

2017

The Experiences of Teachers at Southern California Continuation High Schools: Exposing the Barriers within Alternative Education

Gabriela R. Ornelas
Pitzer College

Recommended Citation

Ornelas, Gabriela R., "The Experiences of Teachers at Southern California Continuation High Schools: Exposing the Barriers within Alternative Education" (2017). *Pitzer Senior Theses*. 79.
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THE EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS
AT SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CONTINUATION HIGH SCHOOLS:
EXPOSING THE BARRIERS WITHIN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
Pitzer College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Arts
in
Sociology

By
Gabriela Rocío Ramírez Ornelas

ABSTRACT

My project explores the role of teachers at Southern California continuation high schools as it relates to serving low-income students of color in the face of the institutional barriers within alternative education. My study focuses on the teachers' career, interactions with students, and opinions on accessibility to resources and funding. I have examined their experiences through twenty in-depth, semi-structured interviews with teachers from three districts. My findings indicate that district members' misconceptions of Latinx students as inherently deviant and academically unengaged drive institutional issues creating financial burden for which teachers are forced to compensate. My study highlights that continuation high schools implement unjust policies, limit teaching materials and resources, reduce funding, and restrict the hiring of ancillary staff. My research pushes for more avenues of communication between the district and teachers to fulfill students' needs through adequate funding allocation. These results extend existing literature in revealing the untold narratives of California continuation high school teachers, the structural issues within alternative education, and the needs of Latinx continuation high school students.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank Dr. Roberta Espinoza, my research advisor, as she took the time in guiding me through the process of creating this empirical work. I would not have been able to conduct this study if it wasn't for your mentorship! I want to especially thank the Andrew Mellon Foundation for funding and supporting my research interests as a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow. In addition, I would like to thank Sally Ellis, a research librarian, who aided me in accumulating literature as well as finding outlets to network with potential participants. Moreover, I want to thank the teacher participants who embraced my desire to investigate their narratives. Without their genuine interest, I do not believe that I would be able to share such rich accounts within my study. Also, I want to thank my partner for providing constant emotional and academic support including late-night coffee runs and quick grammatical edits. Lastly, I want to thank my parents for always being there and instilling in me the desire to learn, explore, and critically analyze the world around me.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

According to the California Department of Education, continuation schools are a form of alternative education that provides a high school diploma program for students who are credit deficient. Within California, a student must be classified as “at-risk” in order to be placed in a continuation school; the majority of this student population has typically displayed behavior that has been labeled by the State of California as “delinquent.” Within California there are 520 continuation schools that teach over 70,000 students (EdSource, 2008). A significant number of students within alternative education are disproportionately students of color from low socio-economic backgrounds and communities. Consequently, many of the students endure daily adverse environmental conditions that manifest into emotional and behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, educational disengagement, and perceived acts of juvenile delinquency (Kratzert, 1990). Acknowledging the link between our educational and capitalist systems, it is evident that economically disadvantaged students of color are being tracked into alternative education, specifically continuation high schools (Kelly, 1993).

Continuation high schools who serve this vulnerable demographic of students receive inadequate funding allocations, teaching materials, and external resources, which makes it difficult to fully serve their unique academic and emotional needs (West Ed, 2008). Because there is not an institutionalized accountability system at continuation sites nor an established avenue of communication between the schools and greater administration, the district and the state can avoid addressing financial and resource disparities (Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). As continuation high schools face daunting structural issues, teachers are choosing to compensate for the gaps perpetuated by the lack of administrative awareness and concern (Ed Source, 2008).

Mobilizing their own personal agency, educators promote the academic success of their alternative students through their own efforts as teachers who care for their low-income students of color.

As there is little research regarding educators' experiences within alternative education, my study examines structural issues facing continuation high schools by analyzing the teachers' perspectives. I explored educators' roles by conducting 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with teachers at three schools within different districts. My thesis aims to answer: What are the experiences of teachers at Southern California continuation high schools? Guided by this inquiry, I focused on three topical areas: the teacher's career, the teacher's interactions with students, and the teacher's opinions regarding their accessibility to funding and resources. I believe that my study is significant in two distinct ways. Theoretically, it is significant because it introduces the unknown narrative of teachers to existing literature of alternative education. Practically, my work calls for avenues of communication between teachers and districts to acquire adequate funding to serve the needs of their students. Under our current political state, this research is important as it exposes the educational inequities within continuation high schools through teachers' collective experiences and knowledge. I believe that my empirical work highlights the institutional processes and mechanisms that reproduce social inequality within California's public education system.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature regarding continuation high schools is limited and difficult to encounter. To compile the literature presented in this chapter, I researched archives within libraries across California, navigated academic online sources, investigated texts from established California Department of Education databases, and connected with fellow scholars whose current work focuses on alternative education. Through existing literature, I pieced together a contextual overview of California continuation high schools.

History of Continuation High Schools

According to the California Department of Education, continuation high schools are a form of alternative education that provide high school diploma programs for non-traditional students (CDE). Established in 1910, the motto of continuation high schools has remained, which is “to serve those who are deficient in the rudiments” (Perez & Johnson, 2008). While the mission statement has never been altered, the target population, educational objectives, and institutional purpose of continuation high schools have shifted over the decades. These distinct shifts can be described in three eras that are shaped by their historical, political, and social contexts.

The first era began with the establishment of continuation high schools in the September of 1910. As World War I loomed, demand for industrial labor increased to meet the need for economic goods to support the war effort. As demand intensified, an influx of child labor partially fulfilled employment gaps, and many children who were working full-time jobs were unable to attend school. This population needed an alternative educational option that was flexible and rudimentary. In response, continuation high schools were created to provide a very

basic education and gave students access to apprenticeships that taught occupational and life skills. These schools primarily served the Native American and low-income, immigrant youth populations as they were the primary work force in child industrial labor at the time. During continuation high schools' initial years, the primary goal of the institution was to provide vocational training.

In the 1930s, the implementation of compulsory education laws and child labor laws initiated the second era as the focus and purpose of the continuation high school was altered. Children were no longer permitted to be employed as full-time laborers, and were legally obligated to attend school for longer hours. With the implementation of the new laws, there was an influx of primarily low-income urban youth into the school system. During the '30s, the education system in place was not structured or equipped to provide educational services to an increasing population of children. In response to the increased student population, the U.S. federal government began to provide funding incentives to continuation schools comprised primarily of low-income minority students. Set within the racial, classist historical context of the '30s, the U.S. educational system and federal agencies utilized discriminatory practices to separate new low-income students of color from the general white student population (Kelly, 1993; Voss, 1968).

With the influx of new students of color, continuation high schools sustained their vocational education objectives but for a different social purpose. The schools' main goal was to socialize the "maladjusted" urban youth of color. Continuation high schools believed that socialization for this population consisted of the reformation of inherent delinquent behaviors and preparation for the "world of blue-collar work." This shift resulted in continuation high schools becoming categorized as dumping grounds for low-income students of color who the

education system had identified as maladjusted. Mirroring the educational strategy of tracking, continuation high schools not only targeted urban youth of color but they heavily contributed to the racialized, classist process of stigmatization that categorized low-income continuation high school students of color as abnormal, unengaged, and deviant (Kelly, 1993; Robinson, 1973)

Throughout the U.S., the 1970s began a populist push for social reform within various institutions especially within the education system. This period granted continuation high schools the ability to integrate progressive opportunities. During this third era, continuation high schools began to invest time and effort into fully serving their nontraditional students. This shift is exemplified through the implementation of new social, academic, and professional programs and policies within continuation schools across the U.S. For example, many schools added community vocational learning opportunities, granted students the ability to take college courses, implemented flexible attendance schedules, and provided students with the opportunity to earn a high school degree. Many of these types of progressive programs have since diminished other than the ability to graduate high school with a general diploma (Robinson, 1973; Smith, 1973).

Characteristics of Continuation High Schools

Currently, the California alternative education system contains 520 high schools that serve over 70,000 students or 10% of the California student population (EdSource, 2008). Students within alternative education are disproportionately students of color from low socio-economic communities. Statistics indicate that California continuation schools are 55% Hispanic, 20% White, 4% Asian, and 16% African American. In addition, over 70% of this student population is enrolled within free or reduced lunch programs (WestEd, 2008).

In general, the population of students who attend continuation high schools are vulnerable. Low-income youth of color who are coping with personal, academic, and mental

struggles are overrepresented within continuation high schools. A majority of continuation high school students are students of color – 20% are English learners – and are three times more likely to be in the foster care system (Kratzert, 1990). In addition, many cope with disabilities – 20% have diagnosed learning disabilities and 50% have emotional and behavioral disabilities (Kratzert, 1990). Students who attend continuation high schools are also more likely to have to persevere through adverse environmental circumstances that often results in students participating in delinquent actions. For example, the majority of students who are in foster care are often categorized as truant as instability of their “home-life” blocks their ability to be active participants in their education. Moreover, rates of regular and heavy alcohol or drug use are two times higher among continuation students than their peers. In addition, students are three times more likely to have been in four or more physical fights and twice as likely to have been a gang member. Overall, continuation high schools serve a vulnerable student population; therefore, teachers and administrators are called to respond to a heightened level and concentration of personal, social, and academic needs (Brown, 2007).

Institutional Challenges

There are many detrimental institutional factors that have made it difficult to adequately serve this unique demographic of students. In general, California districts provide funding and resources for a school based on the number of students they serve. State finance and governance policies thusly view continuation schools as smaller versions of comprehensive schools. Alternative education was designed for smaller student-to-teacher ratios to promote the success of non-traditional students with different academic needs. Because funding is based exclusively on the number of students they serve, continuation high schools are unable to provide adequate resources and services. Current funding allocations do not align with the objectives and mission

of the continuation high school. This has produced negative outcomes that burden students and teachers. One consequence is that teachers focus on credit recovery without the same individualized time and resources per student as comprehensive high schools. Another result is that schools are unable to acquire ancillary staff including counseling, vocational education supports, and additional academic aids because there is little funding to address students' needs. In addition, continuation schools cannot require the financial assistance in order to connect with and integrate outside services (such as drug and alcohol support programs) that can truly benefit this vulnerable population of students (Lehr, Tan, Ysseldyke, 2009; West Ed, 2008).

Institutional issues that plague continuation high schools persist as there is no effective accountability system. As of now, continuation high schools and their corresponding districts follow a vague accountability measure called the Alternative School Accountability Measure (ASAM). In 2001, the State of California implemented the ASAM in order to enable school leaders to document and define their own important academic "engagement" benchmarks (Bush, 2012). Over time, the ASAM has proven to be ineffective as it is not incorporated into any overarching school assessments. Because it is not fully integrated, many government officials, educational policy makers, and district members assume that materials, curricula, and support systems in comprehensive schools are the same in continuation schools. However, this assumption is invalid because continuation high school students frequently cope with adverse personal and environmental challenges that create social, personal, and academic needs different from those of traditional students (McLaughlin And Ruiz de Velasco, 2012; Gibson, 1999). Overall, the main problem that continuation high schools face is a lack of consensus and communication among educators, policy makers, the state, and the district in addressing the lack of funding and resources affecting continuation schools. Additionally, governing bodies do not

devote time to creating legitimate expectations for teachers and measuring the effectiveness of the school in serving their students, thereby contributing to disparities.

Teacher's Voice and Action

There is little research and literature that discusses teachers' experience and narratives in California continuation high schools. However, many sources briefly spoke to the ways in which continuation teachers are individual agents who actively join their own academic efforts as educators with the state standards to support their students. Through this research outlet, I found that continuation teachers broaden educational experiences by introducing community engagement; educators create partnerships and network with outside programs and services such as fieldtrips to community colleges or connecting students with local business networks (Ed Source, 2008; Munoz, 2005). Continuation high school teachers are unique as they fully commit their effort and energy to benefit their students; continuation high school teachers' motivation and dedication to their students drives quality teacher student interactions. A quantitative study conducted by Locke (2010) came to an important conclusion: teachers who care accounted for students who have positive experiences with educators. Students engaged constructively in school because the teachers provided them with a sense of belonging in the classroom (Locke, 2010). As such, teachers are the driving forces within California continuation high schools.

In sum, the literature suggests that there are adverse structural issues underlying California continuation high school that disproportionately affect low-income Latinx students. Understanding that continuation high school students comprise a vulnerable population, institutional challenges that result from little funding, resources, and teaching materials persist within this sector of alternative education. Within the existing literature, the little information regarding teachers who navigate the continuation high school settings highlighted the positive

impact they have on students. My study will continue this investigation as it is the first to examine the role of educators within continuation high schools; prior studies have mainly focused on exposing the structural issues that hinder students' success. I believe my results are important as they highlight the unspoken narratives of teachers within California continuation high schools.

Theoretical Framework

After analyzing the cumulative data, I identified theoretical frameworks to help further explain my findings. Employing a qualitative method, I collected the voices of my participants to present shared results that adequately reflected their own experiences. After analyzing the transcripts, I connected theories to the findings that had emerged directly from the data. Mirroring the main themes that underlie my results, Goffman, Bourdieu, and Valenzuela illuminate the institutional processes of stigmatization and symbolic violence, and highlight the ways in which teachers who care about their students combat these structural issues.

Institutionalized Stigmatization

Erving Goffman (1963) finds that institutional processes utilize stigma attached to individuals to further perpetuate structural issues against disadvantaged groups. There is a strong relationship between stigma and ones' social identity, as stigma refers to an individual being rejected from a society based on a discredited attribute attached to one's social identity. Through the process of stigmatization, others' reaction to the rejected person further perpetuates the tainting of that individuals' actual identity. Goffman concluded that if an individual is a member of an existing disadvantaged group that has faced systemic oppression, the mechanism of courtesy stigma functions to discredit the individuals' "social power" - societal autonomy. Therefore, the whole society, including the affected individual, is unable to deconstruct stigma as

all members take an active part in sustaining extreme disapproval and victims' voices are quickly discredited. (Goffman, 1963).

While analyzing social situations within psychiatric asylums, Goffman (1963) exposes how institutions use the mechanism of stigma to sustain maltreatment. The theoretical framework of total institutions refers to institutions that label an entire group of people as being totally identical and, therefore, justifies the regulation of their perceived alike behaviors. When entering a total institution, admitted persons are stripped of their individual identities and fundamental rights. Through the process of institutionalized stigmatization, those identities are then spoiled and replaced with tainted misconceptions that are viewed to be uniform with all the members of the admitted group. Goffman further states that institutions are then able to regulate the behaviors of the stigmatized as these affected persons are unable to advocate for themselves in a society that discredits their individual voices and autonomy. Institutionalized stigmatization is a powerful mechanism that maintains and shadows the adverse structural issues that negatively-branded persons are forced to navigate within total institutions (Goffman, 1961).

Symbolic Violence

Complementing Goffman's framework of social stigma, Pierre Bourdieu (2009) presents the platform of symbolic violence to describe the ways in which dominant classes mobilize the mechanism of ideological power in order to maintain supremacy over disadvantaged groups. Through the process of legitimizing unjust hierarchy as a neutral social, political, and economic state, dominant classes are able to maintain power by ignoring and discrediting the plights and lived-realities of disadvantaged groups. By manipulating the mass reproduction of knowledge, dominant classes prevent others from critically thinking about societal issues by exchanging needed analysis with imposed false consciousness. Dominant ideologies shape the legitimization

of existing adverse environmental issues by labeling them as normal by societal standards. Bourdieu's conceptualization of symbolic violence plays an integral role in the acceptance of unjust social order to reproduce social inequality and, therefore, maintain supremacy for dominant classes. (Bourdieu, 1991)

Teachers Who Care

In response to institutionalized issues within educational settings, Angela Valenzuela's theoretical framework of teachers who care provides ways in which educators can combat structural challenges (2010). Valenzuela acknowledges that educators and low-income students of color typically perceive each other as not caring. She asserts that educators often use deficit language and action in attempting to regulate unwanted student behaviors. To counter this failing dynamic, Valenzuela purposes the role of caring between teachers and students as integral force in determining students' educational satisfaction and academic success. Recognizing that emotional support and academic success are interconnected, Valenzuela concludes that teachers who care about students, rather than prioritizing the schools and educational curriculum, have positive impacts on students' lives (Valenzuela, 2010).

In addition, Valenzuela states that strong teacher-student relationships are dependent on understanding the communities and environmental conditions that students face and, therefore, deconstructing stigmatized, racialized and classist perceptions attached to low-income Latinx students. Reforming teacher-student dynamics is crucial in countering the ways in which low-income students of color are pushed out of the education systems. Valenzuela concludes that positive teacher-student interactions that focus on caring lead to students' becoming academically successful as their emotional needs are considered by educators (Valenzuela, 2010). Within my study, I examine the way in which continuation high schools are facing

stigmatization as form of symbolic violence; in consequence, teachers are countering adverse labels and subsequent inequitable funding by providing needed resources, materials, and programs because they care about their students' academic, social, and emotional welfare.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

For this study, I conducted 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with teachers at three continuation high schools within different districts. I focused on educators' experiences as they relate to their career, their interactions with students, and their opinions regarding their accessibility to funding and external resources. Through the interviews, I highlighted their personal narratives in order to expose structural issues within alternative education that disproportionately affect low-income students of color. The participation of the teachers in my study was voluntary; I did not provide any type of incentive for their involvement. In addition, I maintained full anonymity of participants and acquired written consent for teachers' participation within my study and to record their interview.

Research Site

I recruited teachers in continuation high schools throughout Southern California to participate within my study. Because I maintained full anonymity of participants, I kept any identifiable personal information private; the name of the participant, name of the school, and any affiliations were all given pseudonyms. I recruited participants from schools from three different districts. Because alternative education has no set accountability system, expectations for the continuation high school, teachers, and staff are created by multiple entities and are inconsistent. Within the affiliated schools, funding and resource allocations provided by the district are not fixed and rely upon a multitude of external economic, social, and political factors. According to district policy, continuation schools should be funded based on the number of students that are enrolled within a particular site. However, teacher participants across all three

districts shared the common notion that administrators manipulated allocations and, in consequence, cut materials and resources necessary to serve the student population.

Due to a lack of reported statistics regarding the specific population that comprises the three schools, I asked teachers for their perceptions of the racial, socio-economic, and gender demographics of their continuation high schools. All continuation teacher participants reported that most students are of color, as Latinx children constitute the majority of the student population. Even though teachers reported that there has been an increase of girls attending continuation high schools, all teachers concurred that the majority of the population are boys. In addition, teachers noted that most students qualified for the free or reduced lunch program, meaning that most students were from low-income families. Certain schools offered free meals as they noticed that some families were finding it difficult to complete the paperwork to register for the program. Overall, teachers reported an overrepresentation of Latinx low-income boy students that attend continuation high schools compared to the overall Southern California comprehensive student demographics. This provides a revealing though not definitive picture of the student population at the three schools. However, as the reported data mirrors national statistics regarding continuation high schools, I believe that teachers presented an informative, perceived racial, socio-economic, and gender demographics of the student population.

Participants

For this study, 20 interviews were conducted with continuation high school teachers working at three schools within differing districts. Because I was interested in interviewing any continuation high school teacher in Southern California, the pool of participants was broad. Even though I interviewed teachers from three schools of differing districts, teacher demographics were fairly similar overall. The race, class, gender, and age characteristics of teachers were self-

identified by participants. The ages of participants ranged from twenty-five to fifty-five years old with the majority of educators being middle-aged. Primarily, teacher participants identified as white men and women from mainly middle-class and low-income backgrounds. *However*, there were four teachers, two women and two men, who identified as people of color from low-income backgrounds.

In addition, most of the teacher participants – about sixteen out of the twenty educators – have worked at the same continuation high school site for over ten years. Most, did not choose to work in continuation high schools but were placed or forced to work within alternative education because of impeding, external personal and economic factors. However, the majority of the population was satisfied with working within this sector of education as they have chosen to teach at the same site for a sustained period of time.

Positionality

I am a woman of color; my positionality informs the ways in which I was perceived by the interviewee. Because of my identity, a sizable proportion of participants questioned the intent of my study when first meeting me in-person. In addition, multiple participants had investigated my personal, professional, and academic affiliations online. Even though most of my social media presence is restricted, many of the organizations with which I am affiliated are dedicated to the empowerment and promotion of marginalized communities. I believe my own positionality and online-presence is important to state as it may have skewed the way in which participants reacted to my study and answered to following interview questions.

Procedure

I recruited participants through the method of snowball sampling: I reached out to any continuation high school educators teaching in Southern California through online contacts,

Facebook groups, and personal established connections with local teachers. To aid me in assembling participants, I distributed recruitment flyers and emails that were passed along through established networks of continuation high school teachers. Most participants of my study received my flyer on a continuation high school teacher Facebook group or received a personal email from a fellow colleague. Therefore, the people who reached out to me had a personal investment in the research I was conducting. Initially, teachers contacted me with interest in my study through email, by phone, or in-person. In response, I provided each participant with information regarding the goals of my research and invited the teacher participant to take part in a one-hour interview. If the teacher agreed to participate in my study, we scheduled a meeting for the interview at a mutual time and place where the participants felt comfortable: public spaces, their homes, and their classrooms.

Before beginning the interview, I explained the purpose of my study, answered any following questions, and prompted participants to read and sign the consent form. The interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to two hours as some participants had the ability and interest in fully sharing a more holistic narrative. My interview questions revolved around three topical areas: the teacher's career, their interactions with students, and the resource and funding accessibility within their school. Every interview was recorded and, throughout the meeting, I took personal notes. The participant had the right to stop the interview at any time. After the interview, the recording was transcribed and, then, destroyed. All names have been assigned pseudonyms and participants' personal affiliations have been excluded. To maintain full anonymity, at times, I was unable to divulge their specific discipline as it was generally unique to their school. Throughout the process of collecting data, I employed feminist qualitative methodologies by providing participants' the choice to edit their transcriptions; in addition, I

purposely conducted voluntary interviews and maintained transparent transcriptions to highlight the hidden narratives of continuation high school teachers.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Continuation high school teacher participants provided an in-depth perspective on the complexities of alternative education. The findings that have emerged from the data reveal that stigmatized misconceptions formed and sustained by district administrators drive structural issues that are compensated for by teachers who care for their students. The results are divided into four sections. The first section will show how adverse external challenges faced by continuation high school students cause a heightened concentration of emotional needs that affect students' academic success. The second section will expose racialized and classist stigmas attached to low-income students of color that makes students' actual emotional and academic needs invisible. The third section addresses the structural issues that are present within continuation high schools. The fourth section analyzes the ways in which teachers fill funding, material, and resource gaps and care for students to promote their emotional and academic success.

Adverse Environmental Conditions

Defined by the state, a continuation high school is an alternative high school diploma program that primarily serves students who are deficient in academic credits. Typically, admitted students are upperclassmen who are very behind within multiple subjects. All teachers explained that students who attend continuation high schools are academically delayed; Mrs. Ramirez, a veteran English and ESL teacher, provides an illuminating example regarding students' literacy ability:

For my English learners, the literacy assessment is already built into our program. They have to do this reading test every semester on-line and test their reading level. My students will get results like they are third grade reading level. I think the biggest deficit is that their reading skills are really low. Because of the way they purchased the

curriculum, they only have that program for the English learners. But, I bet the students in my regular English class, who were English only, would be pretty low on that too. Our estimated average is that our students are at a 6th grade reading level.

It is evident that students who transition into continuation sites have faced educational challenges at their previous comprehensive high schools. As continuation schools were designed as an alternative educational path, students are given a specialized schedule to recover credits in order to graduate. All continuation students, despite their English language ability, are behind academically. However, as low-income students of color comprise the continuation population, they are facing many outside challenges aside from educational difficulty.

Being low-income children of color, continuation high school students are delayed academically as they are facing more pressing issues outside of educational settings. Mirroring national statistics, teachers from all three continuation high schools noted that the students who attended continuation high schools were facing adverse environmental conditions. These circumstances reflected the external challenges of low-income Latinx communities. Coming from low-income communities of color, students are economically, politically, and socially disadvantaged. Ms. Johnson, a 7th year English teacher, described the issues facing students as, “possibly attempting suicide, pregnancies, accidental abortions, abuse, molestation, gang involvement, homeless. I mean anything you can think of they have dealt with. They will come in on drugs - whatever it is; and, it's frequent.” Clearly, students who are placed into continuation schools are dealing with adverse circumstances aside from academic challenges. As students are failing their classes far before transitioning into alternative education, ignored external challenges are the driving factors that allow low-income students of color to fall between the cracks of comprehensive high schools. Systemic adverse environmental conditions play an

integral role within continuation students' lives by negatively affecting their social and academic welfare.

Consequentially, constant challenges have a psychological effect on students at continuation high schools. Under constant environmental pressures, continuation students acquire emotional trauma. Given the high concentration of adverse external conditions, teachers found that students often failed at navigating educational settings while dealing with severe emotional issues. Mrs. Campbell, a veteran English teacher, simply describes her opinion regarding student's overall mental health; she states, "There is the normal teenage lack of confidence in themselves. But, here we have a lot of kids with anxiety and depression. They are dealing with both. They are having a lot of emotional problems that lead to behavioral problems and academic problems too." Affecting their social, and academic behaviors, continuation high school students have high levels of emotional disturbance. Compared to comprehensive high schools, students have emotional obstacles that make it difficult to engage academically. A multi-subject educator, Mr. Robinson pinpoints emotional issues as the shared characteristic among this student population:

I think it's everything here. I think emotions kind of controls everything. It explains the lack of academic success, for that matter. And, indirectly, that's why they're here. Initially, it might be a event that happened in their life or that has happened in their life that brought them here. I think ninety percent emotion, ten percent success. And, if you can get them to look at their situation, handle their situation, comprehend it, they will do much better academically.

Students holding emotional trauma is a common challenge that all continuation high school teachers encountered within their classrooms. Therefore, continuation students are academically delayed because they have to persevere through constant harmful environmental challenges, which cause severe emotional issues.

As students deal with emotional trauma, the continuation site needs to prioritize their psychological needs. Students emotional health is equally as important as their academic welfare. Many teachers noted that students' emotional and academic success are two separate but dependent factors that determine their educational outcomes. Describing this relationship, Ms. Morgan, an English teacher, shares that continuation high school students need emotional support to achieve positive educational outcomes; she illustrates:

I don't think I could be successful as an academic teacher, if I wasn't successful as an emotional support system. The kids could care less what I have to say about anything I could say until they feel at least safe emotionally. They don't have to be my friend or super connected to me. They are teenagers. They will pick and choose who they feel connected to. But, they will usually feel connected to someone, one teacher. And then, that will ground them in the school and that makes it a little bit easier. But, I don't think that I can have any success academically, if I didn't first have success without emotional piece. And, that comes in different forms and it feels throughout the year. But, I think if it starts with them feeling safe and respected and cared for and that it will build too - okay, "Now, I know I can depend on her." It builds in different capacities with different kids. It's kind of the foundation I believe if they trust you as the person then they trust that you're trying to teach them something that's worthwhile. They will give it a shot, but the emotional piece has to be there."

Recognizing that emotional health is an integral part of academic success, teachers draw this connection in order to meet students' credential needs. Through building relationships that promote the emotional well-being of students, Ms. Morgan facilitated positive academic spaces for students as she listened and assuaged their external issues. Understanding the interconnection between emotions and academics, this relationship influences continuation high school teachers' actions. Moreover, there are many alternate ways in which students' emotional well-being is cared for within continuation educational settings.

For most continuation high school students, teachers noted that the physical school became a singular space that was stable and supportive within their lives. As students are being severely psychologically affected by adverse environmental challenges, they gravitate toward the

school as a safe site. Protected by a strong teacher network built on positive teacher-student interactions, students would associate the continuation high school with content sentiments as teachers actively acknowledged their emotional needs. Mr. Gray, a veteran specialized teacher, describes how the school becomes a safe space for students:

The one thing about this place - it has to do with the teachers and the school climate - that the most consistent part of their life for a continuation school student is being here. Our attendance is probably 97%. The best part of their life right now, the most constant part of the, there consist part of their life, they know what to expect when coming here, and the know the safety and community aspect of this school. Sometimes it doesn't really matter to them if they do anything here, because they may run into an adult here. It could be the secretary; it could be the custodian; it could the proctor; it could be the teacher. If someone says something to them, enough to them, they have a conversation and they build a relationship with them. That conversation or a relationship will change their life either long-term or short-term. That's the most important part of this place. We make it like home.

The continuation high school has become a physical space where students feel safe. Through an attached emotional connection to the site, students are eager to attend school because they know that the campus climate is supportive. All teachers noted that by meeting their emotional needs, the continuation high school became a special space for their students. By forming continuation high schools as stable and caring sites, the emotional well-being of students is supported. Therefore, the continuation student can academically engage with the aid of an emotionally caring environment facilitated by educators.

According to established educational standards, students are placed within continuation high schools because they are severely academically behind. As the continuation student population is comprised of low-income youth of color, students at these schools are facing adverse environmental conditions that impact their academic success. Constant external challenges often result in negative psychological issues and emotional trauma that makes it difficult for students to academically and socially engage within the classroom. Understanding

that emotional support leads to academic success, continuation high school teachers build relationships, consequently forming a stable and welcoming site where students feel safe. Because of impeding external challenges, continuation high school students have heightened emotional needs that, if ignored, can affect their academic and social welfare.

Racialized and Classist Stigmatization

Rather than recognize students' external challenges and, therefore, their emotional needs, outer community members characterize continuation students using misguided misconceptions. Mirroring Goffman's social stigma theory, non-affiliated members of the surrounding community actively form and sustain stigma against continuation high schools and admitted students. By mobilizing racialized and classist stereotypes, teachers noted that communities play an integral role in normalizing stigma against continuation schools as they serve low-income students of color. Mr. Robinson explains:

It's pretty much been the same over my 20 plus years. Most of them are all negative; most of them are misperceptions. But, in general, the perception is that kids who go here are stupid and bad. [Continuation schools] are not a place you would ever want to let your kid graduate from. The community just has a very low opinion. Unfortunately, the district office doesn't really try to change that perception, even though, we are probably the most accredited school...Overall the perception is not very good.

By the outer community, most teachers concurred that continuation high schools and admitted students are stigmatized. Through labeling continuation students as "stupid and deviant," non-affiliated community members equate youth to racial and socio-economic stereotypes. Being from low-income Latinx backgrounds, continuation students are often criminalized and categorized as academically unengaged within educational settings. By attaching and maintaining adverse misconceptions of admitted students, their social identities and emotional needs are overshadowed by the surrounding public's perceptions of them.

In addition to the outer community, the district is a very powerful entity that perpetuates racialized and classist misconceptions. Through stigmatizing continuation high schools and enrolled students, teachers note that administrators can delegitimize alternative education because they perceive the site to reflect damaging misconceptions attached to low-income communities of color. Ms. Johnson shares a negative experience she had with a district member who attempted to perpetuate misguided perceptions regarding continuation high schools, she explains:

Also, if I can't necessarily go to the district to do it, I can empower the parents to do it by helping them feel like they know what to say. For my students in general, I remember having IEPs [Individual Education Plans] with a certain school psychologist that works in the district. He called our school a credit mill. He was kind of from the old era of continuation high schools. This was my first experience with him...and, he was like, 'You are just going to go here and they're going to give you.'

Sadly, many teachers shared similar experiences that exposed district members for holding and perpetuating stigma attached to continuation high schools. As the continuation student population is comprised of low-income youth of color, the stereotype that their communities do not value education is socially attached to students' identities. By classifying continuation schools as non-educational "credit mills," district administrators actively categorize continuation high schools as sites that are non-academic by utilizing adverse, conceived labels. As district members are rarely interacting directly with continuation schools, administrators mobilize racial and socio-economic misconceptions as supplementary information to define continuation high schools and enrolled students.

District members shadow students' identities and needs with attached racialized and classist stigma. Through this process, administrators shape continuation high schools as an expendable alternative sector of the education system. Most teachers shared that they believed continuation high schools are the stepchild of the district. This label refers to the ways in which

continuation sites are ignored by district administrators. With the use of stigma, continuation high schools become totally overlooked by administration; Mr. Miller, a veteran history teacher, describes:

[From] the administrator end, I don't think the district office give us much. I don't think they care about the continuation school as long as things aren't bad...I do not think the district cares about us; it's kind of like, "Oh, they're alternative ed, so it's fine." I think [we] are brushed under the rug because we are this continuation schools and all the 'stupid losers.' We are a stepchild of the district - that's how we kind of feel like.

Clearly, the district treats continuations high schools as an invisible sector within the educational system. By labeling continuation students as "stupid losers", district members make the decision to dismiss the needs of continuation students by stigmatizing the population as being academically unengaged. Identifying continuation sites as the stepchild, teachers know that their students' unique needs are not recognized because their schools are entirely dismissed by district members who refuse to interact with alternative education.

Compared to comprehensive high schools, continuation sites are of little importance to the district. Serving a smaller population of low-income students of color, districts actively overlook continuation high schools. Perceived to be lacking positive academic and social outcomes, district administrators do not recognize the self-made successes of continuation sites. Teachers often noted that continuation high schools were of the least priority for the district.

Mrs. Baker, a veteran math teacher, further explains this belief:

We are overlooked and it's fairly noticeable. I think if someone else or three other schools needed something before us, we would be fourth on the totem pole. They have been talking about doing something nice on our campus for the past years. They have had the money but something else came up and they can't do. Part of it is that you don't want to rock the boat too. We don't want to bring any noticeable negative attention or let them know because they are always looking for something not good instead of something good. When something good happens here it is often overlooked. The focus for this new superintendent is on the high school, to get the high school straight. We can be the lowest rated high school; I don't think they would really have a big deal with that.

It is evident that continuation high schools are totally overlooked by the district. In comparison, comprehensive education becomes the focus of administrators as they overshadow the successes of continuation students. In addition, Mrs. Baker shares that continuation sites only receive overarching attention in response to negative happenings affiliated with the school. As a stigmatized student population, the district reacts to only protect their own image within the outer community rather than aid the continuation schools. Therefore, the districts can entirely ignore continuation high schools by controlling negative attention and dismissing the positive work of continuation students. By imposing invisibility onto continuation high schools, the districts' actions have a tangible impact on the schools and their students.

Given that continuation high schools are an invisible division of our education system, the district places principals who have no interest in serving this student population in continuation sites. As assigned principals do not fully understand the needs or align with the schools' goals, teachers noted a high principal turnover rate within their continuation high schools. Describing the placement of principals as unpredictable and ill-advised, Mr. Robinson illuminates:

We have had a lot of principals in a short amount of time. That has been a difficult situation at times because a lot of people were brought in here just for the sake that we needed a body to be the administrator. In that situation, we made the best of it. And, it made everybody become more of a unified staff because we were always kind of working against the person who was the administrator. They really didn't care about students and thought horrible things about them. They had no vested interest in working here except to end out their career and, or be a stepping stone for whatever they're going to do next.

All continuation high schools were negatively affected by a high principal turnover rate. As principals were not specifically selected for the role, administrators filled the positions in order to sustain the continuation site's existence within the district. Stigma attached to students prevented candidates from applying or principals from staying at continuation high schools. As

principals are haphazardly assigned to alternative education, principals quickly filtering through continuation sites reflect a way in which the district overlooks and dismisses continuation high schools.

There is a racialized and classist stigma attached to continuation high schools and low-income continuation students of color as they are viewed as deviant and academically unengaged by the outer community and the district. Holding a lot of administrative power, district members form and perpetuate adverse stigma. Through normalizing stereotypes against students, district members can treat continuation high schools as a stepchild. Therefore, administrators totally dismiss the actual social identities and needs of continuation students – continuation high schools become an imperceptible, expendable sector of education. Mobilizing imposed institutional invisibility through stigmatized misconceptions, districts are able inadequately fund continuation high schools because the students are perceived as unworthy of the resources. The lead decision-makers, district administrators partake in reproducing social inequality within the educational system.

Systemic Structural Issues

Barred as an invisible, stigmatized division of the education system, the overarching administration creates, perpetuates, and maintains institutional issues within continuation high schools as a form of symbolic violence. Surprisingly, all three continuation high schools shared very similar structural obstacles. These institutional challenges can be divided into three topical areas: a lack of avenues of communication, a lack of resources and materials, and a lack of needed staff.

The first structural issue that faces continuation high schools is that there are no established avenues of communication between the high schools and the district. Sadly, existing

stigma attached to the low-income continuation students of color can sustain itself within overarching administrative system as there is a lack of interaction between the two entities to breakdown misconceptions. In response to a question regarding perceived issues, a second-year science teacher, Ms. Flores, provides a fresh perspective critiquing the lack of administrative visibility within continuation schools; she elucidates:

I feel like there could be more presence from the administration coming to school events. I believe there's just some disengagement. I feel like the teachers do a [great] job being available for the kids and doing after school events. And, I just feel like sometimes I wish everyone was there for that because I think it's really important to break apart negative perceptions. And, I don't feel like everyone always is willing to come to [continuation high schools]. I would say that administration's always the hardest part because they think of us in a certain way.

District administrators choose not to engage with continuation schools because of stigma attached to enrolled students. Many teachers noted that districts chose not to be visible within continuation high schools as they refuse to acknowledge the successes of continuation high schools and attempt to entirely ignore this alternative sector of education. Therefore, there are no established avenues in which schools and administrators can communicate to break down damaging misconceptions, promote enrolled students, and discuss the issues that need to be addressed in order to adequately serve continuation high school students.

As district administrators refuse to be present or associated with continuation high schools, they do not fully understand the actual needs of student and goals of continuation high schools. Without communicating with continuation high schools, the district implements policies that do not support admitted students. By placing high ill-advised expectations onto continuation students, continuation high schools are left at a disadvantage as they are forced to comply with unrealistic policies. Critiquing the unjust implementation of requiring A-G courses, Ms. Brown, a veteran special education teacher, states:

Given that we are a continuation site, a full academic schedule with A-G requirements doesn't work for them. I think you have to condense it to still provide them with that because we don't have money and students don't have time with the credits they are behind in. We are trying to make it a mini High School and it's like, 'It didn't work when it was a big one so to give them that won't work.' I just don't honestly feel that the way that it's structured is not going to help most of these kids leave here and be ready to go out, get a job, and take on the world. And, I'm not saying everybody needs to be in a suit and tie or go to college. But, they don't have any of the professional skills necessary to leave. When they leave here, they need to be able to have the motivation to take care of themselves and have the tools to do so. I just don't think that the A-G model is supportive. I think it gets overshadowed with, 'let's get these graduates, the number of graduates to go to college.' Its' unrealistic without funding and the type of students.

The A-G requirement describes a curricular model that provides students with specific courses decided by the UC and CSU systems to prepare students for going to college. Considering that continuation high school students are focusing on acquiring lost credits, the curriculum should mirror a structure that centralizes on students' graduating rather than being prepared for a four-year university experience. Instead of communicating with continuation high schools, district members implemented this policy to maintain a college-readiness image. Overall, most teachers were not in favor of the A-G courses as it placed unrealistic expectations on their students and the continuation sites did not receive allocated supplementary funding to provide those courses.

A secondary structural issue is that there is a lack of funding to acquire adequate external resources and teaching materials in order to fully serve the high concentration of needs held by the continuation student population. Currently, districts are facing fiscal issues as they are pushed to cut budgets to save money. As comprehensive high schools are the main priority of the district, continuation high schools are disproportionately affected by implemented budget readjustments. Many teachers noticed this trend as students with heightened behavioral issues are funneled into continuation high schools instead of being placed into a more intensive social educational site; Mr. Ellison, a veteran science teacher, describes:

Also, there are some kids that shouldn't be in a regular school or in a continuation school. They should be in a different type of school. Because of funding, we get a lot of resistance from the district and then there's a lot of issues. Kids that we know that need this extra help or need to be moved they postpone and postpone by saying, 'We will do this test,' or 'We will do that test to the psychologist.' And, we're like it's not going to solve the problem because we need to get these kids in the right services. But, because there is not much money, there's a lot of resistance to them. But, it ends up hurting the kids who need continuation high schools.

The administrators funneling students with behavioral issues into continuation high schools save money for the district. In consequence, students who solely need an intensive credit recovery program are at a disadvantage. As continuation high schools already receive little funding, requiring sites to meet the emotional and academic needs of educationally delayed students along with the behavioral needs of misplaced students is almost impossible. Through purposeful funneling, district members manipulate their authority over placing students to save money at the expense of continuation students' emotional, social, and academic well-being.

Considering that continuation students face adverse external challenges, ill-advised funding allocations fail to recognize the heightened concentration of emotional needs. As academic success is dependent on emotional health, many teachers concurred that continuation high schools lack emotional resources and, consequently, are unable to promote positive educational outcomes. Magnified by overcrowded classrooms, Ms. Johnson describes how the lack of recognition regarding student's emotional needs negatively impacts their educational experiences; she describes:

But, it's hard because we are constantly against emotional problems. Along with having a better understanding with what alternative ed is, then the funding needs to also come behind that. And, I think what they really need to realize is that they find us on a per pupil basis still. The issues that come with us and inequitable funding, in the sense that we have kids that need more emotional help. If we're going to be equitable, we need to give more to the kids who need more. if we have to give alternative ed more money in order to have the same opportunity that comprehensive has because more money mean smaller class size and more emotional health resources, then we have to do that. But, right now funding is the same way that you find Comprehensive High School. It doesn't

make any sense to me. At least, in the past, the state recommended 15 - 1 and alternative Ed. sometimes, I have like 30. And, it's doing a disservice to the kids. They have a lot of those emotional needs that can very easily take over the classroom. And, if there's 30 of them, it's really hard for me to attend to both the emotional and the academic needs of all of them without any resources to refer them to. So, I think that with a better understanding of what the purpose of alternative ed. is and what the power of alternative ed. can be that it needs to be equitably funded to match that.

It is evident that students attend continuation high schools because they have increased emotional needs compared to comprehensive educational settings. As of now, continuation sites are unable to navigate these challenges as administrators fail to recognize how emotional trauma affects students' abilities to graduate. Therefore, the district does not allocate enough funding to provide adequate emotional resources. Exacerbated by overcrowded classrooms, the emotional needs of all students cannot be fully addressed by one educator without any external programming. Without an understanding regarding the importance of students' emotional health within continuation educational settings, administrators refuse to institute increased funding to provide satisfactory emotional resources.

As administrators fail to allocate adequate funding, educators lack the necessary teaching materials. In order to simply facilitate a course, teachers bear the burden of compensating for tightened budgets that limit scholastic supplies. Facing material restriction, students are negatively affected as they don't have the resources to fully academically engage. Many teachers shared experiences that highlighted the lack of teaching materials present within continuation high schools; Mr. Gray describes:

We have been on a shoestring budget to one point when they were counting how many copies we made on the copy machine. And would say, "After this amount; you're supposed to be on your own." But rarely did that happen. Most of the time we went out to go but the paper and any other supplies we needed on our own because our budget was gone. A lot of us spend our own money.

Most teachers shared the experience of being placed in classroom with limited teaching materials like textbooks, pencils, curricular handbooks, printer paper, poster boards, and erase markers. These basic scholastic supplies are absent within continuation high schools. The increased lack of teaching materials creates a larger negative impact on students as it hinders the continuation teachers' ability to facilitate courses. In response, educators purchased educational supplies to stock their classrooms. By making it difficult to adequately serve the academic needs of continuation high school students, limited teaching materials adversely affect enrolled students.

Lastly, the third structural issue is that continuation high schools lack adequate staff to emotionally and academically serve all students. As the continuation student population has a heightened concentration of emotional needs, continuation sites lack ancillary staff that concentrate on promoting the emotional health and, therefore, the academic success of enrolled students. Ms. Sanchez, a veteran English teacher, shares her opinion that highlights the need for ancillary continuation staff as she explains:

We could probably benefit from a counselor that did more group things or if we had somebody that was on site like school counselor or psychologist. I know that would be a really good component to have. The kids don't know how to have conflict resolution, those kind of healthy emotional and social skills need to be taught. Sometimes it's like a student may need anger management but that is just nonexistent. It's really getting in the way of their academic success and I'm a little worried about what they're going to do when they go out into the world and try to approach these types of situations that come up in public. And that's not really going work; there need to be a counselor.

The hiring of ancillary emotional staff is extremely needed within continuation high schools to promote the emotional and academic success of enrolled students. As limited funding restricts the hiring of specialized staff, teachers concurred that continuation high schools are unable to fully encourage the academic success of students as they are unable to assuage attached emotional needs. Through instituting a continuation counselor or psychologist, students can be provided resources that teach them valuable social skills and, consequently, meet their emotional

needs. Without a counselor to address the emotional trauma of enrolled students, the continuation population is left at a disadvantage.

Moreover, continuation high schools lack educators to teach all of the needed credit recovery courses. Within continuation high schools, teachers noted that they are forced to adapt to numerous academic roles teaching multiple subjects within varying grade levels. Even though teachers may not specialize in certain subjects, they facilitate external courses so their students can catch up in certain academic areas; Mrs. Garcia, a veteran special education teacher, explains the ways in which teachers are adaptive as she states:

We don't have enough teachers so we have to teach a lot of combination classes or we have classes that our history and they made the world history, US history, government, or economics that one teacher is going to teach. One day a teacher may teach economics and two weeks later she may teach us history and two weeks later she's going to teach government because there's not enough teachers. And, student who really needs U.S. history are getting something else that he doesn't need. In English, it's a little bit better, even though we're teaching combination classes. Because English is English even though sometimes were teaching at different levels, different grade levels. Same thing with the sciences. We have one science teacher and we may teach two different science classes but we might have needs of four or five different sciences. We are providing a bunch of kids with all different science fields and they're getting science credits but none in the right sciences.

Within continuation high schools, there are not enough teachers to facilitate required courses for enrolled students. Hired educators are forced to compensate for the lack of teaching staff; Mrs. Garcia provides a way in which teachers counter this challenge as educators taught multiple academic subjects through combining courses. These combined courses are efficient but do not provide students with the adequate educational experiences to satisfactorily meet their academic needs. Shaped by a limited allocated budget, continuation high schools do not have a large enough teaching staff to facilitate the required academic courses for graduation.

Continuation high schools serve a student population that has a heightened concentration of emotional and academic needs. However, as the actual needs of enrolled students are

shadowed by racialized and classist stigma, overarching administrative systems form and sustain structural issues within continuation high schools. Through a process of imposed invisibility, districts limit the funding allocation of continuation schools in order to prioritize comprehensive education. In consequence, continuation sites are forced to navigate institutional challenges including: lack of interaction between districts and continuation high schools, inadequate emotional resources and school supplies, and limited necessary staff members. As unjust institutional obstacles persist within continuation high schools, teachers are forced to compensate for structural issues to promote the academic, emotional, and social welfare of students.

Teacher Action

Institutionalized barriers prevent continuation schools from meeting students' needs, requiring teachers to implement supplemental strategies to adequately serve students. One specific way in which in which educators provide for students' emotional and academic needs is through classroom adaptation. By attempting to fully understand the external challenges facing students, educators are mindful as they plan curriculum, form lessons, and create educational activities. All teachers noted that they adjusted their classroom and teaching pedagogies to effectively facilitate courses at continuation high schools as Mr. Robinson elaborates:

I found that the traditional approach lecturing, reading books, answering questions is not the most doable for this population. Then district talks about all these new programs that they introduced; I've done that naturally by the clientele. I've had to adjust my curriculum, my approach to students, my approach to parents just because I work here because of the client's needs. Being a continuation teacher, my career is ever-evolving. I'll try something new and if that doesn't work I won't use it again. When I find something that is successful, I'll hold onto it. If you don't do that, you won't survive here. So, you have to stay one step ahead of the game.

Moving away from traditional forms of teaching, continuation educators alter provided courses so that their students can educationally engage within their classrooms. Having differing emotional and academic needs, teachers are forced to adjust curriculum and teaching praxis to be

relevant to this student population. Understanding that students face external challenges and adapting to meet their needs is an integral part of the continuation educator's role. Teachers are willing to alter curriculum as these changes facilitate supportive educational settings that promote the scholastic success of their continuation students.

Collectively, continuation teachers gather to form a supportive cohort that is unafraid to voice concerns to administrators that push the educational system to adequately serve their continuation students. Through creating a strong network of educators, their shared critique holds a lot of power in forging positive change within continuation high schools. All teachers relied on the support of other educators when advocating for needed resources and materials. Mrs. Williams, a veteran art teacher, describes the ways in which educators have created a powerful community, she illustrates:

Shared decision-making is very important to us and if we feel that that's not happening, we make it known. So, there have been some instances where we've had to sit down and meet with the principal and say "Hey, you are not hearing us." And I think because we are all close, together we're empowered to act because we know what students need, we are in the classroom with them. That's not to say that we get everything we want. But, because we are in work together to have those discussions, our voices are heard and been valued.

A supportive community of teachers, they can successfully advocate for their students.

Interacting with students daily, continuation teachers understand the emotional and academic needs of their students. Together, educators become active agents in addressing damaging obstacles present within the classroom that negatively affect the educational outcomes of continuation students. Pushing for communication with overarching administrators, the cohort of teachers is a powerful entity that calls for positive changes to promote students' emotional and academic success within continuation high schools.

Teachers in continuation schools are active mentors as they speak up for their students. Understanding that continuation high schools are difficult to navigate due to structural issues, teachers used their professional platforms to become personal voices for students. When discussing what advocacy is as a continuation educator, all teachers responded with similar instances that showcased how they spoke up for their students. Mrs. Garcia shares the ways she has been a voice for her continuation students:

A student may need open notes because they have a problem with their memory. So, if they're not understanding something, they can refer to their notes, giving them that skill so that they can be successful in life – the idea that if I write things down, I will then be able to do my job because I have a reference to go back. With these types of instances, I have to advocate all the time for them. And say, “No we have to do this or we need to have that,” or “We need to set them in the front,” or “We need to provide this for them.” And, most other teachers are receptive. And, usually they understand. I help them understand and they take it. When they teachers doing this, they develop a skill that we are teaching them to be productive and independent once they get out of school and no longer have the school IEP to protect them. They have to know what their needs are and how to be successful just like how I wear glasses. If I'm going to read something, my aid is my glasses.

Mrs. Garcia's example portrays the ways in which teachers verbally advocate for their students within continuation high schools. By understanding their students, teachers can mobilize their voices in order to confirm that their particular needs are being met within all classrooms. As continuation students witness how their educators speak up to maintain their academic and emotional well-being, the students learn how to advocate for themselves. Within continuation high schools, the teachers' voice has a significant positive impact on students' life skills and educational experiences.

As continuation teachers voice concern regarding the structural issues that are present within continuation high schools, educators must sacrifice their own time, effort, and money to fill in immediate funding gaps. Affecting their ability to efficiently run their classrooms, all continuation teachers noted that they were forced to utilize different outlets to acquire needed

resources and basic school supplies. Describing her first years teaching at a continuation high schools, Ms. Johnson explains:

There was nothing and there was no guidance. To be honest, I started writing grants and I started using donors to get donations. And, I got class sets of books. We need them all in here anyway and we need to have 30. I just started getting class set after class set of high interest novels which were brand new, so the kids felt like, “Wow. I'm not getting the trash book” And, I don't think the district actually purchase novels for me until last year. It took them like six or seven years. So, that's how I kind of approached some of those issues of lack of funding. I just like went out and found it myself. I don't necessarily mean like that was noble of me or anything. I just didn't know what else to do; it was the only resort. I usually write about three or four grants every year and that will cover the field trips I will take. I like to take the kids on field trips for some sort of service-learning field trip and for something events that we have. We try to have at least one to two events that kind of celebrate the kids and help some bonds. We fundraise for a big senior event and grad night on our own. I think just not having anything made me find something. So, that's how I approach some of the issues of inequitable funding here.

All continuation teachers shared the experience of having to offset a tight budget with their own money and energy. By writing grants and receiving donations, Ms. Johnson was then able to stock her classroom with the necessary teaching materials – without books she would be unable to teach her English courses. In addition, she provided students the opportunity to positively engage with fellow classmates and the outside community. By acquiring external capital, teachers compensate for unjust funding allocations by providing continuation high schools with more traditional academic resources and, therefore, creating a positive educational setting for enrolled students.

Continuation high school teachers put in emotional, social, economic, and academic effort because they care about their students. Reflecting Valenzuela's (2010) conceptualizations regarding caring teachers, continuation educators are model mentors who truly support and love their students. All teachers pinpointed caring about their students for being the number one reason why they commit their lives to teaching at continuation high schools. A reoccurring source of inspiration, continuation high school teachers compensate for structural issues as active

mentors to promote students' positive academic outcomes. Ms. Morgan describes the importance of care within continuation settings; she explains:

I think if a student has a good relationship with their teacher and they feel like their teacher cares about them and supports them and would go out of their way to help them, they are a hundred times more likely to succeed in the class. If I show students that I care by joking around with them or giving advice or just talking to them, they definitely respond to me better and they are happier here.

By exuding care, teachers have a significant impact on the educational experiences and lives of continuation students. Continuation educators construct themselves to be constant supports through advocating for students, providing them with academic necessities, and having daily interactions with students. As continuation students become aware that their teacher appreciates their worth, they are more willing to engage socially and academically within their classrooms. Reinforced by all the outside work they do, continuation high school teachers are educators who intensely care for their students.

Through understanding the importance of building meaningful relationships, continuation teachers actively provide social support for their students. Recognizing that continuation high school students are facing external challenges, teachers form in-depth bonds to aid with the increased emotional needs of students. Many continuation teachers valued creating a positive rapport with their students. Mr. Gray explains the unique way in which he implements building relationships into his lesson plans:

We have quarters that are 9 - 10 weeks long. First day of school, I give them a paper with questions they have to answer for me. And, I usually put it aside. At the end of the first day when they're all there, I will give them all of their results. I go, "Here is the type of music you all like," and ask, "Who is this?" They all laughed and I'll go, "I'll check it out." And they will go, "You don't want to download that. it's quite explicit." I say, "well, if you all like it, I'm probably going to like it." questions like what's your favorite movie. so, there is like about 40 questions. And then in 5 weeks, I have them come to sit next to me at my desk to check in with a 20 minute conversation. And say, "All right let's. Here is where we are. Here's where I think you are. great job," or, "What's the

problem,” or, “How can I help you?” After, usually at 4 or 5 weeks in, I'm make sure every kid comes to sit next to me at my desk... When you can build a relationship with a kid, most of them will perform better. If you put something between you and them, you kind of lost them until you can get them back. Building relationships has been my philosophy with the kids.

Genuinely caring for his students, Mr. Gray implements time-periods to personally build teacher-student relationships. Showing curiosity in student's non-academic interests and educational performance, continuation students view Mr. Gray as invested in them because he believes that they have the potential to be socially and academically successful. As a continuation high school teacher, building positive rapport motivates students, themselves, to participate within courses. Forming intimate bonds, continuation high school teachers prove to students that they care about them as students and people.

Supporting their students' academic success, continuation teachers are their established emotional supports. As continuation high schools lack the adequate funding to acquire emotional resources, teachers provide their counseling services. Therefore, teachers can academically engage students by caring for their increased emotional needs. Many continuation teachers must switch between academic and emotional roles; Mr. Cooper, a veteran science teacher, ties together these responsibilities by stating:

I don't think I could be successful as an academic teacher, if I wasn't successful as an emotional support system. The kids could care less what I have to say about anything I could say until they feel at least safe emotionally. They don't have to be my friend or super connected to me. They are teenagers. They will pick and choose who they feel connected to. But, they will usually feel connected to someone, one teacher. And then, that will ground them in the school and that makes it a little bit easier. But, I don't think that I cannot have any success academically, if I didn't first have success with emotional pieces. And, that comes in different forms. But, I think if it starts with them feeling safe and respected and cared for and that it will build into - “Now, I know I can depend on her.” It builds in different capacities with different kids. It's kind of the foundation I believe for them to trust you and become the person they trust and is trying to teach them something that's worthwhile. They will give it a shot, but the emotional piece has to be there.

As there are structural issues that hinder institutionalized emotional resources, continuation teachers provide alternative counseling services. Understanding the relationship between academic success and emotional health, continuation teachers must first be an emotional support before they can be an educator within their classrooms. Addressing the increased emotional needs of continuation students, teachers can build a trusting, supportive relationship. Then, continuation teachers can mobilize their care into forming willing students who desire to participate academically.

Continuation high schools have many structural issues which force teachers to compensate for the inequitable funding, material, and resource gaps. Personally and collectively, educators mobilize their voices to advocate for their students' needs and address institutional challenges. In immediate response to daily obstacles, teachers through their own agency acquire economic capital to provide external resources and teaching materials that are needed to run their classroom. Continuation high school teachers put in the effort to promote positive academic outcomes of their students because they care for their well-being. Through building meaningful relationships and providing emotional support, teachers assuage emotional needs and therefore promote the academic success of their continuation students.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

My study provides an academic contribution that begins to expose the complexities underlying structural issues present within Southern California continuation high schools through the collective narratives of continuation teachers. District members have labeled low-income continuation students of color as academically unengaged and deviant through a process of stigmatization based on classist and racialized stereotypes. Mirroring Goffman's (1963) theoretical framework of social stigma, district members invalidate the students' emotional needs derived from adverse environmental conditions by replacing students' lived-realities with misguided perceptions. Holding a disproportionate amount of power, administrators interact with continuation high schools like the stepchild of the school district. By stigmatizing continuation high schools, administrators can de-prioritize the heightened concentration of academic and emotional needs of continuation students.

Therefore, the mechanism of stigma becomes institutionalized as students are often overlooked by overarching administrative systems. Imposed invisibility regarding continuation students' needs is shadowed by adverse stereotypes. Hence, these misconceptions are then mobilized to shape continuation students as being totally undeserving of attention and resources. Utilizing this damaging image, district administrators are validated as they attempt to totally distance the continuation high school from the overall education system. The institutional stigmatization of low-income students of color provides evidence that educational systems erase continuation students' social identities and needs.

As overarching administrative systems mobilize the stigmatized invisibility of continuation students' needs, district members can cause and allow structural issues to be created

and persist within continuation high schools. A form of Bourdieu's (1991) symbolic violence, districts control and decide the funding distribution of continuation high schools. Influenced by skewed misconceptions regarding enrolled students, administrators perpetuate structural issues based on inequitable budget allocations. Overarching administrative systems failed to provide continuation high schools adequate capital to acquire teaching materials, external resources and needed staff in order to serve the emotional and academic needs of students.

Hindered by institutional challenges, low-income continuation students of color are not able to fully receive the skills they need to move forward in life as many never become upwardly mobile. A stigmatized population, the lack of academic success of continuation high school students becomes normalized as their outcomes mirror racialized and classist stereotypes. A main outcome of symbolic violence is the normalization of hierarchal social order. Continuation students are expected to not be academically successful, when their life trajectories after graduation are not upwardly mobile, the outer community relies on stigmatized misconceptions to be the reason why. Rather than recognizing the structural issues present within continuation high schools, the blame is placed on students; therefore, district administrators can perpetuate a cycle of reproducing social inequality with no consequences.

In order to counter institutional stigmatization that perpetuates structural issues present within continuation high schools, teachers compensate for the funding, material, and resource gaps through caring for students. As teachers are constantly interacting with their students, they begin to understand the constant adverse environmental conditions students face. As such, continuation teachers break down stigma attached to students through their daily conversations as an educator and mentor. Understanding the true academic and emotional needs of students, continuation high school teachers constantly advocate for their students' welfare within and

outside of the classroom. Mirroring Valenzuela's (2010) pedagogical framework, continuation high school teachers become active agents for their students because they care about their students. By building meaningful relationships and becoming supplementary emotional supports, continuation high school teachers care for their students' emotional health so that they can be academically successful. Continuation high school teachers must be teachers who care in order to compensate for structural issues as they provide an adapted academic setting that serves the continuation student population.

I believe that my study contributes to existing research as academic literature regarding alternative education is limited. By introducing empirical work that focuses on the narratives of teachers, I can provide a new perspective that was not present within the published literature. As continuation high school teachers are bridges between the classroom and overarching structures, their experiences provide direct insight regarding the complexities that underline institutional challenges. Extending existing research, I believe my study highlights the realities of continuation high schools through the unique narrative of the continuation teacher.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Through this exploratory study, I broadly researched the experiences of teachers at California continuation high schools. Guided by limited established literature, I investigated the teachers' career, interactions with students, and opinions to accessibility to resources and funding. Through the collective narratives, I pieced together a comprehensive overview of continuation high schools through examining the role of the educator. Overall, my study concluded that districts members mobilized racialized and classist stigma attached to low-income students of color to allow and maintain structural issues present within continuation high schools. In response, continuation teachers compensated for funding and resource gaps by providing external emotional and academic resources because they care about their students.

Through ignoring students' emotional needs derived from adverse environmental conditions, district administrators mobilize the process of stigmatization by attaching racialized and classist misconceptions to low-income continuation students of color. As the stepchild of the district, continuation high schools become invisible to the outer community. District members allocate continuation high schools limited funding by imposing symbolic violence as they refuse to recognize the heightened concentration of emotional and academic needs of continuation students. So, as continuation students continue to fail in becoming upwardly mobile, overarching administrative systems reaffirm the stereotype that low-income students of color are not academically engaged and, therefore, are unworthy of resources. This furthers the normalization of hierarchical social order as educational systems reproduce inequality.

On the other hand, continuation teachers actively countered stigma attached to low-income students of color as they challenged institutional issues by becoming agents that pushed

for positive structural changes. As they interact daily with their students, continuation teachers can breakdown adverse misconceptions through understanding the emotional and academic needs of the student population. Continuation high school educators are teachers who care; they are the most impactful advocates that promote their students' academic and emotional welfare through acquiring external educational support, providing emotional counseling, and forming impactful relationships. My study highlights the work and effort of impactful educators who are invested in the positive educational outcomes of their continuation high school students.

I believe that my study holds theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, I believe it is significant because it introduces new knowledge into academia about this topic. As little research interrogated the role that educators play within continuation high schools, I believe my research introduces the unknown narrative of the educator within literature of alternative education. Practically, it is important because my work calls for avenues of communication between teachers and districts. To deconstruct damaging misconceptions, district presence will break down the invisibility regarding the external adverse challenges that continuation students face. As overarching administrators are exposed to the heightened concentration academic and emotional needs of the continuation population, continuation high schools should be legitimized in acquiring equitable, adequate funding that promotes students' educational success.

Shortcomings and Future Research

My research provides a foundation regarding how institutional challenges within continuation high schools are created by dominant entities, sustained within our education system, perpetuated against continuation students, and countered by teachers. The greatest shortcoming of my study is the limited scope. Other researchers can further my work by collecting data on a larger scale to negate or complement the findings I concluded. Moreover, I

believe my findings can be strengthened by further research that interrogates these structural issues from a student and district perspective to collect a comprehensive overview. Overall, I believe the research I have produced establishes a teacher-focused narrative regarding the current position of Southern California continuation high schools within our education system's imbedded social order. However, more research is needed to fully delve into the intricacies of my findings and analysis by cross-examining differing perspectives.

APPENDIX
INTERVIEW GUIDE

I. Teachers Career

First, I will be asking you questions about your school and your role.

A. Background

1. Tell me about your school.
2. What are the goals of the school?
3. What is your job at the school?
4. What are your main responsibilities in this role?
5. How long have you been working for the school?
6. What is your philosophy of education?
7. Why did you decide to work at a continuation high school?

B. Teacher Efficacy

1. Describe your student teaching experience.
2. How do you get through to the most difficult students?
3. How do you promote learning when there is lack of a supportive environment?
4. What do you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?
5. What do you do to overcome the influence of adverse community conditions on students' learning?

II. Interactions with Students

Next, I will be asking you questions about your interactions with students

A. Emotional & Moral Support

1. Do you believe as a teacher you are an emotional support as well as an academic support? Why or why not?
2. How frequently do students come to you for emotional and moral support?
3. What type of support are students generally looking for from you?
4. What types of issues are you usually responding to?
5. How do you generally respond to students who come to you seeking emotional and moral support?
6. How does aiding a student emotionally affect their academic success?
7. Walk me through a specific instance when a student came to you for emotional and moral support (who, what, when, where, why)

B. Advocacy

1. Do you feel that continuation high school students have different needs than traditional students? In what way?
2. How do you make your classroom a supportive space for your students?
3. Do you advocate for your students so that they can be academically successful? Why or Why not?

C. Role Modeling

1. Do you believe you are a role model for students?

2. How are you a role model for students?
3. Do you believe students need a role model? If so, why?

III. ACCESSIBILITY TO RESOURCES AND FUNDING

Lastly, I will be asking your questions about your opinions revolving around your school's resources and funding

A. Issues that need to be addressed

1. What do you think are the most important issues that need to be addressed in your school?
2. In what ways have the district, state, or school addressed these issues?
3. How do these issues affect your students?
4. In your opinion, are continuation schools serving their non-traditional students? Why or why not?
5. Do you feel that the district, school, and policy makers are held accountable for the issues that are present within the school? Why or why not?
6. How would you approach the issues that are present at your school?

B. Agency Within the Classroom

1. How much can you influence the decisions that are made in the school? Can you provide an example?
2. How much can you express your views freely on important school matters? Can you provide an example?
3. How much can you do to get the instructional materials and equipment you need? Can you provide an example?

C. Agency Outside of the Classroom

1. How much can you do, personally, to promote the success of your non-traditional students away from overarching structures? Can you provide an example?
2. How much can you do to get community groups involved in working with the schools? Can you provide an example?
3. Do you feel that working with outside community groups is effective? Why or Why not?

IV. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Can you tell me about your background: where you grew up, your racial/ethnic identity, schools you attended?
2. Do you think your background plays a role in your workplace? If so, how?

V. CONCLUSION

1. Is there anything that I did not ask you about that you would like to share or think it would be important for me to know?

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