest barriers to reading was identified as being a person's attitude. Again, common-sense strategies were included for reading, such as reading while children slept and exchanging child care.

Chapter seven included relevant strategies for improving memory skills, and chapter eight introduced test taking strategies. Five main strategies were provided for improving memory. The steps included: having an intention to learn, being attentive, organizing and

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making sense of information, repeating information, and recalling by sharing information. Several common-sense and elementary strategies specific to different types of tests were given. For example, on true / false tests, students were to listen and read the entire statement before answering. A tip for fill-in-the-blank tests included watching for clues. For example, if the word before the blank is "an" the answer will generally begin with a vowel. Another tip was to watch for the length of the blank, as a longer blank might indicate a longer answer. While a large number of relevant test-taking strategies were provided in chapter eight, including dealing with test anxiety, also included were discussions about creating a willingness to remember and the importance of integrity and trustworthiness as it relates to cheating.

Chapter nine covered expressing oneself in writing and speech. It provided relevant information and useful strategies for improving writing skills. This was one chapter that did not confuse the main lesson topic with life skill strategies. The learning objectives included a five-step writing process (prepare, organize, write, edit, and review) for preparing papers and speeches. The major components of a well organized basic paper were introduced. Researching information through the library and online was covered in this chapter. Examples of various ways of writing citations were provided. Several simple strategies were given for overcoming speech anxiety.

Strategies were included in chapter ten for becoming a critical thinker and creative problem solver. As in other chapters, this chapter embedded a sense that it was attitude and the changing of attitude that would allow critical thinking skills to flourish. At the same time, the chapter provided pertinent information related to critical thinking and problem solving. Listed were six critical thinking skills required of successful college students. They were: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Each skill was thoroughly

developed. This chapter was packed full of methods for improving critical thinking skills along with personal evaluation and decision making exercises.

Chapter eleven covered creating a healthy mind, body, and spirit. It contained topics ranging from eating disorders, dealing with stress, unhealthy addictions, depression, sexually transmitted diseases, rape, and birth control. Most of this chapter presented common-sense strategies and the evaluation of personal values for making healthy choices.

Chapters twelve and thirteen were directly related to life skills. Building supportive and diverse relationships were discussed in chapter twelve. This chapter stressed values and how to make positive changes in one's life. Romantic relationships and diversity were covered in this chapter. Good personal communication skills were identified as being important to healthy relationships. Being assertive and proactive in making good relationship decisions was encouraged. Developing positive habits was covered in chapter thirteen. Ten habits of peak performers were listed which included honesty and being responsible, positive, and grateful.

The final chapter covered exploring majors and careers. While many of the strategies were common sense, others were relevant. Suggestions were given for college offices where a student could find information on various careers. Methods for building a career portfolio were offered. Strategies on writing good cover letters and interviewing were given.

The textbook constitutes the basis of many instructors' lectures in classrooms (Glatthorn, Boschee & Whitehead, 2005), and as such is an important component of formal curriculum. The formal curriculum described in this textbook sought to promote positive habits addressing the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional health of students, sometimes at the expense of other relevant curriculum objectives. Although the textbook in this course offered lessons that coincided with the three main objectives of the orientation, academic strategies, and life skills,

mostly the chapters were dedicated to life skills. This was a textbook that could be used in a self-improvement class geared toward counseling students on how to make positive decisions about their lives.

4.3 Conclusion of Formal Curriculum

The formal curriculum in this course revealed a curriculum that had three distinct objectives that were meshed together into an assortment of lessons. Rather than cohesiveness, the mixed nature of the curriculum was confusing and presented itself as unfocused. Similar to other orientation courses, the curriculum included lessons on academic strategies, life skills, and orientation. It was therefore a formal curriculum with objectives not unlike orientation curricula being taught in classes at colleges and universities across the nation (Abraham & Wagnon, 1992; Barefoot, 2000; Gordon, 1989; Jeweler, 1989; Miller, Dyer & Nadler, 2002; Murphy, 1989; Perigo & Upcraft, 1989; Tinto, 1987, 1993).

Given that, according to the SCC website, more than 85% of the students attending SCC are Hispanic and mostly first generation college students, it was not unreasonable that orientation into the college learning environment was a course offered by SCC. Research has shown that orientation can create a positive sense of belonging for first generation college students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1993).

All three objectives of orientation, academic strategies, and life skills were either tacitly or directly indicated in the course description, the syllabus, and the textbook. While the three objectives were distinct from one another, they were given varying degrees of focus depending on the written document being examined. The objectives were intended to meld together to form a cohesive body of knowledge, leading ultimately to a successful transition to college.

The written documents of the curriculum were manifestations of what was deemed by the community college as important to the transition of their students into college. By examining the formal curriculum, I gained a confused sense of its objectives and goals. I recognized a curriculum that promised to help students gain ambitious skills while at the same time offering lessons focusing on value systems and life skills. While life skills has been prevalent in formal curricula since the late nineteenth century (Kliebard, 2002), its value in academic curricula has also been uncertain (Kliebard, 2004).

On the surface, it appeared that the combination of skills would be worthwhile to a student enrolled in the course. The written documentation suggested that students would gain a variety of skills that could contribute to their success. Gardner and Upcraft (1989) characterize student success as the achievement of academic and intellectual competence, the ability to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, the development of an identity, the ability to make career and lifestyle choices, the maintaining of personal health and wellness, and the development of an integrated philosophy of life. These were all identified components of this curriculum. However, I wondered how a curriculum with multiple foci would unfold to effectively contribute to the successful transition into college for the students it was designed to serve.

While orientation courses have become common at universities and community colleges as a means of increasing student retention (Bean & Eaton, 2000; Hendel, 2007), very little is known about the curriculum these courses teach, how students and professors experience the curriculum, and what the subsequent outcomes are for students' academic aspirations. These courses typically intend to teach study skills and orient students to college life in an effort to help them successfully complete their education. Curriculum used for

orientation commonly includes an examination of the value of going to college, peer support groups, assistance selecting an academic major, improvement of academic skills, introduction to campus resources, and discussion of personal issues such as sexuality. While the formal curriculum promised an ambitious course of study, this research identified a curriculum that lost its focus due to the underlying focus on life skills, thereby creating knowledge of unknown value to the student's successful transition into the college environment.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE ENACTED CURRICULUM

5.1 Introduction

While formal curriculum exists on paper, enacted curriculum is implemented in classrooms through daily lessons. Lessons are meant to translate the intentions of the formal curriculum as described in the written documentation. It is through enactment in the classroom that the meaning of curriculum is created. According to Page (1991), the meaning created from formal curriculum is a social construction and in the classroom context it has two connotations. First, social construction connotes a jointly produced construction. In the classroom context, instructors and students designate meaning to the formal curriculum, and what the curriculum ultimately means is what has been jointly created. Secondly, social construction relates to the wider contexts, which include power structures that influence the meanings individuals construct as they engage in face to face interactions.

The curriculum that unfolded in the classroom at Southwestern Community College (SCC) revealed itself as a series of common sense lessons taught with a focus on behavior. While the formal curriculum ambitiously encompassed a broad scope of competencies that were intended to mesh together to create essential knowledge, what ensued when the curriculum was enacted were lessons of unknown value. Life skills and the changing of bad behaviors or choosing of good behaviors infiltrated and diluted every lesson. Mr. Paz, while understanding the curriculum to be about behaviors leading to students' successful transition into college, narrowed the curriculum to one of discipline. In fact, he very much focused on rules and behavior. The students responded by becoming disengaged and non-responsive as Mr. Paz practiced his series of common-sense rules and guidelines. Mr. Paz subsequently reacted to the student disengagement with frustration.

5.2 Classroom Lessons

5.2.1 Creation of Classroom Behavior

Guided by the heavy emphasis on behavior in the textbook lessons, the enacted curriculum in this classroom also contained a heavy emphasis on behavior. Behavior was addressed in lessons in a multiplicity of ways. Mr. Paz used discipline, scolding, and stories to teach these lessons on behavior. While some of the students saw Mr. Paz's methods for teaching behavior as fatherly, many saw them as condescending. Students complied with the rules of classroom behavior most times, but on certain instances a few rebelled.

Emphasis on discipline was accomplished through class rules that were reviewed during the first day of class and enforced by the instructor throughout the semester. Students who failed to adhere to the rules were chastised. These were rules introduced in the course syllabus. For example, no cell phones, children, or tardiness after 10 minutes were all rules included in the syllabus. Some of the rules were easier to adhere to than others. It was easier to remember to turn cell phone ringers off and more difficult to always make it to class on time. There were never any phones ringing, but occasionally a student would walk in late. The occasional instance where students failed to adhere to these rules contributed to a sense of frustration with the instructor as he emphasized discipline in the enacted curriculum.

The frustration in the classroom was mutually produced. Mr. Paz fervently endeavored to meet the formal curriculum objectives by teaching students how to properly behave and choose habits promoted by the textbook and deemed by him as essential to becoming a successful college student. His lectures frequently contained a message about student responsibility for making good choices. While encouraging good choices is not a bad thing, assuming that students lack a basic rational ability or knowledge about common sense choices

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added to student frustration. The elementariness and the commonsensical nature of the curriculum made this a class that students did not necessarily take seriously. They were apathetic about putting much effort into the class assignments, exams, or quizzes. Student non-responsiveness, which was a response in itself, contributed to a classroom environment of frustration. Because there was such a heavy emphasis on behavior, other lesson objectives were lost and therefore the knowledge created was of unknown value.

While Mr. Paz invited classroom interaction and participation in activities during some of the lessons, uninvited engagement was discouraged and when it occurred it was mostly ignored. Ignoring uninvited engagement was how Mr. Paz discouraged its occurrence. Mr. Paz, as the instructor, had control over whose input he would acknowledge and when he would allow that acknowledgement to occur. This helped Mr. Paz maintain classroom control and discouraged students from randomly contributing their verbal opinions into the lesson being presented.

As the formal curriculum included life skills as a component of the overall curriculum, an abundance of lessons within the enacted curriculum unfolded under the holistic health topic. While the information provided was interesting and possibly relevant, it unfolded in the classroom in the form or elementary and common-sense lessons. This further contributed to a sense of frustration, especially since many students had already been exposed to these topics in earlier educational environments.

5.2.2 Lesson on Procrastination and Time Management

A particular example illustrates how the enacted curriculum's emphasis on behavior and discipline as life skills sometimes created a sense of tension and frustration in the classroom. Early in the semester, while Mr. Paz was discussing the topic of procrastination and time management, a male student walked in late. The student, who was wearing dark sunglasses and

carrying a motorcycle helmet, had to walk directly in front of Mr. Paz to get to an available seat near the far wall. Mr. Paz immediately stopped his lecture, and when the student was directly in front of him he began to scold the student. Mr. Paz and the student were sandwiched in between the table at the front of the class and the first row of desks. There was not much room between Mr. Paz and the student as they faced one another. He told the student that he was more than the allowed 10 minutes late and that "you will not be allowed in if you are late again." During this scolding, the other students became very quiet. Mr. Paz informed the student that "time management is a good skill to learn." He then allowed the student to take his seat. The student stood straight and rigid during the scolding and did not say a word. It was difficult to decipher exactly what the student was experiencing as his dark sunglasses hid his eyes. The entire class was frozen and silent as a degree of tension ensued for the student being scolded. After class, Mr. Paz informed me that this was the third time this student was late and that "he had to learn." The student was never late again. It was clear that classroom rules were strictly enforced and an offense created tension and embarrassment.

This was not the only time tension ensued in the classroom. During class time, a few the students would respond to Mr. Paz's disciplining, which he did throughout the semester, by passing knowing glances between one another, muttering things to themselves, rolling their eyes, or verbally expressing what they were thinking. But, most of the time, the reactions were subtle and students were quiet. Many of the students choose to disengage as a form of reaction. This became problematic as Mr. Paz then was talking to non-responsive bodies, and in effect responding with his own increased frustration.

One student, whom I identify as Mario, who never missed a class, at times behaviorally and verbally expressed his frustration. He was one of a few students who continually showed

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signs of frustration in the class. His demeanor and actions indicated this frustration as he occasionally would mutter things under his breath and move about in his chair anxiously. I could not always hear what he was saying, but he often rolled his eyes upward, looked toward other students disbelievingly, or gazed annoyingly at Mr. Paz.

A clear example of this student's frustration occurred during the last class session in which I was doing observations. Students were taking turns giving speeches. As one student went up to give her speech, Mr. Paz said, "Shhh!" to students who were continuing to talk. Mario was one of the students Mr. Paz was addressing. Mario took offense and under his breath, but loud enough for me and other students to hear, he said, "fuck you." Mr. Paz continued without acknowledging Mario's comment. While it was shocking to hear and other students quickly turned to where the "fuck you" had been uttered, it was short lived as the student began her speech.

5.2.3 Stories to Emphasize the Lessons on Changing Bad Habits

The enacted curriculum also demonstrated some difficulty in integrating the emphasis on life skills with the academic and orientation objectives of the formal curriculum. During the lessons on reading, for example, Mr. Paz alternated between academic strategies, life skill lessons, and an orientation of what was expected from a college student. Some of Mr. Paz's examples were used as scolding mechanisms with behavior lessons embedded. A lesson on reading was interjected with a lesson on growing up and taking responsibility. A lesson that was supposed to focus on a learning objective very often veered away from the lesson focus and became a lesson on appropriate college student behavior. There were many instances where a lesson was interjected with scolding and condescending comments. It was at these times when the academic objective of a lecture became difficult to pinpoint.

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This dynamic was demonstrated in an instance where there were two class days allocated for the lesson on reading. The first reading lesson began with Mr. Paz talking about assignments that were due and explaining that it did not take long for a student to fall behind. A couple of assignments had to be handed in by the end of the day or students would receive a zero. This was done as a threat as Mr. Paz stated, "assignments need to be to me by end of the day or you get a zero!" He then pulled out some graded exams, stating that he wasn't too happy with the grades. He scolded the students as he handed back the exams, saying "if you haven't been reading the material, you need to read!" To apparently underscore the life skills associated with what was considered appropriate behavior, Mr. Paz then transitioned from scolding to a personal story.

He gave an example his wife's friend, who was a 4.0 student and would read while she cooked. In response, a student yelled out, "how was her cooking?" and the other students laughed. Again in his *scolding* voice, he said "you know, God says, I provide food, but I don't throw it in the pan." He went on to explain that he takes pictures of birds with his good camera and he can always tell which ones are going to die:

>....the ones who don't ever leave the nest! The mother gets tired of feeding them and they die. You have to leave the nest and make your own way! You can't live off of mom and dad forever!

As Mr. Paz handed back the exams, he pointed out that Casey, the sole female Anglo student in the class had only missed one question on the exam. He rewarded her with a $5 gift card from Starbucks. He mentioned that Pablo, a male student in his forties had the best essay on the exam, but that since he "messed up on most questions, he gets a coffee latte or whatever." As it turned out, Mr. Paz had accidentally repeated some questions on the exam and so he excluded

those from the point calculation and he also gave extra credit points for the most frequently missed questions on the exam.

As Mr. Paz began his lecture on reading strategies, he discussed some of the reading systems included in the textbook. He paused with a threat to students, "obviously, there are going to be several questions on your test about this." He spent about three minutes on the reading systems which included the SQ3R which stands for survey, question, read, recite, and review. He then expressed frustration over the ineffectiveness of college entry tests and the required reading prerequisite. Mr. Paz expressed his frustration by telling the students:

> Okay, so if they say everybody here has to take the placement exam, everybody has to pass it before we make you take a college level course. If that's the case, then I want to see something that says that if you take the reading and you pass the reading, you're going to do better in college. The reality is, I don't see nothing that tells me that......We know there are two biggest problems in college, reading and math. We've known for years. The students who start college can't read, don't want to read, struggle to read, and therefore, they struggle in college so we make them take the reading exam.

While Mr. Paz said this with enthusiasm, students remained quiet. The non-responsiveness was followed by Mr. Paz hurriedly asking several questions as he addressed any student in the class who had graduated from an area high school: "..you were required to graduate from what kind of a program? Was it recommended, commended? What's it called? There are three levels.." After waiting about three seconds for a response, Mr. Paz said in an exasperated voice, "Yes or No? You don't know, you don't remember, you don't care!" As he said this, the only response was from a few students who emitted a quiet laugh.

Mr. Paz then went over several reading strategies included in the textbook, putting students on guard as he stated, "I need to know that I might get tested on these." He referred students to page 203. The first strategy was for students to "take frequent breaks, you cannot read for four hours straight. It's impossible. Take a break; watch the Olympics." Mr. Paz asked, "what does number 10 (tip) say, what have I been talking about all morning on page 203? Use your learning style. Stop and take notes. Go back and read through." Mr. Paz asked, "so how am I going to keep from forgetting all this?" A student responded: "read all night before test." Some of the students laughed at this, to which Mr. Paz responded:

> Yup, that's what students do. They do all nighters. That's okay. But students
>
> who do will have about a 1.2 GPA lower because they don't prepare themselves to
>
> do things well!.....And when I sit down to read what should I have with me?
>
> Highlighters! At least two of them and at least a pen and some paper.

At this point in Mr. Paz's lesson on reading strategies, the multiple changes in activity between review of the textbook, lecture, scolding, and stories created a sense of frustration in the classroom. Once again, the enacted curriculum then demonstrated a shift back to reinforcement of life skills through the description of effective study skills.

5.2.4 Successful College Students use a Dictionary and Highlighter

Mr. Paz emphasized, by saying it on a regular basis, that successful college students used a dictionary and they highlighted words as they read. While both were helpful strategies included in the textbook, they were elementary strategies that he reminded and scolded students about frequently. They were common-sense strategies that were given greater significance than was reasonable. During the lesson on reading, Mr. Paz mentioned the importance of using a dictionary and a highlighter several times.

Mr. Paz began to talk about schematic learning as he was writing what, who, when, why, and where on the board, but he stopped abruptly to ask the students, "How many of you in here carry a dictionary or thesaurus?" No one raised their hand, but one student yelled out, "I have one (a dictionary) saved as a favorite!" Mr. Paz continued without acknowledging the student's comment. He again reminded students to carry a dictionary and to highlight words they did not understand.

Mr. Paz again referred to dictionary use as he read through a reading assessment with students entitled, "discover if you are a passive or active reader." He read each question on the assessment as the students silently marked their true or false answers. On question 3, Mr. Paz read, "I look for the deeper meaning in words and phrases" and then he stated, "That's none of you that's true because none of you raised your hand when I asked you if you carry a dictionary. I refer to this at least once a day (dictionary) because I visualize what I read!" In response to this, the students remained quiet and non-responsive. He continued reading each question. He then told the students to total up their responses for the even numbered questions and then the odd numbered questions saying, "even would be 2, 4, 6, 8; odd would be 1, 3, 5, 7, in case you forgot your math." There was very little obvious student reaction to this as the students remained still and silent.

Another reading assessment given to the students became diluted by the insertion of the importance of using a highlighter. Mr. Paz prepared the students for this assessment by telling them,

> And again these assessments I'm giving you are useful to you, that's what these
> are, assessments - this assessment is called the retention rate and reading rate. I
> don't know if you've ever watched it on TV, you could probably u-tube it if you

want. You can get on u-tube and watch these people who can read 1000 words a

minute. You ever seen them on TV?

A student attempted to respond while Mr. Paz continued to speak; once Mr. Paz realized

the student was saying something, he stopped talking and the student repeated, "they only read

like half a sentence though huh?" To this, Mr. Paz responded, "well, they just look at the page. I

watched them on Johnny Carson years ago." Before handing out the reading and retention rate

assessment and after discussing an article written by an author he expressed liking, Mr. Paz told

the students yet again:

> The key is to use a highlighter. I strongly recommend that you use two different
>
> colored highlighters; a yellow one most of you use. That's a big problem! I
>
> strongly recommend two highlighters; one yellow when highlighting sentences
>
> and orange when highlighting a word I don't understand. That'll give you a clue
>
> to look up words later. Or, like your book shows you what do you do. Go to page
>
> 205. It tells you to circle the word and write something in the indention, but some
>
> of you don't like to touch your book and some of you don't even have a book and
>
> you've got problems!

For the reading rate and retention assessment, Mr. Paz had the students read a short (three

hundred and eighty seven words) article on binge drinking within a timed number of minutes.

The article defined binge drinking as it related to college students and the problems created by

drug and alcohol abuse including pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, traffic fatalities,

verbal and physical abuse, academic suicide, and accidental death. This article was used for the

reading rate and reading comprehension rate self-assessment. According to Mr. Paz, speed

readers are able to read really fast because they practice all the time and they use a highlighter.

After the allotted time for completing the assessment had expired, Mr. Paz went on to explain:

> Okay, reading rate--you should have already read it--the first mistake I saw all of
> you make was what? Nobody pulled out a highlighter! Nobody in the room did!
> Every time you read, you should always pull out a highlighter! Take notes; just
> like you see me doing, become an active reader. These are things you should've
> been taught a long time ago. Real simple--read chapter 6.

Once again, then, Mr. Paz's discussion of reading strategies was ultimately a combination of lecture, scolding, and reinforcement of particular behaviors rather than a strict focus on academic skills. As such, the enacted curriculum continued to provide mixed, and even confusing, messages about the priority of objectives in this unit of the orientation course.

5.2.5 Lesson on Students Participation in Classroom Discussion

Another instance of mixed objectives occurring within a single presentation occurred during a activity on vocabulary which quickly veered into a lecture on appropriate behavior for student participation. Mr. Paz asked if students had any questions on a newspaper article he had discussed briefly during the previous day's lesson.   It was obvious that several students had done their homework of looking up words they didn't understand from the newspaper article. They knew more than expected as they were challenged to define the words. Mr. Paz began by reading from the article entitled "Tech Toys Enslaving Our Children, Hindering Education." He then asked as he went to the board, "so, is it true that tech toys actually hinder education? And before anyone could answer, he asked: What does the word hinder mean?" A back and forth dialogue ensued as follows and Mr. Paz began to quickly write the words that were being defined on the chalkboard:

Student: hold back!

Mr. Paz: Okay, hold back. Good. What does enslave mean?

Student: Stuck with it!

Mr. Paz then launched into a discussion about inferencing with an awkward reference to Columbus.

Mr. Paz: Can't get rid of cell phone, you know that MP3, whatever. What other word did we not know? Remember, what I told you, schematic learning is so important to college. Inferencing, another topic, ah thing, you have to learn in college and understand quickly. Inferencing is knowing not what's given to you. In 1492 Columbus travelled to the U.S. It took him a month to get here. Your inferencing on how he travelled would be what? How did he travel? Did he travel by plane?

Student: Yeah (Other students giggle and there are a few mumbled responses).

Mr. Paz: In 1492?

More than one student: No, by boat.

Mr. Paz: Did he travel by car, by bicycle, by motorcycle? He travelled by boat. Number one, cause you have to know where he came from. He crossed the ocean. He came from Italy. That means he had to cross an ocean. Number two, he didn't travel like Jonah in the whale's mouth (a few students laughed). So there are lots of things you would inference. A good way to learn inferencing is to look at comics. Just open the book; the newspaper everyday and you have to inference. It doesn't always mean what it says. So, when I'm reading and I want to increase my rate and I want to increase my comprehension in my vocabulary field. So who has the answers to some of those words--which ones were some of those words we didn't understand? Somebody? I don't care.

Maria, an older female student from Mexico with a thick Spanish accent, answered in a barely audible voice: Canvas?

Mr. Paz: Say it louder. Spell it.

Student: C a n v a s.

Mr. Paz: What does it mean?

Student begins, again in a barely audible voice, to give a definition and Mr. Paz clarifies: Image? How many of you knew that that meant canvas? What other words? Somebody?

Student: Capriciously?

Mr. Paz: Capriciously means--on a whim? and, what does whim mean? Some of you don't even know what whim means! On the spot (it means)! compulsive (some of the students laughed)! Compulsive, some of you know what the word compulsive means? wouldn't it be nice if he just said--read the sentence with that word. Somebody read it. You see it?

Student: Today, the enterprise is exa...cer.. exacerbated..

Mr. Paz: Exacerbated!

Student: Yeah.

Mr. Paz: What does exacerbated mean? (Mr. Paz is writing on the board).

Student: It is increased. It is ah exaggerated.

Another student gave an inaudible response.

Mr. Paz clarified: Okay, ruined, is another way to say it? (A few students laugh). Now change the word to ruined.

Student: Today, the enterprise is ruined by the fact....

Mr. Paz: When you change the word to ruined, your mind starts figuring it out really fast.

Student: Well, it's because you have to read the first sentence. It says it is akin to painting a picture on a moving canvas.

Mr. Paz: Akin (with "a" pronounced as a long vowel), means?

Student: Similar.

Mr. Paz: Similar. Wow! Akin (long "a" vowel sound) means similar. Why didn't he just write it simply instead of using that 14th, 15th grade level reading. Well, because he expects people to be able to read. Most newspapers are written at the 8th grade reading level! So, he uses 13th, 14th grade level.....

Mr. Paz then asked the students: Which one sentence or two sentences summarizes the whole thing? I asked you to do that! Who did that?" He saw Casey raise her hand. He told her, "I know you did, but I want someone over here who is falling asleep to answer!" At this point, Mr. Paz's frustration level increased as he exclaimed:

> Did you do it? Did you? No? You weren't here? You know part of reading
> requires this. I'm teaching you this so that you acquire some basic skills. When
> you read and you don't understand the material and its difficult--at the bottom of
> the page, write a summary sentence. This is seventh grade reading by the way in
> your textbook. It's that easy! It shouldn't be too difficult for you to understand it.
> But, we know how things are...

In this example, the vocabulary activity between Mr. Paz and the students quickly incorporated both the academic objectives of the lesson's focus and continued reinforcement of appropriate behaviors as life skills through scolding, references to class rules, and continued frustration

5.2.6 Another Story for Another Lesson

Another lesson in the textbook was on excelling at taking tests. On this particular day,

Mr. Paz began the class period by reminding students in a very elementary way of a few things that needed to be taken care of. Students were allowed to take make-up exams and the quizzes were online and could be taken later than their due dates. Ironically, while Mr. Paz strived to teach his students how to behave like college students, his exam and quiz procedures were liberal and not the norm for many college courses. Frequently college courses have a set time for taking the exams and quizzes with make-up only allowed with a believable excuse. Mr. Paz reminded the students:

> Today, we will cover chapter eight on test-taking. Today and Friday and then Monday will be review. You will take your test Wednesday. If you are not here to take it Wednesday, I will give it to you Thursday. I can't do it Friday because I have to go talk about being a counselor to students. Your spring-break starts early, no class on Friday. You suffer for a week but after that you get to rest for like 10 days. For those of you who don't know what the term "walk" means, it means you don't have class on Friday. That means you are off.

Mr. Paz then went on to talk about his concerns related to the quizzes that were due. Some of the students were apathetic about getting the quizzes completed, which added to Mr. Paz's frustration. In his estimation, he was doing everything he could to make it easy for the students and they were not responding as he expected. Many were not doing the quizzes, and those who were were not making the grades he expected. Mr. Paz reminded the students:

> Some of you haven't done your quizzes, either you haven't read them or something. I don't know what you haven't done but you are way behind. The next set of quizzes are due Monday. The quizzes are for your benefit, not for me. All I have to do is grade them which is a useless amount of time for

me.….Remember, you should be making 90s and 100s. If I am looking at 70s, I'll draw a sad face because you are not reading the book. I couldn't possibly make your quizzes any easier!

After this initial discussion, Mr. Paz moved on to the topic of test anxiety. To emphasize the objective of overcoming test anxiety, Mr. Paz had students participate in an activity where they created an exam. The key to relieving test anxiety, Mr. Paz said, was for students to anticipate and create a test that had the questions they expected to see. As was a common occurrence in the class, Mr. Paz scolded and used personal examples to get his points across. Again, the intended objectives of the lesson were lost due to the amount of focus and time given to teaching appropriate student behavior. As students prepared to get into groups and work on creating possible tests questions for the upcoming exam, Mr. Paz told a story about the consequences of bad habits. He explained,

Today and Friday, we will be practicing what I've been preaching for the last month, how to properly prepare for a test. If you haven't already made habitual changes, you aren't going to do it. It only takes days to get a bad habit, but it takes years to break it. People always ask me that if people go to prison will they rehabilitate, and it depends on the crime, but I would say about 10% of people rehabilitate. But, for the others it is a lifetime of whatever, especially if they don't want to work at it. Prison systems in the seventies, eighties, and nineties were being built at a crazy rate in every state and do you know what statistic they were using to predict how many prisoners we were going to have? It was a survey. I know this has nothing to do with testing, but it's for your own knowledge. They would check third grade reading levels in third graders. If they were behind, 90%

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of them would end up in prison. You say, what! But, it's true. You start getting

behind; start getting labeled as slow; or picked on. How many of you were home

schooled? Anybody? When you are home schooled, one of the things that

happens is you don't get that socialization you get in junior high. That doesn't

mean you won't come out right. It's just saying that you won't get tortured like a

lot of kids do in junior high and that's when everybody gets picked on; no matter

who you are.

Student reactions to this story were subtle. Students mostly remained quiet, perhaps

because they had already learned that verbal responses were usually ignored by Mr. Paz. Mr.

Paz then explained that some students were just bad test takers. He empathized with students

who experience test taking anxiety saying,

You start feeling your heart pounding; the palpitations, the sweating, the falling

apart. The truth is, some of you are just bad test takers and that is the reality of

life. You are a bad test taker at everything. You might get straight "A"s on

everything else and then you just can't pass the test.

He referred students to a page in the text. He told students he wanted them to grasp "how do I

prepare myself to make a test? And yes, that is make a test; not take it, because truthfully, if you

can make a test.....you will be ready to pass it."

Mr. Paz had the students engage in an anxiety provoking test taking activity. He told

students they would be taking a timed test. "I'm giving you 30 seconds to do this, so that means

you better be wide awake. I'll give you 5 extra points on your test if you get it done and get a

perfect score. That's a big if; so wake up and smell the coffee." Students began the test with Mr.

Paz allowing 45 seconds instead of the promised 30 seconds. At the end of the test, Mr. Paz excitedly said,

> Who got it right? What was it? How many of just put your name in the right-
> hand corner? I'm teaching you something you should have learned like yesterday.
> What did it tell you on the instructions? Read everything first before you take the
> test. If you don't do it, that doesn't mean you aren't going to do well. Casey was
> my best tester the last time……. So, what would you do when we prepare to test
> then? Read your instructions!

Mr. Paz had a spokesperson from each group take a turn providing a question they had created. This was one of a handful of times when students were invited to contribute verbally to a discussion. As students yelled out their questions, Mr. Paz looked through the copy of his exam trying to find a question that was similar to the question yelled out. There was an awkward pause each time as Mr. Paz shuffled through an old exam looking for a question that matched. Many of the questions did not match anything on the old exams and Mr. Paz improvised to get his point across by finding questions that were sort of like what was yelled out. Because Mr. Paz had to make the student-created test questions fit the questions that were on his copy of an exam, the process was awkward and forced.

5.2.7 Guest Speaker and a Life Skills Lesson

Several class periods were devoted to creating a healthy body, mind, and spirit. These lessons, while interesting, were related to bad habits and bad choices. Mental health assessments were completed by the students and discussed by the instructor. They included things such as ways of measuring levels of anxiety and problems with depression. As a guest speaker, an athletic coach came in and presented a lesson on physical health and took body fat measurements

of the students. Emotional and sexual health, relationships, and how decisions we make affect

our quality of life were other topics covered by the instructor. Often, the instructor would weave

a life skills message into whatever he was lecturing about by scolding the students about

something they should or should not be doing. He used stories from his personal life to

emphasize a life skills point he was trying to make.

One class lesson was devoted entirely to sexually transmitted diseases and sexual health.

A guest speaker from the Department of Public Health came in and presented the topic. The

speaker introduced herself and indicated that she mostly gave presentations to high school

teenagers. She must have noted student reaction to her comment because she quickly added that

she also presented to adults or anyone at risk. During her presentation sexual terms and

descriptions rolled off her tongue with ease.

She asked how many students had already had a presentation on STDs. Most of the

students raised their hands and two or three stated they had been presented with the information

in high school. The speaker went on to explain that half of all STDs reported are from the age

group 14-24. She gave some statistics before discussing how STDs are transmitted.

The students were attentive as the presenter showed very graphic slides of diseased

sexual genitalia and pictures of babies born with symptoms of sexual diseases passed on through

pregnancy. Throughout the presentation, the students remained very quiet. The students looking

up at the screen were so quiet it was as if they were not breathing. The presenter gave examples

of young people who continually became re-infected with sexual diseases even while knowing

what causes it. Lastly, she pulled out a rubber penis and demonstrated how to properly put a

condom on. At the end of class, she had lots of condoms available to hand out. I did not see

many of the students voluntarily stopping to pick up condoms, so she began convincing students to take a handful as they walked by to leave.

5.3 Conclusion of Enacted Curriculum

Although, the written documentation of the formal curriculum identified a curriculum with ambitious objectives, classroom observations revealed lessons that were mostly commonsensical and elementary. The lack of academic substance in the enacted curriculum created student apathy. Lofty goals that stated students would engage in independent research, reading, and writing through each unit instead unfolded in the classroom with little substance. While lessons that were intended to enhance student's study skills, critical thinking skills, and oral, written, and electronic communication were presented, they lacked stringency. Lessons that had the potential to meet the ambitious objectives became blurred by the insertion of discipline and lessons on behavior. The focus on discipline and behavior overwhelmed all other curriculum objectives and created an environment of "jointly constructed" (Page, 1991) frustration.

Frustration was evident in the mostly non-responsive and occasionally volatile reactions of the students. The elementary, commonsensical lessons which signaled low expectations of the students, as well as the focus on behavior, contributed to student frustration and apathy. Frustration was also evident in Mr. Paz's response to the students. The greater his frustration, the more he leaned toward lessons for teaching discipline and suitable college student behavior.

Student apathy was further evident in the exam grades. If exams were meant to measure the success of student learning, the exam grades in this classroom indicated students were not achieving the intended goals. On the first exam, according to Mr. Paz, most of the students did poorly. He excluded from his grading the questions that a majority of students got wrong, which

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improved their test scores. The second exam was given after the lessons on test taking. Unfortunately, there was a mix-up on the second exam and Mr. Paz awarded the students the full possible 30 points. A page of duplicate questions was included and the page with the correct questions was left out. Mr. Paz stated that without the mix-up on the test, the student scores would have been low. The lessons on test taking had not been effective in improving test scores. Additionally, students were given ample opportunities for extra credit points ,signaling to a perception that students could not be expected to succeed without the extra points.

Excluding the exams, at no point during the semester did I see other measures taken to determine if lessons had resulted in an improvement of students' critical thinking, college reading, problem-solving, test-taking or note-taking skills. The formal curriculum stated that students would be able to demonstrate that they had gained these many valuable skills. Yet, throughout the semester, Mr. Paz complained to me and to the class about the poor quality of work being turned in by the students. At one point, after a student had turned in a notebook assignment, he told me that what had been turned in was "crap" and that some students "just don't care."

As evidenced by the formal curriculum, the lessons were meant to teach a variety of behaviors that would discursively influence a student's ability to successfully transfer into the college environment. The curriculum was described as having objectives that would merge together to create essential knowledge. Ultimately, what was taught in the enacted curriculum unfolded into an unfocused combining of lesson objectives that did not mesh together as anticipated by the written curriculum. The curriculum in the classroom was unveiled as an assortment of topics that became easier to identify with a curriculum intended to influence and adjust the behavior of students, and more difficult to identify with the objectives identified in the

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formal curriculum. Observations revealed that *behavior education* became the foundation of this

course. Subsequently, the value of the knowledge created in this classroom became difficult to

define.

CHAPTER SIX: THE EXPERIENCED CURRICULUM

6.1 Introduction

Participants bring with them influencing factors that affect how they experience the

curriculum in a classroom setting (Erickson, 1985) The perspectives they bring to the classroom

are reflective of broader socially constructed understandings (Page, 1988). Examples of

influencing factors include family, economic, and cultural background, ages of students, the

college environment, and the community in which students exist. Students connect meaning

with their individual values, attitudes and social norms. Within their context of understanding

they experience curriculum as a socially constructed manifestation of the interaction between

instructor, student, and the institution (Erickson, 1985; Page, 1991; Sizer, 1999; Spindler &

Spindler, 1985).

This study revealed that the ambitious objectives of the formal curriculum as translated

into practice created a frustration that bubbled up in the form of resistance, apathy, and

rebellion. Trying to understand what was at the heart of such response, I explored the

experiences of students in Mr. Paz's classroom. Student interviews exposed two major reasons

for student frustration. Students identified experiencing a curriculum of elementariness and

commonsensical information which most of them already knew. Secondly, some students

indicated that they were struggling academically and the class was not teaching them the skills

they needed to meet the academic demands of being a college student.

This study revealed a curriculum that was experienced as a form of discipline and

behavior education. Each participant brings a perspective that is influenced by the perspectives

of others with whom they interact (Page, 1988). Trying to understand Mr. Paz's contribution to

the experienced curriculum, I also explored his perspective. Interviews with Mr. Paz revealed that he experienced frustration over student apathy as he adamantly wanted the curriculum to make a difference for them. Also revealed was his acceptance that the curriculum was of little value for changing student behavior.

6.2 Student Identification of Common Sense Lessons

"Common sense" was what I frequently heard from the students when they described how they experienced the curriculum. For some of the students, the commonsensical nature of the curriculum created frustration. Many of the students, younger and older, expressed that much of what they were learning in this course was a repeat of what they had already been taught in high school, the military, or experience. According to the students, it was very "common sense" knowledge. Almost every student, even the ones who stated they had gained something from the class, indicated the material was "common sense." They had either been exposed to the material before, had learned it from personal experience, or were already acculturated into what was being taught. This was a class that was mandatory and several students stated it was a class they should not have to take. Ironically, while many of the students noted they themselves did not need the class, they expressed that other students probably did. As one student, who didn't think the class should be required for him, put it,

> I think it probably should stay mandatory because there are some people where even though they were in high school and saw this, they slacked off or there are some people who didn't listen and need the review. (Alberto, personal communication, March 2010)

Most of the students who were recent high school graduates had been exposed to the same material in middle school or high school. For example, Alberto, who was 18, stated that

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there were lots of classes in high school that aided in helping students learn how to take effective notes and practice good study habits (Alberto, personal communication, March 2010). While he mentioned that some students needed to learn what was being taught, he explained,

> In my high school experience they did lot of the same things so I was pretty accustomed to the study habits and figuring out how to take notes and what to pay attention to in class and things like that. There were a lot of classes (in high school) that helped me to learn how to take effective notes and develop good study habits. The orientation class stuff is all pretty familiar. I've seen it at least once. (Alberto, personal communication, March 2010)

The students, some of whom appreciated anything they thought might help them academically, including the academic strategies, also said much of what they were being taught was "common sense." A 23 year-old student named Marisa, who had earned her GED, stated: "For me, it's common sense, even when you don't read the chapter. It's just common sense" (Marisa, personal communication, April 2010). And yet another male student, Luther, age 19, was frustrated by the lessons and did not believe the class should be mandatory because:

> The stuff is pretty much common sense--like in middle school, you get a class like this. A lot of common sense. You should know this stuff already. I don't think it's important. I just don't think it's a worthwhile class. No---just common sense. I think students who don't do their work maybe need the class. (Luther, personal communication, March 2010)

Even when asked about specific lessons, students indicated it was all "common sense" information. During an interview that occurred after a lesson on finances, I asked several students if the lesson was useful. Again, many said it was "common sense." A female student,

Vina, age 31, expressed ambivalence toward the lesson saying that the information was useful while also comparing it to "stuff she's already done," and noting that it was "common sense stuff" (Vina, personal communication, April 2010). Shane, age 20, said that he did not learn anything from the lesson on finances because he had already taken a Home Economics course, in which the first half of the course focused on finances (Shane, personal communication, February 2010). Carlos said he already knew about finances because he was a homeowner and owner of other things (Carlos, personal communication, February 2010).

Several students identified the textbook as also containing "common sense" information. Most had read very little of the textbook. Students who had read some of the textbook indicated that it was an easy textbook to read, mostly containing very "common sense" information. Luther, again revealing frustration, stated:

> I have a hard time reading it. A lot of it is common sense. You should know this stuff already. .....It's pretty boring. I've read some chapters, but, I pretty much know it. (Luther, personal communication, March 2010)

This was also a course with a reputation of "being a waste of a class" (Shane, personal communication, February 2010) and "a waste of time" (Maria, personal communication, March 2010) because it provided such common sense and elementary information. It was a class that previous students identified as being of little value. One student was told that students don't learn anything from the class and that the class was an easy "A" (Shane, personal communication, February 2010). Shane, age 20 stated, "a lot of the students I hear who also go to a four year

university in the area[12] and take the university equivalent say it's just a waste of a class and a waste of their time" (Shane, personal communication, February 2010).

Some of the students expressed frustration because of the curriculum. A 25 year-old student, Selena, heard some male students in the class say that the class was "bullshit" (Selena, personal communication, February 2010). She explained, "I hear a lot of students, the guys say, why do we have to take this bullshit? You know it's just dumb" (Selena, personal communication, February 2010).

While the curriculum lessons were elementary and commonsensical, students exhibited apathy by doing poorly on their assignments or not doing them at all. According to Mr. Paz, many of the students failed to turn in quality work. They also did poorly on the exams. This was in spite of students' identification of the curriculum as "common sense" and "non-challenging." Several students stated they did not read the textbook. They listened and found the lectures interesting, but rarely indicated that they applied the lessons in other classes. They were unmotivated and passive about applying what was being taught in the classroom. They were apathetic about learning the material as it was presented.

6.3 Student Identification of Academic Needs

Students in the classroom did not experience the ambitious objectives promoted in the written documents of the formal curriculum. For some students, improvement of basic academic skills was important to their successful transition into the college environment. Students who were older and had been out of school for a while most often expressed that they were academically unprepared for college. Carlos, age 41, stated that he was having a harder time

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[12] Student gave actual name of university.

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keeping up academically compared to some of the younger students (Carlos, personal communication, February 2010). Students such as Carlos did not necessarily need the "common sense" behavior lessons. He needed assistance with basic academic skills. He had been a field service engineer in the military and had earned an associate's degree in electronics in 1993. As he told me during an interview, "I've been out a long time. Class coursework is at a faster pace" (Carlos, personal communication, February 2010).

While some academic strategies were covered in the class, Carlos recognized that he was lacking in basic academic skills. According to Carlos, the textbook and the lessons on reading were helpful, but he would have liked for Mr. Paz to spend more time on reading and for it to be "emphasized earlier in the semester" (Carlos, personal communication, February 2010). Carlos stated that in his math class there were a lot of students who seemed to have an easier time working through the problems "because they were already taught this stuff in high school" (Carlos, personal communication, February 2010).

While Carlos thought there was not enough of a focus on academics in this class, he noted that Mr. Paz was making what he *was* teaching more difficult than it had to be (Carlos, personal communication, February 2010). He thought that the instructor's teaching methods were okay and that "kids" probably needed to hear what Mr. Paz was teaching such as knowing to "pay self first and delayed gratification" as it related to a lesson on finances (Carlos, personal communication, February 2010). He mentioned that he already knew about finances. He found that some of what he was learning was useful, especially the self discovery lessons. While he was not doing so well in his other classes, Mr. Paz identified Carlos as being one of the better students in the orientation course. This student, however, dropped out of the class and the community college midway through the semester.

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Maria, age 44, said that everything was hard for her. English was not her first language, which created its own challenges. According to her, "English class and math is still one of the challenges for me" (Maria, personal communication, March 2010). Maria had already taken several math and English classes and she stated that "I finish my prerequisite classes, English and math. I've finally done those" (Maria, personal communication, March 2010). She identified that she had taken several algebra classes stating "....algebra--but, I finished that. I start from 301, 302, 303, 305 and I finish with all that" (Maria, personal communication, March 2010). In this student's case, in addition to her having been out of school for many years before beginning at the community college, her lack of English skills was making it especially difficult for her to do well in other classes. Furthermore, because Maria had already taken several classes at the community college, she had been exposed to the reading and writing strategies taught in the orientation course. She noted, "What is ironic is that in this class, the reading and writing they give you; they also give you in English 308 and English 309; the things like mapping, scanning, SQ3R. All of these things they teach" (Maria, personal communication, March 2010). For her, the orientation course was like a refresher course.

Maria was a student who expressed it was extremely important to have an instructor she could connect with and when that happened she could learn something from the curriculum. She had connected with Mr. Paz, and this influenced her perspective of the curriculum. Although Maria acknowledged that much of what was being taught in the class was a review for her and mostly "common sense," she was ambivalent about the value of the curriculum. For Maria, the instructor was important to the learning process as she noted,

> It matters a lot for me because its acceptation. If you accept the person who gives
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> you instructions, it means you are going to learn. Example what happen with my

math teacher, indirectly or directly. I reject her attitude and then as consequence, I close my mind even if she's an excellent teacher. ....What I like is for them to be themselves. A simple person, they don't have to come to be my friend. They don't have to baby me, but be respectful. That's all I ask everywhere I go. (Maria, personal communication, March 2010)

Maria brought to the classroom much of what she had experienced in her life. It influenced how she experienced the curriculum. It deeply bothered her when people were treating her with disrespect or were being judgmental of her. She was born in Mexico to a single mother and had experienced ostracism by society and other family members. As she stated during my interview of her,

I did not know about college. All I know is that I want to be important when I was a little girl in Juarez. When I was seven years old, I see how my family treat my mother and I don't like it. Part of my family rejected me because I start to be very rebellious on the way to protect my mother. ....They feel they are better because she was a single mother. ....I always think I'm a princess. Don't want to clean houses and do laundry like my mother. (Maria, personal communication, March 2010)

She expressed that she liked Mr. Paz. According to her, he was a "people person, very sensitive" (Maria, personal communication, March 2010). So, while the course was like a "refresher course" to her, she was positive about it. She noted that sometimes Mr. Paz treated the students like "little kids" to get his point across (Maria, personal communication, March 2010). This did not bother her. She was appreciative to be in school even while being concerned about

the difficulty she was having in her English and math class. She did not complain about anything that was being taught in this class.

Additionally, prior to taking this class, she had heard from other students that the class was "dumb" and a waste of time. As she explained,

> I hear before because I was in accounting with these two ladies and they say, no, that class is dumb and this and that. But when I started, I think it's very good especially because it works with my personality and for me I think this class is good and I keep it. (Maria, personal communication, March 2010)

After getting into the class and liking Mr. Paz and his teaching style, she no longer thought it was a waste of time. Her ability to connect with Mr. Paz influenced how she experienced the curriculum. Furthermore, she particularly liked the personality assessments and that Mr. Paz would tell the students exactly what was going to be on each test (Maria, personal communication, March 2010).

Lance, age 28, who earned his GED before going into the military, stated that he was unprepared for community college classes (Lance, personal communication, April 2010). He said that he was struggling with writing and his math level was at par. He was not doing well academically and was thinking that maybe it was just time for him to quit school, as he expressed to me, "...my grades aren't doing so well. I think it's just time to quit school" (Lance, personal communication, April 2010). Lance was a student who needed academic skills assistance. He continued:

> Being out of school since 1998, I'm wondering, what in the heck are we doing? Last semester was my first semester in college, period. It's really something new to me. In regular school, you're doing something and the teacher makes sure you

learn it. I left high school at such an early age. I didn't know as much as I thought

I did. The equivalency test is at such a lower level. (Lance, personal

communication, April 2010)

When I asked him how certain he was that he would reach his academic goals, he said, "Not so

certain. I came in with a lot of confidence. It's hard when you get to a place and you find out

you're not ready; you're not prepared. I'm actually trying to get on at the prison."

As far as what he was experiencing in this class, Lance expressed some frustration when

he stated,

......it's a great class especially for young kids.....I'm at an age where I know who I

am and he's (Mr. Paz) like I'm going to help you find out who you are and find out

what you want to do. I know who I am and I know where I want to go. (Lance,

personal communication, April 2010)

Also problematic was Lance's lack of academic skills and the "common sense" lessons

he was encountering in this classroom. As he explained, much of what was being taught in the

classroom and what was in the textbook was "common sense." He expressed disappointment

that as an education class, it wasn't challenging him educationally,

Sometimes, I have fun in his class. He does a lot of great things, but it's still a

lack of interest. A majority of what's taught is common sense. Being that I was

in the army for 8 years, I'm not a 16 or 17 year-old needing to be shown what I

need to do with my life. ...Honestly, I've opened my textbook two or three times

this semester. The few times I've opened it up, it's redundant-stuff you should

know - common sense. It's semi-useful. It's not challenging.

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There were some students taking the class who were not struggling academically. At least two of the students had taken dual credit courses while in high school. Neither of them expressed that any of their classes were too challenging. One of these students thought the orientation course should be like an arts type of class where you can take it as a substitute for another class. The other did not think the class should be required. Instead, he thought it should be a class you take if you want to take it. While he thought the instructor did well keeping his attention, he found the class in general to be boring and the material elementary.

6.4 Students Experiencing Frustration

Evident from student reactions and validated during interviews, was a frustration experienced because of the elementary and common-sense nature of the curriculum lessons. This experienced frustration was fueled by *how* the curriculum unfolded in the classroom in the form of discipline and behavior education. While most of the students mentioned the commonsensical lessons, some were offended by the nature of the discipline and lessons on behavior as taught by Mr. Paz. Even so, others were ambivalent about the instructor and the way he interpreted and taught the curriculum.

At one level, students liked the instructor while not finding the curriculum useful. While students were ambivalent because they appreciated Mr. Paz's efforts, they also did not find the curriculum to be of much import. Lance, who said he liked Mr. Paz, also stated:

> I think he is a great teacher. I like what he does, but for that to be a credit class; I understand it's to help people and in certain areas I do need that help. I kind of expected more in that aspect. I don't know that whole education thing. I think it would be great if it was something they did before you actually went to school

here. So, during your orientation, go over some of the material he's teaching, so

you already have a hand up. (Lance, personal communication, April 2010)

Mario, who had taken dual credit classes in high school, did not believe the orientation

class was a necessary class. He said, "Everything is kind of more common sense; like I said, I

learned from that class (dual credit class)" (Mario, personal communication, March 2010).

Additionally, he stated,

> I don't think they should have to show you how to be ready for college. I think
>
> you should already know; you should be an adult. You should know what's
>
> expected from you; how and when and not have to be told. (Mario, personal
>
> communication, March 2010)

He also indicated that he would not give a good rating for this class because in his opinion, "I

really don't think the class should be necessary" (Mario, personal communication, March 2010).

Problematic was that many of the students were already familiar with what was being

taught in the classroom. Mario was well prepared for community college when he started. Thus

far, none of his classes were too challenging. Concerning the orientation class he stated, "So,

that's why I say this class isn't necessary. I've already done (it); I know how to do it" (Mario,

personal communication, March 2010). He explained,

> I took two dual credits my senior year and that was a lot of work. I was
>
> introduced to the way college was going to be. You have to do this, this and this,
>
> here, there, and here. If you don't do it, you don't get the credits. ....So, like I said,
>
> it introduced me to college. (Mario, personal communication, March 2010)

Isabella, age 18, told me, "I don't think it should be required because most people already

know these things; a lot of common sense" (Isabella, personal communication, March 2010).

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During my interview with this student, her lack of interest in this class was obvious. She was short in her responses to my questions and not enthused about the class. She attended regularly, until near the end of the semester, when she stopped showing up for class.

Additional frustration was created because of the focus on discipline and behavior that Mr. Paz applied as he conducted the lessons. His focus on discipline and behavior influenced when students were allowed to engage in classroom discussion. It influenced how some students experienced the curriculum. A few of the male students expressed being bothered by the instructor's failure to acknowledge student's discourse in class. Students wanted their comments to be heard and acknowledged. Mr. Paz intentionally discouraged uninvited discourse as a form of classroom discipline. Mario indicated that he did not think Mr. Paz wanted to connect with him. He was a young student who was also attending a vocational school for diesel technology. He was motivated when he connected to a teacher because as he stated about his teacher from the diesel technology school,

> I feel comfortable with the teacher. I feel like if I do something wrong it's not
> going to matter. It won't be as aggressive or discipline wise. I won't get in
> trouble. (Mario, personal communication, March 2010)

Lectures, where he did not get to know the instructor well, made him uncomfortable because to him it meant he couldn't be sure he would receive a good grade (Mario, personal communication, March 2010).

Ruben, age 17, indicated that "the instructor talks down to us." What was interpreted as "fatherly scolding" by Maria (Maria, personal communication, March 2010), Ruben thought of as offensive. Ruben did not think that students should be required to take the course (Ruben,

personal communication, February 2010). When I asked what he had learned from a particular lesson on learning styles he said,

> I really think I have all the learning styles, but touching on that again, there was a
> lot of class time spent (on the topic); because, we have known ourselves forever,
> so you would think we know how we learn and stuff like that. (Ruben, personal
> communication, February 2010)

During my interview with Ruben, he was obviously frustrated with the content of the lessons. Although, he had learned a little bit about things like procrastination, he did not really need that kind of knowledge (Ruben, personal communication, February 2010). When I asked him what had been useful to him from this class, he said,

> Really um, I can't say; everything is there, really just that whole evaluating
> yourself thing if you are a procrastinator or things like that. We could have
> tapped that and kept going, but we stayed there for a while. It was useful, but
> after a while, I wanted to get on with it. (Ruben, personal communication,
> February 2010)

6.5 Instructor Perspective

Mr. Paz brought his own perspectives into the classroom which influenced the experienced curriculum. In his view, he identified students as needing to learn basic strategies as they transferred from a high school environment to a college environment. Mr. Paz explained his perspective on why he thought students should take the orientation class:

> Most of the students who take the class take it because it's in the degree plan. I
> don't think they understand that when degree plans were developed hundreds of
> years ago, they were designed to educate the student in a very well rounded

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manner. My class that I taught covers how to be a well adjusted student in a

college environment because you go from a high school to a college environment

and it can become overwhelming if you don't know how to highlight your book.

To give you an example, you have a high school student programmed to go to

class 8-5; 5 days a week. They take a math class in the summer at the college and

it's accelerated and they need to know: I'd better study; I'd better take notes;

colleagues to study with…things like that, that's what I try to teach them in class.

You change from an environment that is very structured, very lengthy; very slow

in the way it finally finishes to something that can be very early in the morning

with a teacher who doesn't speak English and you have to do it now. Your

adjustment is huge. This class tries to teach students, look in high school, you

couldn't touch your book, in college you'd better highlight it. (Paz, personal

communication, June 2010)

Mr. Paz (personal communication, Jan 2010) was convinced that, regardless of age or

experience, students in this class needed to understand what it meant to be what he defined as a

well adjusted college student. Being a college student meant understanding the rules, following

the academic strategies and learning life skills. He emphasized that he wanted "students to learn

how to become better students, first and foremost." He stated that if students would diligently

apply the orientation course lessons, they could become successful at reaching their academic

goals. Students needed to be taught how to adjust to the new environment in order to become

better students.

These assumptions did not necessarily match those of the students. Students who were

right out of high school had recently been exposed to many of the lessons taught in this

curriculum. Several of the students had been in the military and already had families. Others were middle aged students who had already lived through a whole range of experiences. They considered themselves mature. If anything, many of the students were looking to be given solid academic tools for achieving academic success. Some recognized that they lacked reading, writing, and math skills, while some were just trying to get core classes completed at the community college where it costs less to attend.

While some of the students would be successful in reaching their educational goals, many would drop out before completion. According to Mr. Paz, ultimately, the class had very little influence on student success. Mr. Paz explained what he thought *did* influence student success:

> It's hard to say, I saw one of my students that I had three years ago and she was always a pretty good student. She made an A in my class, but I noticed that she made As in all of her classes. And, I've seen some, the only A they got was in my class. They liked my class, but everything else they did not care. They start out as good students with good habits. I don't think that my teaching style or my class changes the student that's already academically bad; attitude, or motivational wise. (Paz, personal communication, June 2010)

Several students did not think the class was of any value and they did not believe the class should be required. They did not believe it was providing what the students needed to become academically successful. Yet, this continued to be a course required of all students working toward an academic degree. While students saw little value in the curriculum and therefore did not make behavior changes, Mr. Paz saw value in the lessons on behavior. As Mr. Paz stated:

There are a few it might change, but the majority of them it just enhances what they already start with. There are a lot that do get better, but the ones that are already not going to do it (what it takes to be successful), the class just delays it. It disappoints me a lot because the class is designed for that purpose and you are in my class the whole semester, and I use a lot of psychological approaches and I give them a lot of assessments and I try to show them how it fits in their big picture. Some grasp it and some don't grasp it. Remember, I brought the wellness person to talk about drugs and alcohol; not every person abuses it, but that person who does, and who is promiscuous and does those things on weekends and nights could learn from it and adjust and be a better student. (Paz, personal communication, June 2010)

While Mr. Paz recognized that if you were a bad student to begin with, this class wasn't going to make you a good student (Paz, personal communication, June 2010), he was certain that every student took something from at least one of the lessons he taught. So, while the end result may not have been what the curriculum intended, there was still something to be gained. According to Mr. Paz, while it disappointed him that the course did not necessarily benefit all students, the lessons had value to students who wanted to use the information (Paz, personal communication, June 2010).

Discipline was especially important to Mr. Paz. He believed that "most kids, if you are strict, they will follow you. You'll have your deviants" (Paz, personal communication, Jan 2010). While Mr. Paz's perspective on discipline created frustration for some of the students, it was important to him for students to learn. According to Mr. Paz, "it's important because that's the way the real world is. If you don't show up on time, turn phones off, and do what you need

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to do you won't last long in a job" (Paz, personal communication, Jan 2010). The discipline he maintained in his personal life influenced how he experienced the curriculum as he explained,

> I hate not being prepared. ..... do it right to make sure students learn objectives
> and student gets what I want them to learn. I didn't take this class in college, but I
> lived it. I am very careful not to cross boundaries. I don't cuss in class. I expect
> respect and treat them with respect. ....I tell students the primary reason for being
> here is to learn and mine is to teach. This class is to teach you to be a good
> student. I'm not here to entertain you or give you a good grade, that's just part of
> learning. (Paz, personal communication, Jan 2010)

As a means of control, Mr. Paz did not want students to interject their opinions into lessons or take over a discussion. It did not necessarily mean that he meant to be "talking down" to students as Ruben thought, and it did not mean that he was not wanting to connect with students as Mario believed. It was solely related to his perspective on discipline. Although there were lessons that normally might generate student input, such as lessons on relationships, sex, drugs and alcohol, when it came to in-class discussions Mr. Paz explained,

> I don't want to spend the whole period discussing. I'm not that kind of instructor
> that likes to have the student stand up and talk about this stuff forever. They can
> come to my office to discuss, but not so much in class. If you have a problem
> come see me because I'm a counselor. You're always going to have a student who
> can take over the class with talking and I'm not going to let them do that. (Paz,
> personal communication, June 2010)

6.6 Conclusion to Experienced Curriculum

The experienced curriculum in this study was influenced by the individual perspectives of the participants. Many of the students in the classroom had already been exposed to the lessons in the curriculum while in middle school, high school, in the military, or just through the process of living life. Mr. Paz was guided by a strong desire to teach students how to follow rules and learn *appropriate* college student behavior. Problematic was the focus on discipline and behavior education and lack of focus on academic skills as it created student frustration, non-responsiveness, and apathy. In return, Mr. Paz reacted to the students with a version of his own frustration.

Given that many of the students who attend community colleges are "not the cream of the crop," according to Mr. Paz (personal communication, 2010) and "they have writing skills that are abysmal," according to the course coordinator, Ms. Morgan (personal communication, 2010), it would make sense that many of these students needed more than common-sense strategies and lessons on how to behave. In this class, the students were not given the in-depth academic lessons many of them needed. While a strategy such as highlighting may be relevant, it is not adequate for students lacking in basic math, reading, and writing skills.

The curriculum was experienced as a curriculum where individual student needs went unmet. Much of the knowledge created in the classroom was knowledge that had already been acquired by the students. It was of little value to them to engage in a repeat of the common-sense information. While, as Mr. Paz indicated, most of the students learned *something* from the curriculum (Paz, personal communication, June 2010), ultimately, the knowledge imparted to the students who were required to take the course was of little value to their successful transition into the college environment and subsequently their academic success.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

7.1 Final Thoughts

After documenting and analyzing the three layers of a curriculum used in an orientation course at Southwestern Community College (SCC), I argue that the knowledge created by the curriculum was of little value to the students it was meant to serve. I conducted a case study on curriculum as it was written, as it unfolded in practice, and as it was experienced by those directly engaged in its course of study. The formal, enacted, and experienced were the three layers that made up the curriculum in total (Glatthorn, Boschee & Whitehead, 2005; Mendez, 2006; Page, 1991). In the process of this research it became evident that, although the written curriculum objectives were ambitious, the enacted lessons were experienced as elementary and commonsensical. Emerging from this study was my conclusion that there was a disconnect of relevance between the curriculum and the students.

As I analyzed the written documents of the formal curriculum, I recognized a curriculum with ambitious objectives. Even so, the ambitiousness and degree of emphasis on each objective varied from one curriculum document to another. The unit objectives included in the official syllabus contained the highest degree of ambitiousness, while the textbook focused on life skills and good choices for academic success. Combined, the documents identified a curriculum with objectives for orientation, academic strategies, and life skills. The intended objectives appeared to be relevant based on existing retention research and what it says should be included in orientation curriculum. If I had relied solely on the written documents of the formal curriculum, I would be led to believe that this was a curriculum with relevance for the students it was intended to serve.

Analyzing the curriculum as it unfolded in the classroom and as it was experienced by the participants exposed the extent of disconnect of relevance that existed. It was only through observations and interviews that I was able to identify the disconnect that existed. While the formal curriculum contained relevant and ambitious objectives, the construction of the knowledge in the classroom that unfolded was of little relevance and therefore of little value to the students.

Many of the students who attended the community college entered with low academic test scores (SCC webpage). The curriculum was subjected to and influenced by the individual experiences and aptitudes of the participants. The lessons intended to improve academic skills were insufficient given that some of the students who enrolled at the community college and who were in this class struggled academically. While course objectives promoted that students would gain ambitious skills, there was no academic stringency evident in the classrooms lessons. Academic skills were mostly in the form of strategies. The strategies were introduced in the textbook and reiterated in the classroom. They consisted of common-sense suggestions. While academic strategies can be of relevance, for the students in this class who were struggling academically, they were of little value. Academic strategies did not suffice for the academic stringency the underprepared students needed.

The elementary and common-sense lessons were of little relevance to the students who had already taken classes which taught the same lessons, or who already had the maturity to know what was being taught. The elementariness of the lessons and the orientation of students to appropriate college student behavior thus created frustration. The life skill lessons, while relevant, did not create new knowledge for students who had already experienced adult responsibilities. While, conceivably, most of the students learned something from the

curriculum, ultimately, the knowledge imparted to the students who were required to take the course did not necessarily add to their knowledge base.

7.2 Theoretical Applications

7.2.1 Rendón's Theory of Validation

In light of the misalignment present between the formal, enacted, and experienced levels of curriculum at SCC, it is clear that this and similar community college contexts, as well as general orientation initiatives, can benefit from comparisons with frameworks which theorize student success, particularly for Hispanic students. Rendón (1994) first articulated a theory of validation while doing research on how to create an inclusive and affirming atmosphere for nontraditional students attending a community college. Rendón (1994) defined nontraditional students as including adults returning to school, low-income and first-generation students, and many women and minority students from working class backgrounds. She identified traditional students as mostly coming from middle- and upper-class backgrounds and as predominately Caucasian.

Rendón (2002) conducted a study of a program at a community college in California where student validation was being used. The initial objective of the program which began in 1981 was to encourage Latino students to enroll in 4-year universities. Working with the students was an English faculty member, a counselor, and a mentor. The students committed to a yearlong writing program where the English faculty member's role was to enhance the students' writing and reading skills. Counselors worked with students to make sure they knew what they needed to transfer to 4-year universities. The mentor worked with the students to expose them to professional opportunities.

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The program was geared primarily toward Latino students who had a history of oppression. They were students who were victims of negative stereotypes, including a viewpoint that Latino students had limited intelligence and little potential for college. They were first-generation students from lower income economic backgrounds. They came from families where little was understood about what it meant to get a college education and they struggled with feeling confident in the university environment. She recognized that once these students enrolled in college they needed progressive and sustained assistance to ensure completion through graduation (Rendón, 2002).

Rendón's theory proved to be especially important to studies involving Latino students. She found the outcomes from an inclusion of validation in this program proved to be impressive, with 48% of the students who completed the program transferring to a 4-year college or university. Additionally, a survey showed that students would have recommended the program to their friends. Students believed the program prepared them for university-level reading and writing, and that the counselors did a great job in preparing them for transferring. A key finding was that validation helped the students to gain confidence in their academic ability. Many of the students expressed a transferability of what they had learned into other classes. Furthermore, they identified that their writing skills had greatly improved.

In her theory of validation, Rendón (1994) identified two types of validation. The first was academic validation. Academic validation can occur when institutional agents validate for students that they can trust their innate capacity to learn. Institutional agents help students develop confidence in being a college student. Secondly, there is interpersonal validation. This validation can occur when institutional agents proactively foster students' personal development

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and social adjustment. Validation comes from encouragement, affirmation, and support, all of which Rendón (1994) found especially important to nontraditional students.

Rendón (1994) found that many nontraditional students who attend college, while needing direction and guidance, did not need it delivered in a patronizing manner. These students do not do well in the classroom environments of today that are typically invalidating and competitive. Additionally, in classrooms where faculty and staff view certain types of students as incapable of learning, students are either assaulted with information or information is withheld from them, the result of which is the instilling of doubt and fear in students. Students are silenced and oppressed in these environments. Competitive environments pit students against each other and greatly disadvantage nontraditional student populations such as working class women and minority students (Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Munoz, 2011).

Rendón provided six elements important to accomplishing student validation (Rendón & Munoz, 2011). While Rendón (1994) provided examples of who can and should validate, it was the validation itself that contributed to Hispanic students' academic success. The first was that the responsibility for initiating contact with students falls to institutional agents. Rather than the student being given the responsibility of interaction and participation, it was up to the institutional agents to take the first step. Secondly, validation was essential for students who lacked self-confidence in their ability to be successful college students. Thirdly, validation was a prerequisite to student development. Rendón posited that academic and interpersonal validation contributed to students becoming more involved if they feel confident. The fourth element was validation which could occur both in and out of class. Active affirmation, support of students, and the design of activities that promoted academic excellence and personal growth are important both in the classroom and outside of the classroom. Fifth, validation was not an end in

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itself; it was an ongoing developmental process. Lastly, validation was especially needed during the students' early college experience.

The students in this class were not so different from the students described in Rendón's (1994) research. Most were Hispanic students who were the first in their family to attend college (Rendón & Munoz, 2011). Most were from low-income families. A large number of them were students returning to school after having been out for some time. Rendón (1994) posited that, for Hispanic students such as the ones in this class, validation is especially needed during the students' early college experience.

Students all identified that the community college was successful at creating a comfortable environment. For the Hispanic students in this class, cultural congruence with the overall community college student body existed. Additionally, most of the administrative staff spoke both English and Spanish and many of the instructors were also Hispanic. Every student interviewed, regardless of ethnic background, said they were comfortable attending the community college. Only one student, who also said she was comfortable, emphasized that she did not like the area and was for that reason going to transfer out of the community college. She was the sole Anglo female in the class.

While students were comfortable at the community college, they did not receive validation of their academic potential within the classroom. The instructor and the lessons both presented a message of students lacking in basic behavioral skills and common-sense abilities. This study revealed an enacted curriculum that failed to validate students' ability to learn. Instead, the common sense of the lessons often did the opposite, as it signaled a perception of students lacking basic knowledge. For these students, the curriculum failed to contribute to the confidence needed to meet the demands of being a college student. Rendón and Munoz (2011).

identified validation as essential for students' who lacked self-confidence in their ability to be successful college students.

Subsequently, several of the students responded with various forms of rebelliousness, including non-responsiveness. Rather than validation, the incorporation of discipline and behavior education into every lesson created student frustration. Rendón (1994) identified that the result of delivering direction and guidance in a patronizing manner was the instilling of doubt and fear in students. Hispanic students who are faced with non-validation are silenced and oppressed in these environments (Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Munoz, 2011). The students in this classroom were mostly non-responsive except for times when permitted or invited to participate or when verbal frustration bubbled up to the surface.

7.2.2 Concept of Participation Structure

As was seen in this case study, issues of control have an overarching effect on classroom participation. Teachers determine the rules in classrooms for participation and students respond (Page, 2003). Teachers direct, pose questions, and assess student responses. They have control over in-class discussions. Teachers lead the topic to be taught, its meaning, and the pace of the lessons. They have some key privileges that students do not have in classrooms (Page, 2003). According to Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2005), this control is achieved through the differential use of power. While some students will rebel, many will attempt to meet the accountability measures that tie to student grades. There is an implicit recognition of the unequal power structures that exists in the classrooms.

In this classroom, issues of control created an environment of frustration. Not unlike what occurs in other classrooms, Mr. Paz determined the rules of behavior and participation. He called on students when he deemed their input was appropriate. He enforced the rules and the

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rewards. While most of the students were silenced by the rules of participation, some were rebellious. Others became apathetic and resistant, as manifested by the quality of work they turned in, their failure to do the assignments or quizzes, or do well on the exams.

7.2.3 Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory

This study identified the significance of transactions that occurred between participants and curriculum. Rosenblatt's (1969) transactional theory as it related to literature provided a framework for helping me understanding the process of how participants in this study negotiated the curriculum. For Rosenblatt (1969), rather than just an interaction, there was a transaction that occurred between an individual reader and the written text, and out of this transaction came meaning. Without the occurrence of a transaction, the text was nothing more than letters and words on a page. It was the transaction that turned the text into meaning and that meaning was negotiated by the reader.

According to Rosenblatt (1969), an interaction occurs when two separate factors collide with one another. I identify an interaction as analogous to a peanut butter and jelly sandwich where the bread, peanut butter, and jelly interact with one another while each maintains it own distinctiveness. You can taste the bread, you can taste the jelly, and you can taste the peanut butter. A transaction differs from an interaction because it involves a negotiating relationship between participants, with each mutually exchanging and shaping the other. I identify a transaction as analogous to a baked loaf of bread where the ingredients no longer retain their distinctiveness; instead, they mutually contribute and shape what gets pulled out of the oven.

A transaction occurred between the participants and the curriculum in this classroom. Each curriculum participant assigned individualized meaning to the curriculum. According to Rosenblatt (1969), meaning is assigned based on attention to the residue of past experiences

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occurring in differing contexts, the overtones of feeling, and the blending of attitude and mood. There was a negotiating relationship that occurred between the individual participants and the curriculum with each contributing to what the meaning of the curriculum became. Figure 1 below depicts the transaction that occurs when an individual reads a poem as identified by Rosenblatt (1969). Figure 2 below depicts my application of Rosenblatt's transactional theory to what occurred in this classroom as individuals negotiated and experienced the meaning of the curriculum. Figure 1 below depicts the reciprocal relationship of participants engaged in a reading transaction.

Figure 1
Roseblatt's Model of Reciprocal Reading Transaction

Poem to Read

Reader

Author / Text
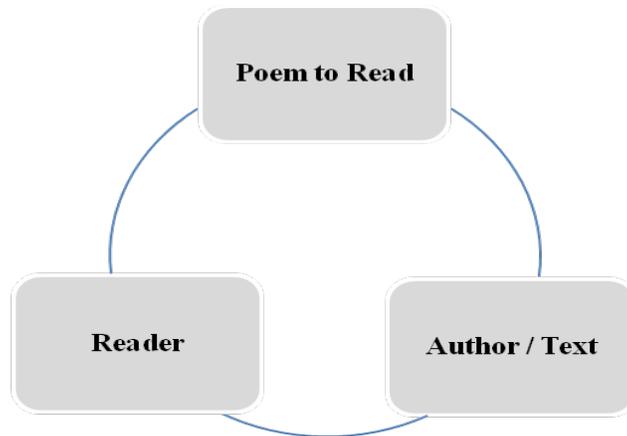
(L. Rosenblatt, 1969)

In comparison, Figure 2 below depicts the reciprocal relationship of participants engaged in a curriculum transaction.

Figure 2
Reciprocal Transaction of Meaning in the SCC Orientation Curriculum
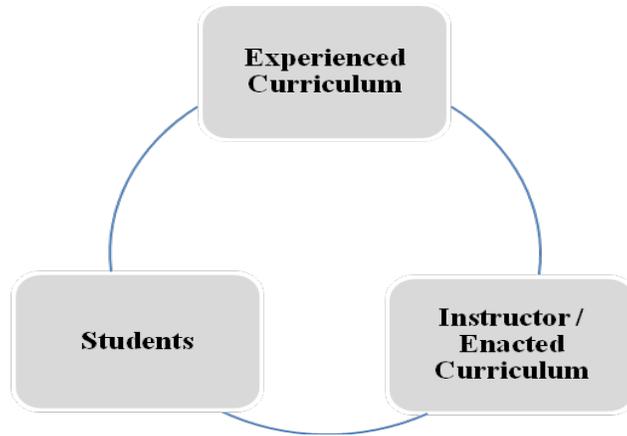
(P. Gutierrez-Hartell, 2012)

The process of experiencing curriculum is an individualized process. Mr. Paz had an experience with the formal curriculum that gave it meaning based on his individualized negotiation. Further, a transaction occurred as Mr. Paz then delivered the lessons to become his version of an enacted curriculum. Each one of the students also had an individualized negotiation with the experienced curriculum. It was the back and forth negotiating transaction that created what the experienced curriculum ultimately became.

7.3 Theoretical Findings

7.3.1 Curriculum is Constructed by Participants

Curriculum consists of tiles of meaning that people impose into its definition, thereby producing a particular version of curriculum within the confines of a classroom. As classrooms are socially and culturally created places, the meaning-making of participants within the classroom constitutes the knowledge that gets created. Instructors impose their own definition of what they will select and focus on as they translate the formal curriculum (Sizer, 1999). Instructors transmit the formal curriculum to students and students respond; it is through this negotiation that the curriculum becomes jointly constructed (Page, 1991).

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Guided by the heavy emphasis on behavior in the textbook lessons, the enacted curriculum in this classroom also contained a heavy emphasis on behavior. Mr. Paz used stories, scolding, and discipline as he interpreted his version of the curriculum. His version of the curriculum contained a strong focus on discipline. He told stories of people who were disciplined and because of it they were able to make good decisions. For example, he told a story about a friend of his wife who read while she cooked. She read all of the time. Reading all of the time was a good behavior for student success. He scolded students telling them they "had problems" when he perceived that they were not making good choices. He disciplined students for being late. He disciplined by not responding to uninvited student input. For him, teaching behaviors that the textbook emphasized was the focus of his lessons. As students resisted what he was trying to teach, he relied on discipline to impose his meaning-making of the curriculum.

Students reacted to the focus on behavior of the lessons as taught by Mr. Paz and they reacted to their perceived non-relevance of the commonsensical nature of the formal curriculum. They reacted with frustration, non-responsiveness or by putting little effort into the assignments. A few students stopped attending class and / or dropped out of school. They each resisted in their own way. They responded as if oppressed by the focus on discipline. They recognized the common-sense lessons as being of little relevance to them. Students learned to be on time, yet they were mostly non-responsive or they responded amongst themselves through looks and the muttering of comments. They went to class while doing very little otherwise. Most did not read the textbook, turn in quality work, or complete their assignments, and they did not do well on the exams. Finally, frustration bubbled up into a "fuck you" directed at Mr. Paz near the end of the semester.

7.3.2 Context Shapes Curriculum

Mr. Paz considered the learning of discipline as important to student growth, as he explained to me: "it's important because that's the way the real world is. If you don't show up on time, turn phones off, and do what you need to do, you won't last long in a job" (Paz, personal communication, Jan 2010). He was adamant about teaching what he understood students needed to learn and do to be successful. Moreover, Mr. Paz explained how he saw his role in the classroom:

> I hate not being prepared. ..... do it right to make sure students learn objectives and student gets what I want them to learn. I didn't take this class in college, but I lived it. I am very careful not to cross boundaries. I don't cuss in class. I expect respect and treat them with respect. ....I tell students the primary reason for being here is to learn and mine is to teach. This class is to teach you to be a good student. I'm not here to entertain you or give you a good grade, that's just part of learning. (Paz, personal communication, Jan 2010)

Mr. Paz brought this personal perspective into the classroom. He put effort into being prepared as he was compelled to meet his obligations. His perspective informed what he focused on and how he taught the lessons. It influenced how the formal curriculum unfolded in the classroom.

Student context also shaped the curriculum. While Mr. Paz's intent was to teach them how to behave like college students, they already were college students. They entered the classroom with individualized life experiences and their interpretation of the curriculum was informed by their experiences. What was relevant to the instructor was not necessarily relevant to the student. For example, being told to carry a dictionary and being scolded for not having one readily available in the classroom was not relevant to students who had a dictionary saved

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as a favorite on their computers. This disconnect of relevance created a conflict that resulted in a lack of interest, apathy and finally frustration.

According to Erickson (1985), settings and wider social environments are related to one another. What occurs in a local setting is influenced by what occurs in the wider environment. In this case study, the orientation course had a reputation that preceded it. It was rumored to be a "waste of time" and an "easy A" by students who had previously taken the class. The rumors were not tied to any specific instructor, but to the course as a whole. The elementariness and commonsensical nature of the lessons only validated what students had already heard.

Additionally, Mr. Paz identified that SCC did not get the "cream of the crop" students. The course coordinator, Ms. Morgan also noted that students who attended SCC had writing skills that were "abysmal." For Mr. Paz and Ms. Morgan, most of the students who attended SCC were lacking in basic college student skills. The choice of formal curriculum used for student orientation implied a mindset that tied the lack of student academic skills to a lack of basic values and an ability to make good behavioral choices.   The orientation curriculum was intended to provide what the students were deemed to be lacking. Even so, both Mr. Paz and Ms. Morgan stated a resignation to the fact that the curriculum in this course was not necessarily going to result in student success.

Given the perceptions of who the students who attended SCC were as described by Mr. Paz and Ms. Morgan, I was surprised at how articulate the students were during interviews. Many of the students had done well in high school. Many of these students were at SCC because of financial considerations, as it costs less to attend here. Others were older and needed validation of their academic capabilities. They were lacking some basic academic skills, but capable of learning. While a few of the students whose first language was Spanish struggled

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with their English, it did not detract from their obvious level of intelligence and capacity to succeed in college. From my interviews, I was able to ascertain that the students in this classroom had the intellectual capacity to learn and subsequently succeed given instruction relevant to their needs.

7.4 Recommendations for Future Research

According to Gaff (1997), in order for curriculum to have integrity, the formal, taught, and learned curriculum must all emanate from the same reality. Whatever curriculum may be, it is foremost an arena where ideological forces collide over the status of deeply held convictions (Kliebard, 2004). They not only collide with one another, they transact with one another and create individualized meaning. While the winning ideological values and beliefs are reflected in formal curriculum, it is what emerges in the classroom as meaning, as it is constructed by classroom participants that ultimately defines curriculum.

It is not enough to focus on the conceptual and survey outcomes of the curriculum, as previous studies on retention and student success in orientation coursework have been limited to. To understand the curriculum in total, all three layers must be thoroughly examined. It is only through this depth of analysis that a possible disconnect of relevance can be identified and corrected. What was relevant in the curriculum ultimately added little value to the knowledge base of the students in this classroom. The relevance of what is being taught and how it is being taught can only be revealed by engaging in the everyday unfolding of knowledge as it is constructed within the classroom by the participants directly engaged in its construction.

Additionally, we need to redefine what is meant by academic success. We need to focus on improving the skills that lead to meeting the redefined academic success criteria rather than the life skills associated with appropriate student behaviors. Behavior education by nature

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involves the teaching of non-academic skills. I argue that behavior education is nothing more than common-sense lessons that serve to invalidate student values and create frustration. Yet, we continue to include them in curriculum to meet academic objectives. Furthermore, we need to redefine our teaching methods. The way in which students access a dictionary, a textbook, or highlight words is changing. According to Thomas and Brown (2011), the traditional approaches to education are losing applicability in today's environment of communication technology. Many of our traditional teaching methods are losing relevance to the students of today. More than ever before, learning will emerge from experience and interaction and less so from tradition methods of memorization (Thomas and Brown, 2011).

Further research of the effect of power structures within the classroom is needed. Inherent classroom power structures greatly influence how curriculum is experienced. Schools and classrooms are cultural places, and power structures are an innate component of the classroom culture. Teachers and students are aware of their roles, and they interact based on what they know about their roles. These power structures contribute to frustration and non-responsiveness and therefore can create a barrier to learning.

This study exposes the need to continue interpretive research of curriculum used in orientation courses at community colleges and universities. What we do know is students are diverse in every conceivable way and this diversity creates an environment where meeting individual needs is a complex undertaking. Curriculum is created through a complex process of participant transactions. Understanding how individual transactions negotiate an enacted and experienced curriculum is important. Providing students with the tools for achieving academic success involves going into the classroom and understanding who the students are and how they experience the curriculum so as to identify how best to meet their individual needs.

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