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"What We're Doing Here Matters":

School Culture of a California Model Continuation High School

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Edwin Hernandez

2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"What We're Doing Here Matters":

School Culture of a California Model Continuation High School

by

Edwin Hernandez

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Robert T. Teranishi, Chair

In educational research, narratives exist about the unfulfilled promise of continuation

schools as many of them are not living up to their full potential; many argue that continuation

school students are not adequately being prepared beyond high school (Kelly, 1993; Ruiz de

Velasco et al., 2008). This narrative poses threats to these environments by stigmatizing

continuation schools, dehumanizing students for their failure, blaming educators for the lack of

student success, with little attention to the institutional and structural barriers that might impede

students from thriving personally and academically. To gain a deeper understanding of the

school culture of a continuation school, this study examines Puente Baluarte Continuation High

School, a continuation high school that serves a high proportion of racial/ethnic minority youth

and has been deemed a model institution.

This qualitative case study is framed within theories of cultural production which draws

closer attention to how students and educators construct and make meaning of their identities in

these cultural spaces (Foley, Levinson, & Hurtig, 2000). In addition, the Paradigm to Understand and Examine Dropout and Engagement in Society (PUEDES) which examines and interrogates the structure, culture, and individual agency of students and educators (Rodriguez, 2013). Drawing on multiple sources of data including: 1) ethnographic observations, 2) document analysis, and 3) semi-structured interviews with students ($n = 33$) and educators ($n = 9$), this study presents narrative profiles of three students and three educators as a form of analysis and interpretation of the findings.

The focal narrative profiles document the assets and "imperfections" within the school structure and culture of Puente Baluarte (Lightfoot, 1983). For instance the findings demonstrate the agency and active involvement of continuation school youth in their communities and school. Furthermore, the experience of Black male students revealed some of the "imperfections" of the school, such as being harassed due to a school culture of control and hyper-surveillance. Despite these tensions, other students reported various sources of institutional support, specifically for foster youth and teen parents. Findings also demonstrate the importance of leadership and school structure, as educators described feeling supported by the school leadership and school district. In return, educators enacted their agency to expand opportunities to continuation youth in the classroom and strengthening their relationships with the community to build institutional capacity. Consequently, the educators in this study view continuation youth from an asset framework as they believe in providing a genuine alternative to the students they serve, opt to resist the social and academic stigma of continuation schools. The findings of this study have implications for policymakers, researchers, educators, as well as community agencies who work to intervene and provide the appropriate resources, programs, and support for this student population.

The dissertation of Edwin Hernandez is approved.

Teresa L. McCarty

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2018

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents, Adriana and Jose Luis Hernandez.

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Acknowledgements

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SELECTED PUBLICATIONS & PRESENTATIONS

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Hernandez, E. (2015, April). Latina/o students at a Hispanic-serving community college: Student validating experiences from faculty. Presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference. Chicago, IL.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Alternative education has historically been excluded and overlooked when discussing issues of equity and social justice in education (Kelly, 1993; Malagon, 2010; Nygreen, 2013; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). Alternative high schools[1] enroll a high proportion of underrepresented and underserved student populations, specifically racial/ethnic minority and immigrant youth (Hurtado, Hernandez, & Haney, 2015; Lopez, 2004; Malagon & Alvarez, 2010; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). These institutions are commonly referred to as "gateways," "gatekeepers," or "second-chance" institutions because of their open-access policies and opportunities for historically underrepresented student populations (Kelly, 1993; Nygreen, 2013). While alternative high schools are important opportunities for students to receive socio-emotional and academic benefits, there is also a harmful dominant narrative that some alternative schools function as "dumping grounds" for unwanted educators and "low-achieving students" within school districts (Kelly, 1993; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). In education, narratives have existed about the unfulfilled promise of these institutions as many of them are not living up to their full potential, as alternative school students are not persisting in school, yet many argue that students are receiving a "second-class education" that will not adequately prepare them beyond high school (Muñoz, 2005; Nygreen, 2013; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). This narrative poses threats to these environments by stigmatizing alternative schools, dehumanizing students for their individual failure, blaming educators for the lack of student success, with little attention to the institutional and structural barriers that might impede students from persisting and thriving personally and academically.

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[1] In this study, "alternative education" refers to program and schools that enroll a high proportion of underrepresented and underserved youth.

This study focuses on alternative education and explores a fundamental question posed by Mike Rose (2012) "How effective are we at providing people a second chance?" specifically in alternative schools (p. 9). Such approach requires that we explore and unpack "the limits and possibilities" to create change for the marginalized citizens in schools (Noguera, 2003a, p. 16), particularly in alternative education. In schools, the challenges towards change are both internal and external that hinder the possibilities for school improvement (Noguera, 2003a). First, the external constraints are connected to the effects of poverty and the social isolation and concentration in low-income communities (Noguera, 2003a). In schools, the external conditions related to poverty have an immense impact on the teaching and learning opportunities (Anyon, 1996; Maeroff, 1988; Noguera, 2003a; Schorr, 1997). Consequently, due to the external conditions of poverty and social isolation concentrated in low-income communities, not only does the education of students of color suffer, but also their own health and welfare, including their families (Greenberg & Schneider, 1994; Massey & Denton, 1993; Noguera, 2003a; Wilson, 1987). Second, the internal constraints are challenges within schools and school systems, this includes the high turnover of educators that contributes to the instability in some schools, which results in inexperienced educators being assigned to the most difficult educational jobs (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Noguera, 2003a). In some cases, when turnover is not an issue, there are various school districts with large number of educators who are demoralized and fatigued due their poor working conditions and low salaries (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Noguera, 2003a). This is of great concern, given that the morale of school personnel can have a tremendous impact on the capacity for schools to change and improve (Noguera, 2003a). Despite both internal and external constraints, there are realistic possibilities for school improvement (Noguera, 2003a). Therefore, this study seeks to understand how effective do alternative schools provide

marginalized students with the opportunity to reclaim their dreams, redirect their educational aspirations, and a renewed opportunity for the educational system to make things right within their limits and possibilities, to address the internal and external constraints within the school system.

Although alternative high schools make up only six percent of U.S. high schools, almost 60 percent of all alternative schools have a graduation rate where less than two-thirds of students earn a diploma (DePaoli, Bridgeland, & Balfanz, 2016). This study focuses on one type of alternative school in California that serves disadvantaged youth: *continuation schools*—the largest and oldest alternative program in the state (Kelly, 1993). As of 2016-17 academic year, California Department of Education (CDE, 2016) reported that there is an estimate of 441 continuation high schools, which enroll nearly 53,439 students. However, it is important to note that there are discrepancies in the total enrollment of continuation schools as the amount fluctuates through the academic year as new students enroll and other students transition back into their comprehensive schools (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012; Warren, 2016). California continuation schools are known to provide intensive services, accelerated credit recovery strategies, individualized attention, smaller classroom environments, and a renewed opportunity to graduate from high school (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). With this renewed opportunity continuation schools position themselves as sites of possibilities for individuals to achieve social mobility through access to a uniform, standardized, academic curriculum. Although continuation schools do provide smaller classrooms and smaller student-teacher ratios, some scholars argue that the structure, curriculum, and teaching practices reproduce what is found in comprehensive schools in the lower-track classes (Kelly, 1993; Nygreen, 2013). Instead of providing an alternative education for students,

continuation schools function as a lower track in a highly stratified educational school system, which has historically been viewed as "dumping grounds" for unwanted students and educators (Kelly, 1993; Nygreen, 2013).

In educational research, continuation high schools have remained in the shadows and overlooked by the broader education system (Malagon, 2010). In this study, my hope is to challenge and avoid the deficit thinking of "dumping grounds" or "second-class education" that commonly used to refer to continuation schools. That single narrative does not help us as it leaves out the important and challenging work being done in continuation schools, thereby limiting the educational possibilities available to us (Rose, 1995). This harmful narrative constrains the way we frame problems and limits our ability to explore the nuances and reimagine the possibilities in continuation educational spaces (Rose, 1995). Therefore, there is a need for more research in the field of alternative education, particularly how we theorize and make sense of how students and educators construct and make meaning of their identities in these cultural spaces (Foley, Levinson, & Hurtig, 2000; Malagon, 2010). By paying more attention to culture and identity, this study will appreciate the cultural validity of continuation youth and educators by coming full circle in the struggle against deficit thinking (Foley et al., 2000; Lopez, 2004). It is imperative to chronicle continuation young adults' and educators' agency and cultural resources that they bring into these educational spaces (Yosso, 2005). Otherwise, the historical deficit narrative will continue to pave the way for how we view the continuation educational sector and the members of this oppressive structure.

To address this static and simplistic narrative about continuation education serving as "dumping grounds" and enrolling "low-achievers," this dissertation focuses on a qualitative case

study at Puente Baluarte Continuation High School [2] located in the Cruz Community, a large

suburb in Southern California. The largest ethnic group in the Cruz Community are Latina/os.

Puente Baluarte was selected as the site of study due to their designation as a Model

Continuation High School (MCHS). Since the early 1990s, the California MCHS awards

program was develop through a partnership among the California Department of Education

(CDE) and the California Continuation Education Association (CCEA). This effort was

established to recognize continuations schools that exemplify the highest quality of education,

each year less than 5 percent of all continuation schools in California receive this award

(Knoeppel, 2007). Puente Baluarte Continuation School is one of the active recipients for the

model continuation high school award for the 2015-18 school years (CDE, 2018). Puente

Baluarte Continuation School and other institutions provide services to underserve and

underrepresented youth through their use of exemplary instructional strategies, flexible

scheduling, and guidance and counseling services. MCHS serve as a resource for other schools

through examples of promising practice in the field. Furthermore, continuation schools that are

selected as MCHS will be recommended to offer site validation visits, share their knowledge and

expertise through sample materials or consultation via phone or virtual. In addition, staff

members from MCHSs schools will be selected to also engage in the review process for MCHS

applications reviews, which will include visiting other continuation schools.

Although the model continuation high school recognition program has been in existence since

the early 1990s, little research has yet to explore these efforts. Therefore, this study will highlight

the assets, strengths, and tensions that exist at Puente Baluarte Continuation School and how it

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[2] All names of communities, schools, and individuals are pseudonyms.

can serve as a resource for other schools through their examples of promising practices in continuation education, but also by honoring and centering the voices of students and educators in this overlooked sector. This study also intends to interrogate the "Model Continuation High School" program by not simply accepting this designation as the solution, but to carefully engage how an institution that has received this award multiple times fosters opportunities for youth or contributes to the reproduction of a deficit narrative through their school structure and culture.

A conversation I had with a community barista at a local coffee shop exemplifies how members of society continue to uphold this dominant deficit narrative about continuation schools. After a long day of data collection, I visited a coffee shop in the Cruz Community to reflect, write, and organize my field data. I was immediately greeted by Cesar, a Latino male barista. Cesar asked, "So this is your first time here?" I shared with Cesar that it was my first time at this coffee shop, as it was highly recommended by a colleague who lives in the community. I also told Cesar that I came to the Cruz community because of my current work with Puente Baluarte Continuation High School. Cesar responded, "Oh interesting, I went to Nuevo Alternative/Independent School," located next to Puente Baluarte. Even though Cesar attended Nuevo Alternative/Independent School, his narrative documents the nuances that exist in alternative schools, as his experience was different than those students in continuation schools. Cesar inquired to learn more about my research, and I explained to him that Puente Baluarte was recognized as a Model Continuation High School (MCHS) by the state of California. I was curious to learn more about how the school's culture, characteristics, and promising practices can inform the work of other schools.

After sharing my research with Cesar, he responded, "That's good what you are doing because I remember as a teenager we use to make fun of those kids [Puente Baluarte]… as they

are inside the school, which is gated, it looked like a prison, while us at Nuevo Alternative/Independent School we walked in and out whenever we wanted." In this exchange, Cesar described the nuances that exist across alternative schools and programs, but this narrative of "us vs. them" contributes to the social exclusion of continuation youth. Lastly, before the end of our short exchange, Cesar identified a common narrative about Puente Baluarte Continuation School, which is the story of (after) school violence that occurred outside of school. Unfortunately, a student from Puente Baluarte was gunned down and killed right in front of the school as he waited for the school bus. This is an event that members of the Puente Baluarte and the Cruz School District are aware of, including community members like Cesar. As he described in his own words, it was a gang-related event, as Puente Baluarte has a high population of gang-involved youth, thus, it is important to explore how the institutions responds and serves this student population. As noted earlier, Cesar is a member of the Cruz Community and attended Nuevo Alternative/Independent School, but in the next section I share observation data and a short exchange with Roberto, a Latino male in his first day of classes at Puente Baluarte.

Nearly three months into the academic school year 2016-17 in early November, I met Roberto during his first official school day. From a distance, I observed students as they walked into the school campus, some in groups and others alone. For the most part, the majority of the students looked familiar, however, in Roberto's case, I had not seen him during my limited timed at the school. As Roberto sat alone on an empty bench in the school quad, I observed as he massaged his hands side to side and slowly began to crack his knuckles as he waited for the bell to ring to begin his educational trajectory at Puente Baluarte. I decided to slowly approach Roberto and introduce myself. I politely asked if I could sit next to him and immediately he agreed. In this short exchange with Roberto, he told me that this was his first day. He was

nervous, anxious, and afraid to be at Puente Baluarte Continuation School. In this brief initial meeting, I learned about Roberto's experiences and what has contributed to him feeling nervous, anxious, and afraid of enrolling at Puente Baluarte. Roberto described the messages he received from educators at his previous school in addition to his family members of the things he could potentially experience at Puente Baluarte. More specifically, some of Roberto's family members who previously attended Puente Baluarte several years ago, shared with him that there was a lot of fights and gang violence, and that he needed to watch his back. These messages came from his mother, father, and uncle who attended this continuation school. Although these experiences that his family members described to Roberto might have been their reality, whether it continues to hold some truth needs to be interrogated. Those perceptions continue to be disseminated in the comprehensive schools and the local community. These messages have been ingrained in how the Cruz Community and the broader society views Puente Baluarte and other continuation schools as unsafe places.

In the two vignettes presented, Roberto, a student during his first day at Puente Baluarte, and Cesar, a former student at a different alternative school and the current barista at a local coffee shop, described their perspectives about Puente Baluarte Continuation School. Both Roberto and Cesar have some insightful information about the continuation school, but that information is from the *outside,* meaning they have little experience in the continuation school or none at all. Their insights might be limited and inaccurate, or they might hold some truth. In the next section, I discuss the importance of engaging and understanding the contribution of continuation schools. This dissertation will highlight the narratives from the *inside,* to strive to genuinely understand the day to day experiences and realities of students like Roberto, educators, and many other members of this continuation school community.

Towards an Understanding of Continuation High Schools' Contributions and Assets

This dissertation is about one of the nation's most understudied, complicated, and underserved public education systems: alternative schools and programs.[3] The model continuation high school in California is one form of an alternative school, and is the focal point of this dissertation. The vast majority of time collecting data was spent in the classrooms, the career counseling center, the main office, and the school quad. My hope is that readers can begin to understand, respect, care, and advocate for the members of the continuation school community, as students and educators each have important narratives to tell and insight that we can learn from. The narratives students and educators share of what it means to be a member of the continuation school community are truly revealing. Most importantly, the narratives they share as individuals and as a group provide us with the building blocks for interventions that can support continuation students in multiple contexts to academically and socio-emotionally empower themselves.

This dissertation study seeks to understand and complicate the idea of public education in those settings that are forgotten and often times excluded from the national discourse of public education. This study builds on the work of Chenoweth (2009), Lightfoot (1983), Rodriguez (2015), Rose (1995), and Ruiz de Velasco et al., (2008) who have provided examples of how institutions can serve marginalized students by showcasing aspects of institutions that value all students. These scholars found that from the moment students walk through the schools' and institutions' doors, those institutions listen and respond to the range of students' needs in and out

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[3] In California, the term "alternative school" is a broad category that primarily includes schools that provide different educational settings for students who have been labeled "at risk" because they have dropped out, are pregnant or parenting, behavioral problems, or need a flexible schedule to accommodate outside work (Kelly, 1993; Nygreen, 2013).

of the classroom (Chenoweth, 2009; Lightfoot, 1983; Rodriguez, 2015; Rose, 1995, 2012). Building on that line of work, the aim of this dissertation is to provide details of teaching and learning, mentoring, relationships, student success, and challenges that exist in a model continuation school to spark our imagination and enrich our assessment of these institutions. The prevailing wisdom that runs through this dissertation study is the need to focus on continuation schools and how we can develop a critique more appropriate to continuation education. How we can craft an asset-based approach and language that is critical without being reductive, one that honors their contribution to the educational sector, but also does not glorify these model institutions as the answer or solution, all this while affirming them. Finally, we must not simply accept model continuation schools as they are, but be constantly engaged with them through all aspects of experience. We must explore and celebrate the contribution of this sector, and showcase how the narratives of continuation students and educators are all connected within the larger education system, the workforce and development, health care, and civic engagement in society.

Conceptual Background of the Study

The conceptual background of this study draws from the need to investigate alternative schools as they account for a great proportion of schools with low-graduation rates. Furthermore, there is a gap in opportunities for low-income students and students of color as well as a need to improve their conditions in schools. Consequently, there is an overrepresentation of low-income students and students of color in alternative schools. Thus, it is of great importance to engage with these schools to improve the conditions and extend opportunities to this marginalized sector that enrolls a vulnerable student population.

The urgency to focus on alternative schools is influenced by the recent *Building a Grad Nation* report, which calls for a greater attention to schools with low graduation rates including alternative, comprehensive, and charter schools (De Paoli et al., 2016). In the report, research shows that more than half of alternative schools have a graduation rate where less than two-thirds of students earn a diploma. As such, there is a great need for research that closely examines the structure and culture of continuation schools that serve disadvantaged youth to better understand how these institutions create conditions, if any, that will foster the academic and social development for students to thrive in these settings.

The need to improve the educational outcomes and narrow the opportunity gaps for underrepresented and underserved youth is of great concern in the United States (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Noguera, 2003a). At the heart of these concerns are the unequal educational opportunities and continued disparities between White students and their Black and Latino peers, low-income and non-low income students, and students with and without disabilities (DePaoli et al., 2016; Noguera, 2003a). It is evident that not all learning environments are created equal due to the enduring reality of inequalities in school funding and learning opportunities (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Burciaga & Erbstein, 2013; Noguera, 2003a). Today, schools with low-graduation rates tend to be overrepresented with Black, Latina/o, and low-income students. More specifically, the number of alternative schools that enroll a high number of low-income, Black, and Latina/o students and the number of these institutions have increased over the years (DePaoli et al., 2016).

In particular, in California the number of continuation schools has grown immensely across the state. Over the last 53 years, the number of continuation high schools has expanded from 13 to 441 continuation high schools, which are located across California in urban, rural, and

suburban communities (CDE, 2016). The purpose of California's continuation high schools has been to meet the educational needs of a diverse student population, which include students who have behavioral problems, are pregnant or parenting teens, have been labeled at risk of dropping out, or need a more flexible schedule to fit in work or other responsibilities (Foley & Pang, 2006; Hernandez, 2017; Kelly, 1993; Warren, 2016). Each year, many low-income students and students of color who experience exclusion practices in mainstream public schools are pushed into these education sectors that have yet to be fully examined by educational research (Malagon, 2011). Continuation schools serve nearly 12 percent of California's high school student population (Hurtado et al., 2015; Warring Jr, 2015). Low-income students and students of color are largely overrepresented in continuation schools (Malagon, 2010; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). In particular, Latina/os have been the largest overrepresented group as they account for two-thirds (68.22 percent) of the students in continuation schools (see Table 1).

Table 1

California Continuation School Student Enrollment Demographics 2015-16

Race	Female Enrollment	Percent of Female Enrollment	Male Enrollment	Percent of Male Enrollment	Total Number of Students by Race	Percent of Total Enrollment by Race
African American	1960	3.51%	2744	4.91%	4704	8.42%
American Indian	289	0.52%	367	0.66%	656	1.17%
Asian	272	0.49%	611	1.09%	883	1.58%
Filipino	136	0.24%	373	0.67%	509	0.91%
Hispanic	14709	26.31%	23427	41.91%	38136	68.22%
Pacific Islander	148	0.26%	181	0.32%	329	0.59%
White	3386	6.06%	5941	10.63%	9327	16.69%
Two or More Races	442	0.79%	657	1.18%	1099	1.97%
None Reported	94	0.17%	162	0.29%	256	0.46%
Total	21436	38.35%	34463	61.65%	55899	100.00%

*Source: California Department of Education (2016)

The overrepresentation of low-income students of color coupled with the limited education research on these educational settings is also a cause for concern. As a result, the need to address the issues surrounding these institutions is critical given that they account for a high proportion of our nation's high schools with low graduation rates. Together, the challenges previously mentioned pose an early-warning call to action that cannot be ignored. This calls for a

collective action across schools, districts, and states to focus on getting a higher proportion of students of color, students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and low-income students from continuation schools on the path towards earning a high school diploma (DePaoli et al., 2016).

Statement of the Problem

The pressing concerns of this study are the deficit framing of continuation schools and their overrepresentation of low-income students and students of color. Despite the rise and demand of continuation schools, these schools continue to be stigmatized as "dumping grounds" for "throwaway kids," since the moment students walk into these institutions they are labeled as "failures" and/or a "threat" to the school (Kelly, 1993; Malagon, 2010; Nygreen, 2013). Students who enter alternative schools and programs are typically facing a number of hardships: inadequate housing, family disruption, problems with immigration, and involvement with either the criminal justice system and/or the foster care system (Malagon, 2010). While the current body of research has contributed to understanding the history of negative experiences students encounter in comprehensive schools and outside of school (Kelly, 1993), not much attention has been placed on the school culture of continuation schools (Malagon, 2010; Malagon & Alvarez, 2010). However, the work of Ruiz de Velasco and McLaughlin (2012) has provided important descriptive information regarding promising practices in continuation schools, specifically the pivotal role of educators and the crucial role of partnerships with outside agencies. Building on their previous work, this qualitative case study focuses on a model continuation school. This study builds on this literature by focusing on Puente Baluarte Continuation School that has been recognized for their outstanding services and programs; moreover, this school serves a great

proportion of students of color, making the research that much more valuable in the education research field.

The overrepresentation of low-income students and students of color in continuation schools is largely a result of the multiple structural barriers they face, which impedes their academic success. Although it is commonly argued that regardless of a student's background, students can thrive and succeed. However, often times this is simply not true considering that all learning environments are not created equally. Low-income and students of color are more likely to be concentrated in schools and communities that are poor and segregated, and receive little funding (Acevedo-Gil, 2016; Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Rogers et al., 2010). As a result, many students of color attend schools that are under-resourced, large and overcrowded (Rodriguez, 2013). Additionally, some of the school factors that have negative and disproportionally affected low-income and students of color include: poor adequate facilities, academic tracking, placement in Special Education, high stakes testing for which students are under-prepared, low teacher and administrator expectations, little support for students who have fallen behind academically, poor school climates that are not conducive to learning, and a overreliance on a school culture of control through punitive school discipline policies (Burciaga & Erbstein, 2013; Noguera, 2003b, 2008). In addition, these schools often fail to provide bilingual teachers and school counselors to provide the academic and socio-emotional support needed for low-income and students of color (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Burciaga & Erbstein, 2013; Fine, 1991; Reyes, 1990).

In recent years, scholars have argued that public schools have exclusionary practices that push students away from school in various ways. Low-income and students of color who attend public schools are more likely to attend a school that fosters a school culture of order and control instead of academic rigor (Noguera, 2003a, 2003b; Rios, 2011). The school culture plays a

crucial role in the high prevalence of student exclusion, as these schools tend to focus on maintaining discipline and order, which limits the amount of time dedicated to meeting students' academic and social needs (Noguera, 2003a, 2003b). Consequently, many of these students find themselves in the classroom bored, disengaged, and profoundly removed from their academics (Newmann, 1992; Noguera, 2003a, 2003b; Steinberg, 1996).

Although low-income and minority youth have access to public education, often times punitive practices and policies cause many students to be *pushed out* of school prior to graduation (Fine, 1991). The term "school push-out" was first used by Michelle Fine (1991) to describe school practices that removed students from comprehensive schools into GED or other types of alternative education program, rather than taking ownership and ensuring that students received the necessary support to graduate from high school. The term "pushed out" refers to experiences of racial and ethnic minority youth who have been forced to leave schools by individuals or factors inside the school, which include disrespectful treatment from teachers and other educators, violence among students, arbitrary school rules, and the growing pressure of high stakes testing (Fine, 1991). This phenomena of student push out is not new, particularly with respect to Black and Latino male students who are overrepresented in terms of being suspended, expelled, or removed from the classroom for punishment and behavioral issues (Noguera, 2008; Rios, 2011). Students who are pushed out and removed from school experience a form of marginalization, as these punishments further contribute to their time out of the classroom and delays in (re)admission to school, both of which can lead to significant gaps in learning and difficulties in reintegration into school (Brown, 2013). For many Black and Latino male youth, the punitive educational practices they experience often results in decreased opportunities and diminished quality of life (Brown, 2013).

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The aforementioned research findings show how race, class, gender, sexuality, and immigrations status continue to affect student's access to equitable K-12 education, high-quality teachers, and equal opportunities to transition into postsecondary education (Acevedo-Gil, 2016; Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Burciaga & Erbstein, 2013; Noguera, 2003a, 2008). Therefore, there is a need to closely examine the school culture of model continuation schools in order to better understand how students and educators describe their lived experiences at school. It also seeks to understand how students describe the potential of their school to enhance their positions in society, specifically to reach graduation or transfer back to their comprehensive schools, but more importantly, what other schools can learn from the practices offered at this continuation school. School culture is important to examine as Rodriguez (2013) discussed, "In schools, school culture is defined by the social climate of the school, the normative beliefs and practices of people within the school, and also is made up of interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships and modes of communicating" (Rodriguez, 2013, p. 132). School culture is also defined as a place where identities are constructed, meaning is negotiated, and most importantly, how things get accomplished (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Rodriguez & Oceguera, 2015). In this study, school culture is centralized because educational stakeholders play an immense role in the trajectory of continuation students. Educational stakeholders' values, beliefs, and norms can directly influence the limitations or possibilities for continuations students. Several schools have argued that school culture helps provide a deeper understanding of the role that schools play in shaping students' experiences, thereby influencing student success and/or failure (Conchas, 2001; Rodriguez, 2005, 2013; Rodriguez & Oceguera, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999).

Research Questions and Methods

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the structure, culture, and student and educator agency of a model continuation high school and to better understand how it serves marginalized students. In addition this study explores the agency of individuals and how their actions, behaviors, and perceptions are shaped by the structural and cultural factors and process in school (Rodriguez, 2013, 2014) given that many of the students who transition into Puente Baluarte Continuation School have been pushed out and neglected from the educational system. Thus this dissertation study explores students' educational trajectories, their experiences in a model continuation school, their relationships with their peers and educators, and their levels of satisfaction at the school. Additionally, this study also focuses on the experiences of educators, their values and beliefs about serving continuation youth, perspectives about the support they receive and their overall sense of satisfaction at Puente Baluarte. Building on a review of the research literature on continuation education and theories of structure, culture, and agency, the guiding research questions are as follows:

1) How do students and educators negotiate their agency within the school structure and culture of a model continuation school?

   1a) How do students and educators experience the day to day instructional and interpersonal interaction at this continuation school?

2) In what ways, if any, does the continuation school's structure and culture afford students with opportunities to improve their academic and social conditions?

3) What lessons can be learned from this model continuation school that can inform the structure and culture of other educational systems?

3a) How do students and educators discuss what lessons can be learned that can be applicable for other public schools?

This study explores what a model continuation school environment is—what socialization occurs, expectations for students, relationships among students and educators and among students themselves, learning pedagogy, and student aspirations. Additionally, this study seeks to better understand the school culture of one model continuation high school in order to understand the perspectives and experiences of administrators, counselors, teachers, and students. Taken together, a deeper understanding from the perspectives of key members of this community will contribute to the education research field by providing a better understanding of the school culture at a model school and how well-equipped and effective they are at fostering opportunities for continuation youth.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant given the urgency and growing need to better understand alternative schools nationwide. This study focuses on the role of a model continuation school, which can potentially provide us with an alternative way of conceptualizing these institutions that serve students at the margins. Ultimately, this research can benefit other schools as they learn about and implement practices and partnerships to nurture a more conducive environment for teaching and learning, mentoring, student success, and building healthy relationships among students and educators. For example, continuation schools enroll a high number of low-income and students of color, in some cases many students come with former or current experience with the criminal justice system and/or foster care system. Thus, continuation schools rely on outside partnerships due to the student population they serve, as they are engaged with multiple systems that are interconnected. As a result, this education sector is one form of intervention through

promising practices and partnerships that is not typically acknowledged and is often overlooked by researchers, policy makers, and practitioners as potential sites to explore recidivism and other forms of intervention for this marginalized student population. Therefore, this study can potentially capture how these institutions are sites of intervention through their practices and partnerships that reintegrate, embrace, and celebrate the socio-emotional and academic development of continuation youth. Additionally, there is an increase of enrollment of girls of color, in particular Latinas at continuation schools (Hurtado et al., 2015). Therefore, it is also important to understand, in what ways, if any, does the institution meet the needs of girls of color or are they simply overlooked due to the larger number of boys and young men of color?

Only once we better understand how continuation schools work can we inform educational practitioners, researchers, and policy makers on how to better serve and advocate for this student population. The significance of this research has implications for schools (including administrators, teachers, counselors, social workers, and school psychologists) as well as outside agencies, policymakers, researchers, and community members who work to intervene and provide the appropriate resources, programs, and support for this student population. With greater attention and responsiveness to students in continuation high schools, and alternative schools broadly, students will be more productive and better contributors to the well-being of society. Responding more effectively to their needs, aspirations, and potential will result not only in personal gain for these students and their families, but also in gains for our nation as a whole, as the graduation rate of these students will lead to an increase in boosting the graduation rates in alternative schools (DePaoli et al., 2016). Finally, through investment and increasing opportunities through support and collaboration for continuation youth, we can shift away from

the narratives of social exclusion to social inclusion for continuation youth, educators, and all members of this educational sector.

Dissertation Overview

The dissertation is arranged in Six Chapters. In Chapter Two, I provide a review of the research literature and the conceptual perspectives that help inform this study. This chapter examines the historical development of continuation schools, research on exemplary schools that serve students of color, and the gap in research pertaining to model continuation schools. Chapter Three presents an overview of the methodological approaches used in this study, which includes the design of the study, a description of the research setting and participants, sources of data, analytical process, and my positionality as a researcher-practitioner. In Chapter Four, the focal participants are the student narrative profiles and their perspective of the school structure, agency, and culture of Puente Baluarte Model Continuation School. The way educators enact their agency within the school structure and culture at Puente Baluarte is reported in Chapter Five. Finally, in Chapter Six, the lessons learned, discussion, and the implications, and conclusion are presented. This chapter addresses the limitations of the study and discusses important recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, school district leaders, and future research about the need to shift the narrative about continuation schools and the need interrogate the broader issues of equity and access in the larger secondary education system.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature and Conceptual Framework

While Chapter One provided the background, statement of the problem and the significance of this study, Chapter Two will present on a range of disciplines, which include anthropology, education, psychology, and sociology to examine the school culture at Puente Baluarte Continuation School in California. This chapter begins by providing the historical development of continuation education in California. Then it provides a review of the scholarly literature on continuation schools by describing the limited research on school structure, student experiences, challenges, and sources of support in this context. The chapter continues by examining the research on exemplary schools to better understand effective practices, services, and programs on how to best support students of color. Finally, Chapter Two concludes with an overview of cultural production theory and a discussion of the Paradigm to Understand and Examine Dropout and Engagement in Society (PUEDES) theoretical framework to interrogate and better understand the structure, agency, and culture of Puente Baluarte Continuation School.

Historical Development of Continuation Education

The first continuation high schools in California opened in the first decades of the 20th century, with the purpose of providing working youth with a part-time education (Kelly, 1993; Nygreen, 2013) and to prepare students for labor market roles as vocational education was a huge emphasis (Kantor & Tyack, 1982; Kliebard, 1999). Educational reformers during that time believed that continuation education was the solution to prevent students from leaving school prior to graduation (Nygreen, 2013). Additionally, many continuation programs emphasize vocational training and guidance with the intentions of helping young workers secure better jobs, decrease exploitation and poverty, and achieve upward mobility (Imber, 1985; Mayman, 1933).

By 1930, thirty-four states and U.S. territories (including Puerto Rico) had established part-time continuation programs (Mayman, 1933; Nygreen, 2013).

The number of continuation schools declined after the Great Depression, the enactment of child labor laws, and the pressure for comprehensive schools to retain their students full-time and their offering of vocational programs (Kelly, 1993; Mayman, 1933). California was one of the few to maintain their continuation school system by transforming their purpose and expanding the types of student population they served (Kelly, 1993; Nygreen, 2013; Williamson, 2008). The 1950 *Handbook on Continuation Education in California* stated:

> These [unadjusted students] may be classified as students who are retarded in school, students with little interest in the school program, students needing remedial work in certain fields, students with limited physical capacity, students returning to school after long periods of absence, transfers, late enrollees, students needing special guidance such as habitual truants, juvenile court problems, behavior cases, health problems, and students requiring rehabilitation (California State Department of Education, p.3).

In short, the years between 1930 and 1965 presented a shift in narratives of whom continuation schools served from "working youth" to "maladjusted youth" and the purpose of continuation education had expanded. By 1950 continuation schools operated similar to comprehensive schools as they accepted all students, school day was lengthened, and they awarded credits and diplomas.

However, the shift in serving "maladjusted youth" contributed to the ongoing stigmatization of continuation schools operating as "dumping grounds," specifically for African-Americans and immigrant students (Kelly, 1993; Nygreen, 2013). The growing concerns of stigma and racial segregation contributed to the reinvention of "alternative schools" to provide a context for continuation schools to challenge their growing stigmatization, and in some cases, to potentially emerge as a respected alternative program (Nygreen, 2013). Part of the growing

movement of alternative education focused on the central belief that every child learns differently and should have the opportunity to select an education option that fits their own unique learning style and interest (Nygreen, 2013). Consequently, this alternative school movement and philosophy, shifted the blame away from students for their failure in school, as Nygreen (2013) argued, "school failure was not located in students themselves but rather within the structure and practices of mainstream schooling with its rigid standards, authoritarian power relations, factory-style pedagogy, and decontextualized knowledge" (p. 39). The critique of mainstreaming schooling, also allowed for the emergence of anti-deficit perspectives alternative schools and their students by providing narratives of their unique needs, challenges, and circumstances (Nygreen, 2013). Therefore, with the increase and momentum of alternative schools in the late 1960s, continuation schools were placed under the same category as alternative education, as they found another justification for their existence by presenting themselves as another choice in the mix of many new alternative schools (Nygreen, 2013).

By 1983, the purpose of continuation schools shifted into watered-down versions of comprehensive schools due to the increase demand for accountability in schools resulting in standardized testing (Kelly, 1993; Nygreen, 2013). Through standardized test and other accountability measures, institutions are able to differentiate between "high" and "low" performing students, as a result of these efforts, those who place at the bottom of this hierarchy are being funneled into continuation schools at higher rates (Nygreen, 2013). In fact, some scholars argued that the overrepresentation of students into continuation schools may be a strategic move by school districts to push out students from comprehensive schools, in order to avoid being held accountable for those students and to maintain their graduation rates at a high rate (Kelly, 1993; Malagon & Alvarez, 2010; Muñoz, 2005).

Empirical Research on Continuation High Schools

The "Dumping Grounds" of Education

This phenomena of viewing continuation schools as "dumping grounds" has been part of a long-history, in fact, nearly 25 years ago in her book *Last Chance High: How Girls and Boys Drop In and Out of Alternative Schools*, Deirdre Kelly (1993) posed the question, "Is it possible to create an alternative environment for pushouts, dropouts, and potential dropouts without stigma? (p. 68). Since their foundation continuation schools have been framed as bad schools by individuals, families, educators, communities, and society which has developed a narrative of fear and anxiety for current and prospective students (Kelly, 1993). One of the common themes is that continuation schools are hostile environments that not only provides a "second-class" education, but also an institution that does not prepare students to graduate from high school and continue onto higher education. Furthermore, the stigmatization of these institutions is heightened when the narrative is similar for educators, who have also been pushed out to these institutions as a form of punishment from their school districts (Kelly, 1993). The collective stereotype is that these institutions are coupled with students and educators that are not in continuation schools by choice, but as form of punishment by school districts (Kelly, 1993). Duke and Griesdorn (1999) argue that alternative programs should shift away from reinforcing the deficit narrative that students are "losers," but serve as sites in which students who have not experienced prior success can begin to reclaim their hopes and aspirations.

Continuation High School Structures and Educators Expectations

In Kelly's (1993) study of two continuation schools in California she described two groups of educations with different teaching pedagogies, as those educators that strongly believe in creating realistic alternative for students, while those that want to "[treat] misfits" (p. 65). In

her study, Kelly (1993) discusses that educators that truly advocate for an alternative opportunity to schooling, she refers to them as "developmentalist", those that believe in reshaping the school conditions to holistically meet the needs of students. On the other hand, Kelly refers to the educators that advocate and focus on treatment, student behavior and control, as "traditionalists," which these dominant beliefs contribute to the existing school rules and structures at the sites. In this way, Kelly (1993) explains how the teaching pedagogy of educators influences the type of continuation school structure, as she describes that continuation schools can serve as safety valves—the perspective of the traditionalist, or as safety nets- the perspective of developmentalist.

In Kelly's (1993) study, she described continuation schools serve as safety valves for comprehensive schools when they accept students who do not fit the traditional goals of comprehensive schools, such as, academic success and behavioral compliance. When continuation schools function as safety valves, they reinforce the methods and expectations of comprehensive schools for student performance and they serve as a site for punishment for students who do meet the expectations of comprehensive schools. To this point, removing students from comprehensive schools places the entire responsibility on the individual, with little attention to the structure of schools and the actions of educators in comprehensive schools (Kelly, 1993). In this way, safety valve schools serve the similar purpose as detention facilities to isolate youth who have been labeled from a deficit perspective for not meeting the traditional goals or expectations of comprehensive schools (Kelly, 1993).

In contrast, Kelly (1993) argues, that when continuation schools serve as safety nets, they provide a culture that responds more effectively to the academic and social needs of non-traditional students, as they served as a "net" that catches students before they drop out of school

or fall through the cracks entirely. Educators that employ a develomentalist perspective in continuation schools interrogate the presumptions, structures, and expectations of comprehensive schools and attempt to modify their school structures and classroom practices to meet the needs of continuation students, rather than focusing on controlling and modifying student behavior. In educational research, Kennedy-Lewis (2015) argues that it is still unclear how both competing philosophies of tradionalist and developmentalist affective student's experiences in alternative schools, given that they majority of the literature in alternative education has employed a developmentalist approach. Therefore, Kennedy-Lewis (2015) argues that the philosophies of alternative schools are unclear, as the conflicting structures of tradionalist and developmentalist in schools can contribute to the further marginalization of students, in some cases, it may contribute to students being pushed out and into the school-to-prison pipeline (Kennedy-Lewis, 2015).

It has become evident that when well-executed continuation high school can provide opportunities for students who have been marginalized. A recent case study focused on immigrant Mexican youth enrolled in continuation school explored the student experiences with institutional agents and their peers in this non-traditional school setting. Mosqueda and Téllez (2016) found that the school culture of a continuation school contributed towards the students dedication and commitment to earn their high school diploma. Using social capital as a framework they examine how "institutional agents" (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, 2011) in a continuation school transmitted access to resources in both social and academic forms that positively influence the educational outcomes of immigrant Mexican youth. Their study also explored the influence of peer networks and how they provide support towards high school completion. This study found that the continuations school established a safe space for students,

as institutional agents played a critical role and being responsible for student success, but also peers and family were considered as social support that contributed towards the desire for students to attain their high school diploma. With that, Mosqueda and Téllez (2016) recommend that hiring caring institutional agents is crucial to develop a culture towards degree completion. As a result, state credential agencies should consider developing specific licenses for teachers interested specifically working in alternative school settings. Consistent with prior research (Lopez, 2004), study documented the voices of students in one alternative school and found that many of them had a deep commitment, love, and loyalty towards their institution. More specifically, the small personalized environment and the validation they received from teachers and staff contributed to a culture of care at the school, in a friendly welcoming campus. Consequently, many of the students felt prepared for the future and filled with optimist and hope, due to the quality of interactions that was established at the alternative school (Lopez, 2004).

Limited educational research has explored the experiences and perspectives of community members in continuation high school, specifically teachers, counselors, and administrators (Kelly, 1993). Therefore, building on the work of Lopez (2004) and Mosqueda and Téllez (2016) which examined student perspective about the important role of caring institutional agents in alternative/continuation high schools, in this study I explore how educators made their decision to work in a continuation school, was it by choice or was it through punishment. The limited research demonstrates that educators in these settings are not there by choice, but rather are punished and pushed out from the school district to work in continuation high schools (Kelly, 1993). This study also explores educators teaching philosophy and career goals. Therefore, if and how, educators enact their agency to serve continuation youth is important to better understand, not only how they view this vulnerable student population, but

whether they provide social and academic opportunities for this disenfranchised educational sector. In addition, in comprehensive schools there has been a great emphasis with teacher retention and issues of high-teacher turnover and how that impacts schools and the students they serve. Therefore, what does that look like in continuation schools, more specifically, in a model continuation school, does the institution have a lot of teacher turnover? Also, do administrators struggle to find and retain good talent in continuation schools?

Curriculum and Instruction in Continuation Schools

As previously mentioned, one of the great concerns in continuation high schools is the curriculum and instruction as the literature suggest that students receive a "second-class" education (Kelly, 1993; Nygreen, 2013). Researchers have been critical of the low-academic standards in continuation schools, demonstrating a culture of low expectations that teachers have for students in continuation schools as well as the lack of quality instruction provided to students (Muñoz, 2005). Muñoz's (2005) study provides a critical examination of the low-academic standards in continuation schools, with pedagogical inconsistency and the schools' lack of self-evaluation. Muñoz (2005) looked at Chicanas at one public continuation school in California and found that although only a few students graduated from these schools, few transitioned back to their comprehensive schools, and even fewer continued their education beyond high school to a postsecondary institution. Furthermore, the study of Hurtado and colleagues (2015) documented how students in continuation high school described how the school assignments were out of the range of their academic abilities, either they were too difficult or not challenging enough. The need to further explore the curriculum and instruction in continuation schools is important to understand how educators engage continuation youth in the classroom. Specifically, as the work of Malagon (2010) shed light on some disturbing practices in the classroom that warrant

attention. In her work, Malagon (2010) described how some educators in continuation school

attempted to provide a "relevant" pedagogy to reengage Chicano male youth by providing them

with books of poor narratives or gang-infested high schools, in which students "act-out" but

eventually learn that they needed to evaluate their "self-defeating" actions or culture. However,

Chicano males resisted and rejected these deficit stereotypes and called for a relevant curriculum,

one that did not consist of false assumptions and damaging misperceptions about boys and young

men of color (Malagon, 2010). Overall, both studies provide the need to further explore the

curriculum and instruction offered to students in continuation high school and the need for

promising practices in the classroom to academically engaged students.

Punitive Policies and Practices in Continuation Schools

In addition to the curriculum and instruction, a great body of research has also

documented how the school structure of continuation schools operates with strict punitive

policies and practices to target low-income students and students of color (Hurtado et al., 2015;

Rios, 2017). In their ethnographic study on Latina/o students in continuation schools, Hurtado

and colleagues (2015) describe conditions commonplace in many of these institutions and found

that they employed similar practices and procedures found in the prison system. Hurtado and

colleagues (2015) showed that the schools they visited had "a number of features in common

with juvenile justice or correctional institutions" but that they "present students with many of the

same kinds of psychologically powerful and potentially damaging experiences" (p. 119). For

example, they showed that continuation schools practices and procedures apply "prison-like

hyper-monitoring" geared toward students with a history of misconduct in school. This type of

hyper-monitoring hinders positive schooling experiences and leads toward even more

problematic responses, in some cases causing students to become passive. In addition to this, a

key finding that emerged from Hurtado et al.'s (2015) observations was gender socialization and how Latina students received less attention from their teachers compared to their male counterparts. The study showed that Latinas were overshadowed by the deviant behavior of their male peers and how the larger presence of males' in these institutions pushed Latinas to the background.

Similarly to the work of Hurtado and colleagues, in a recent ethnographic study, Rios (2017) describes one continuation high school, Punta Vista, as "the probation school," as they educate a high proportion of students that were formerly incarcerated or students who were pushed out from the local comprehensive schools for gang related truancy, defiance, fights, and drug use. While, Punta Vista has a mission to enroll this unique student population who come into the school and classrooms, with a long history of negative experiences with educators as they have been constantly punished and neglected. However, what we learn is that Rios (2017) study aligns with the work of Hurtado and colleagues (2015), as Punta Vista also applied similar punitive practices which consisted of having school security guards on the classrooms, as students were in constant surveillance. Rios (2017) noted that this typical in schools designed for vulnerable student populations. While, this institution that enrolls a population that is seeking to reinvent themselves, unfortunately, what we learn is that the school labeled students by categories as a way to maintain order and control at the institution. As Rios (2017) noted:

> The administration and faculty had a list of character types, folk categories, used to label students for the sake of everyone's safety and to maintain order: the addict, the emotionally disturbed, the promiscuous chola (gangster girl), the angry cholo, the wannabe (aspiring gangster), and the class clown. (p.30)

In fact, even the school principal used the term "the angry type" to describe a student, which eventually led towards the student internalizing his frustrations and eventually his disruptiveness

led towards him also being labeled as a gang member by the school. Of great concern, is how one undocumented student, Jorge, described that the school principal at times threaten to call her brother who is a sheriff's deputy to arrest him and deport him (Rios, 2017). Unfortunately, Rios (2017) argues, "Breaking a rule at the continuation school leads a youth one step closer to the criminal justice system," which is of great concern for Jorge and other undocumented students that have to navigate being displaced from school to school, interactions with law enforcement, and living in fear as they have to avoid deportation. To this point, in Rios (2017) study, many of the students describe the culture of Punta Vista as hostile, as many of them have the desire to go "back to normal" or "back to school," just to transition back to an institution that will view them and treat them with respect and care (p. 145).

Overall, the need to further explore these students racialized and gendered experiences are important, while majority of this research has focused on Latina/os in continuation high schools given their overrepresentation, thus, how does the school structure and culture of punitive policies and practices impact other low-income students and students of color in these educational settings?

Asset-Based Research on Continuation Youth

Research describes students in continuation high schools as more likely than comprehensive school students to: 1) be involved in the juvenile justice system; 2) foster care system; 3) live with a relative other than a parent; 4) move from school to school; 5) engage in regular and heavy alcohol drug use; 6) be involved in a physical fight; 7) as well as to have carried a weapon; and 8) to be a gang member (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). Although the previous description of continuation high school students are important to understand the type of student population enrolled in these settings and the type of support that is needed, it is important

to note that not all students fit those categories and that there is a need to also examine the assets and the strengths that students bring into these cultural spaces (Foley et al., 2000; Levinson & Holland, 1996). A growing body of research has examined the experiences of low-income students and students of color in continuation high schools (Hernandez, 2017; Hurtado et al., 2015; Kelly, 1993; Malagon, 2010; Malagon & Alvarez, 2010; Mosqueda & Téllez, 2016; Muñoz, 2005; Nygreen, 2013; Rios, 2017; Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012).

In her study of Chicano males attending a continuation high school, Malagon (2010) uses Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Chicana feminist epistemological framework to challenge the deficit perspectives of this student population and centers the experiences of the Chicano males in these institutions. Malagon (2010) specifically focuses on how students disengaged from school as a form of resistance towards the structures of the educational system that has failed to meet their needs with a particular focus on how Chicano males came to critically analyze their own educational pathways and schooling experiences (Malagon, 2010). She found that students experienced some teachers had deficit perceptions of Mexican parents and their children as they believe that they did not care for their education. Furthermore, students shared they had negative experiences with teachers as early as elementary school, which had an immense impact on students as teachers would be constantly punished and neglected. For example, Malagon (2010) described the immense impact of how one teacher commented how a Chicano male "freaked" her out due to her perception of him being gang-affiliated (p. 71). As a result, Emilio, the Chicano male engaged in resistance by being silent and refusing to participate in class activities; for others this form of resistance is interpreted not only of him being a threat in the classroom, but also not caring about his education (Malagon, 2010).

Additionally, Malagon and Alvarez (2010) have found that students in continuation schools are both willing and able to succeed academically in spite of the challenges they faced in school. For instance, Malagon and Alvarez (2010) draws on an extensive oral histories with five Chicana students who attended continuation school in high school, but persisted and eventually enrolled in community college, then four-year colleges, and eventually graduate programs. Over the course of their schooling, these Chicana students gained the critical consciousness necessary to examine their educational pathways and the institutions that had failed them. They reported that during their schooling, both the teachers and administrators failed to provide them with the care and resources they needed to succeed. They also felt that their experiences were not validated, and as a result, they felt alienated and resisted the system that marginalized and oppressed them.

Through a critical evaluation and their resistance they proved people wrong by graduating from continuation high school and enrolling and graduating from college (Malagon & Alvarez, 2010). This study contributes to the educational pipeline discourse by shedding light on the potential of students from continuation high school who enrolled, persisted, and completed their higher education. Furthermore, the narrative from the five Chicana women call for action for educators and scholars to refute the notion that students in continuation high schools are low-achievers and to view them as capable of academically achieving in higher education. Malagon and Alvarez (2010) study contributes to the discussion of how we view these learning environments and the need to focus more attention, resources, and strengthen a college-going culture in this non-traditional school setting.

There is a growing body of research that highlights high achieving students of color in comprehensive high schools and higher education (Conchas, 2006; Harper & Associates, 2014;

Howard & Associates, 2017; Pérez II, 2014; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009). These studies provide

insight into how students of color describe their schooling experiences and the practices that

contributed to their success, but also provide insight into alternative perspective of what

constitutes "high-achieving" (Howard & Associates, 2017; Malagon & Alvarez, 2010).

Therefore, this dissertation seeks to understand the assets and the agency of continuation youth

to highlight their contributions and involvement within their schools and communities. Drawing

from the work of Shawn Ginwright (2011) this study seeks to understand how youth civic

engagement serves as a form of healing, hope, and care within this disenfranchised educational

sector. Furthermore, Ginwright and James (2002) discuss the importance of healing and spiritual

development of young people who have been oppressed:

> One of the most devastating impacts of oppression is self-blame and hopeless. However, critical consciousness allows young people who feel victimized to remove self-blame and heal from the trauma of poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression. Healing can be described as psychological, emotional, and physical wellness. The healing process also leads to a spiritual development that provides youth with a sense of life purpose, empathy for the suffering of others, and optimism about social change (p. 41).

Building on the work of Ginwright and James (2012), many continuation youth have been

oppressed by the educational system, thus, in some cases have internalized self-blame for their

individual failure. Therefore, this study seeks to understand how one continuation school that has

been designated a model institution creates spaces for young people to heal and regain a sense of

purpose towards a healthy identity development.

Asset-Based Approach to the Study of Continuation Schools

Recent research on continuations schools have taken an asset-based approach for

understanding these educational settings by presenting promising practices and characteristics of

high performing continuation schools in California (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; Ruiz de

Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). In a statewide study of continuation schools in California, the

work of Ruiz de Velasco and colleagues (2008) documented the nuances in continuation high

schools, given the overall disappointing results of continuation schools failing to provide the

academic and socio-emotional support services to continuation youth. However, in their work

they found some continuation schools that are "beating the odds" in serving a vulnerable student

population (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). The study

found that higher-performing continuation schools engage in the follow three sets of practices

that distinguish them: 1) promoting an asset-based, student-focused school climate; 2) school

discipline policies at higher performing schools; and 3) building academic supports with social

supports and connections to community resources, businesses and post-secondary institutions

(Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012).

  Promoting an Asset-Based, Student Focused School Climate. First, the importance of

promoting an asset-based, student focused school climate is crucial, as many students have

experience hostile relationships with educators in comprehensive schools (Ruiz de Velasco et al.,

2008; Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). Therefore, principals in high-performing in

continuation schools view continuation youth from an asset perspective, through a lens of

empathy and positive views about their ability to succeed, but they also recognize the important

role of their institution of leading those outcomes (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; Ruiz de Velasco

& McLaughlin, 2012). Additionally, principals in high performing continuation schools have

clear expectations, standards, and students outcomes for the entire school staff, which empowers

educators in those spaces and their own values and beliefs about serving the vulnerable

continuation youth population. In return, continuation youth describe how they are aware of the

values, beliefs, and attitudes educators have on them, which students describe it had a positive

effect on their motivation to engage and learn (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). In some cases, Ruiz de Velasco and associates described how some continuation youth were genuinely surprised about their academic transformation, but many of them acknowledge that their teachers and school principal had positive views about them. Furthermore, Ruiz de Velasco and McLaughlin (2012) argued, "while some students come to school goal-oriented and ready to learn, others need educators to step in and build the trusting relationships and links to their lives that may engage them in school" (p.21). Therefore, is important to understand the continuation student population and making connections to their lives to be able to engage them and for them to "buy in" ad to truly being to engage in the academic work (Rodriguez, 2005; Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012).

School Discipline Policies at Higher Performing Schools. Second, examining school discipline policies at higher performing schools documented the nuances that exist in policies and practices in continuation schools. In high performing continuation schools, the school discipline policies were more focused on positive behavioral support, rather than on zero-tolerance approaches. In continuations schools that implemented positive behavioral supports, school principals described their role as coaches and being part of team or family with a mutual responsibility to maintain an academic focus and order in school (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). As a result, many students and educators described that their respective institutions "felt like a family," in which staff modeled respect and care, which contributed to students caring for one another and celebrating their own academic and social development (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). An important practice of high performing continuation schools, as described by Ruiz de Velasco and McLaughlin (2012) was the restorative approach, rather than punitive approach to issues of school discipline. In this way, these institutions focus

more direct attention and instruction in positive behaviors, problem-solving skills and conflict resolution, and the development of nurturing healthy relationships (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). The importance of positive behavioral support and restorative justice practices are important, as many continuation youth enter these school settings having experience discipline in schools or event with law enforcement in and out of school, thus, educators in high-performing continuation schools are explicit and clear about the importance of these approaches in this context (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012).

Building Academic Supports with Social Supports and Connections to Community Resources, Business and Post-Secondary Institutions. The third and final practice, building academic supports with social supports and connections to community resources, businesses and post-secondary institutions is important to increase capacity by creating partnerships that extend beyond the continuation school (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). In effective alternative schools, leaders demonstrated the importance of building capacity through partnerships with other institutions or organizations outside of campus, this included: community colleges, Regional Occupational Programs, local businesses, all which serve to expand opportunities for continuation youth from post-secondary education to the social and emotional support needed (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). In their work, Ruiz de Velasco and colleagues (2012) described how strong continuation programs provided the academic support, but also the social support that is crucial for this student population. In these particular school settings, given how small staff, they rely heavily on outside support of community agencies and individual volunteers to meet the academic to the social and emotional support needed (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). For instance, continuation schools rely on mental health agencies or community-based mental health program to provide drug and

alcohol treatment, and also partnerships with probation agencies to provide opportunities for

students on probation (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). Additionally, educators in

continuation schools fostered relationships and connections with local businesses to extend

opportunities for students to obtain jobs or receive academic credits through internships. Lastly,

another component in strong continuation school programs was the importance of well-designed

partnerships with local community colleges. In this partnership, counselors and teachers in

continuation schools worked collaborated with the local community colleges to develop

opportunities for students to visit the colleges, sit it on classes, and community college advisors

also visited the continuation schools to present workshops for them to learn more about

admissions and the financial aid process (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). Although these

partnerships exist with community college, little research has explored the student perspective

and experience of a continuation and community college partnership. In particular, dual credit

courses afford students with the opportunity to earn college credit while still in high school

(Allen, Thompson, & Martinez-Cosio, 2018; Tobolowsky & Allen, 2016). Scholars argued the

benefits for students to enroll in dual credit courses, is the early exposure to college level course

work and expectations (Allen et al., 2018; Tobolowsky & Allen, 2016). Furthermore, it also

socializes students to the rigorous coursework and high expectations, which with the intend that

it will contributed to students' transition and success into higher education (Allen et al., 2018;

Tobolowsky & Allen, 2016). While, these programs are important for students, little research has

explored the experiences of students in dual credit courses (Allen et al., 2008), and even less in

continuation schools and how students learn about these opportunities.

Despite these promising practices and partnerships, what makes a continuation school

high-performing is the leadership with the school principal and the local support from the school

district as well. While these practices and partnerships provide crucial support for students in continuation schools, unfortunately, issues of equity and access exist given that not all continuation schools have similar access to opportunities (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). In most cases, these opportunities are presented due to the social capital of some educators in these spaces, and at times, it also reflects the vision and commitment of the school administration to serve this vulnerable student population (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). Therefore, the statewide study of Ruiz de Velasco and colleagues described the critical role and support of local school districts, but also the leadership in schools, specifically of school principals (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). Although, the work on high performing continuation school has been important to identified promising practices and partnerships, yet there has been no connection to the model continuation high school recognition program.

Research on High Performing Schools that Serve Students of Color

In *The Good High School*, we learn about good high schools that provide exemplary practices on how students are treated, but also how teachers are valued in their profession (Lightfoot, 1983). Furthermore, in these exemplary schools we learn how teachers are provided with the opportunity for autonomous expression, have an active voice and clear responsibility within the organization and are valued and protected from the various stereotypes that diminish the teaching profession (Lightfoot, 1983). In return, when educators are valued and respected, the portraits of good high schools document how students are treated with fearless and empathetic attention by caring adult educators. Furthermore, while a great deal of attention in high schools from both, the adults and students is focus on the social and psychological dimensions of the environment, the richness in good schools is that they are also concerned and

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emphasize the importance of maintaining an integrity of their academic curriculum (Lightfoot, 1983).

In good high schools, it is clear that students in these schools feel visible and accountable by their institutions and the members of the community (Lightfoot, 1983). In addition to feeling visible and accountable, the students in good high schools feel safe in their environment. As Lightfoot (1983) vividly described one of the institutions in good high schools:

> One of the great attractions of Kenny for students and faculty is the safety and discipline of the environment. Compared to the violence and chaos that characterize many big-city schools, Kennedy feels like a calm and productive environment. More impressive than the feelings of comfort is the recognition that the environment is truly and confidently pluralistic, that there is calm among groups that are often at odds in other settings. (p. 74)

Extensive research has documented the importance of safety in schools, as it allows for students feel calm and be productive in their academics. As noted in Lightfoot's research, many students feared attending one of the institutions in good high schools due the messages they heard about that institutions prior to attending. As Lightfoot (1983) stated,

> Before coming to Kennedy, a senior whose family lives in the Riverdale hills, had heard rumors that the school was a "tough place with lots of gangs." He has discovered just the opposite. "I don't even think there are definable cliques, and I haven't seen a fight since I came here." Another student from West Harlem exudes, "It's like the United Nations, all kinds of people. (p.74)

The experience of students at Kennedy High School, aligns with the stories of students in continuation high schools, as they also learn to fear these institutions prior to coming, but once they enter these settings they realize is not that bad (Kelly, 1993). Therefore, the work of Lightfoot (1983) provides a snapshot of the important work in good high schools as the institutions value their educators, but they also individually know their students and view them fearlessly and with empathetic attention, in return, students feel visible and accountable, as they are also in a safe environment. Furthermore, in addition to meeting the social-emotional needs of

students, they also emphasize the importance of the integrity of the academic curriculum they provide to their students (Lightfoot, 1983).

Similarly, research in other effective schools has also found that such institutions found ways to support good teaching and learning (Haycock, 2002). Additionally, such institutions also find strategies to not only provide the internal support in schools, but also address the external constraints students face within their external environments. For instance, effective schools tend to provide clothing, food, and other basic needs (Haycock, 2002; Noguera, 2003a). This is important, as effective schools find ways to help improve conditions and learning environments for students, as they rely on outside partnerships to help foster student success (Noguera, 2003a).

The work of Karin Chenoweth (2009) presents additional evidence of what schools can learn from exemplary schools that are thriving in educating low-income and minority youth. Chenoweth (2009), in her book, *How It's Being Done: Urgent Lessons from Unexpected Schools*, provides important narratives of successful institutions and the qualities that exist in those settings. Furthermore, Chenoweth (2009) notes that school principals might be hesitant in allowing strangers into their schools, but in these exemplary institutions, school principals recognize that it is important that their work needs to be evaluated and shared with others. Similarly, the additive work of Louie Rodriguez (2015) has brought greater attention to the importance of highlighting the excellence that exist in schools and communities of color. In his work, Rodriguez (2015) argues that the narrative on public school failure and teacher school failure places the sole responsibility on schools and teachers, with little attention to the issues of equity and opportunities in schools. As a result, many public schools are not only underresourced, but they are understaffed and educators find themselves overworked in a profession that often minimal respect is given (Rodriguez, 2015). Given these challenges and

focus on public school failure and placing responsibility on teachers, this shifts away from providing opportunity to share what schools are doing in and out of the classroom to celebrate the excellence in these spaces. Therefore, the work of Rodriguez (2015) highlights the contribution of intentional excellence that is exhibited in schools and communities of color, to highlight and share the models of excellence that students, parents, educators, and/or community members exhibit in multiple contexts.

Overall what this literature demonstrates is the importance of supportive school structures and the values and beliefs of continuation educators that will contribute to the success of students at continuation high schools. The next section presents the theoretical perspectives to understand the school culture and identity of a model continuation high school.

Conceptual Framework to Understand School Culture

Building on the work of Karin Chenoweth (2009), Louie Rodriguez (2015), and Sarah-Lawrence Lightfoot (1983), this study attempts to search for the "goodness" in one continuation high school to highlight the "how it's being done" and to promote and celebrate the "excellence" in this overlooked educational sector of continuation high schools. Drawing from the literature and informed by the theory of cultural production (Foley et al., 2000; Levinson & Holland, 1996), this study draws from Rodriguez's (2013) Paradigm to Understand and Examine Dropout and Engagement in Society (PUEDES), a relevant framework to understand the school culture and identity of a model continuation high school. This next section will delineate the key concepts of the selected theories, and discusses why it is appropriately to use them jointly in this qualitative educational study.

Cultural Production in Education

In 1996, the editors and authors of *The Cultural Production of the Educated Person*

raised important questions in the field of critical educational research and anthropology

ethnographies, as they drew on those frameworks to examine culture, identity, schools, and

schooling. The concept of "cultural production" interrogates how individuals creatively occupy

and engage in the education and schooling space. As Levinson and Holland (1996) noted:

> Cultural production is one vision of this process. It provides a direction for understanding how human agency operates under powerful structural constrains. Through the production of cultural forms, created within the structural constrains of sites such as schools, subjectivities form and agency develops. These are the processes we seek to evoke with our phrase, "the cultural production of the educated person. (p.14)

Additionally, with the focus on culture, it is important to conceptualize it as an ongoing process

of creating meaning in social and material contexts, rather than viewing culture as static.

In the context of continuation schools, cultural production accounts for the practices of various

individuals, including educators and students within the school site. For instance, the role of

teachers is crucial to enforcing such models of the educated person, as they may challenge the

historical deficit framework of continuation schools or contribute to the models influence by the

dominant structure and deficit narrative (Levinson & Holland, 1996). The theory of cultural

production as a framework allows us to portray and interpret the way students and educators

actively confront the ideological and material conditions disseminated in continuation schools.

Levinson & Holland (1996) argue:

> the concept of "cultural production" allows us to better understand the resources for, and constraints upon, social action—the interplay of agency and structure—in a variety of educational institutions. We also argue that a culturally specific and relative conception of the "educated person" allows us to appreciate the historical and cultural particularities of the "products of education, and thus provides a framework for understanding conflicts around different kinds of schooling. (p.3)

To this point, the work of Levinson & Holland argue that is important to explore the difference between schools, as they are critical sites for the production of an educated person, but it is important to keep in mind the interconnection among cultural and social space (Levinson & Holland, 1996).

Cultural production emerged from theories of social and cultural reproduction. Social reproduction theory highlights the function of schools as reproducers rather than to transformers of existing structural inequalities in society (Levinson & Holland, 1996). Social reproduction theory emerged from critical educational studies that provided a radical critique of the social impact of schooling by race, class, and gender (Apple, 1979; Bernstein, 1973; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1983; Sharp & Green, 1975). This work was further expanded to include the exploration of culture. Particularly the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1986) contributed to theory of reproduction by providing an additional insight of *culture* and how it contributes to an unequal social order in a capitalist economy. Bourdieu examined the role of schools in French society and developed the concept of "cultural capital," which described how schools reproduce inequalities through the power of acknowledging and valuing the norms, beliefs, and values that pertain to the dominant class in society. This includes validating the cultural products of elite groups, such as, their arts, speech, style of dress, and consumptions patters. In other words, the values and skills of elite groups are considered as forms of "intelligence" in schools (Levinson & Holland, 1996), while those of working class groups are completely dismissed. Therefore, the work of Bourdieu contributes to the understanding of schools and how they can reproduce inequality by acknowledging and rewarding the cultural capital of dominant groups (Bourdieu, 1977), and as a framework to continue to explore the effects of schooling across historical and cultural contexts (Levinson & Holland, 1996).

Levinson and Holland (1996) argued that historically the traditional models of the "educated person" promoted in schools often times represents the values and ideologies of which dominant groups enforce for others in society. However, ethnography research disrupted the reproductionist prescription by documenting how students manifested cultural forms that resisted dominant ideologies, but also how not all schools contributed to the dominant perspectives (Foley, 1990; Levinson & Holland, 1996). More recent work has shifted away from deficit studies to asset-based approaches by highlighting the assets and wealth that youth of color gain from their home and neighborhood networks (Gonzalez et al., 1997; Moll et al., 1992; Velez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992; Yosso, 2005). For example, there are various studies that have highlighted the important role of parents, in particular mothers of providing their sons and daughters advice about the importance of education (Cargar, 1996; Delgado-Gaitan, 1996; Diaz-Soto, 1997; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Valdes, 1996; Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994), as this relates to the Latino concept of the educated person, which sums up family loyalty, humility, and hard work (Foley et al., 2000). Therefore, this example of the important role of family provides a cultural portrait that pushes back against earlier deficit studies about Latinos, families, and the value of education (Foley, 1997). Collectively, this work challenges the deficit discourse about students and communities of color, to highlight the positive attributes of cultural, community, and family traditions and practices within underrepresented groups which are often dismissed or misunderstood in schools (Foley et al., 2000; Rodriguez, 2015; Yosso, 2005).

Paradigm to Understand and Examine Dropout and Engagement in Society (PUEDES)

In this study, I draw on Rodriguez's (2013) Paradigm to Understand and Examine Dropout and Engagement in Society (PUEDES) to understand the school culture and identity of Puente Baluarte Continuation High School. The application of PUEDES in this study is

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important as it will highlight the importance of school culture to understand the process of students being pushed out into continuation schools, and how continuation schools and educators create a genuine alternative to reengage youth through the socio-emotional and academic opportunities presented (Rodriguez, 2013).

*Paradigms of the PUEDES Framework: Structure- Agency- Culture***.** PUEDES framework examines the structure-culture-agency paradigms, which emerged from the origins in ethnomethodology (see Mehan & Wood, 1975) with the intentions that in order to understand the social actions of individuals, one must understand the interconnections among the social structures and human agency (Brown & Rodriguez, 2008; Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002; Giddens, 1984; Rodriguez, 2013). In other words, the structure-culture-agency framework provides an interactive analysis of how individuals actions (agency) varies on the restraints or flexibility of their environment, either based on a set of rules and policies (structure) and/or the cultural expectations (culture) that are a characteristic of the continuation school context (Rodriguez, 2013). The PUEDES framework is an important approach for this study, for instance, given that many students in continuation youth have been labeled as "low-achievers" and how many of them "do not care or value their education" (Kelly, 1993), PUEDES helps to understand how school discipline policies (structure) and students feeling targeted by educators (culture), might contribute to student pushout/departure from school (agency) given the structure and cultural forces in school. Therefore, PUEDES helps us to understand that the agency of individuals is constrained within the structure and culture of an institution (Rodriguez, 2013, 2014).

To stress this point, the structure-culture-agency paradigms of the PUEDES framework contributes to how we view the work on school dropout/pushout in education. Much of the work

on school dropout has been predominantly informed by a large quantitative body of research that has focused on two frameworks to understand this phenomenon of school dropout, such as, the *individual perspective* and the *institutional perspective* (Rumberger, 2004; Rumberger & Rodrigues, 2002). The individual perspective focuses on the student's characteristics, which includes their attitudes, behaviors, school performance, and prior experiences, while the institutional perspective situates the problems within societal institutions, such as, students' families, schools, and communities (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Rumberger & Rodrigues, 2002). However, one of the methodological challenges with only the analysis of the individual with structural factors to the studies of school dropout is that they are being treated as separately, when both are useful towards understanding the phenomena of why students disengage from school (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009). One of the challenges with many studies of school dropout is how they treat the individual, institutional, and structural factors as relatively disjointed. Other scholars argued that viewing this factors separately, "undermines the inherent sociological nature of the dropout problem" (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009, p. 224). With that, PUEDES encourages one to consider the three dimensions of structure-culture-agency as an interactive analysis of the various forces in the paradigm.

Further demonstrating the value of the structure-cultural-agency framework, educational scholars applied this perspective to their analysis of educational school reform, Datnow et al., (2002) study found that the role of culture was a crucial force in addition to the structure and agency. In addition, Datnow et al., (2002) found that the structure-culture-agency paradigm is reflexive and interactional framework in which each concept influences and is shaped by one another. For example, in their work they found how teacher's deficit-oriented perspectives about their students of color and English language learners influence the implementation of educational

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reform efforts, as some teachers believed that students were not capable of meeting the newly

implemented rigorous curriculum. Therefore, the teachers' individual practices and beliefs about

their students contribute towards the beliefs and practices of an institution, as scholars would

characterize this as school culture (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Rodriguez, 2013).

Applying PUEDES to Understand the School Culture of a Model Continuation High School

The purpose of PUEDES is to particularly focus on the context of school to address the

dropout/pushout crisis, but it can also be applied to study other issues in education (Rodriguez,

2013). In Figure 1, I describe the structure, agency, and culture of the PUEDES framework to

understand the school culture of a model continuation high school.
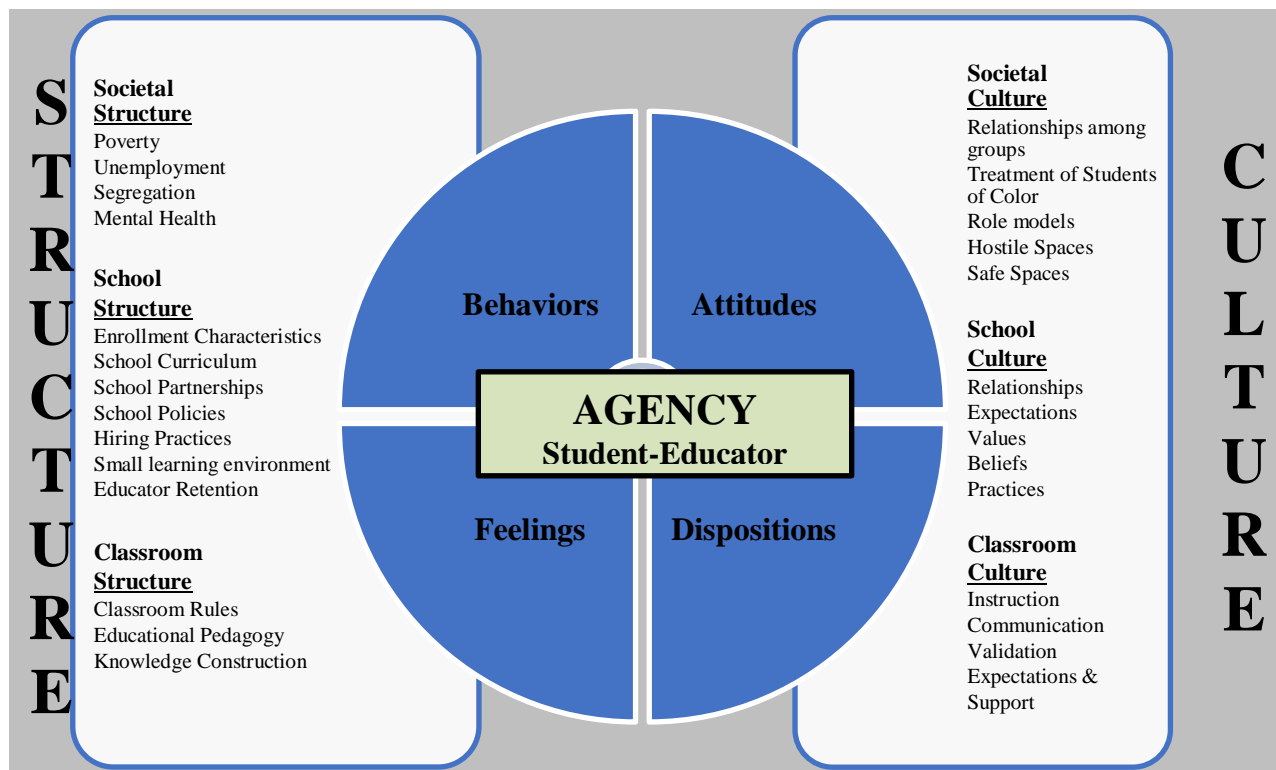
Figure 1. Applying PUEDES to Understand the School Culture of a Model Continuation School.
Note. Modified version from *Rodriguez (2013)*

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In this study, the structure refers to the set of policies, procedures, rules, and resources; which includes how people, resources, and spaces are allocated in and out the school context (Anyon, 1996; Conchas, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Gandara, 1995; Maeroff, 1988; Noguera, 2003a; Rodriguez, 2013; Schorr, 1997). The structure can be applied to various systems, such as society, school, and the family system. Each of these systems operates differently and has its own set of policies, procedures, rules, and resources. For this study, the structure is applied to the larger societal structures, the school structure, and the classroom structure, all of which influence the students, educators, and all members of the continuation school environment. The societal structure is comprised of the social policies that influence poverty, unemployment, segregation, and mental health that is comprised of the larger social structure. Second, the school structure is defined by the enrollment characteristics, curriculum, partnerships, policies, hiring practices, small learning environment, and educator retention. While, the classroom structures focus on the classroom rules, educational pedagogy, and how knowledge is constructed in the continuation classroom. Collectively, the societal, school, and classroom structures provide a lens to examine how they influence the resources and support that continuation schools are provided to ensure that educators have the tools and capacity to serve the continuation student population.

As previously mentioned, the school culture of an institution is crucial as it can shape students towards academic success or failure (Conchas, 2001; Rodriguez, 2005; Rodriguez, 2008; Rodriguez, 2013; Valenzuela, 1999). For this study, culture includes the societal culture, school culture, and classroom culture. The societal culture consists of the relationships among groups, treatment of students of color, role models, hostile spaces, and safe spaces, while the school culture will include the relationships among student-educators, among students

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themselves, values, beliefs, practices, and expectations that make this school unique. Lastly, the classroom culture will examine the instruction, communication, validation, and the expectations and support that occur inside the classroom.

At the center, is the agency of individuals which refers to a combination of a person's actions, beliefs and lived experiences and is "shaped by various structural and cultural factors and processes in school" (Rodriguez, 2014, p. 30) which then influences their decision to engage or disengage in their school or community context (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Rodriguez, 2013). In fact, agency is one of the main reasons why students engage or disengage in school. For example, the agency of an individual might be different at home than in school. Furthermore, agency might even differ from class to class or teacher to teacher within a continuation school. For the purpose of this study, agency focuses on students and educators behaviors, attitudes, feelings, and dispositions at the continuation school. This study explores how educators perceive the student population they work with, also to explore how they engage with students in various spaces inside the class and outside of the classroom. Additionally, how students respond to the educators in the school setting that is considered a model continuation school. Therefore, the agency of students and educators in this model continuation school context varies in multiple spaces, as they are shaped by the structure and cultural factors embedded in the institution (Rodriguez, 2013, 2014).

Overall, the rationale for the selected conceptual framework is informed by the literature, methodological approaches, and theory of cultural production, as the PUEDES framework allows the flexibility to consider how structure, agency, and culture interact and intersect with one another. Furthermore, PUEDES is practical, theoretically grounded, and context-specific. The contribution of PUEDES is not just an analytical tool, but as a method that can inform and

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shape implications for policy, practice, and future research regarding the role of model

continuation schools, and alternative schools broadly (Rodriguez, 2013).

Summary of Chapter

The majority of the literature presented provides a historical perspective of the shifting

role and purpose of continuation schools in California. More importantly, this study attempts to

depart from the deficit frameworks that dehumanize students and educators in continuation

schools. In contrast, this study attempts to provide an alternative perspective through an asset

lens to understand the cultural production and how individuals make meaning of their

experiences in continuation high schools. In sum, this study builds on PUEDES and the theory of

cultural production to understand new constructs of culture in a continuation school by learning

about the promising practices and the agency of students and educators in their practices and

how they engage and serve continuation youth.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Most of the research literature on continuation schools and students' experiences in the

secondary educational system have utilized qualitative research methods, including ethnographic

observations and semi-structured interviews with students, to capture students' experiences in

continuation schools. However, to my knowledge, there is yet to be an empirical study conducted

in a model continuation high school that focuses on school culture. This study highlights both the

students' point of view in addition to the administrators', counselors', and teachers' narratives. In

this chapter, I discuss the research study design, my positionality as a researcher, a pilot study

that help informed the current dissertation, the purpose and research questions of this study, the

process of gaining entrée, description of the research setting and participants, data collection

methods, and finally the data analysis and coding process of this dissertation study.

Study Design

This dissertation employed a qualitative case study approach to gain a deeper

understanding of the phenomenon of a model continuation high school's school culture.

Qualitative case study research designs allow for a focus on the holistic description of a natural

setting and a rich description of the model continuation high school (Yin, 2011). More

specifically,

> Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a
> bounded system (*a case*) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through
> detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g.,
> observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a
> case description and case-based themes. (Creswell, 2007, p.73)

Moreover, the case study approach serves as a method to gain insight, discover, and interpret the

school culture of a model continuation school (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2011). In this

study, the focus on a case study of a model continuation school allows for an in-depth

description and understanding of the school culture at a model continuation school. To help

answer the research questions of this study, three main sources of data collection methods

included: 1) ethnographic observations, 2) document analysis, and 3) semi-structured interviews.

In addition, I used field notes and analytic memos to help process and make sense of the data. In

the next section, I describe a pilot study that contributed to the present study.

Pilot Study

During the 2014-15 academic year, I conducted an exploratory pilot case study as part of

my graduate coursework at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), with the support

and supervision of Dr. Teresa McCarty. The pilot study focused on Latino male students'

experiences at Morrell Gardens Continuation School (pseudonym), a continuation high school in

southern California (Hernandez, 2017). The methods in this pilot study consisted of one focus

group, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and multiple participant observations with three Latino males. In this pilot study, I sought to understand: 1) student pushout into continuation school, 2) students' experiences with their peers and educators in this continuation schools, and 3) students' future aspirations after continuation school. The findings from this project that focused on one Latino male student's narrative profile were published in a peer-reviewed journal *The High School Journal* (Hernandez, 2017). This pilot study with students at Morrell Gardens Continuation School employed sociocultural and ecological frameworks to understand how various contexts (i.e., home, neighborhood, school) shaped and influenced how one young man navigated a continuation school. I crafted a narrative profile of a Latino male in continuation school, and through an ecological systems framework, he explored how he navigated the various contexts, of home, neighborhood, and school. In doing so, this study documented how Esteban, a Latino male, engaged in the continuation school, but also how important was the collective effort of his family, teachers, and the school principal that assisted him during the difficult process of reintegrating back into school after being rejected from various comprehensive and continuation schools due to falling behind on credits. One of the key findings that emerged and aligned with the research literature was how Latino males described their long history of negative experiences with educators in comprehensive schools (Rodriguez, 2005), but they described their teachers, staff, and the principal at Morrell Gardens Continuation School as caring and supportive adults (Mosqueda & Téllez, 2016). Consequently, through this collective and consistent support, Esteban is taking advantage of this renewed opportunity and aspires to enroll at the local community college (Hernandez, 2017). Overall, this pilot study informed the types of questions that I sought out to explore in this dissertation study, but rather than the student being the unit of analysis, the model continuation school was the focal point for this dissertation study.

Purpose and Research Questions of Study

This dissertation contributes to the emerging body of work on continuation schools by highlighting the school culture of one model institution that enrolls a high proportion of low-income students and students of color. Specifically, this dissertation seeks to shed light on the way the institution provides academic and social support to students as they prepare to reach their goals, which can range from transitioning back to their comprehensive school, graduating from their continuation school, and/or transitioning from the continuation school to higher education and/or work. The following research questions guided this dissertation study:

1) How do students and educators negotiate their agency within the school structure and culture of a model continuation school?

> 1a) How do students and educators experience the day to day instructional and interpersonal interaction at this continuation school?

2) In what ways, if any, does the continuation school's structure and culture afford students with opportunities to improve their academic and social conditions?

3) What lessons can be learned from this model continuation school that can inform the structure and culture of other educational systems?

> 3a) How do students and educators discuss what lessons can be learned that can be applicable for other public schools?

Similar to the work of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983), this study incorporates a methodological approach to search for "goodness" in this model continuation school. This approach is a strategic move to shift away from the social stigma and stereotypes that surround continuation schools and the members of this community, as it provides a more humanizing account of students' and

educators' lived experiences and interrogates the larger structural systems of inequity that contribute to the marginalization of this community.

Research Setting

Community Profile [4]

All data for this study was collected at Puente Baluarte Continuation School (pseudonym). Puente Baluarte is located in the city of Cruz, a large suburban community in southern California. The largest ethnic group in Cruz are Latina/os (65.7 percent of the city's population), followed by Whites (23.8%), Asians (3.8 percent), Blacks/African Americans (1.3 percent), American Indians and Alaska Natives (1.3 percent), Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders (0.1 percent), and people who are two or more races (4.4 percent). Regarding education levels in the city of Cruz, the population has a high school diploma as their highest educational degree (27.3 percent). Additionally, 8.3 percent of the city's population has an Associate Degree, 17 percent has a Bachelor's degree, and 8.4 percent have a Graduate degree as their highest educational degree. The average household income is $88,900, while the unemployment rate is 5.43 percent.

Puente Baluarte Continuation High School Profile [5]

Established in 1966, this study took place during Puente Baluarte's 50th anniversary. Puente Baluarte serves students enrolled in grades ten through twelve. The school has a large and open campus, which connects with another alternative school, a comprehensive school, an adult

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[4] To maintain confidentially of school and participants, all data presented in Community Profile was abstracted from document analysis of school data and district data.
[5] To maintain confidentially of school and participants, all data presented in Puente Baluarte Continuation High School Profile was abstracted from document analysis of school data and district data.

school, and the school district offices. [6] Puente Baluarte was identified and recognized by the state as a model continuation high school multiple times, most recently in 2015. In addition, the school has a long history of being recognized multiple times as a Model Continuation School under the California Department of Education (CDE) and the California Continuation Education Association (CCEA) Model Continuation School program. Puente Baluarte has been described by some students, as an institution that welcomes students with open arms, while some administrators have described the role of this institution as a revolving door of opportunities.

In the 2016-17 academic year, the average enrollment at Puente Baluarte was 514 students. The student-teacher ratio at Puente Baluarte is 27 students to one teacher. The staff at Puente Baluarte consists of one administrator, 15 teachers, 10.5 staff, three counselors, and four support staff. Puente Baluarte serves nearly five percent of all the district's enrolled students in addition to providing services to students from outside of the school district and the surrounding communities. Nearly 88 percent of the student population at Puente Baluarte identified as Latina/os. Most of the students come to Puente Baluarte as a result of falling behind on their academic credits, not discipline transfer. Other reasons include residential and school mobility. Some students come to Puente Baluarte because they are exiting the juvenile justice system or custody from foster care. Additionally, approximately 10-12 percent of the students at Puente Baluarte are on probation (see Table 2 for additional student enrollment demographics).

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[6] Puente Baluarte was moved to its present location in 1982.

Table 2

Puente Baluarte 2016-17 Academic Year Enrollment Demographics

Ethnicity	Female	Male	Total Enrollment	Total Percent
African American	4	2	6	1.2%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0	1	1	0.2%
Filipino	0	2	2	0.4%
Hispanic or Latino	164	290	454	88.3%
Pacific Islander	0	1	1	0.2%
White	14	30	44	8.6%
Not Reported	3	3	6	1.2%
Total	185	329	514	100.0%

Researcher's Positionality

Connection to Issues of Equity and Access in Alternative Education

As a working-class Latino male from Mexican-American heritage, born and raised in South Los Angeles, through my educational experiences in K-12 urban public schools I became aware of the inequities that exist in schools. I attended an overcrowded school that was overrepresented with Black and Latina/o students and had limited resources, like many other public schools across the nation. My school emphasized order and control, and had little access to rigorous coursework, college knowledge, and mental health counselors. As a result of the structure of order and control, many of my peers were pushed out of school and re-directed into the continuation high school located in the back of the comprehensive high school. After my peers transitioned into these environments, they had the intention of recovering their credits to

transition back into the comprehensive school, however, for multiple reasons many of them did not and they ended up departing from school altogether. My passion for this research topic began with these early instances of seeing my peers and other youth from my community being pushed into continuation schools, an education sector that has historically and continues to be marginalized from the broader education system.

Another motivation that contributes to my interest in pursuing this topic originates from my professional experience as a practitioner in alternative education settings. As an undergraduate student at California State University, Northridge (CSUN), I worked for the Mentoring to Overcome Struggles and Inspire Courage (MOSAIC) program, which facilitates undergraduate students to serve as youth counselors in various continuation high schools in southern California. The majority of the students I worked with in those settings were low-income students of color who were predominantly from Mexico and Central America. As a youth counselor, I worked individually with students to help them achieve short-term goals during the semester.

These experiences working with students in continuation schools contributed towards my interest in pursuing a Master's degree in bilingual school counseling. During my Master's program at New York University (NYU), I worked as a school counselor at an alternative learning center (suspension school) in the Bronx. Blacks and Latina/os (predominantly from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico) were overrepresented at this alternative school, as they served a short-term suspension from one week to three months. I observed many students of color being funneled into these alternative schools due to the zero-tolerance policies, which has contributed to the labeling and criminalization of students of color (Noguera, 2008; Rios, 2011). In addition, the facility at this alternative school contributed to the isolation and the deficit

narrative of alternative schools. For example, this institution was located in the basement of a large comprehensive school that was divided into five small comprehensive high schools. In addition to the school being in the basement, the school also applied practice and procedures that were similar to the prison system as students were closely "hyper-monitored" (Hurtado et al., 2015). When each student arrived at the school in the morning, they had to walk through metal detectors. The school enforced a "no electronics" policy; after being scanned by the school resource officers, students had to wait for the alternative school security guard to be escorted downstairs into the school. In addition, the structure of the classroom was divided by gender, as the school only had two classrooms, one for males and the other for females. While there were some tensions at the alternative school with their punitive practices, even though this school had many issues that needed to be improved, it is also important to not dismiss the important work and efforts of the institution to provide a nurturing and caring environment for the short amount of time students were at these suspension schools. In particular, it is important to acknowledge the school counselors who worked closely with a group of social workers from a community-based program to provide intensive counseling services to students and assist them during their transition back into their comprehensive school.

As previously mentioned, each alternative school is different. In this brief description of my positionality I described two examples of the nuances that exist in alternative schools through my professional experience. At the alternative high school in California, I focused on assisting students with test-taking to ensure they passed the CAHSSE, which determined eligibility for graduating and earning their high school diploma (Rodriguez & Arellano, 2016). In New York, the alternative learning center was a short-term suspension school, which applied similar practices and procedures to the prison system, but, they also attempted to provide a nurturing and

caring environment to students. Overall, my personal, professional, and research experiences have contributed to my passion to work with and for students and educators in alternative education broadly. It is important to note that my personal and professional experiences have shaped my perspective of how I view these schools that have the capability of reproducing inequality and contributing to cultural reproduction. However, I believe that alternative schools, when well executed, have the potential to provide students with a renewed opportunity to reinvent themselves and enact their agency in healthy ways that will contribute to their academic and social development. I also believe that it is imperative to note that my identity might of played a role in building trust, rapport, and comfort with the students and educators in this study, due to the knowledge and experiences I bring into these spaces. Therefore, this study attempts to build on my personal, professional, and research experiences by providing a rich, in-depth, and holistic perspective of one model continuation school in southern California. In the next section, I present a description of how I gained access to the continuation school and how I developed trust and rapport with the school principal from Puente Baluarte.

Gaining Entrée into School Site

The importance of gaining entrée into Puente Baluarte warrants attention. In addition to being a model continuation school, I was also interested in this particular school because of my previous work consulting for the Cruz School District. In my previous work, in 2016 my colleagues and I had presented a workshop for the school district on working with and for undocumented students and how to create a college going culture for undocumented students. During these workshops, I was able to connect with various educators including teachers and counselors from various high schools in the district. After the event, one of my colleagues and

friends who previously worked for Cruz School District served as the bridge for connecting me and establishing trust and rapport with Puente Baluarte's school principal.

In the spring of 2016, I met with the school principal at Puente Baluarte. In this initial meeting, I shared with the school principal my professional background as a youth counselor and school counselor in alternative school settings in Los Angeles and New York. In addition, I shared with her that the purpose of my current research is to spend extensive time in a school that has been identified by the state as a model continuation school in order to deeply understand unique characteristics of this institution. Furthermore, I told her how I was interested in understanding the school culture of this institution; the educators' expectations, values, and beliefs; and how educators view the student population they serve. In addition, I was interested in learning more about the kind of opportunities that the school provides to students after high school. Lastly, I was interested in how the school works with formerly incarcerated youth, foster care youth, homeless youth, pregnant teens or teen parents, immigrant youth, and gang-involved youth to help integrate them into Puente Baluarte.

During this initial meeting, the school principal communicated that she was open and willing for me to do research at her school. In addition, the school principal was familiar with the whole process of conducting research and writing a dissertation given that she had completed her doctorate in education and had also taught several courses at a college setting for educators interested in becoming administrators in K-12. After our initial meeting and several email exchanges back and forth, and after getting approved from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UCLA, I followed-up with the school principal about obtaining approval from the school district. She connected me with the right people and within one month I was cleared with both UCLA and the Cruz High School District to begin conducting my research.

In August of 2016 when I was ready to begin collecting data, I first met with the school principal. I reminded her of the purpose of my research, the amount of time I planned to spend at the school during the academic school year, and the various forms of data collection methods. In addition, I wanted to get a sense of how I could be of assistance to the school or if there was something that she wanted me to investigate in my research with the school. The school principal's main concern was to better understand if the institution has done a better job at decreasing the number of students who leave Puente Baluarte without knowing what to do or what is next. Additionally, the school principal shared that in the 2017-18 academic year, they would have their Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) visit that will evaluate and help school identity and implement school improvement needs and accountability support. In this visit, the school principal would like my input on the report or potentially use some of the data I have collected. Through this clearly communicated mutual understanding, I was able to establish a relationship with the school principal about my role as a researcher. In addition, there was an opportunity for me to help evaluate the school and give back to their institution as they prepare for their WASC visit and their accreditation renewal in the 2017-18 academic year. This conversation left me feeling supported in this collaborative work.

After leaving her office, the school principal sent an email with an attachment of my picture to the entire school staff at Puente Baluarte to introduce me. In addition, the school principal added me to the school's listserver to ensure that I was informed of the institution's daily activities. This email exchange was important as many of the educators became aware of my role, and the purpose of my frequent visit to the school and the various spaces on campus. This early introduction was pivotal towards the educators knowing me in addition towards building a relationship with most of the teachers, counselors, and school staff at Puente Baluarte.

During my time at Puente Baluarte, I continually informed the educators of my data collection timeline. First, in the fall, my goal was to only conduct observations in order to become familiar with the school and the members of this community. Second, in the spring, I would begin conducting interviews with students and educators. When some of the educators were curious to learn more about my role and work, I reflected on the previous work of Mike Rose (1995, 2012) and Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) to describe what I intended to do during my time in the field at Puente Baluarte.

I informed the educators and students that the goal of my work was to not continue the ongoing harmful rhetoric and deficit narratives about continuation schools, and to not give them a negative reputation. Drawing on the work of Lightfoot (1983), I intended to search for the "goodness" in continuation schools. Clearly there is no perfect institution as schools are complicated but my goal was to critically evaluate and highlight the important work that is done in Puente Balurate in addition to, highlighting the limitations and the potential growth that exist in these settings. Furthermore, I also emphasized that "goodness" in schools has a lot to do with the school's leadership. When a school is open for evaluation, it shows a lot about their confidence, and their open-mindedness for critique and how to find better alternatives on how to effectively work with and better serve students (Lightfoot, 1983). In this way, I thank the school principal, the educators, and the students for allowing me to be a part of their community and to engage in this important and critical work that is needed in these often-untold forgotten settings. In the next section, I introduce the procedures and the range of data collection methods that were used in this study.

The data for this study was collected during the 2016-2017 academic school year at

Puente Baluarte. I employed a diverse range of data collection methods including ethnographic

observations, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews with students and educators. In

the next section, I present each phase of data collection, the recruitment methods, and the

purpose of each data collection tool.

Phase 1: Ethnographic Observations and Document Analysis

Ethnographic Observations. The first phase of data collection started in the Fall of 2017,

and consisted of ethnographic observations through one full-academic year. The purpose of

beginning the first phase with ethnographic observations and document analysis was to become

familiar with the school context and the various members of Puente Baluarte community. The

observations provided me insight into the students', teachers', counselors', staff members', and

school administrators' daily activities, behaviors, relationships and exchanges in this setting

(Merriam, 2009). I conducted ethnographic observations both inside and outside of the

classroom, main office, college/career center (for more details see Appendix A). The

observations were conducted during school hours, lunchtime, and before and after school.

During these observations, I wrote field notes with highly descriptive and reflective information

of the observations within the setting and participants. Ethnographic observations allowed me to

better understand and observe the environment, which also contributed to my understanding of

the school culture that has been cultivated at Puente Baluarte.

Document Analysis. In alignment with the ethnographic observations, the first phase of

data collection continued with document analysis from Fall 2017 to the end of the academic year

in June 2017. Through the academic year, I collected school newsletters, flyers, school website,

community newsletter and the school application to be recognized as a model continuation school (Creswell, 2003). I collected various documents, including state data, to learn more about the student demographics in continuation high school across the state. In addition to state data, I collected school district data from administered surveys for students and educators, which mainly focused on their experiences and satisfaction of being at Puente Baluarte. The student opinion survey was administered in the Fall of 2016, in which 386 continuation youth were surveyed at Puente Baluarte. The student opinion survey provides descriptive information to get a general sense of the students' perspectives about the continuation school. While the staff opinion survey was administered in the Spring of 2017, all 36 certificated and classified employees from Puente Baluarte completed the staff morale opinion survey. The staff survey provides descriptive information about the educators' engagement, sense of belonging, feelings of trust and respect in working with students and educators, and their overall satisfaction working for the Cruz High School District.

Phase 2: Semi-Structured In-Depth Phenomenologically Interviews

The second and final phase of data collection consisted of semi-structured in-depth phenomenological interviews with students and educators at Puente Baluarte (Seidman, 2013). I employ the method of semi-structured in-depth phenomenologically interviews, as this interview approach draws on open-ended questions, which allows for the participants to reconstruct their experiences within the topic of study (Seidman, 2013). This interview method allows for the researcher or interviewer to build upon and explore the responses of participants to the questions posed. This approach, Seidman's (2013) three-part interview sequence focuses on the life history, details of experience, and reflection of meaning. In this study, the three-part interview sequence was conducted in one interview session that ranged from approximately 30-90 minutes

with each participant. Furthermore, the interviews complement the ethnographic observations and document analysis, as the interviews allowed for the researcher and participants to focus on a set of interview questions and to have the flexibility to discuss emerging topics based on the participants' responses (Merriam, 2009). Overall, this interview strategy allowed for more of a natural conversation, which provided insight into the school culture at Puente Baluarte.

The interviews were collected in two segments. The first set of interviews were conducted with six students at the end of December 2017. Of the six students I interviewed, four students were transferring back to their comprehensive school, one student would continue his schooling at Puente Baluarte, and one student had officially graduated early from continuation high school and continue their education at the local community college. This first segment of interviews allowed for me to get a sense of students' differing pathways; why some students decide to transfer back to the comprehensive school, while others decide to say at Puente Baluarte; and what the next steps might be for the students who graduate from Puente Baluarte. The second segment of interviews with students and educators were conducted from late March 2017 through June 2017. By the end of data collection, 33 students and nine educators had been interviewed. Each individual had their unique story and purpose in their role as a student or educator at Puente Baluarte. All interviews were conducted at Puente Baluarte in an empty quiet classroom. As a bilingual speaker in English and Spanish, my linguistic abilities allowed for me to conduct interview with students in both English and Spanish.

Student Interviews. 33 interviews were conducted with students at Puente Baluarte (see Table 3 for student interviews demographics). The interview participants were selected through purposeful and snowball sampling methods. Interview participants were selected for a diverse range of reasons to better understand how Puente Baluarte serves students who are homeless

youth, pregnant teens, teen mothers and fathers, foster youth, formerly incarcerated youth, probation youth, and/or immigrant youth. Since 90 percent of the student body at Puente Baluarte identifies as Latina/os there were some efforts to capture different narratives by race/ethnicity and gender. I became familiar with the unique stories of some of the students after being at the school site for several months and having multiple exchanges with students and educators. The teachers played a major role in helping with recruitment of the students as they recommend students for my study. Through the efforts of teachers, the school principal and other school staff, I was able to identify students for the study. In addition, I had the opportunity to individually engage and recruit students for interviews while spending time at the student center on campus. As a result of the small school setting, I was able to see the students in multiple settings, in various classrooms, before or after school, in the student center, and during various school activities.

At the beginning of each interview, I provided the students with a demographic questionnaire to collect background information (for more details see Appendix B). Interview questions focused on five broad categories: 1) experiences prior to continuation school 2) experiences at Puente Baluarte 3) relationships with peers and educators at Puente Baluarte 4) perceptions of the school structure and culture, and 5) future aspirations and perceptions of opportunities presented at Puente Baluarte (for more details see Appendix C).

Table 3

Interviews with Students from Puente Baluarte

Student (pseudonyms)	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Grade	Academic Goal
Tariq	Black	Male	10	Plans to Transfer to Comprehensive HS
Jalen	Black	Male	11	Plans to Transfer to Comprehensive HS
Jessica	Latina/o	Female	11	Plans to Transfer to Comprehensive HS
Jocelyn	Latina/o	Female	11	Plans to Transfer to Comprehensive HS

Margarito	Latina/o	Male	12	Transferred to Comprehensive HS
Jose	Latina/o	Male	12	Transferred to Comprehensive HS
Fernando	Latina/o	Male	12	Transferred to Comprehensive HS
Luis	Latina/o	Male	12	Transferred to Comprehensive HS
Teresa	Latina/o & White	Female	11	Plans to Graduate from Puente Baluarte
Maria	Latina/o	Female	11	Plans to Graduate from Puente Baluarte
Laura	Latina/o	Female	11	Plans to Graduate from Puente Baluarte
Alex	Latina/o	Male	11	Plans to Graduate from Puente Baluarte
Miguel	Latina/o	Male	11	Plans to Graduate from Puente Baluarte
Thomas	Latina/o & White	Male	11	Plans to Graduate from Puente Baluarte
Jenny	Latina/o	Female	12	Plans to Graduate from Puente Baluarte
Nancy	Latina/o	Female	12	Plans to Graduate from Puente Baluarte
Alberto	Latina/o	Male	12	Plans to Graduate from Puente Baluarte
Lorenzo	Latina/o	Male	12	Plans to Graduate from Puente Baluarte
Albert	Latina/o	Male	12	Plans to Graduate from Puente Baluarte
Monique	Black	Female	12	Graduated from Puente Baluarte
Mireya	Latina/o	Female	12	Graduate from Puente Baluarte
Martha	Latina/o	Female	12	Graduated from Puente Baluarte
Olivia	Latina/o	Female	12	Graduated from Puente Baluarte
Rigo	Latina/o	Male	12	Graduated from Puente Baluarte
Christian	Latina/o	Male	12	Graduated from Puente Baluarte
Francisco	Latina/o	Male	12	Graduated from Puente Baluarte
Omar	Latina/o	Male	12	Graduated from Puente Baluarte
Hector	Latina/o	Male	12	Graduated from Puente Baluarte
Pedro	Latina/o	Male	12	Graduated from Puente Baluarte
Nick	Latina/o	Male	12	Graduated from Puente Baluarte
Steve	White	Male	12	Graduated from Puente Baluarte
Raymond	White	Male	12	Graduated from Puente Baluarte
John	White	Male	12	Graduated from Puente Baluarte

Interviews with Educators. Nine interviews were conducted with educators at Puente

Baluarte towards the end of the academic year in the Spring of 2017 (see Table 4 for educators'

interviews demographics). The educators included the school principal, school counselor, student

advisor, and teachers[7]. The educators were selected based on the students' recommendations, as these educators were some of the institutional agents that were identified as supportive and caring and mentors by some of the students interviewed in this study. The interviews with educators took place in their classrooms or in their offices. The interviews with educators focused on five broad categories: 1) how they came to work in alternative schools 2) their philosophy as an educator 3) their perspectives of the school structure and culture 3) their perceptions of continuation high school students 4) their recommendations for future educators interested in this school context, and 5) what other schools can learn about this model continuation school (see Appendix D).

Table 4

Interviews with Educators from Puente Baluarte

Educator (pseudonyms)	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Position
Dr. Murphy	Female	White	School Principal
Mr. Liera	Male	Latina/o	School Counselor
Ms. Ramirez	Female	Latina/o	Student Advisor
Mr. James	Male	White	English Teacher
Ms. Rosales	Female	Latina/o	History Teacher
Mr. Smith	Male	White	Business Teacher
Mr. Nelson	Male	White	English Teacher
Ms. Campos	Female	Latina/o	Technology Teacher
Mr. Thomas	Male	White	Orientation Teacher

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[7] The courses teachers regularly teach vary from quarter to quarter, dependent upon students needs. In this study, I observed the subject the teachers described in Table 4 or during the interview they shared elaborated on their position as an educator at Puente Baluarte.

Data Analysis and Coding

After all the data was collected, the qualitative case study analysis process consisted of having interviews transcribed by a transcription services company. I read and cleaned up all transcripts for accuracy to ensure they captured the voices and meanings of the participants' word for word (Seidman, 2013). This process also included cleaning and transcribing some of the interviews from Spanish to English. For the purpose of this dissertation study, three students and three educators are the focal point of analysis in this study. The focal participants were selected to represent a diverse range of demographics, experiences, and roles and responsibilities at the institution. In the next section, I shared the rationale for crafting narrative profiles as a way of analyzing, interpreting, and sharing interview data (Seidman, 2013).

Rationale for Crafting Narrative Profiles and Themes

In this study, I crafted narratives profiles of focal participants and themes as a form to analyze, interpret, and share interview data (Seidman, 2013). While, there is no right way to share interview data (Miles & Huberman, 1984), in this study, I draw on the work of Seidman (2013) taking the steps to craft narrative profiles as it can be one rewarding ways of sharing interview data. In Figure 2, this study borrows from Seidman's work (2013) the three steps in the analysis and coding process: analyzing, interpreting, and sharing the work. In the first step of analyzing, one of the goals is to reduce and shape the interview material in a form that can be shaped or displayed. To this point, crafting a narrative profile of the lived experience of an individual is an effective way to share interview data and open it up for analysis and interpretation. In the second step of interpreting, as I crafted the profile and organize themes, I reviewed for consistency or inconsistency with the literature, and inquired about new insights

that build on the existing research literature. Furthermore, in this process of interpreting and crafting narrative profiles, it is critical to remain faithful to the words of the participant. The third and final step is sharing, as the narratives is one way of making meaning of the social world, but also that the narratives are co-constructed by both the participants and the interviewer, as the experience is connected to the context individuals navigate Lastly, there are limitations when it comes to sharing a profile as the narratives we shape of the participants we have interviewed are necessary limited. Their lives go on as our presentations of them are only for specific segments (Seidman, 2013).

Analyzing
- Study and reduce text
- Search for compelling passages
- Telling stories a compeling way to make sense of data
- Crafting profiles

Interpreting
- Crafting profiles and organizing themes
- Review for consistency and inconsistenty with literature
- Going beyond and providing new insight
- Remain faithful to participant words
- Researchers also make meaning

Sharing
- Narratives one way of making meaning of the social world
- The story is both the participant's and the interviewer's
- Link the individual experience to the social and organizational contexts within they navigate
- Narratives are limited

Figure 2. Analyzing, Interpreting, and Sharing Interviews: Crafting Narrative Profiles and Themes. Note. Modified version from *Seidman (2013)*

Additionally, triangulation of the different data sources from observation, field notes, and interviews was taken into account to help build a coherent justification for the narrative profiles and emerging themes (Creswell, 2003; Seidman, 2013). In addition, member-checks were conducted with a few select sample of the participants to ensure the validity of the data and to

determine if participants were being represented in an accurate and respectful way (Cresswell, 2007). In this way, the data analysis is a multistep process that requires data to be condensed and cleaned for a fresh understanding of the participants' experience (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013; Seidman, 2013).

Chapter 4: Continuation Youth Narratives of Agency:
Perspective of the School Structure and Culture

Continuation schools and the students attending them are often misrepresented in the research and policy as the headlines about continuation schools have overemphasized the danger in this educational sector, and have labeled continuation schools as "dumping grounds" for unwanted students (Kelly, 1993; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). In addition, students have been labeled as "low-achievers" or "losers" for not academically thriving in comprehensive schools (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). The limited research on continuation school students often leaves students out of the conversation thus perpetuating the negative representation of these schools and students (Malagon, 2010). Limited research has examined the reality of students' experiences in continuation schools. This chapter sheds light on this vulnerable student population, as it provides their perspectives of their day-to-day experience within the school structure and culture at Puente Baluarte Continuation School. In addition, it will highlight the agency of students which refers to their individual actions, beliefs, and perceptions of their own reality (Rodriguez, 2013, 2014). Drawing on the PUEDES framework, the agency of students will show how it is context-specific, as agency varies on the function of the culture and structure of the continuation school (Rodriguez, 2013, 2014). Ultimately, the student experiences and perceptions will shed light and build on the little existing research on promising practices and possibilities in continuation schools (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008).

Chapter Four will draw on student interviews, observations, and document analysis to analyze and triangulate the data to address these research questions: In what ways, if any, does the model continuation school's structure and culture afford students with opportunities to improve their academic and social conditions? How do students and educators negotiate their

agency within the school structure and culture of a model continuation school? How do students and educators experience the day-to-day instructional and interpersonal interaction at this model continuation school? What lessons can be learned from this model continuation school that can inform the structure and culture of other educational systems? And, how do students and educators discuss what lessons can be learned that can be applicable for other public schools?

First, I present three student narrative profiles of Laura, Tariq, and Jenny, as they each shed light on the diverse student experiences at Puente Baluarte. Three themes emerged from the student narrative profiles: 1) Continuation Youth Assets: Value of Education and Aspirations; 2) Culture of Control: School Safety and Hyper-Surveillance; and 3) Broader Challenges: Institutional Support Beyond Academics. This section will first provide a short description of each student, an introduction to the theme, and the narrative profile of each student. After each narrative profile, I will discuss the sub themes that emerged from their narrative profiles. Each narrative profile and theme will be supported and triangulated with other interview data, observations, and a descriptive student opinion survey. Finally, the chapter will end with a discussion connecting the findings to the research questions, literature, and theoretical frameworks that guide this study.

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Continuation Youth Assets:

Value of Education and Future Aspirations

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The first theme that will be presented is —*Continuation Youth Assets: Value of Education and Future Aspirations.* Scholars have found that a general perception for students that are pushed out into alternative or continuation schools is the common profile of being "losers" or "low-achievers" for falling behind academically in comprehensive schools (Kelly, 1993; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). However, this perception demoralizes students even more as

it puts blame on the individual students, without any accountability on the structure and culture of schools (Rodriguez, 2013, 2015). Furthermore, this narrow focus of blaming individual youth does not provide a full account of the profile of continuation students, as it leaves out an important their assets and strengths they bring into this disenfranchised sector. To this point, *Laura's* narrative is one of many examples of the untapped potential of high-achieving and civically engaged youth in continuation schools. Laura is a Latina and has heritage from Central America and Mexico. She is currently in her junior year and intends to graduate from Puente Baluarte. Laura is the oldest in her family and her parents' divorce had an impact on her academic and social development. Laura's narrative provides a glimpse into the narratives of immigrant youth and their competing responsibilities since she takes care of her younger siblings and has a part-time job to help her mom with finances.

Laura, "I can accomplish things and I'm not a failure"

> The [comprehensive] school was hard, it was honestly just rough for me because it was a lot of drama and then people would pick on me because I was a teacher's pet. So I stopped being a teacher's pet to fit into society and it was just stupid of me, but I just got tired of being picked on… My parents were going through a very rough time. So they split, which meant I had to become something bigger than myself and I had to make that extra push to make it the new life I guess …So we moved out here with my mom and it was a trip [difficult] to get to school on time…I lived pretty far from my school. I lived like an hour away…I would take the kids [siblings] to school, get on those extra two buses, take a train and then get to my school. I'm the oldest…So that was a mission!

> It's better. We found a little house out here. I like it better out here [school] because I got a new start. Not everybody knows my history and not everybody is going to call me the teacher's pet or I actually get like praise for being who I am instead of being picked on for who I am actually!

> I think one thing that did help me was me earning my gold award to show that I can accomplish things and I'm not a failure. I'm a Girl Scout. But it's like a big deal to earn it [gold award]. So I wanted to show people that I can do things and not give up. I did it in Tijuana. What I did was—I collected school supplies and backpacks for children who can't afford them…I did some of my own research because I wanted to make sure that my project was going to benefit somebody who needed it…And I worked with a non-

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profit organization called Healing Hearts Across Borders. What they do is they go down every four months and provide free medical and dental care to people who need it. They also provide food, clothing and like necessities. So, that's what I did.

They [Puente Baluarte] help get students where they need to be or where they want to be. Like the counselors what they do is they sit with you and you give them your game plan and they tell you what to do get there. So they're like your coach. I like to mention Mr. Liera because he is my counselor. And he would tell me, he's like Laura what's your game plan, talk to me and I'll tell you how to get there. And I was like, okay coach and then he started laughing. So, that really benefited me as a person.

It was a big deal for me because I'm trying to figure out what I want to do with my life. So, I think me being open to college really benefitted me. So I like being open to new things and new possibilities especially because [local community college] is offering high school students [classes]…So I will walk around campus and I would see the Sociology 101 class being offered. My teachers would talk about it…So, he'll [community college counselor] be there and then we talk about [community college] offers, my interest in going to [community college], we talked about the classes, the deadlines, the assignments, and stuff like that. But when I first got into the sociology class, he would come talk to me and then he would be like okay, so how are you liking it so far…for maybe like every three weeks like how are you like. It get's good.

I think that the relationship Puente Baluarte has with [community college] is really good…I think as long as the students are willing to show, then yes because for example like the sociology class. This whole room was filled like it was 40 people or 50 people and you can't even get a chair to sit in. So you had to be here early if you wanted to sit down. And then people kept disappearing and it got to the point where there was only like 20 of us in here. And there were only 4 from [Puente Baluarte] here.

It was fun [community college class] because we actually got like that extra perspective on life like I though just walking to the grocery store people would like give me a look and I found out why. And then we talked about like stereotyping and how people in society today, we get judged by the way we look, by the color of our skin. So, I liked it a lot because I was always into that stuff. I think that the theories that we learned in there really just blows your mind like knowing that actually happens without you knowing it…She [community college instructor] also has you get in a group and talked with different people and worked in class assignments. So, we would get perspective of everybody else's vision or the ways they see it so, we would benefit from other people.

In this study, Laura and many other students shared their perspectives and value for

education and orientation towards their aspirations and experience in schools. The narrative of

Laura documents the assets and strengths of continuation youth as they persist in school, despite

the many obstacles outside of school that are out of their control. In her interview and observations, Laura is one of the many students at Puente Baluarte that thrives in the classroom and is highly engaged in multiple clubs and organizations on campus. An important asset that is often overlooked in the literature of continuation schools, is the contribution of continuation student population and their civic engagement. For instance, Laura's narrative is a testament of the potential of continuation students and their ability to contribute to society and care for others. She described the importance of researching and connecting with an organization that will benefit and serve communities in need. In her service project, Laura connected with a non-profit organization to provide supplies and backpacks for children in Tijuana, Mexico. In her own words, Laura described that earning her gold award as a girl scout was important for her and to show others that she's not a "failure." In fact, this form of engagement and recognition for Laura describes part of her identity development and shifting her perspective from individual self-blame towards a healing process that contributed towards finding purpose in her life. Overall, these are stories that have not been captured or received the necessary attention to help shift the perspective about this student population in educational research. However, Laura's work and contribution did not go unnoticed within the Cruz School District, as she was recognized by the school district with an award for her service project with a non-profit organization and her excellence was celebrated in the monthly electronic newsletter sent to all members of the school district. Therefore, this is also an intentional practice by the school to highlight and celebrate the excellence that exist among continuations schools and the important work that continuation youth are doing in the community.

To further support Laura's narrative profile and theme, the student opinion data shows that over 81 percent of the students at Puente Balurate reported that they believe a high school

education is "really important" (see Table 5). The majority of continuation youth at Puente

Baluarte do see the value of an education and believe it is an important element of their

development. Nearly 77 percent of the students at Puente Baluarte reported being aware of the

courses they need and the amount of credits they must earn before they can be awarded a high

school diploma (see Table 5). These findings show students' commitment and dedication to their

education. A great number of students at Puente Baluarte are "on-task," meaning that they are

aware of how many credits they need to reach their academic goal. In part, the school culture at

Puente Baluarte contributed to students being "on-task" as the school counselors are available to

meet with students individually about their academic progress and goals. Additionally, Laura's

narrative provides an example of the important role of counselors in continuation schools, as she

described them as important educators that help students reach their academic goals, as it varies

for each student. Furthermore, students received a copy of their transcript after each academic

quarter, which contributes to them being "on-task," but it also fosters a culture among students to

interact and connect with their peers about their academic credits, progress, and goals. Thus, it

also shows the culture of care among peers, as they check-in with another in terms of their

academic progress, which was something I observed in the classroom and multiple spaces

outside of the classroom.

Table 5

Value of Education

(*n* = 386)	%Yes	%No	% Not Sure
Do you think that a high school education is really important?	81	10	9
Do you know which courses you need and how many credits you must earn before you can be awarded a high school diploma?	77	11	12

The student opinion survey provides further descriptive information about continuation students' plans after high school (see Table 6). The study opinion survey provides description information about the multiple aspirations students hold from: college/university; full-time work; military; and unsure.

Table 6

Percentage of Students Plans After High School

(*n*=386)	College/University	Full-time work	Military	Unsure
What do you plan to do after high school?	55%	21%	9%	16%

In response to a question about students' plans after high school, 55 percent of the students reported "college/university" in their plans, 21 percent marked "full-time work," 9 percent stated "military," and 16 percent stated "unsure." Of great importance is how more than half of the continuation students responded with the intention of wanting to pursue higher education after high school. Thus, this descriptive finding in the survey shows that students in continuation high school value and care about their education and have educational and occupational aspirations. While more than one-fifth of the students mentioned that they want to work full-time after high school, it is important to note that some of the students in this study already juggle working part-time with school and other family responsibilities. Additionally, a small percentage of students mentioned military as an option after high school, which was common in some of the observations and interviews with students, both male and females. Lastly, over 16 percent stated "unsure," which is something that the school administrators have

strategically considered in their efforts to reduce the percentage of students who are unsure about their plans after high school.

The narrative of Laura also provides an important perspective regarding the quality of education and instruction she received inside the classrooms. In her interview, Laura, argued:

> People think that they're just going to get packets coming in [to Puente Baluarte], no! You actually sit in the class and they teach you for the right way and I think that here it's more beneficial for children to come because there's not that many kids and you get more one-on-one with the teacher, especially in math. That's when a lot of people come and help. We have a math tutor in there and we have the teacher. So, it's double the help in the class which is a really nice thing.

In her own words, Laura described the learning that takes place inside the classroom, as she described the additional support they receive in the classroom and the importance of having a tutor in the math classrooms to get the additional support. The student opinion survey further supplements Laura's narrative about the quality of their education at Puente Baluarte (see Table 7). In response to the question "How would you rate the quality of the education at this high school?" 19 percent marked "excellent," 52 percent marked "good," 20 percent marked fair, five percent marked "poor," and four percent had no opinion. The students' perspective signals that they are receiving a quality education, in which continuation youth are satisfied with their education at Puente Baluarte. This is one of many examples of the need to explore students' perceptions regarding the curriculum and instruction to highlight the nuances that exist in schools, in particular, their experience at Puente Baluarte.

Table 7

Quality of Education at Puente Baluarte

(*n*=386)	% Excellent	%Good	% Fair	% Poor	% No Opinion
Overall, how would you rate the quality of the education at this high school?	19	52	20	5	4

The narrative of Laura and other continuation youth are prime examples of how continuation

schools can serve as "safety nets" to support and help students reinvent themselves. To better

understand the perspectives of continuation youth, the student opinion survey posed questions

regarding preparation and opportunities for personal and professional growth at Puente Baluarte

(see Table 8).

Table 8

Opportunities for Personal and Professional Growth at Puente Baluarte

(*n*= 386)	% Exceptionally Well	% Well	% Adequately	% Poorly
How well do you think your school is preparing you for: College or other educational options after high school	21	49	27	4
How well do you think your school is preparing you for: A career after high school	20	51	22	7
How well do you think your school is preparing you for: Real life problems and responsibilities	31	39	19	11

The student opinion asked whether students believe Puente Baluarte has prepared them for college or other educational options after high school, a career after high school, and real life problems and responsibilities. These opportunities are collectively important for the development of students in and out of the classroom, thus, this topic is important to explore. First, in response to a question about perceptions of how Puente Baluarte is preparing them for college or other educational options after high school, 21 percent of the students marked "exceptionally well," 49 percent marked "well," 27 percent marked "adequately," and four percent marked "poorly." Second, in response to a question about how Puente Baluarte is preparing the students for a career after high school, 20 percent of the students reported "exceptionally well," 51 percent reported "well," 22 percent reported "adequately," and seven percent reported "poorly." Finally, in regards to a question about how students think Puente Baluarte is preparing them for real life problems and responsibilities, 31 percent of the students reported "exceptionally well," 39 percent reported "well," 19 percent reported "adequately," and 11 percent reported "poorly." Overall, the survey shows that students feel supported by their school and prepared for life after high school.

In Laura's narrative we learn about her involvement in the continuation school and community college partnership that provides students access to dual credit courses at Puente Baluarte. Puente Baluarte is one of few alternative schools that have a partnership with their local community college. Therefore, the narrative of Laura provides a starting point to unpack the experiences of students in dual credit courses in continuation schools, but also other elements of the partnerships among the continuation schools and community college partnership. Laura is one of the few students in the continuation schools that completed the Introduction to Sociology course offered by the local community college. In her experience, she shared gaining a deeper

understanding and incorporating the theories learned in class into her own experiences. Furthermore, she acknowledges the community college instructor ability to foster dialogue and engagement among students. For instance, through class assignments Laura had the opportunity to learn from others and her own perspective on a topic discussed in class. Despite Laura's narrative of highlighting the "goodness" in this partnership, during my observations and interviews with other students at Puente Balurate, I found that of the 40 students who enrolled in the college level courses, many of them did not persist in the community college dual credit course. In short conversations with other students, some of the reasons why students did not complete was due to the amount of pressure of trying to balance regular school and other life circumstances with the community college course. Additionally, students described how the time of the class did not align with their scheduled due to transportation issues, given that the class was after school, but some had to leave immediately after school to take the bus.

Although the partnership with the local community college is not perfect, there were other critical components of the program that contributed to students transition and enrollment into the community college sector after graduation. For example, Mireya, a Latina student who graduated from Puente Baluarte and enrolled in the local community college, described how the partnership with the local community college was an important program for her academic development. Furthermore, she emphasized the pivotal role of the community college counselor who met with the students on a weekly basis at Puente Baluarte. Mireya noted:

> [The community college counselor] showed me the classes that I would have to take for the major that I want to do. He actually helped me apply to [local community college]. So, if it wasn't for him I would have probably never done it and I'll probably just be overstressing myself in trying to apply for the [local community college].

Despite the challenges with the dual credit courses, Mireya provides additional element into other benefits of the continuation school and community college partnership. In this way, having a community college liaison on-campus on a weekly basis was important, as Mireya had the support from the community college counselor, as he would help Mireya and other students enroll into community college, inform them about majors and careers, financial aid, and work-study opportunities. Mireya graduated early from high school and was the valedictorian of her class at Puente Baluarte. Through my observations, I had the pleasure of seeing Mireya deliver her keynote speech and cross the stage during her graduation. After completing her first semester of community college, Mireya returned to Puente Baluarte to share her experience as a former student at Puente Baluarte with community board members during the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) committee review. In her interview and during this observation, Mireya described her growth, development, and the support she received from Puente Baluarte to help her transition into higher education. In my interview and observations with Mireya, this is one of the many examples of why access to alumni is important for them to share their experiences as a former student with educators or current students. However, this was only one occasion, thus is something that Puente Baluarte should considering targeting more efforts to engage, connect, and maintain a relationship with alumni and/or former students. Overall, like Mireya, Laura plans to enroll in community college once she graduates from continuation school, therefore, her narrative and other students show the assets of continuation youth and the need to celebrate and highlight the assets of this overlooked educational sector.

Culture of Control: School Safety and Hyper-Surveillance

The second theme that will be highlighted focuses on—*Culture of Control: School Safety and Hyper-Surveillance*. Tariq is an African-American male in his sophomore year at Puente

Balurate. Tariq was 16 years old and has been attending Puente Baluarte with his older brother for nearly six months. Tariq and his older brother were referred by a comprehensive school outside of the Cruz School District to enroll at Puente Baluarte to accelerate their credit recovery. Tariq and his brother plan to transfer to a comprehensive high school out of the district for the 2017-18 academic year. Tariq shared with me his mixed feelings about his time at Puente Baluarte. He feels he is thriving academically at Puente Baluarte, but he also faces challenges as one of the few Black male students and has tensions with the school resource officers (SRO's) at school.

Tariq, "It's more of the security guards that are the problem."

> I can see that [Puente Baluarte is a model continuation school] because the teachers are very helpful. They're engaging. They always have a good attitude. They're positive. They're actually helping you even when at my regular school, I don't get that type of interest in me. Going here, it feels good actually. All my teachers are very helpful. If I ask for extra credit, they'll give me some extra credit work to do. They'll congratulate me if I do good. Yeah, it feels really good to be here, so I can see that…The teachers are the upside of our school. One of my teachers, Mr. Felix, the one I was just in right now, I walk in his class, he always has a smile. He said, "What's up, man?" He's so chill. I look forward going to his class because I know that he's always going to be happy and have a smile on his face…I like all the teachers here. I don't think the teachers really see us as different students. I haven't really noticed that really. Then even my counselor, I don't think she's treated us any different or anything. I think it's all just pretty much the same.

> Students themselves, I don't really see much going on with that [relationship]…It's kind of lonely. I don't know who [peers] to talk to, but at the same time, I don't want to talk to anybody. I'm just trying to focus on getting my stuff and doing good out here. I don't want to make no friends, but at the same time, there are no friends to make anyway. The ones I've tried to talk to, they're like super loud and stuff. I don't know. The Mexicans here, no offense, the Mexicans here, they're not racist, but some of them, they give you a look. I was just like, okay, so I just keep walking and stuff…

> It's really not much the kids' problem. It's more of the security guards that actually are the problem…One of them was being super racist to me one day. It was after school, and then the principal says that we can stay after school for 45 minutes. It wasn't 45 minutes. He came up to me directly and he said, "What are you doing here? You must go to the other continuation school, because those are for the other kids." I didn't know what that meant or anything. Then my friends, that were my friends first. They were Mexican.

They were sitting next to me. He wasn't looking to them. I said, "What about them?" He said, "They're fine." I said, "What do you mean by that?" He said, "You have to leave." Then he starts talking to my brother. He said, "You'll have to leave too."

Then I don't know, he mumbled something under his breath. I don't know if I heard something different, but it was a racial slur. I got up, and then I told the principal about it the next day. She seemed like she didn't really care, or she seemed like she already heard the problem before…I felt disrespected kind of. She didn't really do anything. She didn't even look at me. I said, "I have to talk to you." I talked to her. I told her what happened. She said, "Oh, yeah. Okay. Well, just don't stay after school no more." I'm like, whose side are you supposed to be on? She didn't really do nothing about it. She didn't have no follow-up questions and no nothing. It seemed like nothing happened. She probably didn't even talk to him about it. That's what I feel like.

Ever since then, he [school resource officer] mad dogs me a lot. I look over in his direction, he'll give me the meanest mad dog ever. His little lackey friend [other school resource officer], he seems like he just follows him everywhere and does whatever he does. He's just trying to look up to him and all that, so he just copies him. It just gets me like, why are you doing that to me? I didn't do nothing to you…I don't know why he's targeting me or anything. I do think it's because I'm Black. That's how I feel like…No, I don't. I don't think that they [school resource officers] make anybody feel safe.

They do that once in a while. They do random drug checks. That's happened once, the whole drug thing. They'll go into classes. They'll tell everybody to leave their stuff. They'll take everybody out of class, and then they'll sniff. The dogs come and sniff the bags. Then whoever has some drugs or has scent of drugs, they'll get sent to the counselor's office to get checked and all that…To me, it seems like it's extra …it's kind of extra. I don't do any drugs, so that's just wasting my time. I came here to learn and do something…It'll take up like 10 minutes, 15 minutes, just for them to search, just for the dog to smell the bags and all that. Then we'll have to wait.

I've had talks with people before about what I want to do in life, and I really didn't care. But now, if I have a talk, I'll actually be interested in my future…. The more you have the talks with other people about future and stuff, the more I'm interested in my future, the more I want it, the more I need to push to get there. I think about it constantly, like, what am I doing, what else can I do? I think the other kids, something just hasn't clicked yet to where this is happening; this is happening now, you need to get your stuff together, and if you don't, you will not pass high school. If you don't pass high school, what type of life will you have?... Coming here, it changed my perspective about how everything is… I want to get that stuff out [catch up on credits] of the way so next year when I go to this new school, I'll have a clean slate. No one would know me. They know nothing about me. Teachers won't have any perspective on me or anything. I'll just be good.

Despite the institution being acknowledged as a model continuation school, the narrative of Tariq provides insight into the tensions he has experienced as a Black male in a predominately Latina/o campus, but more importantly the discrimination by school resource officers (SRO's) on campus. The narrative of Tariq serve as reminder of the culture of control that exist in schools, as Black males often feel targeted by the school resource offices in continuation school. Furthermore, being one of three Black males on campus, Tariq felt dismissed and his voice silent by the lack of intervention by school administrators. Despite the efforts of Puente Baluarte to serve all students, it is important to not overlook the experience of other racial/ethnic groups.

Tariq's narrative aligns with the minority of students from the student opinion survey which find they are not being treated with respect by their peers (20%) and by other staff (16%; Table 9). Tariq's narrative and the 20 and 16 percent of the students who not feel respected, diverges from the over half of the continuation youth who feel that students respect one another (56%) and by the staff (65%).

Table 9

Respect in Continuation School

(*n* = 386)	% Yes	% No	% Not Sure
Do you think students at this high school are being treated with respect by other students?	56	20	24
Do you think students at this high school are being treated with respect by other staff?	65	16	19

However, Tariq's narrative profile described that the problem is not so much with other students, but more with the school resource officers on campus.

To get a sense of students' perceptions regarding their safety in continuation school, the student opinion survey data asked students about their safety in school (see Table 10).

Table 10

Safety in Continuation School

(*n* = 386)	% Always	% Mostly	% Rarely	% Never	% No Real Opinion
Do you feel your school is a safe place to be?	25	48	8	11	9

When students were asked to respond if they believe Puente Baluarte is a safe place to be, 25 percent marked "Always," 48 percent marked "Mostly," eight percent marked "Rarely," eleven percent marked "Never," and nine percent marked "No Real Opinion." While, the student opinion survey showed that many of the students do feel safe at school, the interview data with students documented how many of the students fear for their own safety before enrolling in continuation school due to the messages they have received about gangs and school violence in these spaces. However, to better understand how the school culture contributes to student safety, in an interview with Mateo a Latino male, he described how the school culture at Puente Baluarte fosters the opportunity for many students to reconstruct broken or unhealthy relationships with other peers, as Mateo argued:

> everybody here is just focused in school…nobody here has problems… like people who [I] had problems with back [in comprehensive] school got kicked out here too. They don't want no problems why? Because they are conscious that they got to move on.

Mateo describes how the structure at Puente Baluarte contributes to the school safety, as many students are aware of this renewed opportunity. Additionally, it is important to note that

many of the students in the student opinion survey reported that Puente Baluarte is a safe place, however we learn from student interviews the ways in which students do not feel safe on campus. The findings of this study also provide an important perspective of the culture of control that exist at Puente Baluarte. While most of the students described Puente Baluarte as a safe space with minimal gang activity or school violence, one of the common concerns discussed by the students educators was the culture of control and hyper-surveillance. During my first week conducting observations outside of the classroom, I witnessed the punitive practice of random drug searches on campus. These punitive efforts were conducted by a team, which included the school police officers, school resource officers, male counselors, and a trained dog. During these random drug searches, the team visited each of the classrooms and all students were escorted out of their classroom. While the students waited outside for nearly five to ten minutes, the team searched the classroom for drugs and weapons. In some cases, both male and female students were escorted to the school counselor officer or another empty office to be interrogated about some of their belongings.

This initial observation was not an isolated case as I observed other instances where these punitive practices took place. For example, several months into data collection, while I was on my way to an empty classroom to conduct a student interview with Mia, a Black female student, we observed a student being pulled out of the classroom during these random drug searches on campus. During the interview, I asked Mia about her thoughts about this incident that had just occurred, and she expressed her own experiences in elementary school in Alabama and how she was fully aware of these zero-tolerance policies and how students were being targeted by the school resource officers and school counselors. Furthermore, many of the students shared different perspectives about the random drug searches on campus, as some of the students

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expressed that they agree with the policy since many of the students bring drugs onto the campus. Many of the students have been socialized to think this practice is normal, but there are others who push back against this practice. Other students described how they were upset with this punitive practice as it was a form of harassment and that the school should not assume that students have drugs all the time. For example, in the interview with Mia, she elaborated on this punitive policy and the implication it has on continuation students:

> Honestly, I would never have anything on me like that'll be like illegal or like against the policies. So, it was kind of shitty because when people like me have do that stuff it's kind of unfair, you know?

In this short exchange, Mia discussed her frustrations with this school policy that often times targets individuals and unfairly labels or pulls students out of their classroom when they do not have anything in their possession. This practice in the school contributes to the culture of control and leads school resource officers to target students of color on campus.

Despite a great proportion of students feeling connected to adult educators and feeling satisfied about being a student at Puente Baluarte, Tariq provides an alternative perspective that warrants close attention for how continuation schools serve students of color and how does the student experience vary among racial/ethnic minority groups. Despite Puente Baluarte being recognized as a model institutions, the "imperfections" of their culture of control was hyper-visible during my observations and student interviews. Thus, there is a need to explore more alternative practices to shift away from the culture of control, specifically in an institution that has been stigmatized for decades.

Broader Challenges: Institutional Support Beyond Academics

The third and final theme in this chapter focuses on —*Broader Challenges: Institutional Support Beyond Academics*. Continuation schools enroll a great number of foster youth,

probation youth, homeless youth, and/or pregnant and parenting students (Ruiz de Velasco et al.,

2008), thus, this theme explores the social-emotional support that Puente Baluarte provides to

their vulnerable student population. This theme is reflected in Jenny's narrative, a Latina

(Mexican-American) female in her senior year at Puente Baluarte. She plans to graduate from

her continuation school. Since the age of five, she has been in the foster care system and has

experienced unstable living situations as she transitioned from one home and school to another.

Jenny has attended over seven middle schools and eight high schools (comprehensive and

alternative) during her educational trajectory. From the interviews and informal exchanges with

Jenny, we learn more about her distant relationship with her family in addition to her experiences

being a teen parent, a foster youth, and being formerly gang-involved and incarcerated. In

addition, we also learn about the institutional support she has received to continue and further her

education.

Jenny, "My life was like a rollercoaster"

> So, it has always been like a back and forth thing. I'm going to a regular high school and then continuation. Well, my whole life I had been moving back and forth going to city to city, home to home. It's like nothing new to me…[but]it does back track me a lot. Like I could have been done last year, but moving [homes and schools] affected my grades.

> I'm in the system. I'm a foster kid. Sometimes there will be issues with the person in the house or sometimes with me. I was younger before and I wouldn't care about what I did...I feel like I could do what I want because I have been on my own since I was five and like my mother hasn't been in my life...but since I'm living my life with other people that are not my family, I feel like I could do whatever I want. Now that I'm 18 it's more hard to feel more like, I'm 18 like I could do whatever I want. So a lot of my anger will move me around or sometimes I will make choices thinking it's going to be better for me.

> My life was like a rollercoaster. And my son was a surprise I found that I was pregnant when I was 5 months... And I felt like, my son was my life saver, I feel like God send me him for a reason, for getting out the hood, getting out from jerks, like I was really bad at the age of 13. At age 13 gang banging, having drugs, doing done things that nobody should be doing at that age… like it is just a stupidest thing I ever did and my son help me a lot like keep up me back to school. I had dropped out in middle school.

And now that I have a kid, I have somebody there I have to take care of. I have somebody there I have to work for, I have to prove that I'm somebody, but I want my son to be proud of me and be like, I was 13 pregnant, I was living in the street for two years and a half...I have been in the system for 18 years...so it was hard for a while...I'm trying to finish school and live with my kid...I am trying to graduate this year from [Puente Baluarte.]

They [Puente Baluarte] have a daycare here. I think that's a good thing. I never seen a school that provides a daycare that's free. I used to have a class in daycare. That's why I look up to them [Puente Baluarte] a lot because they help us. No school would do this, no school will be like oh there's going be daycare for the girls so they wouldn't drop out or for the fathers, there's both, there's guys here [too].

The counselors, everybody in the office, teachers pretty much everybody that works here knows where I stay [group home]. They don't know my whole life, but they know where I stay and who I stay with. The principals she knows my situation, she knows that I'm in the system…I had gotten in a fight, they don't tolerate fights… but she still kept me. I got suspended, but I still stay here…When I need help she will help me out however she can. She's [school principal] a really good person.

I want to go to [local community college] and then from there transfer to [local public four-year college]. The reason why I want to go because I want to major in criminal justice, when I was a little girl I always wanted to be a cop even though my family was gang members and even myself I was a gang member. I've seen my uncle die in front of me like gang members and like – the cops didn't do anything about it. There is a time I wanted to be that cop that's going to help the community. But now that I think about it the cops now are like really bad or what they're doing and there's good cops out there, but for the good cops, the good cops look like bad cops… and I still want to be in criminal justice… I don't have to be a cop.

Jenny's narrative highlights the various supports the Puente Baluarte provides for foster youth and teen parents. Jenny shared how educators and some of her peers at Puente Baluarte are aware of her being a foster youth. For example, some of Jenny's roommates from her foster placement also attended and graduated from Puente Baluarte. In the interviews with Jenny and other teen parents, they highlighted the amount of support they received from Puente Baluarte. Cruz School District supports pregnant and parenting students through the Infant Development Center (IDC) that offers free childcare to all teen parents in the district. Puente Baluarte students

who are pregnant or parenting can work in the childcare center for elective credit. A labor and delivery nurse meets with teen parents twice a month to support the health of both the parent and the child. As a teen parent, Jenny highlighted the importance of having a space and a resource for teen parents, as they provide access to day care in addition to providing courses to learn how to raise their children. Furthermore, at times this space serves as a place for students to build community with other teen parents at the school.

The support that teen parents received at Puente Baluarte is crucial. In this study, the narrative of Jenny and other girls of color described how housing instability and living in multiple foster care facilities negatively impacted their school attendance. In Jenny's case as a teen parent and foster youth she has experienced multiple challenges, in which, at time she stopped attending school due to her housing instability. For students like Jenny and other teen parents the role of motherhood influence their academic reengagement and fueled their desire to complete high school to also disrupt those negative stereotypes of teen mothers.

In Jenny's narrative, the broader challenge of housing instability is prevalent in her interview and other continuation youth's stories in this study. Not surprisingly, Puente Baluarte has a high enrollment of students with housing instability situations due to being homeless or foster youth. These unstable conditions are a challenge, as Psychologist Abraham Maslow (1962) has documented how basic human needs including security, housing, and nutrition are needed for the healthy development of children and children's transition into well-adjusted adults. In Jenny's case, we learn about these broad challenges early in her life and not having some of those basic human needs, in large part due to her unstable living situations in the foster care system. Consequently, these challenges of continually moving from one school or home placement to another affected Jenny's socio-emotional and academic development.

Unfortunately, in Jenny's situation, the issue of housing instability started as early as elementary school. Since elementary school, Jenny recalled having attended multiple schools because of her unstable living situations in the foster care system. While at Puente Baluarte, one of the advantages of continuation school is their small enrollment size, as many of the educators can connect and provide individualized attention, a quality that Puente Baluarte is known for. Specifically, school counselors at Puente Baluarte are aware of the broader challenges students face. As Mr. Liera, one of the school counselors, noted:

> A major problem is the effect of the amount of our families that move around as much as they do. They, right now are living here in Cruz, maybe four months ago, they were living in South Central. A month from now, they are going to be living in Moreno Valley. It's just wherever the work is or wherever they can find somewhere to be and that really affects the students a lot because if they are moving around so much, they can't build a base of friends, or they can't feel that they fit in anywhere because that is going to be yanked from them and they are going to be gone somewhere else next month or next year. They are always waiting for that move or whatever it is. So, all that stuff definitely affects who they are and how they are able to perform at school.

Mr. Liera shared that housing instability is a broader challenge for continuation students because they impede students' ability to thrive academically, nurture healthy relationships, and feel a sense of belonging on campus. In addition, many continuation students who have unstable living situations alluded to the fear of establishing relationships with peers or educators because they are unsure of their living situation and could possibility be in a different school the following day or week. Thus, the narrative of Jenny sheds light on the challenges students face, but also brings to light the importance of educators to listen to students, as she expressed:

> Some kids need a lot of help in life – somebody to listen to them. It's like some people [students] need some – like somebody to go to or run to. If they could just kind of see our perspective, a lot of kids will want to do some stuff. You know you work with a kid that you know – try to listen – you don't have to do what they want you to do, but at least listen to them and I feel like they will be helpful.

The last statement is important to understand how educators could assist continuation youth, and the practice of listening can go a long way for continuation youth. As in the case of Jenny, she feels supported and validated by the educators at the institution and they have the resources to support her as teen mother and foster youth. In this way, Jenny plans to graduate from the continuation school and aspires to continue her education at the local community college and then transfer to a four-year college to major in criminal justice. Her decision to major in criminal justice is personal for Jenny, as a form of healing from the trauma and injustices she has witnessed at a young age. Additionally, Jenny shared how at a young age she was involved in civic engagement, "I used to go to protest with people families you know and I just started seeing stuff." This experience has contributed to Jenny's desire to utilize her agency with her degree in criminal justice to be the voice and create change for her community.

In sum, Jenny's narrative and other interviews with students document the broader challenges students face, from housing instability, being part of the foster care system, formerly incarcerated, all of which might contribute to the lack of school connectedness due to the constant transition from place to place or school to school. Furthermore, some of these challenges begin as early as elementary school, which has an immense impact on students' academics and well-being. However, it also highlights the assets and agency of continuation youth to contribute to their families, schools, and communities. Thus, more support should be geared towards connecting other sectors within the education system to ensure students receive the basic human needs that are essential towards their healthy development.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter centers the experiences of continuation youth to better understand their day to day experience in this disenfranchised sector. The narrative profiles of the focal students,

broad themes, observations, and the student opinion survey provide the opportunity to triangulate the data to explore the "goodness" and "imperfections" that exist within the school structure and culture of Puente Baluarte (Lightfoot, 1983). The narrative profiles provide further insight into the perceptions of continuation students and the emergence of three broad themes: 1) Continuation Youth Assets: Value of Education and Future Aspirations; 2) Culture of Control: School Safety and Hyper-Surveillance; and 3) Broader Challenges: Institutional Support Beyond Academics.

Despite all the challenges students encountered outside of school, their resiliency and agency was evident in their narratives as they remain hopeful and optimistic about their education and future. The findings from this chapter document how the majority of continuation youth value their education and have high aspirations for their future. This finding is telling given the conception that low-income students and students of color do not care about high school and even less about higher education, which often times their poor educational outcomes are attributed to them and their families lack of care about education (Burciaga & Erbstein, 2013; Valencia & Black, 2002; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997). In response, scholars have been documenting the contribution of families and communities in supporting students development in their educational and occupational aspirations (Burciaga, 2007; Ceja, 2004; Gandara, 1995, 1999; Solorzano, 1986). Laura's narrative documents her agency, her involvement, and her contribution to the school, family, and the community. Laura is one example of the many success stories of students who are in a healthy environment, in comparison to their experience in comprehensive school, in which she was bullied and not validated by her peers for being herself. In contrast, at Puente Baluarte, she is validated and celebrated by her peers and educators who support her academic goals and her civic engagement. To this point, the support from the

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continuation school and her civic engagement contributed to her identity development, which is important due to the oppression she had encountered at the comprehensive school that contributed to her self-blame and feeling hopeless. In this way, Laura regained her sense of purpose and optimistic about her education and future (Ginwright & James, 2002). Laura is an example of the importance of telling the narratives and assets of students of color in these forgotten spaces (Malagon, 2010). Little research has yet to explicitly explore the relationship between continuation students and their civic engagement in society. Laura's contribution and civic engagement with her borderland community in the U.S. and Mexico is widely celebrated and acknowledged by the school district. The excellence of her civic engagement is widely disseminated in the school district website and newspapers, thus, is an important way to recognize and embrace the culture of excellence of continuation youth and the assets that exist in this disenfranchised community (Rodriguez, 2015).

Research has shown that students in high-performing continuation schools are aware of the amount of credits they hold and/or need in order to graduate (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). Similarly, in this study the student opinion survey documented how over three-fourth of continuation students are "on-task," meaning that they are aware of their progress and how many credits they need to achieve their academic goals (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). Thus, this was also part of the school culture as many of the students engaged with one another and frequently asked each other about the amount of credits they hold and/or classes needed to reach their academic goal. In addition, this study shed light on student perceptions' regarding the quality of education and instruction receive inside the classroom, which is important as it provided a different perspective from previous literature. In educational research, the curriculum and instruction in continuation high schools has been widely debated.

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The practices and models for "credit recovery" have been controversial and debated scholars because there is great concern about students' ability to master the material (Nygreen, 2013). Research has critiqued the quality of education offered in continuation schools as "second-class" for their "packet-work," in which students work independently with no instruction or guidance from education. In contrast, Laura's narrative and other students rejected this stereotype, as they shared that learning does take place in the classrooms and students do not only receive packet-work.

Considering the anti-deficit discourse about continuation schools and students, it is important to also highlight the efforts of Puente Baluarte and their unique partnership with the community college sector. Research has shown that high-performing continuation schools tend to have partnerships with the local community colleges (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008), but little research has explored the student perspective and experience of a continuation and community college partnership. First, this study contributes to the literature on dual credit courses and the student experiences and challenges within the nuances of these dual credit enrollment programs (Allen et al., 2018; Tobolowsky & Allen, 2016). In this community college partnership, continuation students have been afforded with the opportunity to earn college credit during high school. However, of great concern in this study is the lack of support students received to continue and persist in the dual credit course offered at the continuation schools. Unfortunately, this partnership is not perfect, as Laura was one of the only students that completed the dual credit course. Therefore, more targeted support services should be implemented in the community college courses offered in the future, as it can be challenging for continuation students being their first college course, so more intentional support should be geared towards supporting students to ensure they have a successful first experience with college.

This partnership with the community college sector also provides an alternative perspective in the literature of continuation schools, as other work has continually described the lower academic curriculum and lack of opportunities for continuation students to be prepared for college (Muñoz, 2005). Despite some challenges in the dual credit college course, we learn about other successful stories in this partnership as many students credit the community college counselor for their transition and enrollment into community college. The student interviews revealed the many benefits of the continuation school and community college partnership, as many continuation youth shared the college knowledge they gained about how to enroll in community college and apply for financial aid or scholarships, and the opportunities to visit the local community colleges.

Tariq's narrative highlights that in the search for "goodness" at Puente Baluarte, it is clear that some "imperfections" exist at an institution that has been recognized as a model school. Furthermore, the literature on continuation high school students has predominantly focused on Latina/os due to their large overrepresentation (Hernandez, 2017; Malagon, 2010), thus, Tariq's narrative contributes to the literature and the diverse student experiences, specifically for students of color. While Puente Baluarte is overrepresented with Latina/o students, it is important to further explore the experiences of other underrepresented groups. In particular, the narrative of Tariq presents the importance of triangulating data, as his experience was overlooked in the student opinion survey data. The student opinion survey provides important information regarding students' perspective on respect and safety in Puente Baluarte. This topic warrants attention due to the various messages of fear students received prior to attending continuation school (Kelly, 1993). Furthermore, research in alternative schools has continually described that students arrived at the doors of these schools mainly after negative

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experiences with educators and the school system (Dunbar, 2001; Lopez, 2004; Rodriguez, 2005), however, a great number of students reported feeling treated with respect by staff and they feel their school is a safe place to be, yet through the student interview data we learn about the imperfections of Puente Baluarte.

Unfortunately, the narrative of Tariq is not surprising, as research has shown how Black males and students of color are more likely to be targeted and discriminated by school resource officers (Noguera, 2008; Rios, 2011). This concern about these punitive practices is embedded in the structure and culture at Puente Baluarte, which also mirrors other research that has been described the culture of control and hyper-surveillance that exist in continuation schools (Hurtado et al., 2015; Rios, 2017). The student findings documented culture of control through the strong presence of school resource officers, police officers, and their random drug searches on campus. As a result of this culture of control, many of the students felt targeted. Specifically as a Black male in a predominantly Latina/o campus, Tariq felt targeted by the school resource officers and felt unsafe on campus. This experience contributed to his decision of wanting to transfer back to his comprehensive school. In contrast to this finding, other research in high performing continuation schools as shown that an alternative to a punitive approach, some institutions employ a restorative approach that places a greater emphasis on fostering positive behaviors, problem-solving skills and conflict resolution, and with a strong focus on developing healthy relationships (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). Tariq's narrative is telling as previous research has shown that relationships are important, especially in alternative school settings (Dunbar, 2001; Lopez, 2004; Rodriguez, 2005), because students enter these spaces having experienced isolation and exclusion from the school system and other systems they have interacted with. Therefore, in what ways can a model institution offer alternative practices that

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do not target and dehumanized individuals in this educator sector that have already been historically marginalized? This an important question that should be kept in mind, specifically for continuation schools that are overrepresented with students of color, thus, is important to ensure that a culture of care and healthy relationships are fostered in this educational sector for all youth.

The narrative of Jenny sheds light on the broader challenges students' face and the institutional support they have received. Not surprisingly, previous research has also discussed how housing instability situations are frequently common for students in continuation schools (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). The issue of unstable living situations is not a new phenomenon in the literature, but it is of great concern as continuation youth are more likely to spend less time in one school (Hernandez, 2017; Kelly, 1993; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). Thus, it is important to not dismiss this educational sector, but it further show the importance of research in continuation schools and the need to invest time and resources to support this student population. It also shows that continuation schools cannot do it alone- outside support is needed (Noguera, 2003a).

An asset of Puente Baluarte is the multiple partnerships to assist continuation youth with their socio-emotional and academic development. In the case of Jenny, her narrative provided a compelling story of her social and academic trajectory, being a former gang-involved youth, formerly incarcerated, and current foster youth and teen parent as we learn about the support services she received at Puente Baluarte. Previous research has shown how girls of color who are pregnant are concerned about how to manage single motherhood with school (Fine, 1991). For example, Morris (2016) study found that girls of color were pushed out of school because of the challenge of having to negotiate the pressures of being pregnant and being in

foster care. In particular, the work of Morris (2016) stressed that many of the girls in their study lacked access to child-care services and often repeated courses in school. In contrast, the results of this study mirror the work of Hines-Datiri (2017) as the structure and culture of Puente Baluarte provides the support and services needed for teen parents and foster youth to ensure they achieve their academic goals and disrupt those negative stereotypes. Specifically, Jenny emphasizes the importance of having a day care located on campus as it provides pregnant teens and teen parents the opportunity to continue their education and pursue parenting classes that will help with their development as teen parents. Jenny's story is one of hope, agency, and being optimistic about her future. From Jenny's narrative and other youth, we learn about the school structure and culture that is conducive to her growth through the care, love, and affirmations she has received from educators at the continuation school.

In sum, the goal of this was chapter was to center the voices of continuation youth to present a complete picture of Puente Baluarte by highlighting the "goodness" and the "imperfections" in this disenfranchised sector. In the next chapter, the focus will be on the educator experience and how they enact their agency in these spaces to present students with opportunities.

Chapter 5: "What We're Doing Here Matters:"
Continuation Educators' Narratives of Agency

The scholarship on continuation schools has been dominated by narratives of failure, remedial education, and lack of interventions from educators (Kelly, 1993; Muñoz, 2005; Nygreen, 2013; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). Limited research has investigated promising practices in continuation schools (Bush, 2012; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). The lack of knowledge about continuation schools has perpetuated negative stereotypes about these schools and created confusion about their role and purpose in secondary education (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). In order to disrupt the misconceptions and inform best practices at continuation schools, this chapter focuses on the experiences of educators and their perceptions of the school structure and culture of Puente Baluarte. Exploring the experiences and perceptions of educators is important as their values, beliefs, and perspectives of the students directly inform the school culture which has an influence on student success (Conchas, 2001; Rodriguez, 2005, 2013; Rodriguez & Oceguera, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999). For instance, research has shown the importance of staff morale and their working conditions in schools' matters (Darling-Hammond, 1997), yet little is known about the perspectives of school principals, counselors, and teachers regarding the school culture and the impact it has on how they view their role and purpose to serve and advocate for continuation youth.

This chapter will draw on educator interviews, observations, and document analysis to analyze to address these research questions: In what ways, if any, do the continuation school's structure and culture afford students with opportunities to improve their academic and social conditions? How do educators negotiate their agency within the school structure and culture of a

model continuation school? How do educators experience the day-to-day instructional and interpersonal interaction at this continuation school? What lessons can be learned from this model continuation school that can inform the structure and culture of other educational systems? And, how do students and educators discuss what lessons can be learned that can be applicable for other public schools?

This chapter focuses on three narrative profiles of educators, this includes Mr. James (English Teacher), Dr. Murphy (School Principal), and Ms. Ramirez (Student Advisor). All educators in this study were recommended by students whom the students described as caring, nurturing, and supportive. The narratives document their varied experiences as educators at Puente Baluarte. This chapter will first provide a short description of each educator with brief information about the trajectory of the educator, along with each educator's experience. After each narrative profile, three themes that emerged will be highlighted: 1) Assets and Agency of Continuation School Educators; 2) Leadership and School Structure of a Model Continuation School; and 3) Relationships and Community Engagement. Finally, the chapter will end with a discussion and conclusion highlighting the findings and connection to the literature, theory, and research questions.

Assets and Agency of Continuation School Educators

The theme *Assets and Agency of Continuation School Educators,* focuses on the perspective of educators and how they perceive continuation youth and their role in the continuation education sector. The focal participant narrative in this theme is Mr. James, a White male, English teacher at Puente Baluarte. Prior to his time at Puente Balurate, Mr. James worked at a comprehensive high school within the school district. Mr. James's narrative provides insight into the stigmatization of teachers in continuation schools and the acts of resistance against these

stigmas as a teacher. Finally, through his narrative and observations in his classroom, this theme

will shed light on how Mr. James utilizes his agency to engage and connects with students

through his curriculum and instruction.

Mr. James, "I See My Role as Kind of a Mentor"

> I was there [at the comprehensive school] for nine years I think I needed a change. So there was an opening at the continuation school and people [(colleagues)] always kind asked why are you going there? A lot of people thought I got in trouble and people still ask why did you go there. Friends I've known for years who are also in education still wondering why the continuation school and I don't think they have an idea of like really what happens [here]. I think they just have an image that it's violent and kids that nobody else wants and they [(teachers)] just sit there and do nothing like babysitting almost…This school district and I have been to [other] model continuation schools and the one's I've seen are similar to this. Like people want to be there and from what I have seen it's not a dumping ground, people really want to be there…

> The senior project for the district is the two requirements they have to make a presentation and present in front of the panel of judges and they have to write a research paper, those are the only two requirements of the district says we have to do... Here we have a resume, we write a business letter, we go over business attire, how to shake hands, how to look people in the eye, a lot of soft jobs skills that kids probably, or from what I have seen, kids have not received and they have no clue on it and then we also go over the research paper and the four sections so they see how to break stuff down and how to research it and then we are acquired to do three interviews with a mentor in the profession they are interested in. So they choose a profession and we do an assessment first and based on their personality the computer gives them several types of jobs they be interested in, they are not limited to those so they pick a career they want and it's a vocational research paper and they interview three adults on that so the idea is to get them out of the comfort zone, meet three people in that profession and ask them questions and take pictures with them as evidence and then come back and present that, so they still have the paper and the presentation aspect that the district requires but we're also have them meet with the adults and then do job related stuff and also apply for college.

> Their classes are pretty small… so they get a lot of individual help… Here I know everyone's ability and if they are not working and just sitting there it's very obvious I can see them so I want to go over say get to work what's going on and I could stand over and see how they are doing with their what kind a work they are doing. I put them grades I see who's turning stuff or not so I could just call them up right away, so it's easier to manage and they're getting help the ones who need it more individual attention… And we'd had some who do really well in this environment, it's just they are super shy and kind of anxious so the bigger school they get nervous… In here they have more access to counselors, therapist, we have the interns and some kids come in and say, "I'm just

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having a bad day" and I just you know sit here or sit outside and that's fine, it's not going to set him back too much and I think because it's smaller and we have it more frequently they are more comfortable to start resolving these issues… so it's communication between the counselors and teachers that it's always been updated and telling us what student needs what or what they are doing so it's not like the student goes in on one class and the teacher knows nothing about what's going on.

I see my role as kind of a mentor in the way that it's not me being part of the school versus them but I also try to figure something out cause I know that a lot of them don't want to be here or something happened along the way so I try to have activities that they would find fun or they could have their own spin on it like spoken word or poetry they can roll them some songs and stuff and write their own, so if some want to write a song, poetry but as long as you doing they tend to like that… A lot of them will write about experiences and I'll kind a get to know the kid, -- it just varies why the kids here, foster care or group homes and I think the kids are more apt to share their experiences… They do autobiographical snapshots where I'll say okay between these is a five and ten write about any experience you want but we're going to go over and use dialogue and detail and so we're using stuff we are learning anyway improving our writing, editing and then but they'll do it on something that relates their life so gives them a chance to share so when I read those I'll kind a know where the kids coming from. So I'll get to know them and sometimes I write a comment and I give them back and they don't share those it's just with me and all sorts of stuff they write about but I'll say or write a comment about it and that way they know they've been heard and also I know where the kids are coming from, so if the kid comes in and quiet every day and just kind of sits there and not doing their work if I didn't know that their parents are going through a divorce and it's traumatic I would think that the kid's lazy and not willing to work, so by knowing that I kind a know where they are at and I'll approach them on individual level.

Mr. James' narrative expresses his resistance towards the damaging misconception about continuation schools, and students and educators in this context. Mr. James describes the negative reaction from friends and colleagues about his decision to transfer to work at the continuation school. Structurally, Mr. James describes how he felt overwhelmed working in a comprehensive school that had large class sizes where he did not have the opportunity connect with most students and to further complicate things he shared he received little support from the school administrators. This contributed to his choice of transferring to the local continuation school due to the smaller size and the opportunity to connect with students. In his narrative, Mr. James' alludes to the disconnection that exist among educators in the school district, which

further perpetuates the negative stereotypes of continuation schools. In particular, many of Mr. James's colleagues in comprehensive schools did not understand the reason behind his decision to transfer to a continuation school. In fact, other teachers in comprehensive schools viewed his decision to work in a continuation school as a step down in his educational career. To counter this perspective, Mr. James points out that educators in comprehensive schools in the school district have little knowledge about the work that goes inside the continuation schools, thus, it contributes to their perception of dismissing the value and transformative work at Puente Baluarte. Mr. James shared the perceptions of most comprehensive school educators is that continuation schools are violent spaces, enroll the kids who nobody wants; and that teachers just babysit and students do not learn. Mr. James resists this harmful misconception and pushes back against the social stigma by asserting that there is nothing to fear about continuation schools and students. He further describes his important role as an English teacher working with bright students who could be thriving in honors or AP classes, but he understands the societal circumstances that contributed to their enrollment in a continuation school.

Mr. James's narrative demonstrates how he resists the negative perceptions about continuation schools through his classroom curriculum. Mr. James described that the senior research project is part of the school district requirement for all seniors to complete in order to be eligible to graduate from high school. This project provides students with the opportunity to engage with research for a career they would potentially pursue in the future. It requires students to select a career, review research articles on a career, write essays, interview professionals in the field, complete fifteen hours of fieldwork, produce a portfolio of their research, and present their project to a panel of judges. Through my interviews and observations in this classroom, I observed how students discussed the process of this assignment and how students developed a

senior portfolio that was composed of the information regarding their career aspirations and their interviews with the professionals in their career of choice. The narrative of Mr. James and observations of his classrooms, are a testament to the culture in the classroom of high expectations, as students were engaged in their individual projects, but how they connected with their peers to rehearse their presentations. The final component of this senior project, was their research presentation to a panel of judges from the community, which included: teachers, school staff, community members, and even the school resource officers. Additionally, at one point I also served as judge as I was asked by one of the English teachers to assist one day, and eventually, I became a participant-observer for some of the senior research project presentations. Overall, the senior research project at Puente Baluarte provides insight into the culture of expectations in the classroom, as continuation youth spend a significant amount of time reading, writing, and engaging with real hand experience as they connected their research and fieldwork to a career of their choice.

To further stress the tensions and disconnections that exist among educators within the Cruz School District, Mr. Liera, a Latino male, has over 13 years of service working as the school counselor for Puente Baluarte. Speaking as one of the three school counselors at Puente Baluarte, Mr. Liera noted the challenges that continuation educators face when working with incoming students due to the various conflicting messages about the role and purpose of continuation schools. The conflicting messages incoming continuation students received at home, previous schools, and in their communities, about continuation schools places a barrier for continuation schools and educators in working with these students, as Mr. Liera described:

> If they buy in to the system and put in the work, they're going to be able to make up those credits and either return to the comprehensive school, graduate earlier, or graduate on time.

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The process to get students to buy into the structure and culture of Puente Baluarte is not easy, and part of the problem comes from the comprehensive schools and how they introduce the continuations school to prospective students. As a result, prospective continuation school students enter these spaces with fear, anxiety, and stress of expecting a bad social and academic experience due to previous messages they receive about the continuation school context. Mr. Liera expressed his frustrations with counselors, teachers, and administrators from the local comprehensive schools and how they have portrayed Puente Baluarte to prospective students:

> One of the things that really gets under my skin, is that for, when a freshman starts doing poorly, the comprehensive school counselor will pull that freshman in and say, stop doing poorly or I'm going to send you to that big bad place, Puente Baluarte, you are going to go to the continuation school if you continue to do poorly and you don't want to go there because that is a bad place. And they make us sound like we are an awful place and they use us as the boogeyman. They use us to scare these kids. They do this for a year, maybe two years and then the beginning of their junior year the message changes to, you've done poorly, so let's try to give you an alternate placement, we are going to send you over at Puente Baluarte so hopefully you can do better there. But you just filled this kid's head for two years, that Puente Baluarte is an evil bad place and now you are trying to change the narrative, that's not going to help. You just spent two years breaking us down, and you expect to build us up to the point that the student has to be here in a few conversations? That's not going to happen.

The excerpt above also sheds light on the missed opportunities in comprehensive schools to provide an early intervention, rather than using the continuation school as the scapegoat. Consequently, Puente Baluarte has been introduced as the "boogeyman" to prospective students, which makes it difficult to get students to buy into the system and culture of the continuation school. Additionally, this narrative of fear dismisses the important work that is being done in these educational spaces.

One way that Puente Baluarte challenges the misconceptions that students bring is by hosting new student orientations that bring in prospective students and parents to debunk the stereotypes about continuation schools and introduce them to the school structure and the socio-emotional opportunities at the school. Given the heighten negative reputation of continuation schools and the perception that students are "delinquent youth," is a clear inaccurate message that the school counselors clarified to incoming students and their parents. The counselors message during the new student orientation is the significance of Puente Baluarte as a "revolving door" of opportunities to the members of this community that come for a diverse set of reasons. Therefore, the school counselors emphasize that their focus is not so much on the reasons why they have been pushed out from their comprehensive schools, but their intention is to support students reach their academic goal, whether it is to graduate from continuation school or transfer back to comprehensive school. Overall, the counselors express to students and family members to use this opportunity at Puente Baluarte as a "clean slate," in other words, a new beginning to potentially reinvent themselves academically and socially.

In this study, the narrative of Mr. James provides insight into how the continuation provides a clean slate, as we learn about the academic curriculum and instructional opportunities offered in the classrooms of Puente Baluarte. During my time at Puente Baluarte, I spend a great amount of time in Mr. James's English classroom, as I observed the various assignments that contributed to students' literacy development. In this study, Mr. James provides promising practices for how he engages with students through culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom that allows for continuation youth to produce knowledge through their own writing and sharing of their own personal stories. In an effort to learn more about his students, Mr. James' autobiographical assignments allowed students to share a snapshot of a particular event in

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their lives. This is part of his curriculum that allows for students to develop their writing, editing, and articulation of particular events of their personal experience. For some students, it is more than a writing assignment; it is an opportunity for them to share their narratives of resistance, but also a form of healing from their early exposure to trauma they have experience at a young age.

In sum, Mr. James' narrative reflects a common theme among educators at Puente Baluarte; many of them chose to work in the continuation school sector and for the Cruz School District. Mr. James invites educators in comprehensive schools to shift away from the dominant narrative about continuation schools and the students by visiting them to get an accurate picture of what happens inside these schools. While Mr. Liera and the school counselors provided insight to the tensions and disconnections within the school district and how the new student orientation sessions serve as an opportunity to provide accurate information to incoming students and parents about the structure of the institution and the socio-emotional and academic opportunities students can benefit from.

Leadership and School Structure of a Model Continuation School

The second theme *Leadership and School Structure of a Model Continuation School*, focuses on the leadership and structural components that influences the success of Puente Baluarte as a model continuation school. The most salient subthemes that emerged from this finding is the role of school administrators, the support educators receive from the school district, and the intentional hiring practices within this model continuation school. The focal participant of this theme is Dr. Murphy, a White female serving as the School Principal at Puente Baluarte for over 7 years. Dr. Murphy has a deep commitment to the school and long tenure of over 23 years with the school district. She has extensive experience as an educator, having served as a School Counselor, Dean of Students, and an Assistant Principal at one comprehensive school

before coming to Puente Baluarte as a Principal. In her narrative, Dr. Murphy's describes her

leadership style, the strategies she uses to support her staff and students at Puente Baluarte.

Dr. Murphy, "What We're Doing Here Matters"

What we're doing here matters that much…What I love most about working with high school kids is that light bulb can just click on overnight sometimes… What makes the difference is the staff. It's the staff and the relationship that they have with the kids and that's what makes all the difference in the world… The beauty of working in a continuation school is the opportunity to innovate and try new programs and try new things. It's a small staff. It's pretty easy to get buy-in from the staff to try new things. It's pretty easy to look at student data and see where there are new needs because it's a dynamic population… It's a great match also for my personality because I am not happy in my job unless I feel like I'm positively impacting students, like specific students… I love the district in terms of the focus on people. It's a wonderful place to work. The collaboration is terrific. The collegiality is terrific. The family feeling…So, it's a combination of I like where I work, I like the people that I work with, the salary is good, so it's a good place to work.

As the principal I am the only administrator for the school, so I am responsible for everything... But more specifically I'm responsible for hiring staff… I've had the opportunity to hire about six teachers… And in all of those cases the process is that we identify where we have the need…when teachers apply to come over, I still have the opportunity to interview them and I put together an interview panel with members of the staff, [we] always [have] one of the counselors, one of the teachers, usually a student, a classified staff member… I have the ultimate on a transfer request opportunity to say no, thank you and I have done that…We had somebody who wanted to move over and I didn't think that she was going to be a good match… I started working for the school district in 1993… [So] I have the ability, because I have been in the district for a long time, to ask questions of lots of people about people who apply to come over here, so I can kind of get the scoop about why they're looking [to transfer schools]…

I'm looking for people who genuinely like kids because I can teach you to do lots of things. I cannot teach you to like children… I look for people who have strong communication skills. I look for people who are collaborative and can work with others because particularly in our district, the days of closing your door and doing your own thing are really gone. We do a lot of collaboration in the district… And I also look for people that have enthusiasm for what you're teaching because the majority of my students have previously failed the class that you're teaching. And so, you need to innovate, come up with a different way to present it, be willing to experiment and refine and revise because our school is a little bit more dynamic in a lot of ways than other school sites…So, I'm looking for people that are willing to do that – that are constantly wanting to get better. I prefer somebody who has a solid work record behind them… another thing that I look for when I'm hiring… have you worked with students like mine

before? Have you worked with at-risk kids? When I hired Maribel, one of our history teachers, she previously taught in a continuation school in [Northern California]. If you can hang at a continuation school for years, you can do anything. So, those are the things that I'm looking for. I also obviously look at where you did your bachelor's degree. I tend not to hire people from some of the smaller private universities that lack diversity because – again, I'm looking for people that have experienced working with kids like mine. And, I also don't hire people who have a 4.0 GPA in the college transcripts. And my rationale is if you've never struggled academically, how are you going to relate to my kids who have, and that is one of my interview questions.

The narrative of Dr. Murphy provides insight into the school structure and culture of Puente Baluarte and the important role of committed educators that truly believe in providing students an alternative education. In particular, the narrative of Dr. Murphy gives light to her vision as the school principal and her long-term commitment to serve the continuation student population, as she believes that the work at Puente Baluarte can be transformative for students personally and academically. At Puente Baluarte, one of the important charactericists of the school culture is the value of relationships in how educators engage with students that makes a difference for the social and academic development of continuation youth. Being part of the Puente Baluarte community and the school district, Dr. Murphy refers to the healthy collegiality and family feeling of being part of a small team that is invested in providing the opportunities and resources for students and staff. Therefore, one advantage of being part of a small staff is the ability to get buy-in from educators to be innovative and open to new ideas in and out of the classroom. Findings from conversations with other educators pointed to the idea of their voice and input being included in the decision-making process, which was an attribute of Dr. Murphy of being inclusive of her staff and consulting with them about major decisions.

In the interview, Dr. Murphy described her satisfaction of being an educator and her long-term commitment and service to the school district. Dr. Murphy's long history to the district and many years of service as principal at Puente Baluarte also influences her strong commitment

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to the school and the positive school culture. In particular, her stability within the school district of over more than 23 years has contributed to building her network and her capacity and knowledge to navigate the educational system. In her leadership role, Dr. Murphy described the importance of her advocacy to ensure that Puente Baluarte is not overlooked and dismissed from receiving the support from the school district. For example, one aspect that Dr. Murphy credits the school district for the support, is in her ability to hire and recruit educators that are dedicated and committed to serve in the continuation education sector. Structurally, Dr. Murphy's hiring practices also influences Puente Baluarte's success as a model continuation school. Specifically, Dr. Murphy intentionally hires teachers and staff who can connect, relate, and support continuation high school students. In her role as the School Principal, Dr. Murphy's vision is to attract and recruit good talent, as she describes that she looks for educators who genuinely care and empathize with the continuation student population. Furthermore, she describes the importance of finding good educators who continually want to improve and have experience working with students in continuation schools. For instance, part of her hiring process and interview process is asking prospective educators about their academic experience and if they have encountered any challenges because she believes that educators will be able to better relate to the continuation student population if they have experienced academic challenges themselves.

Overall, the staff's overall satisfaction of being employed at Puente Baluarte was demonstrated in Dr. Murphy's narrative and interviews with other educators. The support staff members received from the school administration school district was frequently part of the conversation of what contributed to their satisfaction at Puente Baluarte. The satisfaction in Dr. Murphy's leadership style is also demonstrated in data from the staff opinion survey, as 90 percent of the staff reported that they look forward to coming to work at Puente Baluarte. 87

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percent of the staff indicated that they felt good about their relationships with their colleagues while 90 percent reported that they are satisfied with the equipment, materials, and supplies provided. Regarding their workload and responsibilities, 85 percent reported that their assigned work responsibilities are fair and reasonable. Over 75 percent also reported they are given adequate opportunity to obtain additional skills/training that they want or need. Similarly, 92 percent stated they feel they receive adequate support from the principal/director and more than 95 percent of the staff shared that the interaction among students and staff is conducted with respect, trust, and confidence. Finally, 89 percent reported that they feel Puente Baluarte is a safe place to work and 97 percent of the staff feel that the Cruz High School District is a good place to work. Overall, the staff opinion survey provides descriptive information in terms of educators' levels of satisfaction at Puente Baluarte, which compliments Dr. Murphy's narrative perspective on relationships, school leadership, stability, and hiring practices, all which have an immense impact on the school structure and culture of Puente Baluarte.

Community Engagement and Relationships

The final theme is this chapter focuses on *Community Engagement and Relationships,* and more specifically the efforts of Puente Baluarte to connect with the local community organizations. Through these relationships continuation youth have benefited from these resources and social and academic opportunities. The focal narrative in this theme draws on the work of Ms. Ramirez, a Latina, Student Advisor at Puente Baluarte. In her narrative, we learn about how her role evolved during her long-term, as she initially was hired through a grant to increase institutional capacity, which eventually led towards a full-time position. Ms. Ramirez's narrative focuses on her agency to increase opportunities for continuation youth through her

community engagement work and relationships she has established to ensure her students have

access to opportunities as students in comprehensive schools.

Ms. Ramirez, "I am the Resource"

> I have worked for the district for 25 years… I was offered an opportunity by a principal for a grant, it was a three-year grant and this grant was that, you have three years to implement programs that could be absorbed by the school after the grant is over… So, basically that's how I created my job, because at that time they didn't have anybody who was doing college advisement, who was working with the ASB, who was doing financial aid, who was doing career days, who was networking with the community, [Puente Baluarte] was very isolated and any time you said [Puente Baluarte] they had a bad reputation I guess, people were very standoffish, so I started going to community meetings all throughout the city and I was like, well, wait a minute, why if the other schools get to go to these conferences or if the other schools get these opportunities why don't our kids and so I started networking and I started so, a lot of the things that exist today are because I did grass root kind of work to be able to put [Puente Baluarte] on the map…. what I did was I just saw, look our school doesn't provide these services to the kids so I started grabbing things that I felt were important for the kids to have access to and why couldn't our kids go to college and why couldn't our kids do financial aid, why couldn't our kids do certain things? So, in that grant, that's what I did, I really didn't do it to create a job for me but I did it because these services where needed here at the school…I'm a resource for students…whatever the kid needs, I will help them…I wear a lot of different hats based on the needs of the kids…I requested a [community college representative] to be at our school on a regular basis because my position is that all of our kids like 98.9 of our kids are all potential community college students.

> Well, I've been here really long time, I really love this school and I really love this population and I think that ever since I was an young the biggest thing that I love about this population is when the light bulb turns on, when all of a sudden they change, you know, they come, they have their issues, they have their barrier and you know challenges and all that stuff and then all of a sudden like they blossom and all of a sudden it's like everything make sense and so that piece right there, is why I'm still here, because it warms my heart every single time and it sometimes it's not even when they are here, sometimes it is after they graduate, because even when they graduate they might not have it altogether but then now they're a year out and then they're like, oh wow, I should have done something about this and there…I tell them I'm here, as long as I'm here I will help you, I will help you with financial aid, I will help you get into a college, whatever is that you need, I will help you because just because you are not a student here, it doesn't mean that I'm not here to help you and I get students that come back, you know sometimes for years…Well, I give them access, I am the resource, so I allow them to see me…if I can help them I will, that's just who I am as a person…

So, the thing that I most, that appreciate most from our continuation school and others is that it's an opportunity for students to change the direction or their path that they've been on because sometimes in life that's all you need is just somebody to give you a chance and so for a lot of our kids they've been, they've had failures and struggles and barriers all their life whether it's just food, whether it's shelter, whether it's family dynamics that have gotten in medical challenges, they have gotten in the way of them being able to be successful… So, I think that the continuation school provides that opportunity for those kids to be able to redirect or to find the guidance or the help or that the support that they need and it's not just one person, not just like me or the counselors or the teacher, it depends because with all the personalities that we have on campus from the students and the staff, there is a lot of opportunity for any given student to find at least one person that they connect to that will be their support that could be their lifeline to a better life or at least a sustainable life.

In the narrative of Ms. Ramirez, we learn about the collective interest and agency of Puente Baluarte to increase capacity for the continuation school by building partnerships with outside agencies. Ms. Ramirez, like many of the educators at Puente Baluarte, employ an asset-based framework and student-centered approach in her work with continuation youth. In this case, Ms. Ramirez aims to disrupt the issues of equity and lack of access to opportunities for their continuation school and students. Similar to Dr. Murphy, Ms. Ramirez also has a long tenure of service at Puente Baluarte and the school district. Her accumulated experience has contributed to her agency and deep commitment to continuation schools. Ms. Ramirez described how the school culture was different in her early years at Puente Baluarte and how it has evolved over time due to the commitment of the school leadership and the collective agency of individuals. For example, she described the lack of resources for students in continuation school, in comparison to other students in the comprehensive schools within the school district. She critiqued the structure by asking, "why couldn't our kids go to college and why couldn't our kids do financial aid, why couldn't our kids do certain things?" This inquiry led her to do grassroots work by connecting with community members to bring resources to Puente Baluarte and increase the capacity to serve students.

As a result of these efforts, Puente Baluarte established a Student Center, which serves as a multipurpose room on campus that is co-directed by Ms. Ramirez. Many students describe this space as "the lab." The lab space provides students with the opportunity to earn additional or recovery credits by doing individual work at their own pace and receive college and career knowledge from multiple institutional agents. Puente Baluarte has a partnership with the local community college where a community college representative visits the Student Center once or twice a week to help students apply to college, enroll in classes, take the assessment, apply for financial aid, and promotes the community college classes offered at the continuation high school. Furthermore, Ms. Ramirez has a strong belief that majority of her students have the potential to be community college students, thus, her purpose has been to provide students with the information to transition into the two-year sector. In addition, through my observations, I witnessed how students engaged with one another and how Ms. Ramirez and other institutional agents interacted with students to help them achieve their goals. The Student Center allowed me to learn about the various resources the school has for students including assistance with scholarship and employment opportunities. In addition, at times I found myself as a participant-observer through my engagement with students, as several of them knew about my research and how I was a current student at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). For example, sometimes I worked with the community college representative to assist some of the students with their financial aid applications.

Ms. Ramirez's narrative also demonstrates Puente Baluarte's long-term commitment to students through her description of her role as "the resource" and gives students access even after they have graduated, as many students come visit her for support due to her social capital and connection to the community. Ms. Ramirez's form of agency is one of the many actions that can

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contribute to the academic success of students, as her agency contributed to the school culture through the increase of opportunities and partnerships that directly influence the students' experiences. Ms. Ramirez utilizes her social capital to connect with community agencies to bring resources into the continuation school. As a result, the transmission of resources has a direct influence on the social and academic outcomes of continuation students. Ms. Ramirez highlights her important role and work being done at Puente Baluarte and recognizes educators' critical role in impacting the lives of continuation students. Ms. Ramirez's narrative sheds light on the important role of educators in continuation schools and how educators highlight their students' assets. Ms. Ramirez noted that continuation students have the greatest compassion, empathy, and respect towards their peers in this school context due to having similar background or experiences. This statement is of great importance, as there has been less emphasis to recognize and validate the strengths and assets that continuation students bring into these unique spaces.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter builds on the previous chapter about students' experiences by providing insight into the narratives and the experience of educators at Puente Baluarte Continuation High School. In this chapter, the search for "goodness" was explored through educators' perspectives, but like many other schools, there remains imperfections and tensions in continuation schools. This chapter drew on narrative profiles, observations, and description data from the staff opinion survey to shed light on the following three themes: 1) Assets and Agency of Continuation Educators, 2) Leadership and School Structure of a Model Continuation School, and 3) Community Engagement and Relationships.

Similar to the student narratives, this chapter provided insight into the assets and agency of educators through their resistance as they pushed back against the social stigma and deficit

narratives about continuation school. First, the assets of continuation educators described their student-centered approach and how they believe in the potential of their student population, which is crucial towards fostering a healthy school culture. Research has shown how school culture is critical to how educators help construct students' identities and how they influence students' trajectories (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Rodriguez & Oceguera, 2015). This study documents the role of continuation educators, their high levels of satisfaction with their job, and how they viewed their role as an important way to create opportunities for students' success (Conchas, 2001; Rodriguez, 2005, 2013; Rodriguez & Oceguera, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999). Specifically, their values and beliefs were clear, as they strongly disagreed with the common perception about continuation schools being "dumping grounds" for unwanted teachers (Kelly, 1993). The concerning common perception that educators are transferred from comprehensive schools to continuation schools as a form of punishment (Kelly, 1993) warrants attention and a deeper analysis. One thing that is clear and evident from this study is how educators want to work at Puente Baluarte and the school district. This contributes to the identity of the institution and one of the characteristics that many educators believe that highlights the culture of the institution in being a model institution for continuation schools.

Although a great amount of research has documented the deficit perspectives of continuation schools and the educators that work in those settings, not much has explore the impact it has on the continuation educator. Furthermore, educators in continuation school discuss that most of the negative messages come from their own colleagues within the comprehensive schools in the school district, thus, this negative perception is of great concern due to the lack of respect or credibility for the teaching or educator profession in continuation schools. Therefore, this study documents how not only students, but also educators in continuation schools are

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affected by the damaging misconceptions about this small learning community, as they are not only marginalized from how society perceives them, but also within the broader education system that devalues their important role in this disenfranchised sector. Furthermore, this perception of continuation schools as "bad places" further explains the amount of time continuation school counselors allocated during the new student orientations to debunk these damaging misconceptions and provide a more complete and accurate picture of the role and purpose of Puente Baluarte. In particular, the interview with Mr. Liera provides insight into the tensions and disconnections among the local comprehensive schools and the continuation school. Thus, it warrants attention for comprehensive schools to engage more with continuation schools to better understand their efforts to ensure they transmit accurate information to prospective students.

Another important finding was the perspective of continuation educators on the curriculum and instruction efforts at Puente Baluarte. Educators at Puente Baluarte believe that the old narrative of "dry-down" curriculum and "second-class" education (Muñoz, 2005; Nygreen, 2013) does not align with their school structure and culture. In the field of education, the work of Ladson-Billings (1995) has documented important promising practices teachers can utilize to engage with underrepresented and underserved students through the implementation of "culturally relevant pedagogy." Teachers who employ a culturally relevant pedagogy see themselves in connection with and part of the community they serve. Additionally, educators who draw on this lens also employ an asset-based framework as they recognize continuation students' potential and they contribute to students' development by helping them make connections between their local context to other national and global comparisons (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In this study, Mr. James assignments provides an alternative to deficit narrative

of "dry-down" curriculum, as he provides promising practices of how to engage students through relevant pedagogy that students can make connection to their local context and experiences. For example, Mr. James' senior project assignment is an example that pushes back against the deficit narrative, as students are engaging in research and fieldwork related to a career of their choice. This assignment provided the students with various skills that translate into higher education and their professional field. The senior project is a promising practice as other research with alternative schools has documented that some students reported spending minimal time reading and writing in and out of the classroom (Muñoz, 2005). Furthermore, the senior research project has also been an important component for Puente Baluarte to be recognized as a model institution, thus, this is one of the promising practices recognized in the continuation education sector.

In education, school leadership and their vision play a critical role in contributing to the school culture of an institution, specifically in continuation schools (Knoeppel, 2007; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). School principals play a pivotal role because they have the ability to extend opportunities to vulnerable student populations in continuation schools (Knoeppel 2007; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). Additionally, when the school principal's passion and commitment to serve students is hyper-visible, it trickles down to the entire staff (Knoeppel, 2007). In return, the students absorb the passion and the nurturing and caring affection they receive from their dedicated teachers in continuation schools, which influences their socio-emotional and academic development (Knoeppel, 2007 Rodriguez, 2005). In this study, the staff at Puente Baluarte felt supportive by the administrative staff and the school district, as they received needed resources, in return, many of them express their high levels of satisfaction of working at the continuation school (Darling-Hammond, 1997, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001, 2002). In addition, the school principal,

counselors, and teachers express the strong support and commitment from the school district to invest and see the continuation school as a priority, which directly influences the school culture at Puente Baluarte. As many of the educators described in their narratives how they felt supported by the leadership of the school and the district. To this point, educators value the continuation education system at Puente Baluarte, but they are also critical of the nuances that exist in continuation schools, as each institution has different practices and different levels of support from their school districts.

The need to explore staff members' levels of satisfaction and support they receive in a continuation school warrants attention, as research has shown that high turnover of school leadership and teachers is one of the many challenges in schools. This high turnover can have an immense impact on the school culture (Darling-Hammond, 2003). To support the interviews with educators, the descriptive data from the staff opinion survey complimented the interview findings. The staff opinion survey demonstrated an overall sense of satisfaction being a continuation school educator at Puente Baluarte. They reported being supported by the continuation school and the school district. Drawing from the research on teacher attrition, the work of Darling-Hammond (2003) discusses four major factors that contribute towards educators' retention or departure from a specific school or from the teaching profession completely. The four factors include salaries, working conditions, preparation, and mentoring support in the early years of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Although this study with Puente Baluarte did not explore all four factors, from the staff opinion survey and interviews we learned about the working conditions and support staff members received from the model continuation school and the school district. Which is important as the research has shown how high turnover of principals, teachers, and educators in schools, creates an amount of challenges

for the structure of an institution due to the instability of establishing a school culture that will benefit students, educators, and all staff members (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Building on the work of Darling-Hammond (1997, 2003), in this study, an asset of Puente Baluarte was the stability and low turnover rate of educators. For example, Dr. Murphy and Ms. Ramirez have worked in the school district for over 20 years, which is important as they are connected to the community and school district. Limited research has explored the hiring practices of educators in continuation schools due to the common perception of the "dumping ground" framework, yet Dr. Murphy provided insight into her agency as she brings in educators that will meet the needs of the continuation student population. Dr. Murphy describes her leadership role and the importance of relationships in their hiring practices and how representation matters in being part of the continuation school community. Research in high preforming continuation schools has shown that school districts provide continuation schools with the opportunity to hire staff that will meet the needs of their student population (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012), yet limited research has explored the intentional hiring practices that exist in continuation schools and educators' perspective about the process. Similar to Ruiz de Velasco and McLaughlin's (2012) research, Dr. Murphy provides insight into their hiring practices and their resistance of the dominant narrative of Puente Baluarte being a "dumping ground" for unwanted teachers in comprehensive schools (Kelly, 1993). Dr. Murphy resists the simplistic narrative that all continuation schools serve as "dumping grounds," as she argued that she has the agency and support from the school district to recruit and hire educators who will meet the students' needs. This is a practice that warrants more attention in order to explore how continuation schools recruit and retain educators who understand and genuinely care about the continuation student population. In this study, the narrative of educators described the critical

role of continuation educators, as not all educators in the broader education system truly understand this student population, thus, it truly takes a caring professional to work in this continuation school context.

The values, beliefs, and perspectives of continuation educators at Puente Baluarte point to their agency and sense of responsibility to provide a realistic opportunity to continuation students and not a "second-class" education. Research has shown the importance of agency as both an individual and collective trait in schools and communities that strive to address an issue together (Noguera, 2015). In this study, the collective agency of educators is highlighted in their abilities to exercise their agency to increase opportunities for continuation students. For instance, we learn about the important role of Ms. Ramirez, as she critiques the school structure and culture when she started working at Puente Baluarte. For example, she points out issues of equity that exist in the school district due to continuation youth not having access to the same opportunities as students in comprehensive schools. This enactment of agency by Ms. Ramirez brought some change into the culture of the institution, as she connected with community agencies to bring in more resources and opportunities for students at Puente Baluarte. The school leadership, specifically the school principal and school district administrators support the efforts of Ms. Ramirez as she enacted her agency to increase opportunities for students. For example, partnerships with the local community colleges have been highlighted as one of the promising practices in high performing continuation schools (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008), yet little research has explored the experience of continuation youth who engage in the continuation school and community college partnership. It is imperative to highlight this partnership as research has shown that continuation high school students receive little information about preparing or enrolling college (Muñoz, 2005). In contrast, this study offers an alternative, as it

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shows the importance of these partnerships and the need to strengthening the continuation school to community college pipeline. But we also need to be vigilantly aware that access is not enough because many of the continuation youth who enroll in the community college courses offered at Puente Baluarte did not persist in the class. Thus, this an untapped area within the educational pipeline that needs to be further explored.

This chapter highlighted the narratives of educators and their contribution to the students and Puente Baluarte community. In the next chapter, the focus will be on the lessons learned from Puente Baluarte Continuation School and will merge the perspectives of students and educators to collectively highlight the "goodness" and the "imperfections" that exist at Puente Baluarte. Furthermore, the next chapter will provide the perspectives of the members of this community and how they can inform other continuation schools and the broader education system to better understand the role of continuation educators and how critical these spaces are to humanize students and provide a realistic opportunity to all students who walk through the doors of continuation schools.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Implications

The aim of this study was to examine the structure, agency, and culture of one model continuation high school in California to understand how they serve and prepare students into postsecondary education and/or work. Given the negative reputation of continuation schools and the members of this community, I sought to understand the assets of this disenfranchised sector by understanding the cultural production in continuation schools and how students and educators make meaning of their schooling/professional experiences and how they utilize their agency within the structure and culture of this institution. The following research questions were pursued in this dissertation study:

1) How do students and educators negotiate their agency within the school structure and culture of a model continuation school?

> 1a) How do students and educators experience the day to day instructional and interpersonal interaction at this continuation school?

2) In what ways, if any, does the continuation school's structure and culture afford students with opportunities to improve their academic and social conditions?

3) What lessons can be learned from this model continuation school that can inform the structure and culture of other educational systems?

> 3a) How do students and educators discuss what lessons can be learned that can be applicable for other public schools?

To answer these research questions, this qualitative case study drew on multiple data collection tools to analyze and triangulate the data, which included: observations, document analysis, and interviews with students and educators. Taking everything into account, this study contributes to the literature and is important to the field of alternative education, as part of the lessons learned

from this study disrupts the tired and decontextualized narrative of continuation schools as "dumping grounds," as continuation youth and educators deserved the recognition and respect for the important and challenging work being done each day at Puente Baluarte Continuation School. However, other parts of the lessons learned provide recommendations on shifting away from the punitive policies and practices embedded in this model continuation school, which provides implications to not simply accept institutions as a model school or program.

Debunking Deficit Narratives and Engaging with Continuations Schools:

Through Community Based Research, Theory, and Practice

This chapter presents an overview of the key themes drawn from the findings in Chapters Four and Five of this study. In this study, I drew on the theory of cultural production and the PUEDES framework to help us shift away from blaming continuation students for their shortcomings, but placing more of accountability on the structures and cultures in schools. In addition, this approach helps us to recognize the agency that individuals hold and the importance of collective agency to take action for change and image the possibilities that exist in continuation schools. By recognizing the cultural production in continuation schools, this study attempted to search for the "goodness" in alternative schools and to help us understand and contextualize the day to day experience of students and educators within the school culture of Puente Baluarte. In searching for "goodness" of the school culture in a model continuation school, this institution had "imperfections" and "tensions" embedded in the in culture of the institution (Lightfoot, 1983). In the next section, a review of findings will be presented with a focus on the ecological context that examines the three layers connected to the research questions, which include: the individual level, continuation school context, and the broader lessons for the educational systems (see Figure 3).
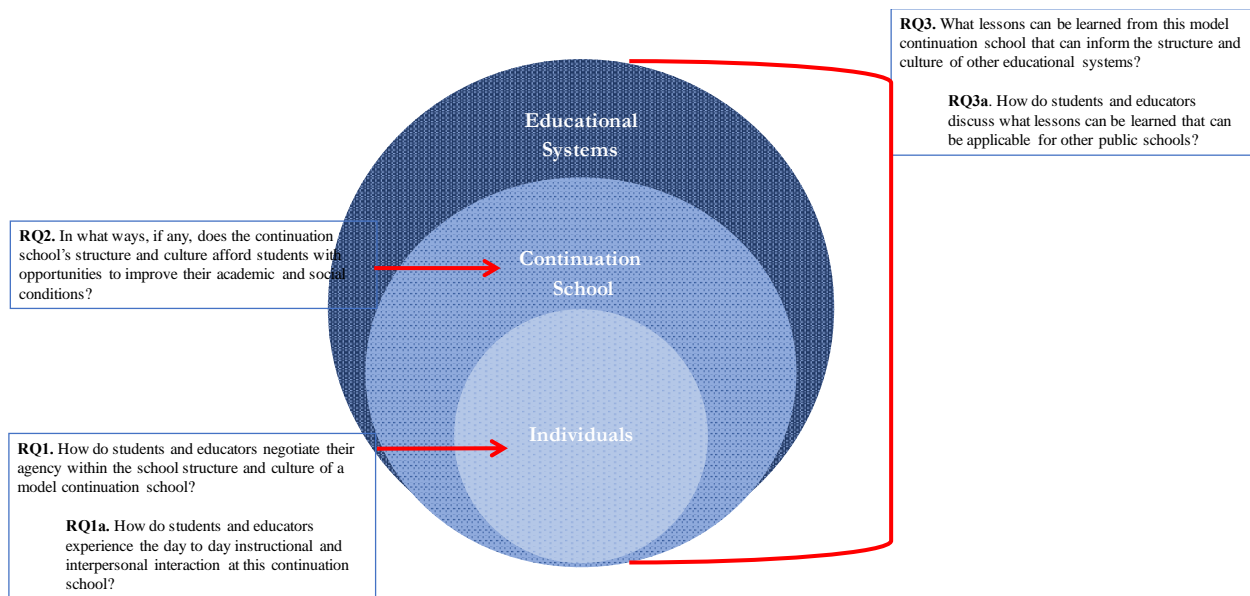
Figure 3. Ecological Model of Individuals, Continuation School, and Educational Systems

Individual Level: Students and Educators Agency

The findings contribute to limited research of continuation high schools and it offers an alternative perspective towards how we theorize about individuals in this community (Malagon, 2010). This study drew on asset based approaches to understand the individual experiences within the continuation school structure and culture, as the narratives of students and educators illuminate their agency and resistance within the school culture of a model continuation school. At the individual level, majority of students and educators enacted their agency and resisted the deficit narratives that devalue the role and purpose of continuation schools, specifically at Puente Baluarte. Although, students and educators understand the nuances across continuation schools and how it varies by school district, in this case, both students and educators highlighted the importance of relationships as an asset towards Puente Baluarte being recognized as a model school. Scholars have argued how educators view the student population they serve is crucial for their academic success or failure, as it contributes to the school culture of an institution (Conchas, 2001; Rodriguez, 2005, 2013; Rodriguez & Oceguera, 2015; Valenzuela, 1999). An

important finding that emerged from all sources of data (interviews, observations, and descriptive surveys) was the assets and agency of educators. First, continuation educators rejected the damaging misconceptions about Puente Baluarte serving as a "dumping ground" for unwanted educators and the labeling of their students as "losers" which dehumanizes continuation youth. This finding is important as continuation educators enacted their agency and view their profession from an asset perspective, while other educators in the broader education system might devalue their role, continuation educators see the value and wealth in making a difference with the continuation student population. Secondly, this asset perspective of seeing value in their profession further contributes to how they view and understand the background of continuation youth and the circumstances behind institutions pushing out students into continuation school. The values and beliefs of continuation educators about students was important, as the school principal described that many of her students have resiliency, as life has knock them down, but they are still getting up and persisting in school. To this point, educators understand their students and the broader challenges that are beyond their control, which contributed to them falling behind on academic credits. So this is important because they see the potential in students and they see their role as critical to help students reinventing their academic and social identity and expanding opportunities at Puente Baluarte.

From the student perspective, many of the continuation youth were surprised or event felt empowered by being included in this study to share their experiences and/or recommendations on ways to improve their social and academic experience. Students were ready to share, resist, and push-back against the stereotypes of continuation students. First, many of the continuation students described the challenges they had encountered through their lives, despite the trauma they experienced, their narrative documents their agency and resilience was vibrant as they

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continue to persist and contribute to a more promising society. Many of the students have enacted their agency and resisted their previous spaces due to the mistreatment they encountered in larger comprehensive schools. The misconception of continuation students is that they do not value education, but that is not the case. In this study, the student opinion survey and the interviews with students document how continuation youth value education and have high aspirations toward education and/or work in the future. Furthermore, the narratives of students document the potential of students in continuation schools, as the narrative of Laura provides insight into the day to day experience of continuation youth, as the value education, but are also individual members that contribute to a promising society through civic engagement and commitment to serve the community. The narrative of Laura is one of many in continuation schools, as her experience in comprehensive schools was not healthy due to the victimization she experienced, but in her transition to Puente Baluarte she found herself and her identity to thrive in continuation school and to reclaim her dreams.

School Context: Continuation School Structure and Culture

To better understand the school culture of Puente Baluarte this study drew on the PUEDES framework, which examines the structure, agency, and culture of educational institutions (Rodriguez, 2013). Furthermore, this study drew on the work of Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) to search for the "goodness" in continuation school, but part of the process is also examining for the "imperfections" and tensions that exist within the structure and culture of Puente Baluarte. While, Puente Baluarte has been recognized as a model school, this study takes an approach to not simply accept the recognition, but to engage and understand the value of this institution from the perspective and experiences of the members of this community.

Examining the school context of Puente Baluarte was important as it render the opportunity to learn more about the structure and culture of this designated model continuation school. In learning about the continuation school through the lenses of educators, the interviews, observations, and descriptive surveys signal their high levels of satisfaction and commitment to serve their school district and student population. In particular, school leadership plays an immense role in the school culture of an institution Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012), as the narrative of Dr. Murphy was a testament of the pivotal role of administrators that are dedicated to ensuring their students and staff receive the necessary support, resources, and attention from the local school district. In addition, many of the educators at Puente Baluarte described how school leadership has contributed to their long-tenure at Puente Baluarte and within the school district. Research has noted that stability in schools is important for the culture of the institution, as it reflects on the leadership and support they receive to ensure educators are satisfied. Another important finding was the insight of Dr. Murphy to shed light on the promising practice of having the agency and autonomy to recruit, hire, and retain educators that that are committed to serve the continuation student population. Findings clearly show how continuation educators felt validated and supported by the school leadership and school district. In return, they enacted their agency in and out of the classroom by expanding opportunities for continuation students. The role of continuation educators matters, as findings show Ms. Ramirez went beyond to ensure that issues of access and equity were addressed within the local context. To this point, the efforts of Ms. Ramirez with support from the institution and the school district has focused over the years to strengthen the organizational capacity of Puente by cultivating partnerships with the local community based organizations, mental health agencies, and higher education organizations.

The academic opportunities at Puente Baluarte are important to highlight given the limited research in continuation schools, with the little attention on promising practices in the classroom. Therefore, through interviews and observations we learn about the curriculum and instruction opportunities at Puente Baluarte, in particular, the external partnership with the local community college as they provide dual-credit courses to continuation youth. Although, one of the imperfections of this partnerships is the lack of structural support for students to persist in the dual credit courses, this study, also highlights the goodness in this partnership as many students are expose to college, financial aid, scholarship information for higher education. Furthermore, this continuation school and community college partnerships is also important to reconsider and dismantle the "dry-down" curriculum in continuation schools, but to think about alternative opportunities for continuation youth. In addition to dual credit courses, the narrative of Mr. James provides insight into culture of high expectations in some of the classrooms in the continuation school context, as Senior Research Project provides students with an opportunity to engage with research on a career of their choice. Therefore, this assignment provided with real-hand experience and the ability to engage in research and fieldwork in a career for their choice.

This study mirrors previous research, as educators at Puente Baluarte employ a "developmentalist" philosophy, as they advocate for a genuine alternative school opportunity, one that is centered around the notion of reshaping the school structure to meet the needs of continuation youth (Kelly, 1993). In this way, continuation schools serve as safety nets, as they foster a culture that responds to the socio-emotional and academic needs of continuation youth, in which it aims to serve as interventions before student fall through the cracks entirely (Kelly, 1993). However, in some cases, tensions and conflicts in philosophies emerged from some educators in this study, in particular from the school resource officers who employs on a

"traditionalist" approach at times, which is centered around the notion of student behavior and control (Kelly, 1993). The "traditionalist" approach from educators, has shown how it contributes to the school culture through damaging implications of overpolicing, surveillance, and control of students of color (Kennedy-Lewis, 2015; Madrigal-Garcia & Acevedo-Gil, 2016; Rios, 2011). Consequently, the work of Kennedy-Lewis (2015) mirrors this study, as conflicting philosophies of traditionalist and develomentalist exist at Puente Baluarte, which contribute to the further marginalization of students of color.

In particular, the narrative of Tariq, one of the few Black males on a predominantly Latina/o campus discusses his perceptions of some of the "imperfections within the school culture of Puente Baluarte. In his narrative, Tariq's experience is not an isolated case, as research in continuation schools has also documented the culture of control and hyper-surveillance that exist in these spaces (Hurtado et al., 2015; Rios, 2017). Unfortunately, the culture of control at Puente Baluarte contributed to Tariq being targeted by the School Resource Officers (SRO's), which shows how continuation schools can be racialized anti-Black spaces through their punitive practices and their "hyper-monitoring" of students of color--in this case Black students (Hurtado et al., 2015; Rios, 2017). Unfortunately, Tariq's experience being targeted by the SRO's contributes to his lack of sense of belonging at school and feeling isolated, neglected, and unsafe on campus due to the mistreatment he encountered with the SRO's. Educational research has shown the disparities that exist in schools with students of color, in particular Black males being unfairly treated and criminalized by the education system often leading to higher rates of suspension and incarceration (Noguera, 2008; Rios, 2011). Similar patterns exist in society, as the people who are being marginalized in society are also being marginalized in continuation schools. Thus, it is imperative that institutions like Puente Baluarte explore other methods to

connect and engage with vulnerable student populations, reevaluate punitive policies and practices that contribute to racial/ethnic minority youth feeling isolated, excluded, and targeted. Consequently, this signals a need to interrogate what it means to be a "model school," as they have limitations and can also learn from other institutions. For instance, they can learn from other high performing continuation schools that use restorative justice approaches to education-ones that emphasize fostering healthy relationships, rather than a punitive approach (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012).

Broader Education System: Lessons Learned from a Model Continuation School

This study provides insight into the broader education system through the various lessons learned about the school culture of Puente Baluarte as one of the designated model continuation high schools in the state of California. First, individuals matter, as the role of educators stood out in this study, as most educators at Puente Baluarte described being student-centered and being part of a small learning environment contributed to knowing each and every one of their students. The agency of educators and viewing the continuation student population from an asset perspective was imperative towards understanding their students and the broader challenges they encounter outside of school. For instance, the narrative of Jenny in Chapter Four is one of many examples of the resiliency of continuation youth, but also the collective agency to ensure Puente Baluarte has the structure to support Jenny and other continuation youth. Therefore, as formerly incarcerated youth, teen mother and foster youth, Jenny's narrative provides insight into the structure and culture of Puente Baluarte and their capacity to support many foster youth and teen parents through the resources and center on campus to meet their needs. As a teen mother, Jenny described the importance of the institution having a day care on campus, which allows for her and other teen parents to continue their education and not have to depart from school. Overall,

opportunities and resources matter to ensure students receive the necessary support beyond academics and to connect them to resources and help alleviate some of the broader challenges they might be facing outside of school.

Finally, this study provides messages from students and educators on the need to reconsider the discourse of continuation schools and to explore the nuances across alternative schools. Unfortunately, continuation educators described the tensions and division that exist among education systems, as the role and purpose of continuation schools continues to be discounted. In particular, continuation educators point to the lack of support from their colleagues in comprehensive schools, specifically how educators in comprehensive schools present continuation schools as an evil bad place, rather than as opportunity to academically reengage youth. Consequently, students enter continuation schools with a negative image prior to their enrollment, which is a form of disservice for students due to the inaccurate information, which contributes to their high anxiety and stress from the damaging misconceptions they have been ingrained with. And of greater concern, the work of continuation school educators is even more difficult for teachers and counselors to get students to buy into their academic culture. Therefore, continuation students and educators call from comprehensive schools to reflect and engage with continuation schools by visiting their local institution to learn more about the promising work that is being done in continuation schools.

Overall, what we call educational institutions, specifically continuation schools, has significant implications for how we view and treat people, thus, the surrounding stigma and stereotypes of fear have been imposed in society to how they should perceive continuation schools. From the student perspective, these stereotypes were messages they were aware prior to their transition into Puente Baluarte, thus, many of the students enter these spaces filled with

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anxiety, stress, uncertainty, and couple with the trauma they have experience not only in school, but in their communities. To avoid continuing the same rhetoric, this study was important, to hold all secondary education institutions accountable, but this also points to the need to visit and connect more with the work going inside continuations schools, engaging with the members of this community, to explore the nuances across schools, to building capacity, and the sharing of promising practices to truly provide an alternative education to the diverse student population in this overlooked sector.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Like many other research studies, there are several limitations to this study and generalizations cannot be made to other continuation high schools, the experiences of other students in these settings, and the broader alternative education system. Although this study sheds light on continuation high schools' possibilities and potential, Puente Baluarte is a school that cannot be replicated since all continuation schools vary based on the needs of the community, the size of the schools, school district support, and the additional services or partnerships each institution provide to students. In this way, this study does not dismiss the lived realities of the disturbing experiences and secondary-class education that some students do receive in some continuation high schools in California. Additionally, some scholars have argued that the case study as a methodology is limited because it only analyzes a single-site and does not have a comparison site. In addition, scholars have argued that a small sample size in the study is a limitation. In contrast, other scholars argue that the case study methodology allows for the opportunity to investigate "contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (Yin, 1994, p. 13). However, using a case study methodology provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena of the model continuation high school. Therefore, this study is

certain to reveal future directions. These directions will develop a deeper understanding for the possibilities of model continuation high schools in California as well as further research concerning the experiences of students and educators in continual schools.

Future research should explore diverse contexts and students in various settings to learn more about the experiences across urban, suburban, and rural environments. Specifically, it should explore other model continuation schools to continue to better understand and disseminate promising practices and partnerships in the field of continuation education. This study also mainly focuses on the experiences of Latina/o students given that they account for over 90 percent of the student population at this model continuation high school. Further research is needed to better understand the unique experiences of other racial groups including Black students, Asian American and Pacific Islander students, and Native American students. Additionally, is also important to explore other narratives not only race, but also by gender, sexuality, and other identities. Furthermore, future research should explore the experiences of students who transition back to their comprehensive schools to better understand their adjustment and support they received in this process. Additionally, future research should explore the continuation school to community college pipeline to understand the transition of continuation students and the structure of support in these partnerships.

Collectively, future research should incorporate different methodologies, such as, Participatory Action Research (PAR) or Community Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) to include students, parents, educators, community members, and other members that are directly involved with the continuation school sector. This study also contributes to theory as future research should continue to employ theories of cultural production to understand culture and identity in continuation schools and drawing from asset based frameworks to understand

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how individuals from these communities define their cultural spaces. Finally, future research should also consider branching out to explore other alternative education sectors, given that in some states students are being pushed out from traditional schools into alternative schools or programs as early as elementary and/or middle school. Hence, it is important that we draw closer attention to this growing educational sector that enrolls a high proportion of racial/ethnic minority students, thus, we need to understand the student experiences and the structure and culture of these institutions to support youth enroll in alternative education.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This study provides implications for policymakers, practitioners, school district leaders, and advocacy organizations to include continuation schools in the broader discourse of secondary education. Nationally, a growing number of racial/ethnic minority youth are being funneled into alternative schools, which is of great concern given the nuances in focus and quality. Hence, it is important that we pay attention to this growing educational sector with targeted policy and practice efforts at the federal, state, and local level. While there is a strong emphasis on the well-being of low-income students, students of color, foster youth, homeless youth, and immigrant youth, it is important that targeted efforts are also directed towards alternative schools and members of this community. Policymakers, advocacy organizations, and other stake holders must do a better job of including this educational sector and student population in their efforts; hopefully, this will contribute to the asset based frameworks of shifting the narrative about continuation schools but also bring together state and local actors and institutions to effectively build capacity to effectively support students and educators in this educational sector.

This study has implications to reconsider the punitive policies and practices in continuation schools, as they contribute to the marginalization of students of color, rather than contributing to their safety and own well-being. The culture of control and hyper-surveillance is damaging for students of color, in particular for Black males. Therefore, Puente Baluarte should consider incorporating critical interventions/asset-based approaches, specifically, restorative justice pedagogies and/or trauma informed approaches which focus on nurturing hope, healing, and care towards the healthy development of youth (Ginwright, 2011). In addition to the school contexts, community organizations play a crucial role in responding to some of the broader challenges students face. Therefore, this study provides the importance of bridging partnerships and the need to consider continuation high schools in the conversation of policy to expand opportunities for employment, higher education, and civic engagement opportunities. Continuation schools need to do a better job at creating civic opportunities for students to enact their agency to address issues that are relevant to their local context or personal experiences, this can be transformative to engage youth in issues that are relevant to their local and personal experiences. In addition, higher education opportunities are important for youth development, as continuation schools are an untapped area within the educational pipeline that requires more attention and support in this sector due to the broader challenges students face. Many continuation youth aspire to continue their education in a community college, which is important that higher education initiatives contribute to the youth development and transition of continuation students of color along the educational pipeline.

As the state of California is revamping their accountability program for alternative schools (Warren, 2016), this study has implications for policy to shine a light on the strengths and weaknesses for alternative schools. In particular, our understanding of the "model

continuation school program" remains extremely limited, thus, policy makers, educators, parents, and the public can benefit from this study to better understand how state and local efforts can improve the quality of these institutions. This study has implications for policy to bring in school districts together to eliminate the social and academic stigma that devalue students and educators, as it will provide the opportunity for engagement, collaboration, and shared accountability among comprehensive schools and their local continuation and/or alternative schools to truly serve their student population. In this way, more efforts should be geared towards shifting the perspective, but also creating the necessary tools and language of redefining continuation schools and the culture and identity of students, educators, and all members of this learning community. Furthermore, there is a need to better support teachers, counselors, and administrators in continuation schools. More importantly, educators in continuation schools matter, and the broader education system should reflect, respect, and learn more about the good work happening in some of these model continuation schools. Findings from this study has implications for the training, recruitment, retention, and support for educational leadership, teacher preparation, and counseling education programs to learn more about the importance and valuable work of education in continuation schools. This can also be an opportunity for graduate educational programs to consider partnering with their local continuation schools or alternative schools as potential sites for placement for pre-service educators, including: pre-service teachers; pre-service counselors, and/or pre-service administrators to learn more about the role and purpose of these schools and the possibility of building bridges among comprehensive schools and alternative schools to dismantle the damaging misconceptions.

Conclusion

One of the fundamental questions posed earlier in this study by Mike Rose (2012), "How effective are we at providing people a second chance?" was explored to unpack the concept of "second-chance" that has been widely used in the field of alternative education. Framed within theories of cultural production and the Paradigm to Understand Student Engagement and Dropout in Society (PUEDES) which examines the structure, agency, and culture of a model continuation school, this study draws attention to the need to reconceptualize the concept of "second chance" in continuation schools or alternative education broadly. As the concept implies the following: 1) continuation youth had a "first chance" in education and/or society 2) places sole responsibility on the individual dual who succeeds or fails, and 3) it does not acknowledge the larger context through which education occurs and the broader challenges continuation youth face outside of the school setting. The need to reconceptualize the concept of "second-chance" is important in the context of alternative education and the need to build bridges across systems to truly provide higher education, employment, and civic engagement opportunities for the development of continuation youth.

Appendix A: Observation Protocol

Date: _____Location/Site: _____

Setting: _____ Lesson Topic:_____

Purpose of the Observation:_____

Participants:_____ Time of Observation:_____

Physical Setting:
1. What is the physical environment like?
2. What is the context?
3. What kinds of behavior is the setting designed for?
4. How is space allocated?
5. What objects, resources, technologies are in the setting?

Participants:
1. Who is in the scene?
2. How many people?
3. What is each person's role?
4. Who is allowed in each scene? Who is not?

Activities and interactions:
1. What is going on?
2. How do people interact with each activity and with each other?
3. How are people and activities connected or interrelated?
4. What are the expectations of the activities and interactions?

Conversations:
1. What is the content of conversations in this setting?
2. Who speaks to whom?
3. Who listens?

Researcher Behavior:
1. How is my role affecting the scene I am observing?
2. What do I say and do?
3. How do participants respond to what I say and do?

Appendix B: Student Demographic Data Questionnaire

Demographics
1. Name:
2. Grade:
3. Age:
4. Birthplace:
5. Education: Names, locations, public or private
    a. Preschool
    b. Elementary school
    c. Middle school
    d. High school/Continuation school
6. Do you work? If so, how many hours?
7. How far is your school from where you live?

Family
8. Birthplace of Mother
9. Birthplace of Father
10. Mother's Occupation
11. Father's Occupation
12. Parents highest level of education
13. Siblings (order)
14. Sibling's schooling
15. How do you identify?
    a. Racial identification
16. What is your family's income level? (estimate of yearly income)
17. What language do members of your family speak? What do you speak at home?

Appendix C: Student Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you so much for meeting with me today. Before we start I want you to know that the purpose of our conversation is to understand your experiences in continuation high school.

Format

In this interview, I will ask you questions about a number of topics including your previous experiences prior to continuation high school, your current experiences in continuation high school, your relations with administrators, teachers, peers, and your aspirations after continuation high school.

Confidentiality

Please feel free to say exactly what you are thinking; nothing you say will offend me. There are no wrong or right answers. I am really interested in your experiences and opinions. Everything you tell me is completely confidential. You may also choose not to answer any questions if you like. You may see me writing at times. I just want to make sure I am capturing what you are sharing with me. Your name will not appear anywhere. Please feel free to use a pseudonym when referring to yourself or others.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

SECTION A: INTRODUCTION & PRE-CONTINUATION H.S.

Intent: To warm up and get a sense of pre-continuation high school activities and experiences at previous high school.

1. Can you tell me what you were doing before coming to continuation high school?
2. How did you hear about this continuation school?

3. Who helped you enrolled in continuation school? And in what ways? (family, educators, friends)

    a. What messages did your family and friends shared with you about your transition to continuation school? What did they think?

4. What did you know about continuation schools prior to coming here?

    a. Who shared that information with you?

    b. Has your perception change now that you're attending continuation school?

SECTION B: CONTINUATION H.S. EXPERIENCE

Intent: To examine students' transition and current experience in continuation high school and their perspectives on the structure and culture of the school.

1. What is it like being a student at this continuation school?

2. This continuation schools is considered a *model continuation school* by the state of California for their program and services. What do you think?

    a. What are some of the things you like about this continuation school?

    b. What are some of the things that you don't like about this continuation school?

3. What do you think about the ***structure*** of the school? (Probe: students they serve, curriculum offered, school policies, small learning environment, student cohort, classroom structure)

4. What do you think about the ***culture*** of the school? (relationships, values, and beliefs among students and educators, expectations and support in the classroom)

    a. Do you feel the classes you are taking are preparing you to graduate and go onto college?

    b. Tell me about your relationships with your peers at this school?

5. Are you involved in any extra-curricular activities or have you participated in any programs at this school? If so, which ones? (Probe: ASB, field trips, community college course)

6. Do you feel safe at this school? (Probe: bullying, fighting, gangs/gang culture, drugs)

    a. What do you think about the School Resource Officers (SROs)? (probe: drug searches with dogs and what they think)

SECTION C: SOURCES OF INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Intent: To learn about the experiences students have had with various institutional agents and the ways in which they serve to impede or enhance student success.

1. What are most teachers at this continuation school?
    a. Do you feel that your teachers care and support you here at the continuation school?
    b. Do you feel that your teachers have high expectations for you?

2. Are the teachers at this continuation school different than other schools? If so, in what ways?

3. What are most counselors like at this continuation school?
    a. Do you feel that your counselors support you here at the continuation school?

4. What type of information or resources do the counselors share with you?

5. Who do you reach out to people on school to connect you to information or services?
    a. Who or where do you go to for this kind of advice? [PROBE: Do you go to your teachers? What about peers? And school staff? OR if there's a particular space/resource they use often on campus]
    b. Tell me more about a time you sought out this kind of advice.
6. Do you have anyone at school you consider a mentor?
    a. Tell me about that relationship.
    b. What makes it a special relationship for you?

SECTION G: FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

Intent: To understand students current goals, aspirations after continuation high school, and who has contributed to shaping those career goals and future aspirations.

1. What are your future plans, to graduate from this continuation school or transfer back to your comprehensive school? If so, why?

2. What are your goals after high school? (career/college, work, other)

3. Do you feel this continuation school has prepared you for your future aspirations?

4. Have the educators at this continuation school influenced your decision? If so, in what ways?

5. Have any educators at this continuation school discussed college with you? If so, what have they shared with you?

6. Before coming to this continuation school, what was your attitude towards going to college?

SECTION H: REFLECTIONS & ADVICE

Intent: An opportunity for the student to offer closing thoughts about their experience at continuation high school and as well for them to share the strengths of the program, the challenges, and what areas can potentially be improved and what future collaboration is needed with other agencies.

We are almost done with the interview. We'll finish up with just a few closing thoughts now.

1. What are some of the things that might make it difficult for you to finish high school?

2. What advice will you share to educators and students in comprehensive schools about your experience at this continuations school? (support, challenges, potential, collaboration)

3. If you had the opportunity to speak to an administrator at [this continuation high school], what recommendations would you share with them to enhance the success of students here?

We have come to the end of our interview. I am most grateful for the time that you have spent with me to understand your experience. Is there anything you would like to add or think I should have asked about? Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your time!

Appendix D: Educator Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you so much for meeting with me today. Before we start I want you to know that the purpose of our conversation is to understand your experiences and role as an educators at this continuation school that has been recognized as a model school.

Format

In this interview I will ask you questions about a number of topics including your previous experiences as an educator prior to arriving at this continuation school, your current experiences as an educator, your philosophy as an educator, and your relationships with students and other educators at this continuation high school.

Confidentiality

Please feel free to say exactly what you are thinking; nothing you say will offend me. There are no wrong or right answers. I am really interested in your experiences and opinions. Everything you tell me is completely confidential. You may also choose not to answer any questions if you like. You may see me writing at times. I just want to make sure I am capturing what you are sharing with me. Your name will not appear anywhere. Please feel free to use a pseudonym when referring to yourself or others.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Can you tell me a little bit about what you were doing before coming to work at this continuation high school?

2. What led towards your decision to work at this continuation school?

3. How long have you been working at this continuation school?

4. Can you describe and share with me your role and responsibility as an educator at this continuation school? (principal, teacher, counselor, staff)

5. How is working in continuations schools different than other schools?

6. How do you feel about the continuation program's effectiveness and place/role within the larger secondary educational system? (*structure and culture of the school)*

7. This school has been recognized as a model continuation high school. What do you think is unique about this continuation school?

8. In what ways do you think the school prepares students to reach their goal, either to transfer back to comprehensive school, graduate from continuation schools, and/or transition into college/career? (*probe for programs and services*)

9. Tell me about your students here. What do you know about them? What is your relationships with them like?

10. What specific challenges do you think continuation high students face in mainstream school environments and outside of school?

11. How does this continuation school help students once they transition into this school to become more academic and socially integrated in positive ways? (*structure and culture of the school*)

12. What specific interactions do you have with them that you think will help them be better students?

13. What messages will you share to educators who are interested in working in continuation schools?

14. What messages will you share to educators in comprehensive schools about the role of continuation schools and the work that is being done here?

15. Lastly, what can we learn from the practices and policies in continuation schools that can inform other schools?

We have come to the end of our interview. I am most grateful for the time that you have spent with me to understand your experience. Is there anything you would like to add or think I should have asked about? Do you have any questions of me?

Thank you for your time!

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