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Examining Discourses in a College Readiness Program: A qualitative study

Kendra Marie Farr
University of Texas at El Paso

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EXAMINING DISCOURSES IN A COLLEGE READINESS PROGRAM: A QUALITATIVE
STUDY

KENDRA MARIE FARR

Master's Program in Sociology

APPROVED:

Angela Frederick, Ph.D., Chair

Cristina Morales, Ph.D.

Char Ullman, Ph.D.

Stephen L. Crites, Jr., Ph.D.

Dean of the Graduate School

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my father, Gary Farr. Dad, I love you and miss you so much. This is all for you.

To my family, your unconditional love and support has allowed me to do this, and I am forever grateful. I would not be where I am today without it. To my niece and nephew, I hope this work is the first step to creating a better place for you to grow up in. To my friends, I can never thank you enough for all the support and love you show me on a daily basis. You mean the world to me. Finally, to the AVID staff who participated in this research, it was an honor to work with you and alongside you. Thank you for everything.

EXAMINING DISCOURSES IN A COLLEGE READINESS PROGRAM: A QUALITATIVE
STUDY

by

KENDRA MARIE FARR, B.S.

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Abstract

In the past ten years, there has been an increase in the Hispanic student population in college across the United States (Krogstad et al. 2022). However, U.S. Census Bureau statistics (2021; 2022) have shown that they are still less likely to attain a four-year degree compared to their White counterparts. To begin understanding why this occurs, researchers look to curriculum at the high school level to see how students are becoming college ready. High schools utilize college readiness programs to help students prepare for the rigor of college courses. One program is an elective course offered at primary and secondary levels of education that recruits minoritized students from low-income households. The goal of the program is to foster the individual determination of students through using effective writing, inquiry, collaboration, organizational, and reading skills needed to be successful in college. This thesis seeks to understand how discourses play a part in the success of individual determination and this program. Six participants from one local high school were interviewed and observed during the second half of the 2022-23 school year. Results showed that all AVID staff utilized and internalized the discourse of individual determination that suggested students were the center of their academic successes and struggles. Within the discourse, there was little to no consideration for structural and institutional forces that shaped student performance. I argue that there is a way for this discourse to introduce intrinsic curricular methods of motivation into the classroom that could be more successful in preparing a student for college.

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1. Introduction

In the past ten years, we have seen a consistent rise in the Hispanic population within the United States. As of 2020, Hispanics comprised 18.9% of the U.S. population, making them the second largest racial/ethnic group behind non-Hispanic whites (OMH 2020). During this time, we have also seen an increase in the Hispanic student population within colleges across the United States. From 2010 to 2021, the percentage of Hispanic college students rose from 14% to 19% (Krogstad, Passel, and Noe-Bustamante 2022). However, when looking at overall educational attainment compared to their White counterparts, we see that only 20.6% of Hispanic students have completed a bachelor's degree or higher at 25 or older, versus 41.2% of White students (U.S. Census Bureau 2021; U.S. Census Bureau 2022). If there is an increase in Hispanic/Latinx¹ student enrollment in colleges, yet they are still statistically less likely to have a bachelor's degree, it makes one wonder what is happening at the high school level that is leaving these students unprepared for college and less likely to have a degree from a four-year university.

Sociologists and education researchers have often focused on parental capital and socioeconomic status as the driving force behind disparities in college graduation rates (Redford, Johnson, and Honnald 2009; Lareau 2011; Calarco 2018; Hamilton, Roksa, and Nielson 2018; Paugh 2018; Kolluri 2020); however, scholars are paying increasing attention to understanding how programming at the high school level also influence students' divergent college trajectories (Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio 2003; Moore et al. 2010; Duncheon 2015; Smith and Noah 2022). Contributing to the expanding scholarly literature on college preparatory programs at the high

¹ The term "Hispanic" is the current governmental classification for people of Latin American descent. Both "Hispanic" and "Latinx" are terms subject to change as time passes but are currently widely used in social spaces and research as of 2023.

school level, I present findings from a case study of a high school program, Advancement via Individual Determination (here forth referred to as AVID). I focus attention on the discourses AVID educators employ to frame both the successes and struggles of Hispanic/Latinx youth as these educators work to keep their students in the college pipeline. I seek to answer the following questions in my research: (1) *What discourses do AVID teachers and tutors use to talk about the successes and struggles of their students?*; (2) *Are there places where these discourses fall short in capturing student experiences?*; and (3) *How does the use of these discourses enhance or diminish the larger goals of this college preparatory program?* The ultimate goal of this research project is to study how discourses within a college preparatory program influence students' individual determination, and how the discourses could promote college preparedness for minoritized students.

2. Background

2.1 Inequities in Hispanic/Latinx College Enrollment

There are numerous reasons why Hispanic/Latinx students may be less likely to pursue or complete a bachelor's degree. Some of the primary reasons stem from socioeconomic status (Terenzini, Cabrera, and Bernal 2001; Titus 2006; Carales 2020). Hispanic/Latinx students are disproportionately from lower-income households and are more likely to attend lower-resourced schools located in low-income neighborhoods, which places them within a context of structural disadvantage. As a result, Hispanic/Latinx students do not have the same access to various educational tools that contribute to overall success (i.e., tutors, computer labs, extensive libraries, more experienced educators, etc.) (Lee 2002; Ladson-Billings 2006) Although Hispanic/Latinx parents are found to highly value education, most lower-income parents also express discomfort

when asked to help their children with schoolwork. This can be attributed to many factors, including an unfamiliarity with the process of the American education system or even language barriers (Ceballo 2004). These factors also affect the ease of applying for college. Parents are often unable to provide information on the steps it takes to go to college since they have never gone through the process, making the application process less accessible and more complicated to complete for the student (Redford et al. 2017; Barshay 2018; Ahearn 2021).

The state of Texas represents a crucial site to study Hispanic/Latinx high school students' college decisions. In a Texas attrition study published in 2021, researchers found that Hispanic students, who comprise over half of the Texas public school population, are only about half as likely to graduate from high school compared to their White peers (Johnson and Goodman 2021). And among those Hispanic/Latinx students who do graduate high school, fewer than 23% of Hispanic/Latinx students go on to attain an associate degree or higher (Schak and Nichols 2018; Johnson and Goodman 2021).

College degree attainment for Hispanic/Latinx students has a broad range of economic and social benefits. Research shows that Hispanic/Latinx young adults who attain a four-year degree are more likely to experience upward social mobility through increased access to employment and wealth opportunities, such as retirement (NCES 1997; Krueger and Lindahl 2001; Cahalan et al. 2021; UnidosUS 2023). This in turn would have an effect on larger economic systems within the U.S, with some research estimating that bridging achievement gaps could add approximately \$20 trillion in GDP, and around \$3 trillion for state/local revenue over a 36-year period (Lynch and Oakford 2014).

In addition to addressing long-term economic effects, a broader public benefit could be gained by increasing the college-going rates of Hispanic/Latinx young adults. Between 2007 and 2009, the United States experienced an economic downturn that has since been labeled “The Great Recession.” During this time, fertility rates in the United States had dropped 4% amongst all groups of women aged 15 to 44. Today, researchers predict this decline in fertility will also create a severe decline in higher education enrollment rates starting in the year 2025 and will continue to have an effect through 2029 (Sutton et al. 2011; Barshay 2018). This enrollment decline, which researchers call an “enrollment cliff,” can be detrimental to public four-year universities that rely on funding based on enrollment rates, like the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). Since it is impossible to reverse the lack of college-aged students by 2025, it is imperative we turn our focus to the current high school students who statistically are not on a path to pursue higher education to bridge the cliff in the coming years.

2.2 Discourses as Symbolic Violence

My research is inspired by the spirit of liberatory education, namely, the ideas presented in Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993). Freire was best known as an educator and philosopher concerned with teaching the importance of critical consciousness as a means of liberation. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire defines critical consciousness as the ability to recognize or identify structures that perpetuate inequalities. Critical consciousness also involves taking a stance against these structures and actively trying to dismantle them. Freire criticized power dynamics that perpetuated oppressive conditions and understood that acknowledging such conditions was the first step toward freedom. Freire’s ideas were motivated by his poor living conditions growing up. In this spirit, my research contributes to other scholars’ work whose

goals are to find a way to fix the persisting educational disparities between White and minoritized students.

Freire argued we employ a banking system of education in which we simply deposit information into students without discerning whether it relates to them, benefits them, or truly recognizes them. Moreover, this system was created to benefit middle-class White students, leaving behind marginalized groups of students, including people who are disabled, use English as a Second Language (ESL), and international and racially minoritized students, to name a few. The education system, according to Freire, often demands that minoritized students assimilate to a dominant culture that reflects the White middle class. These students are expected to be skilled at receiving, memorizing, and understanding information without question, in the hope that this will maintain the working class (Freire 1993). This results in a student who can recite information, but is otherwise disconnected from it personally, lacking more important skills for educational success, like critical thinking, reading, writing, and comprehension skills.

While Freire focused on liberatory education with people living in slums of Brazil, French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, considered the ways in which school reproduces social class. He conceptualized how educational systems often reproduce inequities using symbolic power and violence. Bourdieu (1991) argues that symbolic power comes from larger institutions that grant power to the individuals who work for them. This power comes in the form of shaping the individuals' identities within the institution, which informs them of the role they are meant to play in the social system. Symbolic violence occurs when the symbolic power is exerted on those with the least power within the institution. In education, the institution is the school, which then grants power to its administration and teachers, which is, in turn, exerted upon the students (Goldstein 2005). Goldstein (2005) argues the type of symbolic violence that occurs within an

institution, such as a school, aims to tell the students “who they ought to be” (p. 22). Moreover, most symbolic power and violence are hidden and difficult to name.

One way in which symbolic violence is carried out is through the use of discourses. Discourses are beliefs, ideas, and attitudes, or courses of action and practices that inform and construct the subjects and the realms they discuss (Foucault 1969; Lessa 2006). These systems of thought are how methods of knowledge and power, including symbolic power, are formed and transmitted in education. In addition, Lessa (2006) argues that research practice must consider how discourses shape realities within the institutions they study. To begin creating equitable experiences in education, we should focus our attention on the discourses used in classrooms. This research analyzes how discourses are used in school contexts, specifically, in the AVID classroom.

2.3 Self-Determination Theory and Symbolic Power

Another form of symbolic power that presents itself is outlined in Ryan and Deci’s (2000a) self-determination theory. Ryan and Deci explore human motivation and begin to understand why an individual is motivated to do something. They note that there are two main types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, that account for why people engage in various activities. Firstly, intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because an individual finds it enjoyable. In education, this would look like a student completing work in their favorite subject with little external pressure to complete it. More recently, schools have promoted intrinsic motivation in curriculum formation by suggesting ways to make a class more engaging, including teaching material that is relevant to the students, or valuing the understanding of

content, rather than making sure they only understand it in the contexts of test-taking, specifically in primary level education (Waterford 2020).

In contrast, extrinsic motivation occurs when individuals feel pressure placed on them to act in a certain way, sometimes to avoid punishment (Ryan and Deci 2000b). Extrinsic motivation is multi-faceted in that there are different forms, determined by what regulates it. There are four regulatory types that are defined by the amount of autonomy the person feels in the motivation. These include external regulation, which has the least amount of autonomy, introjected regulation, in which an individual does not recognize the regulation to be their own but performs a behavior to avoid or please an outside factor; identified regulation, in which the individual finds the action to be important; and integrated regulation, in which the person is motivated to act out of necessity. This is closely related to intrinsic motivation, yet it is not necessarily enjoyable for the person to do (Ryan and Deci 2000b).

In the context of education, students may feel the different types of regulation depending on how they deem the content of a curriculum to be relevant to them. As such, extrinsic motivation can become a form of symbolic power. If most educational institutions are structured to deliver a form of curriculum that serves to oppress marginalized students, such as the case with the banking model of education, we will find that marginalized students may be extrinsically motivated to do work, resulting in disinterest and resentment towards education from the student (Ryan and Deci 2000b). The extrinsic motivation then perpetuates cycles of marginalized students receiving labels that shapes their perceptions and discredits their academic abilities, affecting abilities to succeed, especially in higher education, thus contributing to the achievement gap (Guay 2022). In addition, self-determination theory, itself, has the potential to

become a form of discourse-based violence, if it is used to focus too narrowly on individual motivation as the driver of college readiness and overall educational success.

2.4 The AVID Program

My study examines a high school program that seeks to improve the college trajectories of marginalized high school students. The AVID Program is an elective course available at the primary and secondary levels that recruits minoritized students from low-income households in hopes of preparing them for the demands of college, as well as life after high school.

Nationwide, approximately 57% of all AVID students are Hispanic or Latino, and 65% of the total number of students are considered low-income (AVID 2021). The AVID program was initially designed for promising students in California schools who were not on track to attend college. AVID was later implemented on a national scale after the release of the *Nation at Risk* report, which found that there was a large achievement gap between minoritized and white students (Paugh 2018; AVID 2023a). In most cases, students are invited to participate in the AVID program based on different criteria, such as average letter grades and teacher recommendations.

The AVID program places emphasis on high-quality instruction, utilizing teachers and college tutors who are adaptive, creative, and able to create a supportive environment for students (Bailey 2002). AVID teachers are provided with access to unique training opportunities, such as the AVID Summer Institute, in which they can meet other AVID educators and learn about teaching techniques, along with how to implement them. Within the AVID program, WICOR, or Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading, is one instructional technique that forms the program's foundation. The job of the teacher is to implement WICOR to

enhance the learning and individual determination of a student. In the classroom, and in contrast to other classrooms, WICOR is not taught directly, such as through a lecture, but is implemented through having the student participate in activities. Such activities include reading assignments, group projects, essays, and more, where collaboration amongst peers, tutors, and teachers is highly valued. Arguably, Tutorial Request Forms (TRFs) are one of the best representations of the use of WICOR while also honing students' public speaking skills (see Appendix A). Twice a week, students are asked to bring in a question from any of their core classes that they did not understand and fill out a TRF. Then, all students are sorted based on the topic and placed in groups (e.g., math students are grouped together). The students take turns presenting their questions to their group, and they work together to find a solution.

Upon joining the program, it is customary for the students to be interviewed by the coordinator or college tutors. The questions on the interview are goal-oriented, to include what college/major the student wishes to pursue. This allows the program to monitor the growth of the students throughout their years of school and allows educators to be more aware of the goals the students have set and the support students need to reach their goals.

To achieve all this, AVID employs "untracking" techniques to promote students' individual success. Untracking techniques, known as a reformative education method, involve regrouping students not based on skill and academic standing, but rather, creating a heterogeneous mix of students and providing them with the means to be critical thinkers and take an active stance in their own learning. This results in a student-based learning mode where they can help and bring each other up to the same level. Untracking programs also enlist the help of educators who can set high expectations for students and help them reach those goals, provide extra time for the students to fully understand various concepts, and effectively communicate

with the rest of the school to be on the same level of education (Wheelock 1992; Loveless, 2021). A good representation of the benefit of untracking programs was outlined in a classic study in which educators Burris, Heubert, and Levin (2006) examined the effects of untracking techniques on an accelerated math course within a middle school. They found that the untracking methods, which they note to include implementing mathematics workshops, restructuring the curriculum to benefit the students better, and using tools like calculators, offered students a “universal acceleration” in their math courses, dramatically improving the overall success rate of the students. It was specifically noted that minoritized students who participated in the study, who otherwise would not have chosen an accelerated math class or would not have passed due to rigor, especially benefited from this change in curriculum (Burris, Heubert, and Levin 2006).

A 2016 study compared tracking policies in two urban school districts. This research argued that tracking methods facilitate inequalities within education, stemming from outdated ideas of minoritized students’ academic intellect. While restructuring their tracking policies, both districts recognized that their tracking programs were counterintuitive to their goals of creating equitable education opportunities (Turner and Spain 2016).

In a separate study, Heather Tills, an educator who studied Teaching English as a Foreign/Second Language (TEFL/TESL), analyzed two case studies showing how untracking methods in two AVID programs gave minoritized students access to academic tools that promoted success in college preparatory courses, specifically through the space AVID created. Tills identifies that students who were provided with an extra space that included a melding of various students at different academic levels, in this case through an AVID classroom, were more likely to be successful in their academics while also maintaining their cultural identities (Tills 2018).

Most importantly, AVID focuses on college readiness by providing students with resources for college success. AVID tutors are key in promoting college readiness by being examples for the students. All AVID tutors are in college or have already graduated with a four-year degree, meaning they know what it takes to apply and be accepted to college. They can share their college experiences and provide advice on how to navigate life post-high school. In addition, all AVID tutors are provided mandatory training that also strengthens their skills in overseeing TRFs and other group activities when needed. AVID tutors are always present in the classroom to help students. AVID also works closely with college resources on campus, such as a College and Career Readiness Center, in which counselors are available to students to help with tasks like resume writing and applying for financial aid. Some AVID programs also offer students an opportunity to visit various college campuses, gaining valuable information about campus life.

Data collected about the AVID program throughout the past ten years has shown that low-income, first-generation college students who participate in the AVID program are four times more likely to graduate from college than their counterparts (Engle and Tinto 2008). Other studies have shown that AVID students perform similarly or better than non-AVID students in the same level of higher education. One such study showed that AVID students in their sample received undergraduate certificates and associate degrees at higher rates than non-AVID students (Woolridge 2018). In another study that took place in Texas, data showed that most AVID students met criteria for defining college success at high rates, including earning a C or better in all courses, and returning as a full-time student for a second semester (Watt and Huerta 2011). Every high school senior in Texas who participated in the AVID program during the 2021-22 school year graduated from high school. In addition, 72% of these students were admitted to a 4-

year university. Of the Texas AVID cohort, 61.4% were Hispanic or Latino. Since these college preparatory programs are still being utilized by many high schools across Texas, and the number of Hispanic/Latinx and other marginalized groups of students continue to rise, it becomes apparent that programs like AVID need to be studied more to understand how they can serve to address the inconsistencies in the quality of education for marginalized students.

3. Methods

3.1 Study Site

This project is a case study of a college readiness program. I collected data at an urban high school in El Paso, Texas. El Paso borders Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, and is the second largest city in Texas with a predominantly Hispanic community. The school in which this study took place is in a rapidly developing area of El Paso, mainly comprised of lower and middle-income households. To protect participants' confidentiality, I here forth refer to the school using the pseudonym, Vista High School (VHS).

VHS is relatively young compared to other high schools around the city, so most of its programs, including AVID, are also relatively new. This specific AVID program was started in 2017 after teachers and administrators noticed that students lacked certain college resources. At the time of data collection, the school principal and AVID coordinator worked together to prepare all seniors for college, meeting once a week with head department teachers to discuss implementing the best teaching strategies to facilitate student success. For this particular AVID program, since the high school population is small, the AVID program does not send out invitations, but rather, the program is open for any incoming freshman or sophomore to join so long as they are enrolled in a course of rigor, as determined by the AVID coordinator. To recruit

students, VHS chooses AVID seniors who are deemed to be exemplars of the program to work with new students. These seniors guide middle school tours that take place throughout the school year, provide useful information about the program, show them the AVID classroom, and introduce the coordinator and AVID tutors present.

The goal for Vista High School was to be considered an AVID Demonstration school. This requires the school to be an exemplary model of the AVID essentials, meaning all teachers must be familiar with the WICOR process. One challenge the school currently faces on the road to becoming an AVID Demonstration school is having all teachers on board with their implementation of teaching strategies, including WICOR. In my study, I outline how structural forces could hinder teachers from utilizing AVID strategies.

The AVID program in this school consists of two AVID elective teachers and seven college tutors, including myself at the time of the study. The majority of the students and staff at VHS are Hispanic, including the participants of the study. Within this particular school's AVID program, most students are on the free or reduced lunch program and are first-generation college students (AVID 2023b).

3.2 Phase One: In-Depth Interviews

Phase One of my study involved in-depth interviews I conducted with AVID teachers and tutors. My sample size consisted of four of the six AVID college tutors, along with both AVID teachers. Because of my familiarity with the environment, including the participants, recruitment was done verbally after providing a general description of the research I wanted to do. All potential participants already had my personal contact information and were notified that if they had any questions, they could contact me at any time or ask me in person. All participants were

provided with an Informed Consent Form (ICF) prior to the start of interviews that outlined all aspects of the research, along with a discussion of the benefits and potential risks associated with study participation. Participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary, both verbally and through the ICF, and they could withdraw from the study at any point.

I conducted four interviews in person, in various private spaces at Vista High School, with permission, including the school library, AVID classroom, and teachers' offices. The two remaining interviews were conducted over Zoom. In the ICF, participants were notified that I intended to record the interview, either using a recording device (in-person) or by recording the Zoom call. They also had the option to deny being recorded, in which case I would take rigorous notes rather than recording. All in-person participants agreed to have the audio from the interview recorded. Additionally, both participants who were interviewed via Zoom also consented to having the Zoom meeting recorded, including audio and video. I guaranteed that the information provided by all participants would be confidential. As such, the data collected from interviews was stored on a personal, password-protected computer that was only accessible to me. In addition, I notified the participants that what was shared in the interview would not be shared with any other participants within the study. In tandem with the audio/video recording of the interviews, I also took notes of things I found to be important, including recurring themes within our discussions and other points I felt may be important to revisit during the data analysis process.

The interviews were semi-structured and occurred in a more conversation-like fashion, most likely due to my familiarity with the participants. On average, the interviews lasted about 40 minutes. During the interviews, we discussed how the AVID teachers and tutors understood learning to occur within the AVID program. Specifically, I asked questions about pedagogical

techniques, assignments, and lesson plans used in the classroom and what they felt was successful, what could be changed, and why. These questions also led to the participants conveying how they understood the students were affected by AVID strategies, including specific moments in the classroom. Some of these moments were also captured in the observation portion of this study. In addition, I inquired about positive working relationships and tensions they experience with teachers not connected to AVID. This also revealed how the use of the discourse affected community relations among other teachers and throughout the whole school. Examples of some questions that were asked include:

- What are some ways that you make connections with the students?
- What impact do you think the AVID program has on students' academic identities?
- Can you give examples of instances where teachers have worked well with the program and its strategies to ensure student success? Explain why you think it worked well.

3.3 Phase Two: Observations

In Phase Two, I triangulated my interview data by collecting data in the form of classroom observations. In the ICF, I outlined that observations would occur after the interview phase, to which they agreed. I also reminded participants about observations at the conclusion of each interview. Through these observations, I sought to document particular teaching and engagement techniques and points brought up during interviews by generating rigorous field notes. Some observations also came from my own time as a college tutor, including experiences I had that were relevant to the research. Any observations I include from my own experiences were collected during the observation portion of the study. The observations occurred from the first week of May until the last day of school, June 2nd, totaling around 80 hours' worth of

observations. There were no audio or video recordings of any observations. Rather, detailed notes were either handwritten or typed on my secure, personal device. To avoid any participant bias, the participants did not know specifically what days they were being observed.

3.4 Artifact Collection

Throughout the interview and observation phases of this project, I also collected various relevant documents that were referenced within the interviews and were noted to be significant in my observations and my time as a college tutor. This included Tutorial Request Forms (TRFs) (see Appendix A), Three-Column Notes (see Appendix B), and Binder Check rubrics (see Appendix C). I also took specific notes on visuals used throughout the spaces in the study site. This included posters and other visual aids used in the classroom that I found to be relevant to the study.

3.5 Data Analysis

Once the data collection process was complete, I transcribed all recorded interviews using Microsoft Word's built in transcription software. Because the software was not entirely accurate, I went through each interview and made corrections to the transcription as needed. During this process, I also replaced any identifying information, including names of people, or the name of the school, with preassigned pseudonyms that were unrelated to any identifiable characteristics, including professional titles. To further protect the identities of people mentioned in interviews, I have altered other specific details in the stories I share below that are not pertinent to the findings. Any notes taken during the interview and observation portion of the study, either written or typed, were transferred to my personal, secure computer.

I began by analyzing the gathered data using a thematic analysis technique. In qualitative data, thematic analysis is utilized to identify themes within data sets (Lochmiller 2021). For my research, thematic analysis was used to identify specific patterns that may occur in the classroom, which informed me of what to specifically look for in the observation portion of collecting data. Here, I identified three themes I coded for— “Perceptions,” “Social Capital,” and “Tensions.” I also took a grounded theory approach in my observations—which researchers use to create hypotheses or theories from the data (Glaser and Strauss 1999)—to look for unexpected patterns that were not categorized within my codes. Through grounded theory, I discovered a pattern of using the discourse of individual determination. This pattern became the main focus of this study.

3.6 Reflexivity

My own identity and role as a tutor in AVID played an important role in the research process, presenting both strengths and challenges. I worked with the AVID staff for almost two years, so I was familiar with their working styles. I was also accustomed to the general classroom dynamics and how they are established. This familiarity with the environment allowed me to interpret the data I collected more thoroughly than someone who may not be as familiar with AVID classroom processes. On the other hand, my proximity to the participants and learning environment initially made it more difficult for me to identify this discourse. In my interviews, I also had to make a clear distinction that, in the moment, I was not a tutor collecting data, but as a researcher and student that was not affiliated with VHS or the AVID program.

This research has been inspired by Paulo Freire and his theories. I first learned about his work in my graduate studies where began to really understand how there are oppressive

structures embedded in many aspects of our society. As a woman born and raised in a city of diverse, minoritized people, the idea of institutional oppression sparked my interest in studying how to begin combatting oppression for the sake of benefitting my community. Reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1993) gave me renewed hope that it is possible to enact change for the future through education. Since then, this has been the driving force for my work and what I intend to pursue in my own education. I acknowledge that this hope, along with the goal of making positive change in my community may, in turn, make me predisposed to believe that my data will show that equitable education can be achieved through the AVID program.

However, there were several steps that I took to make sure my research was rigorously and ethically collected. It is my belief that if the data collection, in any way, was false, it would not be impactful to the future of education and could, in turn, harm my community. As such, in explaining data collection, analysis, and discussion portions of this thesis, I try to be as transparent as possible by providing real emotions, tensions, and experiences that the participants and I observed or experienced. I feel that this is important to the research because it provides a realistic portrayal of a classroom that can be considered reformative and shows it is not always as easy as it seems. In providing this accurate portrayal, and because of my familiarity with everything in the study, this created challenges I discuss in later sections. As a result, I took special care in making sure identifying characteristics were omitted and pseudonyms were used to protect participants' privacy, especially when including more emotional moments observed or noted in interviews. Open channels of communication were always maintained, and still are today, for participants to speak with me or ask questions about the research and I honored any request participants had in the duration of the study. I hope that my work will also build upon the

existing structures of the AVID program to one day be able to aid in expanding teaching strategies that can be used on a schoolwide level, or nationally.

4. Findings

4.1 The Discourse of Individual Determination

When starting my research, I wanted to understand how AVID teachers and tutors used the AVID program to create connections with their students and how they set goals they felt were attainable for the students. As my research progressed, I realized there was an underlying discourse of individual determination the teachers and tutors had that informed them and guided how they understood their students' motivation to learn. Perhaps this should not have been a surprise, given “Individual Determination” is even embedded in the name of the program. Reflected in AVID’s name, I observed a discourse of individual determination built through the AVID program's learning strategies. These strategies, through which teachers and tutors are socialized, informed the expectations staff had for their students. Specifically, using this discourse created expectations amongst the teachers and tutors of students being solely responsible for their academic successes and struggles.

Using the discourse of individual determination then resulted in the AVID teachers and tutors understanding and measuring the students' motivation through the actions the students take or do not take to be successful. This specific discourse did not consider other factors that influence a student’s academic performance, such as school discipline, teacher attitudes, and other larger structural constraints that play a part in a student's education. Instead, it significantly emphasized the students' decisions and was used to indicate how the teachers and tutors perceive the AVID students’ preparedness to graduate, go to college, or find a career.

In particular, one of the primary forms of the discourse of individual determination was reflected in the discussion and promotion of self-confidence amongst students. On a large wall in the classroom, portraits of all the seniors hung on a “college wall” that showed their dream college on a small college shirt the students had illustrated and colored. As the school year progressed and students got acceptance letters from various colleges, staff hung these letters alongside the student portraits, serving as a reminder of what they had achieved so far and promoting confidence that they could achieve going to college post-graduation.

Esme, one of the AVID teachers, also emphasized the power of self-confidence to help motivate students, even when they felt discouraged by their other courses for various reasons. She believed that building confidence in students would encourage them to be determined to succeed academically. “It’s about talking them up and telling them, ‘You’re pretty awesome. Have you seen that you can do this?’” Thus, Esme used the discourse of individual determination to convince the students that, if they are confident and understand the outcomes of their decisions, they can succeed in achieving their college goals.

I also noticed this discourse in my interview with Kristen, an AVID college tutor. Kristen summarized what she thought it took to be a successful student, saying, “You are responsible for yourself, so that means you need to take action to take advantage of your education.” Her emphasis on personal responsibility in this statement becomes part of the discourse she uses to understand why students succeed and why they struggle. Elsewhere in the interview, while discussing why some students were failing courses, Kristen expressed displeasure that students do not seek help from their peers. “Why are you letting yourself struggle?” she would ask them. Kristen had great compassion for her students, and I could hear the concern in her voice and saw it on her face as we discussed their struggles. Yet, it seemed the only discourse available to

Kristen and other AVID staff was one that placed the responsibility for students' struggles solely on individual students.

Kristen's response to students struggling was not uncommon. And at times the emphasis on personal responsibility led to assessments that student laziness was at the root of their struggles. In one interview, Alice, a college tutor, shared her perception of why students were struggling and why she felt students were not receptive to using specific WICOR methods to keep themselves organized. "We would make sure [the students] had what they needed. So, I don't know if it's part of being lazy..." Alice further noted, "Why do I need to take an extra step and write in my agenda if I already know it's due tomorrow, so I understand that. But it could be used for long-term deadlines."

It is important to note here that both Alice and Kristen's socialization around individual determination occurred prior to becoming tutors. They were both AVID students who graduated from the same program. They relied on their own experiences as AVID students to perceive the students based on this socialization. Similarly, they employed the discourse of individual determination in order to obtain a better understanding of student motivation. In their use of discourse, both tutors suggested that they themselves had shortcomings when they were AVID students. For example, Alice noted that she was shortcoming of the expectations of AVID, saying "I was too lazy to update my agenda in high school, too." Similarly, Kristen placed herself at the center of blame for feeling she did not do enough in high school, saying, "Did I apply to as many things as I should have? No. But that's all on me." As a result, their socialization into the individual determination discourse extended to their interactions with students, implying that if a student did not apply to several colleges or scholarships or seize other

general opportunities shared with them, they became seen as “lazy,” uncaring for their future, or unmotivated to succeed.

The discourse of individual determination even extended to placing responsibility on families. During my interview with Esme, I inquired about her understanding of why one of her students, Stella, was failing seven out of her eight classes. A senior in the AVID program, Stella typically maintained a good grade-point average and was a student-athlete; thus, maintaining grades was a prerequisite for her to play in her sport. Esme immediately suggested dynamics in Stella’s family were to blame for her academic struggles. “She’s caving to the pressure of being the first in her family to graduate from high school, the first in her family to be able to get into college” Esme suggested. She notes that she understands why Stella would feel this pressure because she was also a first-generation college student. Like Alice and Kristen, Esme sought to make sense of Stella’s struggles by recalling her own experiences. Esme went on to say, “[Stella] has to figure her way out of this, and there are a lot of times where I purposely have to stand back. Because if not, they're not going to fly. She knows what she has to do, and she needs to get it done.” Here, Esme used the discourse of individual determination from her own experiences to place Stella at the center of her struggles and solely responsible for whether she would successfully overcome them.

Amongst some of the classes Stella was failing were courses of high rigor, including AP classes. Since one of the primary jobs of a tutor is to monitor student grades, we saw that the courses of high rigor were the ones that students failed the most. When the tutors asked the students directly why they were struggling, some would say the teachers were too harsh or difficult to understand. This was consistent amongst the seniors, who would name some of the same teachers even though they were in different class periods. Because of this, the tutors were

tasked with going to the classes that students identified to be most challenging to see if the student was simply not understanding the teacher or if the teacher was actually at fault somehow. As part of Kristen's assignment, she observed an AP class. In it, she noted that it was representative of a college course, as the teacher asked the students to come prepared by reading the assigned material before the class period. Then, the teacher would lecture before asking the students questions to gauge their understanding of the material. When I inquired if she felt the students were struggling or the teacher was at fault, she said, "It was just up to the student to have that sort of work ethic, and I think many of them were just struggling to keep up. So yes, they were having trouble, and it may not all have been their fault, but it's like if you can't hack it, you probably shouldn't have been in that class." Kristen started by reiterating the previously discussed understanding that it is on the student to be successful before suggesting that students who do not possess high levels of individual determination or "work ethic" to be successful in the class should not be in that class. Although she hinted at the possibility that other things may make them struggle, saying it was not entirely their fault, her discourse of individual determination still places the student as the primary reason for the struggle.

The discourse of individual determination extended beyond AVID and into the larger culture of the school itself. For example, every morning, the principal of VHS would make announcements. She outlined crucial deadlines, congratulated various sports and academic teams on their achievements, and would end the announcement by declaring, "Remember students, the decisions you make today affect you tomorrow." Almost without fail, students heard this quote every day throughout the school year. They heard it one last time during their high school graduation ceremony. This message suggests that students are the sole factor for their successes and struggles.

Teachers outside of AVID also used the discourse of individual determination. In one instance, I was sent with another tutor, Jessica, to observe a math class in which multiple AVID seniors were failing. We explained to the teacher that some of our AVID seniors had been failing the class and we came to see if there was anything we could do to help them. They became visibly irritated and told Jessica and me that we should go back and ask the students why they were failing, instead. He quickly dismissed us and put the student back at the center of the issue.

4.2 Structural Influence on Individual Determination

Missing in the discourse of individual determination are deeper understandings of broader institutional and structural constraints shaping student performance. Institutional constraints include—but are not limited to—school location, length of class periods, transition times, standardized testing, and access to classroom space. Structural constraints also include those generated outside of the school, including lasting effects of COVID-19. Each of these constraints can affect students’ academic performance and college readiness. Not considering how these influence a student’s academic success can create tensions that further impede the student’s work.

When reflecting on why Stella might be failing her classes despite being such a promising student, Esme first suggested that Stella cannot handle the pressure her family places on her. Yet, Esme also recognized that Stella was physically exhausted from managing her responsibilities she carried as a student-athlete. VHS is in the far east part of the city, which makes traveling to other schools for games take longer. In some extreme cases, the students may spend close to two hours round trip to attend an away game in the same city. Other home games would occur during the week on school nights, usually not ending until around 9 or 10 p.m. “Anytime they travel to the different parts of the city,” Esme explained, “it’s taking forever...to

get home.” Yet despite Stella’s grueling schedule, Esme still emphasized the family as being responsible for Stella’s academic struggles.

Students, themselves, expressed dissatisfaction with their education because of poor classroom experiences. In my experience, when asking AVID students why they were failing, most would suggest their teachers were moving too fast in the curriculum, making it harder for them to understand the material. This feeling amongst students was expressed throughout the school year but came to a head during the spring, which is testing season. Teachers of core subjects, specifically math and English, were under greater pressure to effectively prepare students for statewide standard tests, since students’ test scores were lowest in those subjects. Before the school year began, specialists were even brought in to help bridge gaps in English. “It’s so bad that we’ve got kids at the high school right now who actually are reading at second and third-grade levels,” said Esme. It seemed as if the pressure of standardized testing was affecting the quality of the curriculum. Yet, students affected by this placed specific blame on their teachers for how they taught, rather than recognizing structural constraints.

The pressure of standardized testing during this time within the school year is exacerbated by the length of class periods. Teachers are limited to 45-minute periods to teach the curriculum, which centers around standardized testing. The brevity of class periods becomes another structural constraint missing from the discourse of individual determination. Consequently, the discourse is used to blame students for not working hard enough if they do not finish their work within the class period, rather than critiquing the amount of time a teacher has per class period. In addition, students are blamed for taking up too much time, affecting opportunities for other students to participate in a class activity, which I discuss next.

This was the case with one project in AVID. In all class periods, students worked on their "Paper Bag Speech," where they decorated a brown paper lunch bag with different illustrations that represented their dream college or job. Inside the bag, students brought three items that were important or symbolic to them. They would then give a speech about what they drew on the bag and the significance of the items in it. With this, students learn about each other and strengthen public speaking skills. Most classes got through them quickly, but because senior classes had more students, seniors took a few days to get through the speeches. In turn, the short class periods became a source of tension for the AVID teacher. One student, Mike, was presenting an item that was very important to him: his old pacemaker. Mike had been sick often growing up, resulting in having to be in and out of the hospital and having a pacemaker. Throughout the school year, he would miss class for health reasons relating to his heart. In concluding his presentation, Mike passed around his old pacemaker, as other students had done with their items before him. However, because the class period was ending and he was one of the last to present, Esme told him not to pass it around. The tone was somewhat harsh, almost like Mike was doing something wrong, even though other students had been given the space to share their interests with their classmates. Before this, Esme had voiced concern about finishing the speeches and staying on track with the other planned assignments, trying to avoid having one class period fall behind. At Mike's expense, this tension was expressed by taking away his time to show his item. The pressure created by short class periods ultimately led to a missed opportunity to intrinsically nurture a student's motivation.

The school also did not have enough classrooms for its teachers, resulting in many teachers floating from classroom to classroom. Javier, who joined VHS as an AVID teacher and coach, was especially affected by this. Although he was given an office for his coaching position,

he did not have his own AVID classroom to teach his classes. Instead, he would move from classroom to classroom, utilizing other teachers' classrooms during their conference period. His AVID class periods would occur in a science lab, yearbook room, or law enforcement elective class. On TRF days, one of his AVID classes would combine with Esme's. Javier's students did not have the opportunity to customize a space in the same way Esme could, which created stronger connections to the students, tutors, and Esme. For example, some students would create drawings for the tutors, who would then hang them up in Esme's classroom and showcase them proudly. As mentioned, Esme's AVID seniors also had a whole wall that included their portraits and helped them keep track of their post-graduation goals. Esme and the tutors utilized other tools in the classroom, including folders containing copies all students needed for their assignments, such as TRFs, Three Column Notes (see Appendix B), and Cornell Notes. In contrast, Javier would have to carry these assignments from class to class for his students or send the students to Esme's class to get them.

In my observations, Javier also had very little time to meet with AVID students after class, as he would have to hurry to the next class or back to his office in time to begin his next class. In some instances, he would be slightly late, taking time from an already short period. Javier also did not have the capabilities to have tools in his class that are informative for students' AVID assignments like Esme had, which I observed both tutors and students rely on. Such tools included the types of marks students would use in their AVID Weekly assignments or creating Focus notes—graded assignments in the program.

Even though Javier faced structural constraints daily, other staff felt that Javier was to blame for his class seeming informal, and for the students not having a sense of belonging in the class. Caroline, a tutor, said, "I don't really see them caring about AVID as much as students

with Esme. I don't see them having that like mentality that AVID is helping them.” She later said, “I think Javier is more laid back. I just feel like for the two years he has AVID students, before they move to Esme’s class, he needs to be on it.” Here, Caroline compared Javier to Esme, but did not realize how access to classroom space can affect the effectiveness of teaching.

Moreover, these structural constraints were also missing in Javier’s own use of the discourse of individual determination. When asked about his perception of the AVID team, having come from a different AVID program, he mentioned, “Sometimes I feel inadequate compared to [the tutors and Esme] because I wonder “am I doing enough?” but if you’re constantly wanting to improve, you constantly feel like you’re not doing enough.” Javier internalized a sense of personal inadequacy, yet he did not acknowledge the constraints he faced that do not affect others as much. He also noted that wanting to improve means feeling like you are not doing enough. This perfectly exemplifies the discourse of individual determination in that it suggests problems are rooted in the individual teacher rather than the broader school context. It also indicates that improving—or not improving—is determined by whether an individual can overcome the feeling of inadequacy. This is extended to the students who face various types of constraints and are expected to evaluate what they can be doing better to improve rather than being empowered to critique or improve a system that better supports their learning,

4.3 Building Community and Expanding Our Frameworks

Central to AVID’s framework is the use of the discourse of individual determination, which emphasizes personal responsibility and extrinsic motivation at the individual level. The institutional and structural constraints both students and staff experience are not considered in the discourse, leaving students and teachers feeling responsible for structural issues out of their control. Yet, it is my belief that there are ways the discourse of individual determination could be

used to empower and intrinsically motivate students. It becomes a matter of reframing this discourse to consider these constraints while also motivating students to be academically successful. It would be challenging, but the AVID program, especially at VHS, is in a position to make this change possible.

AVID tutors often discussed various ways to motivate students in the AVID program. These suggestions could be implemented to improve the use of the discourse of individual determination while navigating the more significant structural constraints that exist. One such idea was revisiting critical assignments in the AVID program and discussing their relevance to the student. Binder checks were one such assignment (see Appendix C). Binder checks were utilized randomly to ensure that, at any given point, a student's binder would be organized to the standard that is expected of AVID. Within the binder, students were expected to include their agenda. But, if AVID's main priority is college readiness, we should evaluate whether tedious work like this is a skill that would be useful at the college level. Keeping an agenda may be helpful but updating it daily may not be necessary for all students. Alternatively, to intrinsically promote organizational skills, students can restructure the rubric normally used to grade binders to a format that works well for them, outlining how they use their agenda.

We have also experienced success giving students the power to restructure their own assignments with the Tutorial Request Form (TRF) process. In a normal TRF process, which looks relatively the same across all grades and class periods, students would write their problem on a board and then present their supplemental information to their group using a premade speech structure known as a “60-second speech”. Once a problem had been solved, students would give a closing speech where they recapped what they learned during their presentation to show they understood. Here, sentence structures were also used, such as “My point of confusion

was...” and “My A-HA moment was...”. Since this assignment is tedious and occurs twice a week, it was something that most students did not look forward to. Yet, I saw that when seniors were allowed to change this process, they were more willing to do it. Toward the middle of the school year, each senior class period is allowed to create their own TRF, and, as a class, they determine how points are allocated for it to be graded. Moreover, the students are also responsible for forming their own groups and conducting them with little help from a tutor. They are told to choose their group wisely and consider who they are typically grouped with if they struggle with the same subject. They are also advised to think about how many sections their form has, as fewer sections mean each section is worth more points, and if something is wrong in a section, they could lose all of the points. In creating a new TRF, I saw that it encouraged the seniors to work together to come up with a solution they would all be happy with. Each class would present ideas, with the best ideas being voted on and implemented.

Considering ways we can empower students will also contribute to one of our greatest strengths— building community. The importance of community was brought up throughout almost all of my interviews with the tutors. During my interview with Kristen, she expressed the importance of having a sense of community when she reflected on her time as an AVID student in high school. “A sense of community is what motivated us as students. We celebrated birthdays together, did community service together, had bonding exercises together. We were like a family.” During my observations, I experienced first-hand how a sense of community can have a worthwhile impact on students. During the end-of-year banquet for AVID seniors, there was perhaps the most impressive sense of community. During the senior banquet, a teacher gave a speech centered around the importance of reflecting on people who positively impacted their lives during high school. At the end of that speech, the teacher asked the students to raise their

hands if the AVID tutors had made a positive difference in their lives. Every single student in the room raised their hand. Since I was still a tutor then, it was very emotional to see that, nearly bringing me to tears, and I felt a strong sense of community.

Stephanie, an AVID tutor, also recognized the work it takes from everyone to make the class run. As she explained, “When I came on as a tutor, I was surprised at what everyone does. Both tutors and teachers have ends to uphold, and it takes an equal amount of work from everyone to get it done.” In my observations, I saw how much Esme relied on the tutors to complete tasks for the program throughout the school while she was able to run the classroom, which was vital in establishing AVID on a schoolwide level. Alice also mentioned the importance of relying on each other, saying, “Everyone needs to be on the same page, and you can't communicate an instruction different from what the teacher expects to the student because then it confuses the student.” Here, I also recognized that Esme highly trusted the tutors to represent AVID well by helping other teachers and students, even if more significant structural constraints made the job difficult. This trust also promoted a sense of community.

Yet, this sense of community amongst students and on a schoolwide level was not always present. For students, both Alice and Kristen suggested utilizing bonding exercises with the students sooner in the year so students would have the chance to bond with each other faster. These exercises included games that relied on teamwork and communication to succeed. For example, one such game required two teams of students to step through a hula hoop while holding hands, with the fastest team being the winner. When I started working, these bonding exercises could not happen as easily since students were online because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In returning to school, there were still fears of people getting sick. It was towards the end of my second year working at VHS that these games became more frequent. Another

significant bonding experience before the pandemic was traveling to different universities with AVID students. Yet school travel had been suspended because of the pandemic and has not yet been reinstated.

5. Discussion

In my research, I found that a discourse of individual determination profoundly shaped how teachers and tutors understood the successes and struggles of their students, and even how they viewed their own performance. This discourse attributed successes and struggles to individual characteristics, such as self-confidence and personal responsibility. Furthermore, this language did not leave room for consideration of how larger structural constraints affect student motivation and success. These constraints included the location of the school, how teachers handle standardized testing, typical school day schedule structure, and lack of classroom space to teach AVID classes. With the exclusion of these constraints in the discourse, teachers and tutors used the discourse to suggest that it is the student who is solely responsible for being successful in their academics, and it was up to the student to meet the high expectations set by the program, regardless of the obstacles in their paths. Moreover, teachers internalized this discourse, as was the case with Javier. This discourse of individual determination may stem from trying to replicate a type of curriculum intended to provide students with an opportunity for upward mobility, namely, the curriculum of a middle-class student. In providing extra resources for students, such as access to tutors, they emulate such a curriculum. Yet, the oversimplistic use of this discourse may ultimately be disempowering to students.

In contrast, understanding sociological perspectives that focus on structural constraints may be a way to introduce intrinsic curricular methods that promote student motivation and better prepare them for college. This could, in turn, also positively impact educational policies

regarding AVID and other similar programs. The AVID program, in particular, is uniquely positioned to begin implementing these changes in its practice because it already has a robust curricular foundation that allows for creative freedom for teachers to adapt their curriculum. Through building community, such as having teachers meet and discuss ways in which their curriculum could be adjusted to be more empowering for students, the AVID strategies utilized within the program could be implemented on a schoolwide level. The foundation for a strong sense of community existed at VHS, as the AVID program had support from the administration, along with AVID teachers and tutors who were well-versed in AVID strategies. If a larger emphasis were placed on teaching teachers how to implement AVID strategies in their courses, rather than only supplying them with a vague outline of WICOR, the community would grow, and AVID could begin to be used throughout the school consistently. Acknowledging the structural constraints within a teacher's learning environment would also allow teachers to more fully understand why some students may not be receptive to different learning methods and what could benefit them. As such, the teacher can edit their framework while still using AVID strategies and find something that better suits the student rather than suggesting that the student needs to work harder to understand. Moreover, policies can be created with these suggestions in mind to positively impact programs and education.

Carrying out this research presented me with a complex set of benefits and challenges. Being closely tied to the research site allowed me to understand the perspectives of teachers and tutors on a deeper level than what an average researcher may achieve in the same amount of time. Working in the environment I was now studying in gave me intimate knowledge of how the AVID program operated within the school because I had been a part of the process to make it happen. For example, I learned how AVID strategies were tracked and recorded when Alice and

I worked on compiling and organizing data that showed the strategies being used. When I began conducting my research, I knew that it was necessary to include how the strategies were foundational to the program. It also gave me more raw data for observations because I had been in the spaces for so long. These observations guided how I conducted interviews and allowed me to understand the use of the discourse better.

On the other hand, conducting my research in a place for which I had close ties also came with challenges. I found myself falling back on the same discourses that attributed successes and struggles to individuals without recognition of larger constraints these individuals negotiate. Before I started this research, I had been working as an AVID tutor at VHS for almost two years, and as a result, the structural constraints outlined in my work were just average things that we had to work around to help the students and help the program. They became commonplace and were hard to identify. They were just part of the job. Having been heavily socialized into the use of this discourse of individual determination at VHS made it hard for me to take a step back to see the more significant issues at hand, namely, the existing constraints that had an impact on the effectiveness of the strategies. Because of the close ties I had to the research site, I also struggled with providing a critique of those who participated in this research, with whom I am also close. I struggled with feeling guilty for analyzing my participants' words, feeling like I was painting them negatively when I, myself, had used the same discourses during my time as a tutor. I hope that my peers do not see the data I have presented in this work as a harsh critique of their teaching and tutoring methods. I know how hard it is to see past the discourses that we became socialized with in the AVID program, and I commend the dedication staff showed to doing work with good intentions, regardless of the discourse and constraints.

After collecting and analyzing all of the data for this work, I realized how crucial it is to bring these concepts to light to begin restructuring models of education that are equitable for all students. I hope this work contributes to a new body of research that understands how discourses like these change the classroom environment and combat the banking models of education that Freire critiques. I hope my work makes it easier for others to implement new changes to the AVID program, as well as other programs designed to open doors of opportunity for Hispanic/Latinx high school students to attend and graduate from college. VHS has the potential to implement these changes and serve as a model for other schools in the future.

6. Conclusion

There are a lot of studies on the students of these programs but less on the “actors” who are involved in these programs. It is important to analyze how these actors use discourse to begin understanding student motivation within these classrooms. I analyzed and critiqued how the teachers and tutors of the VHS AVID program use the discourse of individual determination and offer solutions to combat the tensions caused by the discourse.

This work has only scraped the surface of the many factors that influence students' academic journeys and educators' experiences in forming and implementing an equitable curriculum for all students. Findings from my project point to important avenues for future research. Future research could expand its participant size to include not only AVID teachers and tutors but AVID students in the program as well. In including students, the effects of staff's use of the discourse could be studied more in-depth. Specifically, we can understand how and why the discourse motivates or demotivates students by analyzing when students feel most motivated. With this approach, the role of the community could also be better understood by analyzing how students perceive community amongst their peers, teachers, and tutors.

Conducting this research in various regions of Texas in multiple schools could also offer more insight into how the discourse of individual determination affects students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. On a larger scale, this research could be done across the United States to fully capture how the discourse is used and how a wide range of structural constraints play a role in feelings of motivation and empowerment.

I would like to conclude this work by commending the hard work done by everyone involved in the AVID program during the 2022-23 school year at VHS. The experiences I gained in working at VHS also guided me to find a deeper passion for the sociology of education. With their willingness to participate in the project and trust in me to do right by them, I am writing this now. I am forever grateful to them for helping me on my academic journey.

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Appendix A

Tutorial Request Form (TRF)



Name: _____ AVID Tutor: _____
 AVID Teacher: _____ AVID Period: _____ Subject: _____
 Date: _____

Tutorial Request Form (TRF)

BEFORE	DURING	COMMUNICATION	AFTER	CLOSURE	TOTAL
____ / 20 / ____	____ / 12 / ____	____ / 8 / ____	____ / 10 / ____	____ / 10 / ____	____ / 50 / ____
Indicate how the student demonstrated engagement in tutorials. Check all that apply.					
Collaborative Inquiry <input type="checkbox"/> Uses Socratic questioning <input type="checkbox"/> Utilizes resources to investigate student presenter's POC <input type="checkbox"/> Takes focused notes (Phase 1) or supplements academic class notes (Phases 2-3)					
Communication <input type="checkbox"/> Communicates clearly, both verbally and non-verbally <input type="checkbox"/> Listens effectively to decipher meaning <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates command of academic vocabulary <input type="checkbox"/> Adapts speech to an academic setting					
Closure <input type="checkbox"/> Summarizes key academic learning points <input type="checkbox"/> Reflects on today's tutorial process and identifies next steps					
Topic/Essential Question from Academic Class: _____					
Initial Question: _____					
Source: _____ / 2 / ____					
Key Academic Vocabulary and Definition Associated with Topic/Question:					
1. _____					
2. _____ / 4 / ____					
What I Know About My Question:					
1. _____					
2. _____ / 4 / ____					

Critical Thinking About Initial Question with Corresponding Steps:
 Use these symbols in the Critical Thinking box and on the board to identify the following:
 I = A-Hai moments ? = Point of Confusion C₁ = Need to research © = I'm confident about....

1. Show your thinking about your initial question, and identify your Point of Confusion. _____ / **4** / ____

2. List the general steps that you took leading up to your Point of Confusion. _____ / **4** / ____

Tutorial Question (from Point of Confusion):
 Write an authentic question about your Point of Confusion that is different from your initial question.

_____ / **2** / ____

Appendix B

Three-Column Notes

HANDOUT 2.17a (3 of 3)



Three-Column Notes

Directions: Group members take three-column notes on their own paper for each student presenter's questions during the tutorial process.

Point of Confusion Question	Tutorial Notes	Steps (Math/Science) Process (LA/History)

Appendix C

Binder Check Rubric

Binder Total ____/10	***Must have <u>PHYSICAL</u> binder with dividers*** Dividers ____/5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Math Divider ____/1 • Science Divider ____/1 • History Divider ____/1 • English Divider ____/1 • AVID Divider ____/1 Binder ____/5			
Focus Note Taking Total ____/40	*Student must show AT LEAST one set of Focus Note Taking from each <u>CORE</u> class*			
	Math ____/10 *Heading ____/2 *Topic/Obj. ____/2 *Essential Question ____/2 *?'s on left side ____/2 *Summary ____/2	Science ____/10 *Heading ____/2 *Topic/Obj. ____/2 *Essential Question ____/2 *?'s on left side ____/2 *Summary ____/2	History ____/10 *Heading ____/2 *Topic/Obj. ____/2 *Essential Question ____/2 *?'s on left side ____/2 *Summary ____/2	English ____/10 *Heading ____/2 *Topic/Obj. ____/2 *Essential Question ____/2 *?'s on left side ____/2 *Summary ____/2
Learning Logs Total ____/20	*Student must have one learning log per week with correct dates* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete Learning Logs ____/20 *Complete learning logs are AT LEAST one paragraph (4-6 sentences) long and are reflective, NOT summative*			
	Teacher/Tutor use only $\frac{(20)(\# \text{ of complete LL's})}{\text{Total of LL's being checked}} = \# \text{ of points earned}$			
Organization Total ____/30	Pencil Pouch with Supplies ____/ 5 *Pouch, pencils, pens, highlighters	Neatness ____/5 *Nothing falls out of binder *No loose papers in side-pockets	Agenda ____/10 *Agenda marked up to current week *Differentiation between completed and uncompleted assignments	TRFs/Three Column Notes ____10 *TRF's in AVID section of Binder *Three Column Notes in AVID Section of binder
Final Grade:	_____/100			

Vita

Kendra Marie Farr was born and raised in El Paso, Texas. Farr began her college education at El Paso Community College (EPCC), where she graduated with an Associate of Arts degree, before transferring to the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). In the spring of 2021, she graduated with her B.S. in Psychology with a minor in Biology. She then began the Master's program in Sociology in the fall of 2021. As a graduate student, Farr worked as a teaching assistant for several professors within the Sociology and Anthropology department, a graduate assistant for the Military Student Success Center, and a research assistant for Dr. Danielle Morales at UTEP. She was also a Spring 2023 Aspire fellow for graduate students who are interested in teaching at the community college level. Farr intends to continue her graduate studies with UTEP in the fall of 2024. She hopes to gain a PhD in Teaching, Learning and Culture and become a college professor.