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Growing Together Separately: An Analysis of the Influence of Individualism in an Alternative Educational Setting

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**GROWING TOGETHER SEPARATELY:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE INFLUENCE OF INDIVIDUALISM IN AN
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL SETTING**

BY
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SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

“When I come in that room right there— 109— that’s when I feel like I’m a part of this.”

Marcus, a baby-faced thirteen year old in a white tank top and dirt-smudged khakis sits across from me at a picnic table beneath a couple large, shade-giving trees at his school. It’s mid-March, warm, and the Southern California sun breaks through the leaves of the tree and speckles his face with light. His eight-hour school day is almost over. Marcus is the youngest person in his class, a group of usually twelve to sixteen students who spend all day together as they move between Science, Physical Education, Health, two English classes, two Math classes, and, on Wednesdays, Food Justice. His small school is not gated like many public schools in the area. There are colorful blocks painted on the concrete, the chipping paint a reminder of the daycare center the school once housed. There are only a handful of classrooms. Marcus’s school, Santa Adela, is a California continuation school, a school for students who have been deemed “at-risk” of not graduating from high school. Room 109 is the site of the Food Justice program, a weekly class about cooking, gardening, and food politics that Marcus and his cohorts are required to take.

For Marcus, Food Justice was a program in which he could “feel like [he’s] a part” of a larger project that not only “ma[d]e the school better,” but “ma[d]e the world a better place.” The program was also a place where Marcus could make choices about his activities, as well as his future. He felt that his own individual growth was central to his

experiences in the program, as was the growth of the community of the Food Justice program.

I interned for a semester at the Food Justice program and spent Wednesday afternoons with Marcus, the other Santa Adela students in his class, eleven other interns, two directors, and often a counselor from the school. During the course of that semester, I noticed that features of what I will call Individualism majorly influenced the experiences and understandings of program members and bled into almost every aspect of the program— from the daily organization of work to students’ reflections on how the program affected their thoughts about the future— but that they also were complicated at nearly as many turns.¹ The various aspects of the program expressed a complex mix of encouraging and subverting Individualism, and this mix was constitutive of the experiences and understandings of those in the program. While the program purported to challenge the Individualizing influences of the school system, the reality was that the program was constituted by a more complex mix of values, relationships, practices, and discourses that incorporated some aspects of Individualism even as they challenged it.

Individualism has been described many times across a wide range of subjects, disciplines, and political ideologies. Peters and Marshall describe Individualism as a “universalist conception” that focuses on the autonomous, rational, self-interested, individual subject (Peters and Marshall 1996:66).² Individualism in the program was iterated in various ways, highlighting autonomy, rational choice, self-interest, and focus

¹ I capitalize Individualism to differentiate it as a specific system of understanding, which I will outline in this chapter, rather than a nebulous emphasis on individuals as opposed to groups.

² A conception of Individualism that comes from liberal and neoliberal thought, which I will not be discussing in this paper.

on the individual, detached from social contexts, at different moments.³ At these and other moments, the program also directly rejected these Individualist notions.

Individualism was a crucial component of the Food Justice program for Marcus. However, practices that were strikingly non-Individualist were also crucial in the program, and were often more obvious. Both shaped his experiences as he cut vegetables in the kitchen, dug in the dirt, and talked about seed saving. Both affected how he understood himself and the groups of which he was a part inside and outside of the program.

The program was explicit about its value of the communal and of collective work and learning, but subverting Individualism in the program meant much more than sharing work, food, or ideas, more even than understanding the effects of economic, cultural, and educational conditions. It is not just about group work or effort. Unlike individuality, Individualism is composed specifically without consideration of social conditions and constraints (Varenne and McDermott 1998:213).⁴ Individualism lacks not just an engagement with social contexts, but with the methods by which these social contexts are made apparent and salient.⁵

When the program subverted Individualist notions, it did so in a number of ways: firstly, practices, discourses, conditions, values, and interpersonal relationships in the program often promoted collective work and collaborative measures of achievement.

Secondly, the program shifted the focus from the individual subject, on which the school

³ “Choice” is a particularly complicated feature of Individualism, as it is sometimes invoked as a normative and sometimes as a positive.

⁴ Individualism therefore obscures the conditions in which social actors always find themselves, whether or not those conditions are visible to the actors. This is not to say that social actors merely find themselves in conditions—they also shape and reshape those conditions and the conditions surrounding them.

⁵ And, while the program often explicitly promoted community, that did not mean it necessarily rejected Individualism. The individualistic, liberal conception of community “is construed simply as no more than the aggregate of freely contracting individuals” (Peters and Marshall 1996:19).

system focuses, to the communal. Thirdly, it recognized the social and cultural conditions of the program members. Finally, program members considered the ways in which those conditions were made salient.⁶ These were the aspects of Individualism which showed up, to varying degrees, throughout my data collection, and on which I rely to analyze the influences of Individualism in the program. Rarely, if ever, were all of these ways of impeding Individualism found simultaneously in any particular moment of the program; often, though, one or two of these ways were present while, in other ways, Individualism was reiterated.

When Marcus would enter the space of the program, Room 109 and the garden behind it, he was understood and was encouraged to understand himself both as a contextualized member of a group and as a freely choosing individual. These understandings were supported in more and less explicit ways. The program promoted and challenged Individualist understandings of goals, results, difference, practices, conditions, relationships, and success and failure in the program. Both sorts of understanding together produced program outcomes that sometimes matched stated program goals and sometimes did not. To understand the Food Justice program, which may give us insights into similar alternative educational settings and into alternative education and its relation to “traditional” education more broadly, it is critical that we understand the convoluted ways in which Individualism was present in the program and was, at the same time, directly confronted by the program.⁷ Recognizing this paradox is crucial to understanding the experiences of program members. Through my analysis of

⁶ This last way was particularly rare.

⁷ Throughout this paper, I use quotation marks around words like “success” and “traditional.” I don’t mean to say that these terms are not very real in the ways they are used and in the ways they affect people’s lives; I only mean to signify that I am speaking of a particular cultural usage of these terms.

the influences present in the Food Justice program, I have found that, even in alternative educational settings where Individualism is ostensibly challenged, the Individualizing influences of the school system are constitutive of the program structure and the experiences and understandings of its members.

The Students, the School, and the Program

In this thesis, I will critically analyze the practices, conditions, interpersonal relationships, and discourses within and surrounding the Food Justice program to reveal how Individualizing influences affect an alternative educational setting. Students in the program ranged from ages thirteen to fifteen. Two co-directors developed and ran the program. One was a college professor, and one was the district garden coordinator. Interns, who were accruing credit at a local college, were all in our late teens and early twenties, making us not much older than the Food Justice students, and students ourselves.⁸ At twenty-two and in my last year of college, I began my stint as an intern at Food Justice. The three groups—directors, interns, and students—were stable and did not overlap; though the interns were also students and the directors and interns together managed and supervised the program, these three groups remained functionally and conceptually differentiated in the program.

The program acts as an ethnographic case study of how Individualizing and non-Individualizing influences affect alternative school programs that aim to promote collective work and community-building. In consideration of my data, it is clear that these influences have tangible effects on student experience and understandings,

⁸ A point many interns often noted in regards to their expected authority within the program, which I will discuss in later chapters.

relationships within the setting, and student engagement. The program attempted to bring together members who differed in numerous ways to complete an educational project, and that difference was negotiated through these various influences as program members went about their daily experiences in the program.

Over the course of a semester, I observed the ways the program both promoted and challenged notions of Individualism. These notions were realized through practices, interpersonal relationships, and discourses in the program. Use of discipline, project-based learning, and the school system's success-failure framework promoted and challenged Individualism in the program in various ways, and these uses were in turn shaped by program notions of Individualism. This confusing scheme of reinforcement and subversion of Individualism kept arising during my interviews and observations and was what first interested me in the topic of Individualism in the program.

As the program focused on the students but contained the experiences, practices, and perspectives of all involved in the program, so, too, does this thesis. In order to understand the ways in which the program is situated in broader educational, social, and cultural contexts, I will, in my first chapter, discuss the context of the program.⁹ The context I will provide will not only include the context of the Food Justice program, Santa Adela, and California continuation schools, but broader contexts within the American school system that include racialized and otherwise targeted discourses, testing and tracking, and conceptions of success and failure, as well as some context of the food justice movement's inclusion of school gardens. The chapter will also outline the space of the program, both physically as a classroom place and as a space of supervised movement. I argue that the conditions of the school system generally provided

⁹ Perhaps betraying my less Individualist framework.

Individualizing influences in the program, which the program attempted to challenge in a number of ways and ultimately incorporated into its structure. My second chapter focuses on the interns, who, for practical reasons, gave me the bulk of my interview data over the course of the semester. The interns told me mainly about our complicated roles in the program and our even more complicated relationships with the students. I understand interns' daily navigations through program spaces and dynamics by analyzing our relations to the success-failure framework of the school system, the project-based learning model, and gentle disciplinary practices. The interns understood and shaped the program according to more subtle Individualist and more explicit non-Individualist notions. My final chapter focuses on the students and their perceptions of the program, though the students are central to my entire thesis. The chapter details some of the many insights the students gave me into several of the ways in which understandings of success and failure, project-based learning, and discipline promoted Individualism in the program as well as challenged it. I argue that Individualizing and non-Individualizing influences together constructed the experiences and understandings of the students and affected the ways the students shaped the program. While the program explicitly attempted to challenge Individualizing influences, it also promoted them in a number of ways, creating a complex program structure that incorporated Individualism as it simultaneously subverted it.

I chose to focus on these two of the three groups involved in the program because there were only two directors and because, while the directors and interns had different jobs and responsibilities, our roles as mentors were often functionally similar. The

directors, however, did contribute to this project in numerous ways, including giving me generous interviews.

The program is affiliated with a school I will refer to as Santa Adela. As I mentioned, Santa Adela is a California continuation high school, which is a high school for students who are not on-track to graduate at their neighborhood comprehensive high school. Continuation high schools provide flexible scheduling and opportunities to obtain credits to encourage greater percentages of their students graduating high school.¹⁰ The Food Justice program acted not only as one of these “flexible” options, but also as a hopeful tool for changing the practices and conditions of the Santa Adela students who attended.¹¹ The program proposed to teach these students about healthy eating, provide nutritious snacks, engage the students in food justice politics, and expose the students to college student interns who help to provide educational guidance, all while cultivating a school garden. Interns, in turn, would get hands-on experience in food justice activism and class credit at their colleges. Both groups were meant to be part of a collaborative learning environment that differed from settings usually found in the school system.

The Food Justice program focused on growing and cooking healthy, sustainable foods and engaging in broader issues of food politics. It covered both tangible skills such as making jam and theoretical skills such as discussing films about the National School Lunch Program. Guest lecturers were also brought in throughout the semester to teach special cooking and gardening skills. The semester during which most of my fieldwork took place was the first in which the program directors decided to split the program by age level-- younger students from nearby elementary schools who previously attended the

¹⁰ I will discuss continuation high schools and the context of Santa Adela as a continuation high school in more depth in the next chapter.

¹¹ Flexible may be an odd word to use here, as the program was mandatory for these students.

program with the Santa Adela students now attended only on Mondays and the Santa Adela students only on Wednesdays. This was also the first semester in which the entire length of the program each day was part of the Santa Adela students' regular school day and counted as a class period.

The physical infrastructure of the program included a classroom with a kitchen and a garden, originally set up by a teacher who'd long left the school by the time the program came to fruition. The garden had been practically abandoned and most students at the school didn't realize that it existed at all. Extensive work by both interns and students went into making the garden useable during the first year of the program. The garden is over 4,000 ft² large -- one director called it "a small farm"—and also boasts an outdoor classroom space constructed and decorated by program members. Community members donated almost all materials in the garden and kitchen, from knives and bowls to the concrete benches in the outdoor classroom. Community members also donated from their own home gardens much of the produce with which we worked that did not come from the program's garden.

The classroom and garden spaces were the physical sites of a sort of program culture. Hutchins describes culture not as "any collection of things, whether tangible or abstract. Rather, it is a process. It is a human cognitive process that takes place both inside and outside the minds of people. It is the process in which our everyday cultural practices are enacted" (Hutchins 1996:354). This explanation of culture is useful in examining the ways conditions and practices of the Food Justice program and the ways members experienced and understood the program were shaped by various influences. Culture is neither fixed nor can it be located, but its effects and process can be observed

and referenced. The cultural process of the Food Justice program and its intersections with the many other cultures of its members encompassed the dynamic processes by which members navigated influences of Individualism in the program. As a process, culture is relational rather than inherent. The program's culture involved not just the shared practices of those under its title, but also the ways similar and divergent practices met and the ways with which they were dealt. Culture is often seen in the ways that we have learned to deal with the conditions in which we find ourselves. It "is an adaptive process that accumulates partial solutions to frequently encountered problems" (Hutchins 1996: 354). The program's variously influenced processes provided a fittingly complex solution to the complex problems the program faced; program members took from both Individualizing and non-Individualizing influences to develop a program structure as we navigated the issues that came up over the course of the semester.

Success and Failure as Individualizing Terms

A major shared cultural understanding that was reconstructed in the program was that of the relation between success and failure¹². Success and failure are two terms we hear often in regards to American Education. Whether about raising test scores, graduation rates, or teacher quality, "success" in the American school system is the goal and the diametric opposite of "failure". These two terms, suspended in air as fundamental qualities of programs, districts, schools, and students, are rarely located within the sociocultural conditions that construct and bind them, except perhaps to superficially

¹² I have no explanation for why I write "success" before "failure," other than that it's how they first came to my head, which, in itself, is worth some critical interpretation.

mention team efforts on the parts of families and school administrators, difficult situations for urban youth, or developing a “culture of success.”

In their book *Successful Failure: the School America Builds*, Varenne and McDermott (1998) discuss the ways the success-failure framework of the American school system is highly Individualistic, despite the fact, they argue, that the experienced realities of these terms are highly social in practice. According to Varenne and McDermott, each term entails a cultural understanding in relation to the other.¹³ Success and failure are neither wholly individual nor completely based on group characteristics and sociocultural infrastructure. They are terms used to purportedly describe individual practice, though they are mired in both cultural understandings of the two terms, especially as dichotomous, in the types of measurements used to grant the labels “successful” and “failing” and the reasons those measurements exist as they do, and in the opportunities afforded to the individual. The success-failure framework of the American school system locates success and failure within the individual as labels that refer to individual (and individual group) choices, By analyzing conceptions of success and failure within the program, I have found numerous ways in which the Individualizing success-failure framework of the school system has permeated, been thwarted by, and been reiterated within the program.

¹³ Varenne and McDermott critically analyze the cultural construction of success and failure and conclude that each designation is context-specific. They warn against seeing these designations as traits solely of the individual rather than bound by the system that makes certain traits and conditions important in specific instances. Unlike other well-known educational theorists like Bourdieu, Varenne and McDermott see differences not as “enculturated” into the body, but as bound by the cultural and social systems that make differences problems with which people contend (Varenne and McDermott 1998:143). Varenne and McDermott’s theoretical approach focuses on “the processes that might make [a] characteristic consequential” rather than on the characteristics of the students themselves to uncover the ways that the success-failure framework Individualizes a wholly sociocultural phenomenon in the school system (Varenne and McDermott 1998:142). However, their approach still takes into account the particular practices of the students as they work under and within these processes, confirming the students’ agencies within the conditions by which they are bound.

In the Food Justice program, these labels, and what they represent for the various members of the program, both make up the reason for the program's existence and its largest problems. The labels, and the system of measurements and ideological framework they represent, were specifically meant to be subverted by the Food Justice Program. Yet, without these specific labels, there would be no need for a program that provides flexible credits and new potential educational opportunities to turn students from "failures" into "successes".

Differences amongst the college student interns and the Santa Adela students were made salient in a number of ways, especially in that Santa Adela students had come to be labeled as "failures" in the educational system while the interns had come to be labeled as "successes." These labels affected relations between and within the high school, intern, and co-director groups and structured much of the divide between the students and interns. As program members navigated this difference and the conditions it created, they exhibited Individualizing and non-Individualizing influences through their practices, interactions, and contributions to program discourses.

Varenne and McDermott also warn against simplified theories of "cultural deprivation (...) to explain the fate of the poor in the United States" (Varenne and McDermott 1998:8)¹⁴. This theory and other ideas about "the culture of poverty" explain school and other socioinstitutional "failures" as "people [adapting] themselves to their conditions, including poverty, to develop 'cultures' that responded to their needs and then

¹⁴ More recent research on the "the linguistic, ethnic, and racial differences that appear to have a profound effect on American classrooms" has led anthropologists to see "harsh conditions" as "products of historical processes" wherein people were "invaded and colonized (...) pushed out of their areas of origin and pulled to major industrial centers [which] gave their children something that did not fit in classrooms" in which they found themselves; those who came from backgrounds of hegemonic privilege found lines of difference drawn in the classroom to categorize their dominant ideologies as "successful" (Varenne and McDermott 1999:8).

to pass the cultures along to their children” (Varenne and McDermott 1998:8). While this theory purports to move beyond Individualist explanations of school failure as coming from something inherently wrong with the individual persons of a particular group, it still locates failure within the individual actor or actors who adapt, and locates culture within individual actors and groups in a given set of conditions (ie. it is still Individualist.)

Varenne’s and McDermott’s explanation exemplifies the least common way the program challenged Individualism— considering the ways in which conditions were made salient by decentering the individual and asking instead how the sociocultural system has been developed to frame the individual in a particular way. They provide a detailed description of the ways the success-failure framework of the American school system is Individualizing, which I use to analyze the ways the program thwarted and reiterated this framework and therefore undermined and promoted Individualism within the program.

Collectivity can be seen as antithetical to the Individualizing view of success-failure prevalent in the school system. Locating success and failure wholly within the person constructs each label as an individual trait. Even if one describes an activity or attempt as “successful” or “failing,” it is often framed in such a way that the success or failure of the activity is situated discursively within the person performing it, as part of the “constitution of [the] individual” (Varenne and McDermott 1998:212). To frame success and failure collectively is not to say that a person cannot singularly fail at a task, but that that failure is not a trait of the person and is part of the process of the collective. Failure and success are part of the ongoing practices of the group, constituted by those in it, as they work collectively towards a goal; failure and success are not the only two available outcomes, nor are they outcomes in of themselves. The project-based learning

model attempts to thwart the success-failure framework by promoting collective work in which practices are part of the collective learning processes that the group undertakes to work towards a larger goal.

Project-Based Learning and Collaborative Work

The curriculum of the program was grounded in a project-based learning style. Project-based learning, especially garden work, has recently gained traction as a way to improve student achievement (Barron et al. 1998:272).¹⁵ Youth from low-income, urban, racially marginalized areas and low-performing schools have often been the targets of this technique as a way to inspire interest in school and community revitalization (Maida 2005:16). This pedagogical model has been particularly popular in the food justice movement.

The Food Justice program used the model of project-based learning to encourage educational benefits not only in the high school student group, but in the student intern group, as well. The program was inextricably linked with the colleges attended by the interns, especially the college which employed one of the co-directors. As it was initially conceptualized as a component of a class on food politics at the college, the program was obviously not just meant as a learning experience for the Santa Adela students. The interns also engaged in a project-based learning technique to better understand community relations, social injustices, and food politics. The use of the project-based learning model in the program illuminated the ways the program tried to build relations between the differing individuals that helped to comprise it. Despite the sometimes

¹⁵ Sometimes also referred to as “practice-based” learning, especially if it has an emphasis on building practical skills.

solitary work of project-based learning and the one-on-one mentoring often associated with it, the project-based learning model is highly collective.

The project-based learning model works to counteract some of the Individualizing issues found in the success-failure framework of schooling. Project-based learning can entail individual work, but a “central, organizing premise of PBL [project-based learning] is linking theoretical knowledge to practical application through the use of collaborative groups in which students are responsible for deciding what is to be learned” (Cockrell 2000:348). In the Food Justice program, the model was employed to engage the students and interns in collaborative projects that practically applied food politics theories. But this model, like the success-failure framework, is more complex in practice than it seems. As I found throughout my fieldwork, program members creatively found spaces and practices of Individualism within the model.

Cockrell, Caplow, and Donaldson (2000) explain that:

Collaborative learning is premised on Vygotskian concepts that define learning as the social construction of knowledge. Acquiring new knowledge and restructuring existing knowledge emerge as individuals with differing viewpoints, experiences, and levels of knowledge about a particular topic engage in testing, reconciling, and ultimately forging a new, shared understanding of that topic through interaction with one another. (Cockrell et al. 2000:348)

They call for an analysis of “context and process” in studying learning settings in which project-based learning is used, and provide one method, “explor[ing] students’ perspectives of their learning as they engage in an instructional process,” which they used in their own study of a graduate Education program (Cockrell et al. 2000:350). Rather than just focusing “on the effectiveness of the strategy in achieving a particular outcome,” studies of learning models that underlie “strategies such as collaborative groups” should “emphasize the context of learning in their focus on the social milieu in which individuals,

by interacting and sharing understandings about a topic, acquire new knowledge and restructure existing knowledge” (Cockrell et al. 2000:349).

“Collaborative groups are a core element” of the project-based learning model and “provide an important context for understanding students’ perspectives of their learning” (Cockrell et al. 2000:359). Cockrell et al. also argue that collaborative learning allows “students [to] have a feeling of ownership of knowledge when they acquire it” (Cockrell et al. 2000:359). Project-based learning is based on the idea that:

Knowledge is constructed and reconstructed through discourse in a social context. In the traditional, or foundational, approach to learning, a neophyte attains membership in a knowledge community by acquiring its language from an authority. The collaborative approach, as a nonfoundational form of learning, establishes learning communities that, through discourse, discover and evolve an understanding of the language of the knowledge communities. In other words, a collaborative approach to learning acknowledges that knowledge is common property rather than primarily the property of authorities. (Cockrell et al 2000: 359)

As I observed throughout the past semester, the program sometimes promoted collaborative groups that learned together and shared knowledge, but at other times mimicked the structure of the “traditional” learning approach that constructed knowledge as settled and obtained by individuals from authority figures. A lack of discussions about social and cultural conditions was an Individualizing influence that shaped understandings of knowledge in the program, as was a lack of transparency regarding program decisions. The pervasive learning model of the school system that permeated the Food Justice program was another Individualizing factor in the program that promoted “foundational,” non-collaborative understandings of knowledge.

Dolmans, Wolhagen, van der Vleuten, and Wijnen (2001) argue that educators, when “confronted with problems during group work,” often “choose solutions they are familiar with from their own experience during professional training, i.e. using the

teacher-directed model” (Dolmans et al. 2001:888). They say that these solutions “are consistent with a view of human learning called ‘objectivism’, in which knowledge, scientifically collected and ‘objective’, should be transmitted by teachers to students,” and argue that “the solutions chosen are not adequate” for solving problems during collaborative work because they are “in conflict with the intentions and philosophy of PBL” (Dolmans et al. 2001:885). Through project-based learning with mentors, the program attempted to move away from an objectivist approach to a more collaborative approach in which students, interns, and directors developed knowledges together.

Dolmans et al. say that solutions that are consistent with the collaborative nature of project-based learning emphasize personal connections, collectivity, and reflection (Dolmans et al. 2001:886). They argue that the goal of project-based learning is “(re)constructing the learner’s knowledge” and producing “self-reflective students who, to a large extent, themselves control the learning process and who make use of self-imposed standards rather than external ones” (Dolmans et al. 2001:888). In this way, project-based learning can enhance rather than inhibit agency, but does so collectively rather than individually and focuses on contribution to the group and broader, long-term goals.

Invisible Discipline and Invisible Individualism

Discipline can be used to promote and to challenge Individualism. Program members told me a lot about discipline—how it functioned in the program, how it has changed in the program over time, and how it was practiced in the students’ other classes. Disciplinary practices in the program focused more on creating habits than on

chastisement from above, a form of gentle discipline that encouraged students to discipline themselves according to certain behavioral values and norms. Interns and directors had consciously implemented the disciplinary practices used in the program according to feedback from past students who had not responded positively to the latter form of discipline. While these practices were purported to promote communality, in some ways they also promoted Individualism by focusing on the freely choosing individual, measuring students individually against behavioral norms, and decontextualizing the ways in which discipline was constructed and bound by social conditions.

According to Foucault (1975), this normalization process is one way by which power is distributed in the modern school system. Instead of visible discipline being demonstrated on the students by authority figures, students learn to discipline themselves and each other by adhering to norms. While this form of discipline creates “a whole range of degrees of indicating membership of a homogeneous social body,” it also “play[s] a part in classification, hierarchization, and the distribution of rank” (Foucault 1975:184).

For Foucault, the gentle power of the modern school system promotes practices and understandings in ways that keep the bodies of students under control. This gentle, invisible power “differentiat[es] individuals” by assigning labels to them based on their practices, rather than just dealing with the practices as permitted or forbidden (Foucault 1975:183). He argues that “the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another” (Foucault 1975:184). Foucault’s analysis is useful in considering the ways in which gentle

disciplinary practices can work to promote and impede Individualism in alternative educational settings.

Methods

In the spring of 2014, I conducted interviews with and observations of the students, interns, and directors over the course of one semester. Not all students and interns were interviewed and, as I will repeat in my chapter on the students, the students least enthused by the program were the ones least likely to participate in the interviews. Originally, my research plan included two student surveys, one at each end of the semester, but that plan was eventually scrapped when only one student turned in a survey response. In addition, I faced various limitations regarding data collection due to numerous obstacles to obtaining permission to undertake my study and was only able to conduct one interview with each participant. All interviews were conducted one-on-one and were recorded. I've used pseudonyms for all participants, as well as for the program and school. Data from this thesis will be presented to the school board of Santa Adela's district and will hopefully also lead to program grants in the future¹⁶.

I interviewed four students, six interns, and both directors, and I observed all interns and directors and a few more students. I explained my project to the entire class and then again to each participant when I interviewed them. As my theoretical frameworks evolved over the course of my data collection, not all participants were aware of the focus of my thesis. Students had to obtain written consent from a parent or guardian and provide their own written assent to participate in each of the three methods

¹⁶ I am very grateful to all of my interlocutors and to the families and guardians of the students who participated.

(interviews, surveys, and observations.) The structure of this consent and assent procedure made it somewhat difficult to get every student who wanted to participate involved in the project. Marcy, the director who first started the program and who taught the class connected to the Food Justice internship, suggested that I research this community in the hopes that my research would provide data to present to the school board and use in future grants for the program. However, she was not involved in data collection except to review my methods, allow me program time to undertake my collection, and help me gain permission from the school board.¹⁷

It is important that I note that when I discuss the program, the school, or the school system, I not only connote the physical sites, written regulations, and individual bodies and materials of these entities, but the social relations and shared cultural meanings that constitute the overall structures of what these terms represent. It is also important that I touch on, though I do not have space in this thesis to flesh out this theoretical framework, the ways in which the complexities of the program provided an example of community not just as an aggregate of individuals or as a totally mass consciousness that opposes parts of the whole to the whole itself, but as something less bound by dichotomy.

Throughout this thesis, which is submitted in partial completion of my Bachelor's degree, I describe students who have been classified as unable to take part in a comprehensive high school education. I should be constantly aware of the racial, socioeconomic, educational, and other privileges I carry as I attempt to uncover the ways in which the lack of some or all of these privileges affected the students in the Food Justice program this past semester. Also, as an intern in the program myself, I was both

¹⁷ Without which this project would not have been possible.

an insider and an outsider-- I was intimately involved with the program, but in a very different way from the students. Any analysis of the relationship between the interns and students in this thesis must reflect my dual role as insider and outsider and the fact that I was able to gain only information the students made available to me knowing my ties to the program and the other interns. The relationships I developed in the program were therefore both helpful and detrimental to my creating a comprehensive picture of the program. To profess to be able to portray a complete picture of all people and experiences in the program would be inaccurate and unethical. Instead, I hope to be able to give broad enough background on and context of the program to justly depict the experiences of program members and the ways in which those experiences were shaped by Individualizing and non-Individualizing influences.

It is also important for me to admit, as it will likely become (if it isn't already) obvious, that I am often critical of what I see as a hyper-Individualizing society and school system. Much of this thesis operates from that position. The students constantly reminded me, however, that some forms of Individualism, the kinds that allow agency and recognize differing needs, are very important in many contexts. The students also reminded me that, for people who are often recognized solely by the conditions in which they find themselves, recognition as an individual subject can be a welcome respite and a source of power. These are only a few of the ways the students so beautifully and unrelentingly challenged me this past semester. I hope this thesis does them justice.¹⁸

¹⁸ In that spirit, I must note that many of the students wanted to be included in my report that they would like more field trips. Anyone reading this who has sway in that regard, please be informed.

Chapter 2:

The Context of the School and Program

As I mentioned in my Introduction, I am not using a particularly Individualist frame and do try to consider broader social, educational, and cultural contexts and the ways they shape experience. Therefore, I think that it is necessary to discuss the context in which the program is situated if I am to engage in a critical analysis of the Individualist influences found within and constituted by the Food Justice program. The Food Justice program came into being in 2010, and has since gone through a couple iterations. It has always, however, involved Santa Adela students, interns from the nearby colleges, and at least one director, Marcy. The conditions of the school system, Santa Adela, the colleges, and the food justice movement, as well as general differences between the three groups within the program and the physical and conceptual spaces of the program, affected the context of the program. These conditions generally acted as Individualizing influences in the program. The program structure and the school garden project model on which the program was based were meant to challenge some of these Individualizing influences, but, even within these aspects of the program, program members revealed a more complex interplay between Individualizing and non-Individualizing influences.

Moving in the Program Space

The program setting was physically broad. It consisted of a large classroom at Santa Adela High School, which was also used by art classes, and the sizeable garden

behind it. In the classroom, three quasi-rows of large, old, mismatched, wooden tables took up most of the center of the room. The classroom also housed the program's kitchen, which consisted of a stove with an oven and a four electric burner stovetop, cabinet and counter space with a kitchen sink, and a large, industrial-style glass door refrigerator, all in one corner of the classroom. The garden included 6 raised plant beds, a large native garden area, a small fruit tree orchard, a newly donated and assembled aquaponics system, and an outdoor classroom space built over the previous year from donated materials.

On Wednesdays, the high school students would arrive as a group at 1pm, as they were required to travel from class to class together due to their designations as CDS students, a label I will explain further later in this chapter. In theory, the students were then funneled through the gate to the garden instead of into the classroom, left their backpacks outside, and were immediately immersed in the day's activities paired in groups of 2-3 with interns or a director. This process was consciously and explicitly conceived by the directors this semester to mitigate the "chaos" of starting class that they felt took away from everyone's experiences the previous semester. The reality was that the beginning of each program session usually started with negotiations in the classroom about which students wanted to work on which activities.

There were usually twelve to sixteen students on Wednesdays. With twelve interns and two directors in the program, students could easily be engaged at a one-to-one ratio. Kaitlin, an intern in her first semester with the program, said:

We do tend to do things more as individuals than as a group, in general. We do [some] things—like we all cook a meal, or something, which is a final project [on which] we're working together, but, I think because we have so many interns, there tends to be a lot

of one-on-one time, which I think is really good because it lets the students get to be their own person and work on their own projects.

Because of this, students were able to guide much of their own projects and groups of interns and students could coalesce and break apart as per student interests and garden and kitchen needs. The high level of supervision also meant that students were able to move around the garden and classroom spaces relatively freely, as there would always be an adult around. Of course, one can question how free the students were to really explore the kitchen and gardens when they were constantly supervised. The extensive supervision allowed for individual choice ostensibly, but was simultaneously a condition by which the students were bound. Directors and interns negotiated wanting to allow the students the opportunity to be in control of their own activities with wanting to keep the students engaged with others and safe, especially keeping in mind the legal and political restrictions on them as temporary caregivers in a school setting.

Allowing the students some space physically and in terms of activity was part of the program's tentative movements away from the "traditional" success-failure model of the classroom, in which practically all activities are mandated and monitored for comparative qualities and progress. Instead, in the program, students' fluid movements through activities allowed them time to work on what they liked best or on tasks with which they had the most difficulties and to switch activities as they saw fit, without an authority figure constantly watching over and recording their progress through the activities in comparison to the other students. They could conceptualize a project from start to finish and see the working parts of each step in completing it, whether that was making lip balm over the course of an afternoon or growing carrots over the course of a semester. While this work may seem individual, it was discussed and experienced as part

of the larger group goals, as opposed to an essay or test in which students work side-by-side but completely individually. This challenged the Individualizing success-failure model by constructing activity as part of collaborative, ongoing processes in which students must struggle and learn to find the routes that work best for them, the group, and the project and by relocating success and failure outside of the individual students, as well as deconstructing understandings of the two terms as dichotomous.¹⁹

After about 30 minutes of work in the garden or kitchen, all groups would converge in the classroom to discuss the plan for the day, and perhaps hear a guest speaker's, a director's, or interns' lecture about cooking, gardening, ecology, food justice, or safety and health concerns in the garden and kitchen. Interns purposely, as they had been instructed to do by more veteran interns, would try to space themselves out among the high school groups to break up cliques and hopefully minimize the possibility for the high school students to turn away from the larger group and only talk amongst themselves. Lectures were rarely given in a "traditional" classroom format. Instead, they often involved many questions posed to the students, videos, or interactive activities. The day would end with a snack prepared mostly from produce from the garden and with the help of some of the students, and sometimes would be accompanied by some group reflection, another change in the schedule the directors instituted this semester based partly on feedback from previous students and interns. Otherwise or after group reflections, students, interns, and directors would just chat casually in small groups over their snacks. Then students would sometimes help the interns and directors begin to clean up. When the program ended for the day at 2:30, indicated by the school bell, the students

¹⁹ However, the prevalent value of letting students "be their own person[s]" continued to be a firm Individualizing influence in the program.

mostly left as a group, as they had arrived, only to disperse outside to find friends or leave the school grounds. After the students left, the directors and interns would finish cleaning up the rest of the room, putting away kitchen supplies and garden tools and wiping down tables, and head out.

The program structure allowed the students some ability to be away from the authority of the classroom space and other students they were with all day, while still allowing legal and safe supervision. Students worked with relatively dangerous tools (shovels, knives, etc.) with which they usually had little experience.²⁰ The program also, therefore, worked to train the students' bodies to be secure, especially because they had been deemed insecure as "at-risk" students. This was part of their institutional, social, cultural, and educational training in becoming citizens. Institutionalized public schooling has, from the beginning, been consciously formed to produce reliable citizens and workers in the republic and in the labor market (Nassaw 198:47). Peters and Marshall refer to Foucault's ideas about "disciplinary institutions" to describe the ways that bodies in the educational system are disciplined to create a "docile and useful workforce for the demands of an emerging capitalism" (Peters and Marshall 1996:32). Students' bodies were disciplined in the program to be focused and on-task, and high levels of supervision kept them from straying in those regards.

Relative to the rest of their school day, the students were not explicitly bound in terms of movements through space in the program. However, they still were not allowed to leave the space until the end of the program time and did not control the focus of program movement. As Kaitlin described it, the students had "a choice in what activities *they* d[id], [but] as a group they normally ha[d] activities planned out for them.' This was

²⁰ Of course, ideas about safety are culturally shaped and informed by the legal and school systems.

one area where divisions between the three groups were clear. The directors ultimately made decisions about the larger group's movements through space, the interns managed and facilitated these movements, and the students participated in and, sometimes, resisted these movements. Boundaries and expectations had changed in multiple ways since the previous semester. As I mentioned, the program took up a full hour-and-a-half class period during the spring semester and so students were required to attend the whole of each program session.²¹ It now also counted toward graduation credits, which Marcy, one of the directors of the program, said the students, "desperately need[ed]."

It is important that I reiterate that not just the students, but the interns, directors, and program structure itself existed within the conditions of the educational system. The program attempted to be like and unlike a "traditional" class in a number of ways. The schedule of the program was designed so that students were not sitting and listening to one teacher figure very much. Instead, students, interns, and directors tried to directly interact with and teach each other. By explicitly breaking up and displacing the foci of teaching and learning, as well as by having twelve young "pseudo-teachers" and by attempting to recognize student input, power in the program flowed differently than in many "traditional" classroom spaces. This does not mean that power was not still mostly unidirectional, as the directors and then the interns were seen as having "expert" knowledge and authoritative control. But power flowed more easily across and up lines of authority in the program than in the "traditional" classroom.

The program was still a class, however, and acted even more so after the entire program period became a part of the students' required school hours. This change

²¹ As opposed to during previous semesters, when only a portion of each program session was part of the students' required school day.

happened for a multitude of reasons—for safety reasons, for bureaucratic reasons, for attendance reasons. But, the project-based learning model of the class promoted more close contact between “teachers” and “students” than in most “traditional” classroom settings and partially deconstructed those roles. An intern told me about her experiences the first day working with two girls, new students to the school, who were helping her mulch and de-grub a raised plant bed. She said that at first the students did not want to touch the mulch nor the bugs, but soon, and collectively, they were spreading mulch in the raised beds and picking out grubs with their hands. The interns felt that this was a major triumph. The activity quickly became a “group” activity. All involved were doing the same activity, though the intern maintained some “expert” and authoritative control.

Marcy told me she chose the site at Santa Adela to develop a program because it was part of the local community, “under-resourced,” “within walking distance” of the college campuses, and “a continuation school that was 85% minority.” These conditions not only provided a reason for the program to exist, but also continued to shape the program and program members’ experiences throughout its activity over the last couple of years. The structure of the program ostensibly challenged the Individualizing influences of the school system through group work, project-based learning, and a deconstruction of “traditional” classroom dynamics and movements through space; however, other factors, such as the high level of surveillance in the program, were also central to the program structure.

Santa Adela as a Continuation School

Continuation schools are deeply embedded in the Individualism of the school system; they simultaneously challenge some aspects of this Individualism because it is difficult to record many measurements about them. Santa Adela is situated in a Southern California suburb where the median yearly household income was reported as about \$106,000 in the 2010 census, almost double the yearly median of the state (United States Census Bureau). Despite the district's relative wealth, district officials told me that many students in the school district are homeless and/or food insecure. As a continuation high school, Santa Adela strives to graduate students who have been deemed unable to graduate on a "standard academic track." Santa Adela's assignment as a continuation school also enables teachers and administrators to implement programs such Food Justice to produce better graduation results and otherwise bring students from educational "failures" to educational "successes".

Continuation high schools were first created in California in 1919 as "a mandated alternative for students who need a more flexible school day or week and a program different from that of the traditional high school" (CCEA). The California Continuation Education Association supports these mandated educational arrangements, and encourages continuation schools that employ an "occupational orientation or a work-study schedule, intensive guidance services to meet students' special needs, and a program that will lead to completion with a diploma" (CCEA). About 15% of all secondary students in the state attend a continuation school in a given year (CCEA). In their 2008 report on "Alternative Education Options: A Descriptive Study of California Continuation High Schools" as part of the "California Alternative Education Research

Project,” Ruiz de Velasco et al. (2008) note that “since 1965, state law has mandated that most school districts enrolling over 100 12th grade students make available a continuation program or school that provides an alternative route to the high school diploma for youth vulnerable to academic or behavioral failure” (Ruiz de Velasco et al. 2008:1).

This law implies two significant assumptions: first, that academic or behavioral failure is a possible outcome for students and that some youth are more vulnerable to this failure than others; and, second, that this failure occurs inevitably and that, within a student population of a certain significant size (therefore, a significant amount of likely or inevitable failure), resources must be made available to attempt to bring students from failure to some acceptable level of success. Continuation schools themselves are therefore also considered successes and failures by the same standards, with schools designated “Model Continuation Schools” by the state-affiliated California Continuation Education Association based largely on test scores and graduation rates, though student, faculty, and “community member” statements are taken into account. The district must also certify that every high school graduate in the district “whether from a traditional or continuation high school is equally prepared for productive citizenship” for a school in the district to qualify as a model school (CCEA).²² Measurements of success and failure at continuation high schools, however, are not easily quantifiable, even if the qualities of the terms “success” and “failure” are agreed upon.

A major issue with quantitative data about continuation schools is that “even the most basic data about continuation schools-- their enrollment figures-- are uncertain [...] due in great measure to the mobility of the students they serve” (EdSource). That the

²² Again, we see the goal of producing productive citizens through modern education.

state's student census, the CBEDS, which counts students on a single day of the school year, placed the number of continuation students at 68,371 for the 2005-06 school year while the Alternative School Accountability Model (ASAM) system's data showed that 116,551 students attended a continuation school during the same year emphasizes the tenuous nature of quantitative data about such a mobile population (Ed Source). The two numbers vary to such a degree mostly because of differences in when and how attendance was measured; the CBEDS records attendance only on one day in October, while the ASAM monitors changes in attendance at multiple points throughout the year for 85% of alternative schools and statistically estimates the total number of students (EdSource). The huge disparity between these two figures and their varying methods of collecting data about continuation schools makes evident the unreliability of quantitative data-gathering to record the realities of the students' positions in even any basic way. In the Food Justice program, many of the students were new to Santa Adela that spring, and a couple new students arrived more than halfway through the semester. A hugely mobile population with needs that vary greatly from other school populations and from each other cannot be sufficiently investigated using only such inconsistent figures, figures that obfuscate the conditions that make them relatively arbitrary. Even the ASAM data, which is more holistic than that of the CBEDS, cannot provide substantive information about circumstances as seemingly straightforward as those of attendance.

In addition, the lack of appropriate methods present in much of the data collection in continuation schools, especially the artificially low figures gathered by the state data system, leads to the further obscuring of “continuation high schools and the students they serve[, who are] largely invisible to most Californians” (Ruiz de Velasco et al. 2008:1).

The problem is further exacerbated when trying to assess programs at continuation schools that do not fit course types typically found at a comprehensive school. Because continuation schools allow for more flexibility in gaining credits to be used toward graduation requirements, student activity is often undocumented under traditional quantitative research methods (Ruiz de Velasco et al. 2008:5). The Food Justice program, for instance, started as a partially after-school program where Santa Adela students received credit for attending the first hour of each session. Spring 2014 was the first semester where the high school program took place entirely during the school day. Program sessions took the space of one Science class a week. Student attendance fluctuated from day to day throughout the semester. The flexibility of the continuation school system and the mobility of its students call for highly-specified, qualitative research methods.²³

One reason why using quantitative data to assess the Food Justice program specifically would be inadequate is that there are no formal exams in the program. The program has no grading system for program activities.²⁴ Students receive credit only for general program attendance and attendance at the end-of-the-year fundraising dinner. Therefore, other than attendance, there is very little quantitative data about the program at all. The lack of individual assessment in the program makes it difficult to analyze the program in ways that might be conducive to analyzing more “traditional” educational settings without some of the complex non-Individualizing dimensions of the Food Justice

²³ Additionally, research on continuation schools often focuses on who is in continuation schools and how to get them out. While this is important, Varenne and McDermott might conclude that it is even more important to consider why continuation schools are necessary within the current school system, how certain students are tracked into them, and how and why such designations exist in the American school system.

²⁴ This is another way in which the Food Justice program is an alternative educational program.

program. In this way, the program, and continuation schools more generally, complicate the Individualizing measurements of the school system.

School Gardens and the School System

To discuss “alternative” education in the American school system, we necessarily must discuss what is perceived to be its converse or antecedent. The “traditional” school system came out of the need to educate the public in the wake of the industrial revolution; the “factory model” of schooling prevailed for nearly a century, measuring and moving along students on an assembly line-like track. More recently, the neoliberal financial economy has produced the “corporate model” of schooling, in which “individual” choice and blame, as well as deregulation in some areas and hyperregulation in others and pushes to privatize more of the school system have mixed with the older factory model to produce a school system that is increasingly focused on gauging success and failure (Pinar 1992:230). Despite changing ideas about curriculum and testing, including an increasing focus on computer technology and conceptual or semiotic learning, ideas about intelligence and academic success continue to be realized in very narrow terms (Pinar 1992:230).

The 2013-14 school year was the first of the new “Common Core State Standards” system of curriculum tracking and testing, which is supposed to prepare students for a more conceptual and digital world. The Common Core website says that:

The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers.

With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.²⁵ (Common)

While the standards in some ways represent progressive changes in the curriculum, including emphasizing discussion over rote memorization and using digital testing to better engage students and adjust to each student by selecting questions based on number of previous right answers, they also represent ongoing efforts to track students and to funnel them into positions beneficial to certain economic models. Tracking is a very visible way in which the broader sociocultural conditions of students construct their more immediate conditions, which further shape their practices; those practices then feed back into the larger sociocultural conditions in many ways, from economic status to perceived laziness and other negative attributes of certain ethnic groups (Ochoa 2007:32). In this way, tracking works to obscure the effects of sociocultural conditions and constructed systems of measurement and locates a lack of school success within the individual or within individuals connected to a specific ethnic group. Tracking is highly Individualizing, in that it is enforced in supposed disregard of sociocultural conditions and focuses on the individual, ascribing traits to each student as a freely-choosing individual. Tracking is also a disciplinary technique in Foucault's understanding of discipline, in which students are assigned descriptive, recorded labels, which then often humiliate students into hopefully bringing them up to a normal standard of behavior.

The directors made it clear that they did not want the Food Justice program to encourage tracking, and that interns should not assume that any of the students were or were not going to college. Co-director Marcy told me that, while she wanted the program to teach practical skills, she also wanted "to avoid the tracking, right? I don't want to be

²⁵ Also note the emphasis on individual and family-unit responsibility.

an ROP [Regional Occupation Program] program in the sense that like, ‘Okay, these are all the kids that basically go into, like, we’re gonna teach them how to do computer skills or we’re gonna teach them how to do this stuff because they’re not going to college.’”

During the interns’ orientation, Marcy acknowledged that the program “could start looking like a vocational program” if its goals were not expressed clearly. She explained that, while she felt that jobs that require cooking and gardening are “fine jobs,” she wanted the program to give the students a “range of options,” broadening what they perceived to be their post-high school opportunities by teaching them a wide range of practices in the classroom—from knife skills to ecological politics. The interns and directors were especially wary of how the project-based learning model of the program could easily make the program feel and act like a vocational training program, which was not the intended goal of using that model. The program actively resisted tracking by framing potentially vocational skill-building as part of learning to work together to produce a finished project, a less Individualizing approach, and by trying to provide the students with options regarding the skills on which they wished to work, an approach more in line with Individualism. In that way, the program resisted an Individualizing feature of the school system by utilizing Individualist methods of promoting free choice.

One intern, Susan, noted that some students were excited by the vocational skills they were learning when they were taught in a way that didn’t denigrate such skills and gave them new opportunities to consider:

Because this class, like it can come off as a lot of different ways [...] For some people, I think they might see it as, like vocational training a little bit. Because, like—and like, those students who see it as that, I think are actually kind of excited about it. Like, they’re like, “Oh, cool!” Like, “I’m learning how to cook and like maybe I, I do want to, like be a chef!”

While the program was meant to teach some “practical skills” and open up possible vocational opportunities for the students, the project-based aspect of the program was intended to function mostly as a basis for complex collaboration, general skill- and communication- building, academic confidence- and resource-building, and political engagement. By framing what are often thought to be vocational skills as part of multifaceted collaborative efforts that dealt with large, political and academic issues, the program attempted to defy the academic tracking of the “traditional” school model that categorizes certain students as unable to engage in certain hierarchicalized levels of academic work. Students were not relegated to working in the garden because of their own individual (or cultural) academic failings, but were part of the group’s efforts to bring gardening, cooking, political economy, ecology, and other subjects together while they negotiated complex group relations. At the same time, students were encouraged to broaden their future options for employment and career advancement.

Students were also encouraged to develop relationships with the college interns to both gain collaborative experiences and to learn about potential educational and career paths after graduation. Students placed in higher educational tracks are often able to engage in opportunities for developing “critical thinking, analytical capabilities, and public speaking abilities” in the classroom, skills that have been deemed central to further opportunities for education, like college (Ochoa 2013:69). Students placed in lower educational tracks also often have fewer opportunities for friendly teacher-student interaction (Ochoa 2013:73). The program explicitly tried to supplement this lack of opportunities for friendly relationships and critical, analytical communication practices in the classroom through the projects that engaged the interns and students together in

discussion and problem-solving, though those projects were often sidelined for the projects that used more manual skills, such as cooking and gardening. But these projects, too, were meant to develop collaborative communication and critical thinking skills. The projects in Food Justice often required multiple people working together, multipart organization of tasks, and some improvisation, and the fruits of the program members' labor would be enjoyed together in an intimate way—we would eat our collaborative efforts.

Though tracking has long been the norm, recent testing policy has “created a narrative of failure that shaped a decade of trying to 'fix' schools while blaming those who work in them” (Rethinking Schools). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) testing claimed differences in abilities of children from lower income and racially marginalized communities, and punished these children's schools for these structural differences. Many reformers consider the Common Core, the new standard of testing, to carry on many of the negative effects of NCLB. The Common Core, despite many progressive changes to the NCLB model, is still a “heavy-handed, top down” system based on the “test and punish approach”; what's more, the high sufficiency levels of the Common Core have been proposed as new graduation benchmarks,²⁶ which would thrust more students and schools into the “failure” category for not completing their degree requirements and lead to more dropping-out and “privatized charters and voucher schools, especially in poor communities of color” (Rethinking Schools).²⁷ In both cases of standardized testing, the focus is on the abilities and designations of individuals without regard to the ways their

26 These standards are based on what have been framed as global educational standards. They also are supposed to test for college-readiness and to hold such readiness as a benchmark of success (Common). I will discuss discourse surrounding “college-readiness” in later chapters.

27 There are many arguments for and against private charters and voucher schools, which I will not be discussing in this paper.

practices exist within the conditions in which they live, learn, and test. These conditions not only lead students to having different answers on tests, but make the results of those tests mean different things and have different stakes for different students and schools.

Testing is just one way in which the school system is deeply embedded within a success-failure framework. Testing success is located within the individual and is seen only in dichotomy to testing failure. Testing is another disciplinary measure in which students, and schools, are compelled to reach a norm, individual school and student performance is recorded, and stigma is afforded to the “failures.” The Common Core website also says that “it should be clear to every student, parent, and teacher what the standards of success are in every school.” Discourse around testing standards are an example of school system discourse in which success is framed as fixed, distinct from failure, achievable by the individual, and removed from the system in which it is constructed.

With increases in globalization and digital technology, competitive testing stakes are raised and the models of success and failure are again (as in the Cold War and other times of huge political and economic transition) linked to larger values such as nationalism (Pinar 229). For California, this means either assimilating its large student populations that experience linguistic, cultural, economic, educational, and racial barriers, or making them less visible. One director of the program described such issues with the educational system that affect students from schools like Santa Adela as “putting kids somewhere when we don’t know what to do with them”.

Anxiety over increasing Californian school performance, as defined by these tests, has led to both the cultural and fiscal cutting of certain “alternative” programs and the

implementation of others, as schools, districts, and the state search for ways to bring up test scores and graduation rates. The development of the food justice movement in schools shows the new ways schools are experimenting to try to meet these rigid and ever-increasing standards and the ways that those in the movement have capitalized on this anxiety to promote their causes in the schools. The negotiation of these testing and programming opportunities and practices by school officials, educational experts, and food justice activists has helped shape the conditions of the Food Justice program at Santa Adela.

The food justice movement has in response, in the past two decades or so, placed an increasing import on school gardens. These programs have been implemented in schools across the country, with programs like the “Edible School Yard” hoping to increase students' ecoliteracy, consumption of healthy foods, and pride in the school grounds, as well as to spread these benefits into the community (The Edible School Yard Project). These gardens provide projects through which students learn together about food justice. However, critics have argued that these projects, which have been touted as excellent programs for urban and low-achieving schools, not only require and reinforce certain social, economic, and cultural privileges, but draw attention away from more critical issues of food justice, such as agrochemicals and the rights of farm laborers; others have lamented seeing mainly ethnic minority students, especially Latino students, in gardening programs where manual labor is prominent and very little is done to actually change the system that guides these students into lower academic tracks (Guthman). School gardens therefore often have non-Individualizing effects, but a lack of

contextualization of students in larger social conditions is an Individualizing aspect of these programs.

Santa Adela's administration struggles to find resources for its students. As one director of the Food Justice program told me, salad bars were implemented in all school cafeterias in the district except for Santa Adela's, presumably because of its small student population. One of the original intentions of the Food Justice program was to supply the cafeteria with fresh produce, but this turned out to be logistically impossible. The school board has generally been receptive to the Food Justice program. As I mentioned in my introduction, I will be including some of my findings from this research in a presentation to the board. This presentation will hopefully encourage the board to further support the program, as well as to work with the program to continue to improve experiences for the students involved. In addition to seeking support from the board, the program seeks support from the community through community engagement activities, such as holding a booth at the local Earth Day fair and at a sustainability fair at one of the colleges of the interns. An end-of-the-year, multi-course, fundraising dinner prepared by program members with ingredients from the garden acts as a final project for the students and raises money for the program. These activities are mostly for friends of the school, interested college students beyond the interns, and friends and family members of the students, interns, and directors, but the activities reflect the ways Santa Adela encourages programs that create a more positive image of the school and its students. The activities also help to prove the "success" of the Food Justice program.

The program is based on the understanding that certain designations constructed by the school system's success-failure framework exist and hopes to help change these

designations for the students through project-based learning. The Food Justice program exists because these designations exist within the school system. The program therefore both works against the success-failure framework and within it. The framework is Individualizing, and its pervasive nature leads to more Individualizing effects within the program.

The school system generally promotes Individualist notions of success and failure. Implementation of school gardens can be an attempt to respond to some of these notions, but is often couched in Individualism itself; this project of the food justice movement often lacks contextualization of those who are compelled to participate. This is just one example of the ways in which Individualizing and non-Individualizing influences interact in the Food Justice program and often even come from the same sources.

Race and Class in the School and Program

Santa Adela is a small school, enrolling fewer than 100 students and employing only 9 teachers. Its student population is reported to be almost 65% Latina/o (Ed-Data). According to state government statistics, 9.1% of students are classified as “English Learners,” but a larger percent are classified “Fluent English-Proficient Students” and “ELS Redesignated Fluent English-Proficient Students Since Prior Year” (Ed-Data). Teachers at Santa Adela are reported as 44.4% white and 22.2% Latina/o (Ed-Data). Santa Adela's teacher population has a much higher percent of Latina/o teachers than the district at large, but the percent of Latina/o teachers is still only about a third of the percent of Latina/o students in the school population. In the 2011-2012 school year, 51.3% of Santa Adela students were receiving free or reduced lunches, 21.8% higher than that of its district.

Homelessness, hunger, and contact with the criminal justice system are challenges Santa Adela students and their families often face. Many students have instability at home, sometimes due to issues with immigration and poverty. For Santa Adela students, schoolwork may often be an afterthought, with food insecurity, family health and financial issues, and other major stresses at the forefront of their minds. Again, we see the need for qualitative analysis that examines the broader sociocultural structures in which the students are positioned to adequately assess their needs and experiences.

The state educational statistic website, Ed-Data, states that “the percentage of Hispanic students continues to grow (...) A continuing trend is the increase in the percentage of students with special needs and English learners” (Ed-Data). Across the country, but especially in Southern California, the growing Latina/o student population in public schools, as well as the changing needs of the general student population with this increase and the changing role of the school in response, has become a pertinent topic. Many of these increasing needs come from challenges facing students that are learning or have learned English as a second language or who have or whose families have needs concerning immigration and documentation. “Enrollment of English learners in the 11th grade is 14 percent statewide, while it is about 21.3 percent in continuation schools statewide” and continuation students are “three times more likely than students surveyed in comprehensive high schools to be in foster care or living with a relative other than a parent,” heightening both material and social concerns for students of continuation schools (Ruiz de Velasco et al. 2008:3). In addition, social, cultural, and economic stigma surrounding the Latina/o community produce both greater needs of Latina/o students and insufficient remedies by the school system; continuation schools typically face these

issues in a greater percentage of their students. The Food Justice program is designed specifically to counteract some of the negligence and inequities of the school system in which Santa Adela students are situated.

The quote from the Ed-Data website also makes a seemingly benign connection between learning English and having learning disabilities. The terms “special education” and “special needs” are used to denote students with disabilities (California Department of Education). Latino and other minority and immigrant students have a long history of being classified as “special needs” or learning disabled, or of at least being grouped with students with learning disabilities (Gonzales 1990:90). Not only does this grouping raise questions about what classifications such as “learning disabled” mean in various educational and other contexts and across generations of school children, but also about representations of minority, low-income, and immigrant students in the educational system.

These representations and classifications have educational consequences for many of the students at Santa Adela. That a large number of Santa Adela students are from low-income Latino families illustrates the implications of the conflation of “learning disabled” classifications and ESL and other Latino immigrant classifications, especially racialized and classed implications, and shapes the conditions of the program. These implications and conditions reverberate in the experiences of the students through their self-conceptions, values, opportunities, experiences and practices. They are part of what Varenne and McDermott describe as being “always already there” in any educational situation (Varenne and McDermott 1999:14). I observed the Food Justice program attempt to challenge these classifications, but the structure of the educational system, as

we will see, did not allow for the program to escape these classifications all together and they were often reified within the program.²⁸ Because descriptions like “special needs” locate the issue within the individual rather than within the system or system of measurement, this context is obscured.

That the needs of minority students are either not being met by or do not correlate with the goals of the current American school system is made clear by the fact that “only 60 percent of Latina/o and 57 percent of African American students graduated with their high school classes in 2002,” (Ochoa 2013:25). Latino students “compris[e] 55 percent of all students in continuation schools...compared to 42.3 percent... in comprehensive schools statewide” (EdSource). These statistics are reflected in the aforementioned demographics of Santa Adela.²⁹

All students in the program were “CDS” students. CDS stands for “Community Day School,” and designates programs that are meant to “serve troubled students;” these students “have been expelled from school” or “have had problems with attendance or behavior” (Community Day Schools). CDS students at Santa Adela came from various schools and conventional grade levels. Their classes were chosen for them, as a group, and they spent the entire day together every day. This led to tensions between students, influenced students’ perceptions of themselves, and helped to shape the educational conditions in which the students were situated when they entered the Food Justice program each day. The students came from a variety of backgrounds and family

²⁸ The practices and opportunities of those involved in the program exist within the context of the educational conditions that create these classifications and make them salient within the classroom.

²⁹ There are many theories that purport to explain this graduation gap among different racial groups, some of which entail the concepts of biological and/or cultural “deficiencies” and the slightly more nuanced concepts of cultural “differences” (Gonzales 1990:34 and Varenne and McDermott 1999:140)²⁹. All of these concepts lack a serious analysis of context.

situations, but many came from what one director described as “incredibly challenging lives.” Some students stayed at Santa Adela after they were no longer CDS students; some left to go back to comprehensive schools.

The two non-student groups in the program were divided conceptually from the students by function and authority. One was the college student intern group. The majority of student interns were female (there were only two male-identifying interns.) They identified as Indigenous, Navajo, Latina, Asian, and, for the majority, White, and a few interns also identified as two or more races. Interns mostly came from more affluent backgrounds, though, as with the Santa Adela students, there was some diversity in that regard. The program had tried to increase diversity in a number of areas; Marcy, a director, said that she was “really pleased this [spring] semester that our percentage of students of color among the interns [wa]s higher.” Interns differed in age from the students by about three to nine years; interns’ ages ranged from eighteen to twenty-two, while the Santa Adela students’ ages ranged from thirteen to fifteen, making the youngest intern only three years older than the oldest student. The interns’ academic interests ranged from Environmental Analysis to Politics to Latin American Studies, but all came from one of three small, prestigious, private colleges nearby. The colleges were also residential, and many of the interns lived on their campuses. The majority of the student bodies at all of the colleges were White, though the demographics differed somewhat between the three.

Interns’ descriptions of their socioeconomic status or class ranged from working or lower class to upper class, though some interns noted that their status or class had changed over time in varying directions. Annual tuition at each college was about

\$60,000 for the year in which I undertook this study, but many students received some form of financial aid. The other interns and I mainly understood the colleges as spaces of socioeconomic privilege, despite a lack of conversations about this privilege. As one intern described it, “We talk privilege much of the time, but class is something I believe we aren't quite sure *how* to talk about. I feel that because we are so privileged to be here, we make assumptions that we are all privileged in the same ways.” Some groups on campus, including ones with which a few interns were affiliated, have worked to bolster discussions about class privilege, but interns generally felt that there was still much work to be done. In the following chapter, I will discuss the ways in which not knowing how to talk about class and other social demarcations affected relationships between interns and students and the roles of the interns in the program.

A privilege shared by the interns was that of educational privilege. It is important to note that a large impetus behind the creation of the program in 2010 was that the director was teaching a college class on the political economy of food and wanted to incorporate a school garden project as one of the community partnerships entailed in the course. From the beginning, the ties between the wealthy academic institution of the college and the neighborhood continuation school were constitutive of program conditions.

The final group was that of the co-directors. One co-director, Alyssa, was the garden manager for the district. The other, Marcy, was the professor of the class from which the interns were drawn. Marcy, along with others, had built the program from scratch and kept it running, which included maintaining the grounds, cultivating relationships with district officials and donors, running program prep and sessions,

managing interns, and a host of other activities. Alyssa had joined the program the previous year, and had taken on major roles not just in the garden, but also in curriculum planning, program development, and day-to-day activities in the program.

The directors and interns worked with younger students from other nearby schools in the garden and kitchen on Mondays and worked with the Santa Adela students on Wednesdays. While they acknowledged the challenges of working with the Santa Adela students—one director, during orientation, told the interns that it feels like an “uphill battle”—members from both the intern and director groups often described the Santa Adela students as their “favorite kids to work with.”

Santa Adela sits in one tiny corner of a highly Individualizing school system. Testing, tracking, and other features of this school system are Individualizing forces with which the Food Justice program attempted to contend. The program used the school garden project model of the food justice movement in response to these forces. However, the food justice movement itself cannot be called totally non-Individualist, because the experiences of those in marginalized socioeconomic, racial, and other social conditions are overlooked, even despite the fact that components of the movement, particularly school gardening, are often targeted at those same people. I will argue in the next chapters that the Food Justice program reflected this contradiction in the ways that program members negotiated difference and did or did not consider social conditions in their understandings of and practices within the program.

The Food Justice program exemplified the ways in which the contexts of alternative educational settings are shaped in part by Individualizing influences from the school system and the larger educational and political movements that guide them. Even

as they challenge Individualism, these settings incorporate Individualizing influences into their structures, and into the experiences and understandings of their members.

Chapter 3:

Negotiating Influences of Individualism in Roles and Relationships: The Interns

Interns negotiated Individualist and non-Individualist influences as we attempted to navigate the program space in terms of what our roles were in the program, our relationships with students, our positionalities, and how we shaped the conditions and practices of the program. Interns tried to find common ground with the students while acknowledging difference in the program. We attempted to build communality in the program, but often employed Individualizing disciplinary practices and often did not recognize difference in the program in ways that contextualized program members and their experiences. We also tried to acknowledge the students' individual identities and needs. Interns' negotiations of Individualizing influences in the program shaped the students' and their experiences in profound ways. While interns explicitly promoted the non-Individualizing values of the program, we also more subtly reiterated Individualizing influences in the program.

Learning in and Shaping the Space

Interns arrived at least fifteen minutes early each day to help set up the day's activities and begin tasks. When the students came in, the directors usually assigned them to interns or the interns invited the students to join them. When the group activities began, interns and students mingled. Often, a couple interns did some tasks in the garden or kitchen while most of the interns helped the students to do some of the smaller

activities within the larger group activity (e.g. smashing garlic for the sauce the group was learning to make.) Many of the interns learned skills through these activities right alongside the students, though many had some previously learned skills in these areas and a few had significantly more experience. Interns deferred to each other and learned new skills from each other. This was one area interns had to navigate—trying to seem like competent role models for the kids while wanting to acknowledge that we, too, were learning.

Many of the interns felt that the best way we could do this was to try to learn more about cooking and gardening and pay close attention to instructions to then help the students, but not to pretend to be experts where we were not or to deny mistakes. We were usually quite open with the students about making mistakes, showing them where we went wrong and how we could improve, or identifying with students when they, for instance, cut too thick a slice of a vegetable by acknowledging that we had done the same thing earlier when practicing. Interns felt less anxious about admitting their mistakes as the semester progressed and we felt that we could work more collaboratively with students and not lose their interest as quickly. Interns also increasingly reminded the students that we were students, too, who were learning alongside the high school students. These conversations moved away from Individualism through the project-based learning model, in which mentors are supposed to guide students rather merely hand down “content knowledge or serve as the expert” (Cockrell et al. 2000:350). Cockrell et al. say that “a collaborative approach to learning acknowledges that knowledge is common property rather than primarily the property of authorities” (Cockrell et al. 2000:359). Interns and directors tried not to pose as authorities of knowledge while still

acknowledging that they were deemed thusly by the school system; to combat this, interns and directors not only tried to admit that we often made mistakes and were still learning, but that learning with the students was vital to our own learning.

Interns, on the one hand, tried to keep up a collaborative, decentralized learning environment, but, on the other, felt that we should have some disciplinary and organizational authority to structure the class. These competing perspectives illustrated the ways collaborative efforts were often frustrated in the program. Many interns felt that, as their mentors and caretakers, we could never truly seem to the students to be their collaborators. We held some position of authority due to the “always already there” structures that bound the program as a school program, even if we were able to shape these structures to better fit the more collaborative and project-based nature of the program. Interns noted that, in this way, communality was fundamentally limited in the program space.

Like the students, the interns were graded mostly based on attendance, though we also were required to participate in all activities, complete assigned tasks, and fulfill our assigned jobs. The interns, too, were engaged in projects that were meant to teach us about broader issues; most interns felt that the program did a better job of connecting the projects to these issues for the interns than for the students. Marcy, one of the directors, said that part of her role was “making sure the practice that [went] on at [Santa Adela wa]s relevant and working for” the interns, as well as for the students. A main project for the interns was learning how to navigate the program space in ways that would be beneficial to the students.

Many of the interns expressed interest in making the space of the program comfortable for students who felt less comfortable there. One intern, Annie, who had some experience working in nearby schools, said that she tried “reaching out to the ones that maybe aren’t, like involved in the joking around and like making fun of each other in like a playful way. And like reaching out more to those people who are outside of that.” Annie was very excited when one of these students opened up to her one day about her family and some issues she’d been having. Annie wanted the students to feel comfortable in the space and in coming to her for help, about problems inside or outside of the program. Xavier, the youngest intern, who had some experience in educational gardening programs, repeated multiple times during one of our interviews early in the semester that “one of [his] goals [wa]s to include kids who d[id]n’t really want to be a part of the conversation.”

Speaking up and communicating, as well as “expressing oneself,” is an Individualizing value of the school system that was readily brought into the program. The interns, as well as the directors and students, reiterated and rejected various Individualizing values of the school system within the program space. In this instance, this Individualizing value was actually employed to challenge Individualism in other ways; the interns wanted students to participate in the program more by being “a part of the conversation,” to add to the communality of the program space. Interns hoped that all of the students would feel that they had a stake, as well as a place, in the program activities. Instilling this value nevertheless still echoed the Individualizing nature of the school system, in which each person is compelled to practice a similar yet separable act of speaking. Xavier’s goal would both communalize and Individualize the students.

But Xavier was aware that while “for some students, it is good to kind of be forced to be included in the conversation, because they’ll like relax and get into it, [for other] students, sometimes the best like thing for them would be to just ease off and just like let them be and like maybe that would allow them to kind of engage on their own, on their own part.” Xavier’s comment outlined one way in which allowing the students choices as individuals could actually lead to more collective experiences. Xavier also noted that having so many interns in the space often meant that interns could “do a lot less” because “there’s a lot of traffic.” Many interns spoke of the “chaos” surrounding their roles as interns.

“What Are We Doing Here?”: The Role of the Intern

To understand the ways in which the interns actually affected and experienced the program, we should try to understand the interns’ role in the program. However, they were not entirely clear about what that was.

Interns were each assigned jobs, which we held for the entire semester. Though each intern or pair of interns was responsible for the task to which they were assigned, the entire group worked together to complete these tasks. For instance, two interns were responsible for going to school curricular meetings and discussing Food Justice curriculum with other teachers at the school to better integrate our lesson plans with the lessons of the other teachers, but all interns made suggestions and helped coordinate curriculum. Ultimately, the directors devised and decided on the curriculum and individual lesson plans of the program, taking the ideas of the interns into account. Another intern and I were in charge of cleaning up the program space at the end of the

day, including making sure all tools and utensils were cleaned and put away in their proper places, ingredients were stored properly, dish towels were laundered, and the classroom was clean and ready for use by the art class the following day. All the interns, though, at the end of each day, helped to clean up and organize the space. Other assignments included construction, management, and upkeep of the aquaponics system, garden and compost management, sign-in and sign-out, fundraiser dinner set-up and menu, and other jobs related to one-time events. Many of these jobs ended up being held unofficially by all the interns collectively rather than by the interns to which the jobs were assigned. A handout given to the interns at our orientation said that, in addition to our individual jobs, we could give the directors a week notice if we wanted to develop and lead a program activity; none of the interns who made activity suggestions were given the opportunity to do this.

The interns entered the program through one director, Marcy, our professor. As part of the interns' course at the college where she taught, Marcy doled out internships at the Food Justice program and a number of other sites to her students based on our experiences and interests. Each intern in the Food Justice program was chosen based on the mix of skills which we, together, represented and that were needed in the program. Some interns were well-trained in cooking, organic gardening, and food justice issues prior to the program. Others had experience working with younger students or in schools in the area generally. One intern was continuing her internship from the previous semester, and already knew a few of the high school students who had been part of the program then. Though there was a range of confidences coming into the semester, all of the interns felt capable enough to pick up the skills they felt they lacked or to make up for

them in other ways. However, differing knowledges and preferencing of knowledges did lead to some frustration early on. One intern said:

I found myself frustrated the first week way more than now, cause like, the people who knew how to garden, how to compost, or do aquaponics, whatever, like got to do way more things than I got to do. And there was, like this assumption that you knew everything about food justice and gardening as you go on, but, like the point of the internship, I saw, is like learning just as much as the kids.

As I mentioned, the idea that students and interns would learn together throughout the semester is one most interns felt was a central part of the program.

Many of the interns did not feel confident in knowing their general role in the program. Interns told me a couple weeks into the semester that they felt that we were “still trying to figure that out.” Most felt this came partly from the indefinite role we played as student-mentors, and partly from unclear expectations:

They didn’t really tell us what we were doing. Um, we were just kind of, like thrown into it. With, like no training on how to deal with the kids—or, like, not deal with them, but like how to teach them. And even, like what we’re teaching them, to be honest. Um, so, I think the function is, from what I’ve gathered so far, is like, there’s this overarching theme that maybe we’re not totally aware of, even though we contribute to it. It’s like, mainly [the directors, Marcy and Alyssa]. And then, we’re there to like engage the kids, and like help them be engaged, and help them be enthusiastic, and like be there as a support network for them to be, like excited about learning.

When I asked what the interns wished they’d been told before starting the internship, many said they wished they’d had clearer guidelines about what they were to do in the program:

I guess like a clearer idea of what we’d be doing. I mean, there was like a general, “Okay, we’re here with [Food Justice], we’re going to be teaching them, like seminars on the meat industry, or like this specific topic in food justice one day, and then another day we’ll be like weeding and planting.” Um, but I wish that we had more of an idea of what [Marcy]’s and [Alyssa]’s goal was. And maybe like, talked about like what the interns’ goal, or, was, or even motivation. Like, what is it that we’re trying to get the students involved, like, is it specifically food justice, or is it to support the kids? Cause I remember there was this one day when [Marcy] was, um, saying, like, “Oh, we can really make this class anything the kids want them to be. If they want to bring essays in to write, like we can help them write their essays.” So, there’s like sort of a blurred line between, like being there for the kids and food justice. And it’s like, what are we

putting the emphasis on? Um, so I just wish, like we had a clear, like vision of that motivation.

This uncertainty was also related to the interns' liminal positions as student-teachers. From the beginning of the semester, the directors made sure to point out this grey area and its potential complications. During the orientation day, which was an hour-long period in which the interns were introduced to the program space, the second co-director, Alyssa, and the school counselor, Marcy explained that it would be difficult to walk the line between friend and teacher with the students, and that our relationships with the students would be "different from the traditional teacher-student relationship."

When I asked one intern about her feelings about the lack of clarity concerning our roles in the program, she said that, while she often felt confused:

At the same time, I think the chaos is, like a good thing, because I feel like there's this collective effort to, like make the class what it is, [...] with the interns and with the students. I think that kind of like, the goal of [Food Justice], is like this collective energy and effort to produce something together. But it can be frustrating.

Interns also sometimes appreciated the lack of specified roles because, as Xavier said, it allowed for the interns' roles to be "what we want to make out of them." Also, Asher, then in her second semester as an intern in the program, noted that the program was more open to intern input this spring semester than it had been in the past. One student had a clearer and much more concise answer to the question as to what the role of a Food Justice intern was: "They're supposed to help us out. And that's what they do."

All of the interns also had their own more personal learning goals for the program time. In addition to wanting to learn more about food justice, interns wanted to improve cooking skills, gain internship experience, practice working with students, or, for instance, do thesis research. One intern said:

For me, part of it is just learning more about, um, I guess, like how to do classes that involve, like projects and stuff. [...] It's kind of a rare thing. And so, that's kind of

another function—but like, for me. I’m like, “Okay, I’ve got to get a sense of what leading a class like this is about.”

The fairly uncommon quality of the project-based learning style of the program, especially one incorporating cooking, gardening, and food justice, drew many interns who planned to do work in education or environmental programs after they graduated.

Interns also felt that their indeterminate roles were sometimes problematic and sometimes helpful in forging relationships with the students. Interns wondered about “our image as an intern,” and how that affected student perceptions of the interns and possibilities for relation between the students and interns, “Like are we their friend, are we their teachers and their mentors?”

Interns described difficulties in navigating this liminal space in a school system that teaches students to view persons of authority and students (of less or no authority) dichotomously. As one director, Marcy, said, the students “ha[d] been through an educational system where they’[d] been deemed problematic and we represent[ed], like it or not, um, a particular kind of privilege and establishment.” As I mentioned, interns tried to foster understandings of knowledge and learning as communal. Many interns attempted to create a more communal space by drastically restricting active disciplinary action. Asher said that, in the Fall semester that preceded our Spring semester, the interns “didn’t want to be disciplinarian, so we were really just trying to, I don’t know, trying to engage them on a friend-to-friend level,” but that the students “could tell that the interns didn’t even really want to be in a position of power because we didn’t even really want to be the one in charge [and] saw that as a person of authority [...] giving up their authority,” and that the students saw this as the interns’ lack of power and control and they “definitely knew that they kind of could walk all over” the interns. Asher felt that

this had improved since the last semester due to a restructuring of the program in which the interns and directors decided that students would not be disciplined for exercising agency to control their activities in the program and the interns were given some curricular and pedagogical authority. By deciding this officially in the program, the interns and directors had a more stable disciplinary framework from which they could work, and the interns' goals were not pushing against program goals. Asher said that, in the previous semester:

When we did run into, like, disciplinary things, that really gave us an opportunity to sit down with [the directors] and like talk about, like our strategies that we want to implement towards discipline and the ones that, like they were exercising, or that, like we thought they were exercising, and trying to come up with a—like instead of getting angry and things like that, that we could just, um, kind of like take the student aside and just do a different activity. So it's not punish. So we're not, um, criticizing them in front of the group. Because that seemed like that was something that was happening, like, out of habit. And then, also, that's [what it seemed] all their other teachers do throughout the day do. So, the kids were just like totally unresponsive to that. So, we were trying to think of a more positive way where it wasn't a punishment. The interns did not want to further label students as failures for not wanting to do an activity or expressing their own agencies, and to instead find ways with the students to better integrate the needs of the particular students and the needs of the program. In doing so, the interns hoped to include student needs into the communal goals of the program. However, this change led to more of the gentle disciplinary practices that often individualized students, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

Many interns also tried to break down the dichotomous relationships in the classroom between those with and without authority. The interns felt that this actually led to a better classroom environment and less problems, because students would feel less that they were defined in opposition to authority figures and their agency would be more fully recognized. This was not a completely radical reformation of the classroom

experience, because the students still would be under the watch and some authority of the interns, and under the greater authority of the directors. But the interns felt that the collaborative qualities of the program should be used to foster positive relationships and greater sharing of influence over the students' activities between the students, interns, and directors. One intern, Kaitlin, said:

I think the role of the intern is, um, I guess to work with the students but not to be in too much of an authoritative role. Kind of work alongside the—more of a role model and an example, um, and to be able to teach without kind of playing into the typical like student-teacher paradigm.

Kaitlin's and other interns' comments about the role of interns as being "models" and "examples" for students can be seen as a form of less visible, normalizing discipline, which, again, I will further discuss later in this chapter.³⁰

Interns also saw themselves as "mentors" in the program, which is a common theme in the project-based learning model (Cockrell et al. 2000:360). The interns were clear that they appreciated the collaborative and project-based nature of the program and that calling out single students for singular actions that were deemed "troublemaking," especially in front of the other students, was detrimental to fostering group collaboration and complex, multi-faceted, long-term project-learning. Rather than simply making the interns' authority less visible by "acting like friends," the interns wanted to give the students more control over the program. The directors took note of this and committed to creating some more opportunities for student input in the future. The interns hoped this would help to define our roles as not just mentors to but also collaborators with students in program activities, as much as would be possible within the conditions of the program and school system.

³⁰And can be seen as problematic given the ways in which the interns' "example" behavior is linked to hierarchalized conceptions of "successful" behavior.

Building Relationships, Building Community, Navigating Difference

Intern-student relationships helped to promote communality in the program; however, interns had difficulties knowing how to approach difference with the students. We were concerned about our relationships with the students as confined, defined, and otherwise affected by the differing educational, socioeconomic, racial, and cultural conditions and groups in which the interns and students were situated.

Interns felt that there were barriers between the interns and students, with which the two groups struggled throughout the semester. But the interns felt that these barriers were neither total nor inflexible, and many expressed active efforts to manipulate and weaken the barriers. Annie told me that she thought “there [wa]s a divide, [but she did]n’t know how huge it [wa]s.” Most interns were also aware of the ways race and ethnicity affected the experiences of the students and that students often felt more comfortable with the few non-White interns. Annie said that she didn’t think “the high school students [we]re as warm to [her], honestly, as the other people who were like visibly Latina.”

Another intern, Susan, described relating to students through shared language, food traditions, and national origins:

[They] were a little bit confused, cause I was just like, “Oh yeah!” Like, “Do you guys, speak Spanish?” Like, “Yeah, I speak Spanish, too!” And then they’re like, “Who is this person?” Like, “This is kind of strange.” [...] There’s one in particular [who would say] “Do you speak Spanish?” Like, “Oh, yeah.” And then like he was talking about, like food and food that’s like Mexican and then, like pointing out, like, “Oh, this guy’s Central American!” I’m like, “Oh, I’m Central American, too!” [...] And then there’s, there’s one other student, too, who’s a little bit—I think she’s a little bit younger than the rest of them, but, um, she’s also, like, “Oh, I know how to cut this and that cause this is in Mexican food a lot!”

Interns came from all areas of the United States and from other countries. Interns also came from a variety of educational, socioeconomic, ethnic, racial, religious, and political backgrounds. However, a modest majority of the interns came from moderate to

wealthy backgrounds, identified as White, and considered themselves to lean far left politically. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, all but two interns identified as women. Difference across visible demographic markers led to differences in experiences and relationships with the high school students, especially in the beginning. Susan said that, on the first day, the students seemed “kind of suspicious” and would “look at us and be like, ‘Hmmm....’ Like, ‘Who are you guys?’” Annie said:

My background from them is entirely different. Like, I’m this young white girl, like what do I have in common with these high school students? Like, I literally have no idea what they’ve been through in their lives. Um, so I felt like that was, like recognized. Like an unspoken recognition between the, the high school students and me.

Annie found that she was able to connect with some of the students over the shared experience of having switched schools partway through high school. Many interns noted that their relationships with students grew as they uncovered similar experiences, such as similar interests in science, growing up with a grandparent, or coming from a financially unstable home. Susan said that, while she had many similar demographic markers as many of the students, she, too, had trouble navigating difference in the program, even when trying to connect through similar marginalized identities. She felt that direction in this area could be very helpful, depending on how it was given:

Like, so you can, you can scare the interns, kind of, into being like, “You can’t trust them” and all this stuff. Or, you can just be like, “You should be aware of—“ you know, like, for example, [at the beginning of the semester I was working with] one of the students. I was like, “Hey—“ well, he said his name, and then I told him, “Well, how do you parents say it?” Because it was a very common name in Spanish but he was saying it with an English accent. But like, “What do your parents, how do your parents say it?” And he just like—just the way that that interaction went, I think that he doesn’t live with his parents. And then, and then I thought about it and then I was like, “Oh, he probably, like doesn’t live with his mom or his dad.” And then I was like, “Well, how does your grandma say it?” And then he was like, “Oh, yeah, my grandma.” And then he said some other stuff about his grandma. I was like, “Oh, he probably just lives with his grandma, then.” So, I don’t know, it’s good to keep those things in mind, cause you

don't always know— like if it's true that these students, um, I don't know, are living some pretty harsh stuff, then it's like helpful.

Interns also noticed the way racial and ethnic difference often played out differently along gender divisions. Susan told me that:

In the last two classes, when we've been working on stuff, the guys tend to be, like at the edge and the people that tend to be there are [...] the people of color. And we're talking to the guys, right? While like the, the girls that, um, who are mostly Latina [...] they tend to be together and they talk more to the interns that are White. Who tend to also be women, too. [...] The guys are a little bit more receptive to talking to the women who are Brown. And, um, and to [Pete], too. Cause he's Asian American.

Interns felt that the group projects helped them to discuss difference with the students in a way that was positive for them. Asher, one of the younger interns, explained that often, in the midst of collaboration gardening or cooking, students seemed to feel comfortable enough to ask her questions about her life outside of the program. Interns struggled between wanting to acknowledge and consciously counteract these barriers, wanting to appreciate and understand the ways in which these barriers affected the lives of the students, and not wanting overstep our roles and interfere in the students' lives too much. Interns were confused about how explicitly and how often we should discuss and combat these barriers with the students.³¹

Susan, who was particularly interested in critical pedagogy, told me that she felt that we also needed to be more vocal about locating ourselves in our conditions with the students and:

Establish a sense of community before talking about privilege and the ways we are complicit in each other's oppression and possible ways of liberating our communities. You need a sense of trust because these experiences are painful to talk about. So that's probably why privilege probably only comes out in subtle ways during class. We haven't started getting to the conversations that require a lot of trust. But many interns, even towards the end of the semester, were unsure if those conversations would ever happen.

³¹ Some worried about seeming like the interns wanted to “save” the students.

One of the aspects of the students' lives the interns wished they knew more about were their CDS designations. Every intern I interviewed admitted to not fully understanding what the CDS designation was or meant. When I asked one intern what the CDS designation meant, she said:

Santa Adela is a Continuation High School, I think it's called. So that's for kids who either had to drop out of school or they failed a few classes or, um, they've had legal troubles or things like that where they've had to take extended periods away from school. [...] From what I understand, it's a school where you go there to get more credits and either transfer back to an original school where maybe you, like, failed classes, um, and had to leave. Or to get your GED. Um, and then end school, I guess. And then, the CDS program, um, which is the students that we get, is for students who are mandated by the state to get an extra thirty minutes, um, of school. And I'm not even really sure why that is. [...] And even within Santa Adela, they're treated really differently.

Interns knew that the students' CDS designation greatly shaped the students' experiences in school, but weren't sure quite how or how to speak with the students about the topic. Most knew that this meant that they had extra class time and had to move from class to class together all day, and most understood that this was because they'd been in some sort of educational or legal trouble. One intern admitted that she didn't know "in what type of situation they're in exactly to have ended up at that school." Most felt that they could and should know more about the designation to better work with the kids. But some also felt that this may not be necessary, and could even be detrimental to their relationships with the students. Susan said "the strange thing" was that, if she hadn't been told about the students' CDS designation or known about the educational conditions of Santa Adela High School, she didn't think she "would have noticed a difference."

Interns balanced concerns about wanting to have as much information as possible to try to better recognize the conditions in which the students attended and understood school and the program and not wanting to exacerbate preconceived notions about the students' abilities and lives. Many felt that the conditions that shaped the realities of the

students were constantly modeling their lived experiences, whether the interns were told something about the students' lives or not. Interns felt that we were generally mindful of avoiding referring to students negatively, especially in the ways to which we'd heard the students be referred— as “troublemakers,” “impossible,” “bad kids, ” and “the worst of the worst.”

Every intern with whom I spoke was excited about the growth of relationships between the interns and students in the program over the course of the semester.³² While interns often acknowledged that the students, and they themselves, were bound by their sociocultural conditions, which suggested less Individualistic understandings of the program, they didn't always feel they needed to know what those exactly were. However, many wished for more training in how to discuss these conditions with the students more generally. A few interns, especially White, higher socioeconomic class female interns, also admitted to me that they were nervous about how to confront and appreciate difference when interacting with the students and wanted some direction in that area. The directors told me that they hoped for more intern training and input in the future, and that more had occurred in previous semesters when interns were able to take on more leadership roles. They had plans to implement more intern training and opportunities for input in the program in the coming semesters by restructuring the program so that interns had more opportunities to take on such roles.³³

³² To speak individually, I was personally very excited when a couple students told me that they'd missed us when we had been on spring break and had not seen the students for a week, because I felt that we were becoming a more positive part of their weeks.

³³ The directors hoped to fundraise enough money, for example, to create work-study jobs for interns at the program so that they could spend more time and energy on program-related activities.

Negotiating Disciplinary Practices

The interns shaped the experiences of students in the program, as well as their own experiences, through disciplinary practices. These practices were, to varying degrees, influenced by and reiterated notions of Individualism; some disciplinary practices worked mainly in opposition to these influences, but those practices functioned in tandem with the practices that promoted Individualism.

Because many interns noticed in the beginning of the semester that issues of race, class, gender, and other intersectional factors had not been discussed much by the interns, and not with the students at all, we brought the issue to the attention of the directors. They invited volunteers to lead a group activity with the students. A couple of interns who had experience in the area volunteered to provide some programming on building trust in the community.

One of the interns who led these activities, Susan, said, in other high school programs with which she'd been involved, "Students pushed the boundaries of comfort because we brought up housing, education, violence, unemployment." Susan adapted an activity in which she and the other intern, Carolina, had participated in another program. Carolina asked the interns to meet with her and Susan before one program session to discuss the activity, and she led much of it once the students had arrived. Students and interns were given index cards and markers and asked to write five values they felt were important. Examples of acceptable values for this activity were "honesty," "integrity," and "trust." Some students expressed disdain for the activity and many said they couldn't think of five traits. We suggested they think of people in their lives whom they respected and to write down traits or values they felt those people possessed. Then Carolina asked

everyone to cross off two traits. Some students bemoaned having to choose, but finally all the students made selections. Then they were asked to cross off another two.

Carolina asked everyone to write the final value in large print on the back of the index card. Tape was passed around and students and interns stuck loops to our index cards. Then a whiteboard was passed around and we placed our values on the board. The board read many of the same traits multiple times, such as “happiness,” “respect,” and “forgiveness” (both mine and Carolina’s chosen trait.) Then one student, Nelson, held up the board as we discussed the values and what they meant, including how we could foster these values in the program. For instance, Carolina suggested that if someone were to say something mean to another person in the program, “so if, for example I were to say something mean to [Susan],” who stood next to her, “I would say five nice things to her.” We discussed that no one wants to be insulted nor interrupted when speaking; the latter point Carolina emphasized by repeating it when one student starting speaking to another student while she was wrapping up the activity. Students gave no new suggestions as to how to foster these values in the program community, but many agreed with or added on to the suggestions the interns gave.

Another important point we highlighted was that we, as the interns, should not and did not want to be disciplining the students. We said that students should keep themselves and each other, as well as the interns, in check by always being accountable for their own actions and the actions of the group. We said that, if someone were to have his or her phone out (which a couple students did at the time, and which they knew was against program rules), another student could ask that student to put it away. A student immediately yelled to another to put her phone away, and a couple interns reminded him

that he should take her aside to ask her to put her phone away nicely, rather than calling her out in front of the class and humiliating her. We told the students that they all had the power to make the program space a better place to be. At the end, all students were asked to say “aye” in agreement with the community values we’d produced. One student had been pulled aside by a counselor during this part of the activity, and the director had us wait until he had returned to the group to say “aye” before we ended the activity.

This activity was implemented as a direct challenge to practices in other classroom spaces in which a set of values was handed down to students rather than created through community input and agreement. The activity concealed, however, the ways in which disciplinary power was distributed through the activity to the students and interns to make them complicit in producing the same normative behavior that the school system dictates. The same models of “successful” behavior that the school system promotes were reiterated through the activity: respect for those who are speaking, acceptance of and happiness with assigned tasks, and attention to both. However, through the activity, we asked that the students, as we asked that we, be part of the corrective system that observes and judges practices in the space. Much of the activity reified the kind of corrective system of the modern School that Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*, but the activity did not contain some aspects of discipline central to the Individualization of students in such a system.

While the activity was purported to allow the community to come together to create a list of values to be held by all those in the community, the only acceptable values the students and interns were permitted to write were those already sanctioned by the school system. This veiled the power of the school system in producing the normative

values that dictated behavior in the program classroom while making the students and interns accountable for enforcing and ostensibly selecting these values. Students and interns were compelled to reproduce the power of the school system within the program and to constantly reproduce it in their practices of discipline on one another and on themselves. A sort of shame and guilt Individualized those who stepped outside of the norm and simultaneously brought them back into the homogenous group. Moreover, these normative values obscured the production and reproduction of the seeming objectivity of the system, which deems certain behaviors as “successful” and others as not, and which was further Individualizing in that the seeming objectivity removed individuals from the context in which their actions were being judged. When Carolina recognized the behavior of the student who interrupted her as unsuccessful, she framed the behavior as objectively so, masking the ways that the conditions of the program constructed it in that way (conditions such as the understanding that the interns were permitted to hold the attention of the group when they pleased, but the students were not.) The activity was Individualizing in its disregard of sociocultural conditions and the ways those conditions have structured understandings of successful behavior in the program, as well as in the ways that it located the unsuccessful quality of a behavior within the individual who practiced it, rather than in the system that deemed it so. Also, when the students did not respond to our requests for values, we gave pointed suggestions based on values embedded in the school system. In this way, we impeded possibilities for collaboration and connecting ideas that are the focus of the project-based learning model (Dolmans et al. 2000:866).

Another Individualizing aspect of the activity was that it did not directly confront issues of difference. While we discussed values of respecting and honoring others different from us, we did not mention what that difference might be or look like. The interns received no training on how to foster community across the socially and culturally varied program group and the students encountered no moments in which they could discuss issues of difference as a group and build trust with each other and the interns.

But the activity was, as were all activities in the program, a complex mix of impeding and reiterating Individualism. The activity was meant to bring the program together as a community to produce communal values that aligned with the communal goals and community-building in the program. It was especially effective in this last regard, wherein students, directors, and interns all noticed positive changes in fostering community after the activity. Many interns were grateful for the opportunity to learn how to promote community through a set of structured values and practices. Pete said that, before the activity, he “didn’t know how to deal with conflict” between students, but now “remind[ed] them to keep them[selves] accountable” and let conflicts “go for a little bit” before “eventually step[ping] in.”

In some ways, the activity was meant to reduce some sorts of interstudent disciplinary practices, especially those regarding humiliation and bullying. Interns made a conscious effort to stress that students and interns should not “call out” others for behaviors. Humiliation is a form of discipline that forces students to assimilate to the group by publicly recognizing individual deviances from the norm (Foucault 1977:182). Xavier said of the activity and our prerogative to mitigate humiliating interstudent disciplinary practices “like when they start getting kind of catty and being like, ‘Why’d

you say that?,” like, “Put your phone away!” that “we just need to make sure that that stops happening and they kind of like connect to the conversation we just had with not, not like pestering each other.” At the same time, by asking students to pull aside other students, we were asking them to further obfuscate the fingers of power that ran through the program space and compelled students to conform to the normative behaviors of the school system.

The activity and the practices it engendered did not contain one key Individualizing element of Foucault’s modern disciplinary system—it did not entail “documented” and “descript[ive]” examination (Foucault 1997:187-189). There was no systematized nor clearly measurable way of placing students along a path from “successful” behavior to “unsuccessful” behavior. Even if a student brought out their cellphone during class and another student effected normalizing judgment on the first, the behavior was not documented nor graded and therefore could not formally be attributed to the student who practiced the behavior. So, while the activity reproduced the normalizing powers of the school system within and between the students and interns, it also worked to thwart the Individualizing success-failure framework that categorizes students according to perceived and recorded traits.

The behaviors of the students and interns were not attributed nor made part of their “successful” or “failing” individual identity in the school system, but were constructed as being part of the range of behaviors that developed and changed within the group as people in the program worked to change its conditions, practices, and opportunities. Success and failure were framed as neither dichotomous nor the only two options available to students— their behaviors were part of a complex pattern of relating

to others and to the program space. While the activity clearly deemed some behaviors as “successful” or “failing,” it did not work to attribute the appropriate (or inappropriate) performance of behaviors to individual students. A critical attribute of the success-failure framework is that it decontextualizes highly contextual measurements by attributing those measurements to the individual. While it reinforced the structure that deemed some practices “successful” and others not, the assessment of students’ performances of these behaviors were not attributed to their whole individual as an embodied trait.

Interns felt that the community values activity generally “worked pretty well” for most of the students, though some of the students, especially some of the boys, “got kind of distracted, because at the end of it they got kind of bored;” some of these students had complaints about the activity itself from the beginning, and felt that the activity was useless. A few interns said that the activity reminded them to not get frustrated with students deemed “behavioral problems,” but that behaviors could instead be discussed. Discussions would better foster communal values.

Interns also thought that having discussions with the students rather than reprimanding them outright helped us to build relationships with the students. We hoped that, as our relationships grew, we could become better resources for the students. Pete said:

With a couple of the students I think that we’re a pretty good resource for advice, too. Especially advice that’s not related to just gardening or science or whatever. It’s nice when the kids, the students can open up and like talk to you about things that are going on in their home and in that role I feel like being an intern is definitely like being a mentor and not telling them what to do but taking a good time to listen to what they’ve got going on and guiding them in the right direction.

Kaitlin appreciated the ways in which she felt the interns could “engage with the students without being too much like, ‘Do this, do that.’” She also brought up the

normalizing aspect of discipline and felt that the students in the program had more choices as individuals than in many of their classes and, especially, in many other similar school garden programs:

I think that we do a good job of kind of not kind of forcing the ideas of like gardening or kale or anything on the students, which some garden education programs do. [...] There's a lot more kind of, 'What do you think about this?' instead of, 'Here's what's healthy food or here's what you should grow in a garden.' But, of course there is a little bit of [that]. But I think in general there's a pretty good emphasis on, 'You can try it if you want,' but there's no, 'Here's a mold you should fit,' or, 'Here's the healthy food you should eat,' which is good.

Another aspect of less visible discipline in the program was, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, supervision. The high levels of supervision in the program produced specific opportunities for expression, collectivity, and agency within the program. The students' educational lives were marked by explicit, legal supervision due to their CDS designations. Their educational progress was supervised by the state and its legal systems, and they were supervised thoroughly throughout the day at school. How, then, interns wondered, could students best be supervised under the law and with concern for their safety while minimalizing the stifling of their agencies? Xavier said that he felt "like a lot of the students' problems is kind of just like feeling like they're being watched in this place that they don't want to be all the time."

The interns took this into account as we negotiated the types of supervision we used in the Food Justice program. While we were legally and systemically bound to maintain a high level of supervision over the high school students and were more than willing to acquiesce to this binding in the hopes that this would keep the students safe, provide them with more personal attention, and help the activities of the program to run more smoothly, we were also aware of the students' negative feelings about much of the supervising authority with which they came into contact and that they often rebelled

against their highly supervised experiences in the educational system.³⁴ The directors said that it was important that we not be “dictatorial” about supervision, but that we be “super vigilant and proactive with what kids are doing and what's going on,” stressing the gentle disciplinary model of the program. We tried to constantly balance socially, legally, politically, and educationally appropriate levels of supervision with allowing the students space to engage in program activities in the ways they chose. Even when challenging the Individualizing effects of supervision, we promoted Individualist choice-based reasoning.

The interns also wanted students to have opportunities to contribute to the goings-on of the program, to interpret and work within the activities as the students saw fit, to move fluidly within the confined space of the program, and to express their negative opinions and suggest positive changes.³⁵ In this way, we simultaneously promoted choice-based reasoning and autonomy while encouraging the students to see themselves as integral to the communality of the program and as communal partners with the interns and directors. This illustrates the indistinct quality of program goals and practices with regards to Individualism.

In addition, the stated goals of the program— to provide the students with healthy food, to teach students about food justice, to open up post-high school opportunities for the students, and to incorporate their outside curriculum with that of the program’s through project-based cooking and gardening learning— did not in every instance

³⁴ And such supervision is nearly unavoidable with such a high ratio of interns to students.

³⁵ The last point was particularly difficult for the interns and directors to maintain within the program, because the students had been taught throughout the educational system to understand that they are not in control of their own educational opportunities, a sentiment that had been reinforced under their CDS designation. This was reinforced again, in the program, because interns exerted authority not just as caretakers and pseudo-teachers, but also as embodiments of hegemonic privileges.

coalesce with the goals of the students; students had a range of goals, and, for some, the main goal was getting out of the program each day quickly.

One way the directors and interns consciously combatted the disconnect between students' and the program's goals was by attempting to show students that their opinions were taken seriously and that their goals and the goals of the interns and directors could converge. One director, Alyssa, told me about a story in which she and a student connected through her communicating to him that her goals were in the interest of his goals because she cared about him:

There's this one student (...) and he was having a lot of issues and a lot of things going on at home and he would open up to me a lot. And I remember sitting down with him and he just looked—and I was like, “Dude, you okay?” And he was like, “Yeah, it's just been a rough one.” And I was like, “You know—“ I don't even know why I went on this rant with him, but I was like, “High school isn't forever, like and after that, the world's really big. And you can get out of here and it's gonna be okay.” And I told him, “If you are interested in college or if you have certain things you're interested in, like let me know. We care about you.” And I think that's where it really connected for him, and where he realized—he was like, “You would do that for me?” I'm like, “Heck yeah!” I was like, “if you have, I mean, on the weekends, there are like different places to volunteer and different things to do.” I was like, “just let me know, I'll connect you, just let me know what you're interested in basically.” And he was just super blown away by that.

Though the director was still somewhat bound by prescriptive educational success pathways (ie. going to college, “get[ing] out of the here” through education), she tried to be aware of the “always already there” conditions of the student's life, and how she and the program could work with him to change his practices if and in the ways he saw fit to reach goals of higher education.³⁶ The director also mentioned that she told the student to speak with one of the interns who was heavily involved in getting students of minority, low socioeconomic, and first-generation backgrounds to college and who had come from

³⁶ Also, she did ask about interests he might have other than going to college.

a similar background herself. Alyssa said that having the college students present was a way of connecting the students to opportunities they may not otherwise get.

Interns were also aware of the ways in which the students faced discipline during other parts of their school days that labeled them negatively according to a measuring system that was created with certain biases and humiliated them to move them towards a norm of behavior. Asher said that she became aware of these disciplinary practices during the fall semester:

When some kids would swear in front of me, they would be like, “Oh, do you think because we swear we’re stupid? And I would say, “No. Definitely not. I don’t think that like has a correlation.” And, apparently, that’s what their teachers had told them, that if you have, if you swear, then you have a bad vocabulary and therefore you’re stupid. Um, and things like that really stuck with them a lot.

Interns hoped to provide a space where discipline, more and less visible, did not produce negative experiences for the students. The ways in which program discipline differed from the discipline in the school generally was most evident in the moments in which those lines were blurred. For instance, when a guest lecturer came in to talk to the students about aquaponics, one student, Nelson, was very animated. He kept saying, “No!” and “What?!” when the guest lecturer explained what would happen with our new aquaponics system. Excited, he split from the large circle where we all stood to talk with his friends at the edge of the circle about the system. Eventually, they also began talking about other topics, and their voices grew a bit louder. The interns tried to bring the whole group back together into the circle by encouraging that we all listen and participate together. A school administrator who was attending the lecture gave Nelson detention. While both techniques of managing the students’ behavior were normalizing disciplinary practices, the program’s practices, in this instance, were less Individualizing, while the administrator’s singled Nelson out as problematic and gave him a documentable

punishment for which he would later give his time, separate from and unaccountable to the group.

Pete explained that the interns tried to stay away from the form of discipline the administrator used:

We don't really do punishments, we kind of—it's hard. It's clichéd to say it, to use [behaviors] as like an example to learn something from, but I guess that's kind of the approach that we all agreed would be the best for these students and I think it works.

There is another level of normalizing discipline that has to do with Individualist influences in the program that goes beyond day-to-day disciplinary practices. The reason for the program's existence is wrapped up in a school system that has labeled these students as deviant from educational norms and the school system's directive to normalize them. The program is part of a system that tries to change the practices and conditions of students to meet educational norms, such as adherence to behavioral instruction and interest in getting good grades and pursuing higher education. Program members worked hard to give students more opportunities for success in the school system, and students often took pride in their new goals for success and achievement. But the program obscured the ways that, by encouraging adherence to the school system's measurements of educational success, it promoted normalization of students under the guise of individual choice.

By accepting a norm of constructed behavioral standards and values and chastising those who deviated from it, the program Individualized the students. However, documented identification and classification of those who strayed from accepted behavioral norms, such as Foucault describes, were not present in the program. An absence of individual, recorded grades for activities in the program challenged the

Individualizing influence of the school system, which had identified and classified these students as “failing” or “at-risk.”

The ways in which interns negotiated discipline, difference, and other difficult issues in the program demonstrated the ways Individualizing and non-Individualizing influences were both constitutive of the practices and experiences of program members. Through the project-based learning model, interns hoped to promote collectivity and communality in the program, which helped to thwart the Individualizing success-failure framework of the school system. Disciplinary practices were less visible and were somewhat Individualizing, but did not rely on the Individualizing documentation that normally occurs in disciplinary practices in the school system. Interns hoped that we could provide individual support to each student and show that we recognized them as individual actors who could make their own decisions, but that we could also promote collective work and show that we recognized the students as collaborative partners. The experiences and understandings of the interns illuminated the ways mentor figures in alternative educational settings can promote Individualism even as they more explicitly challenge it.

Chapter 4:

Individual Attention and Communal Experience: The Students

The students were the program members who most sparked my idea for the topic of this thesis. Like the interns, the students in the program faced variously Individualizing influences as they negotiated difference, discipline, and success and failure throughout the projects of the semester. Students' relationships with interns and each other were central to their experiences in the program and were a major source of Individualizing and other influences. A major theme that recurred throughout the interviews I conducted and informal conversations I observed during program activities was that of autonomy and agency, though almost every student also brought up the "community" of the Food Justice program. Many of the students saw the program as very different from their other classroom experiences, especially in regards to the more communal nature of the program and its effects on disciplinary practices and conceptions of success and failure in the program. Some students, however, highlighted the ways in which the program was more similar to other classes in these ways than it purported.

A major methodological problem with interviewing and observing the students was that the ones who agreed to participate in the study were also mostly the students who generally tended to want to participate in the program. This likely skewed my data significantly in some areas. However, much of what the students who did participate told me or did during observations can likely be applied somewhat broadly to my analysis of the program, because they have to do with general conditions and practices within the

program. But the small, quiet minority of students who did not choose to participate should not be ignored, especially because they are the ones who may have felt the most out of place, unserved, and potentially threatened by the program.³⁷

The students with whom I did get a chance to speak had mostly positive things to say about the program, and progressively so throughout the course of the semester. Multiple students told me during interviews that they looked forward to school more since starting the program. One student said that, during the week, he “always th[ought] about what we [we]re gonna do next” and another told me, “I like coming to school now [...] cause every Wednesday I get to come to [Food Justice].” What the students expressed most often was their simultaneous appreciation for the more and less Individualizing aspects of the program, illustrating the intricate ways in which these various influences constituted experiences in the program.

During my interviews and observations, I also noticed some ways in which Individualism was a major influence on the experiences of students in the program but was less visible. It was more difficult to discern the ways in which the students felt these less visible influences were constitutive of their experiences in program, because they were wrapped up in expectations and lessons that were deeply embedded within the program and school system. I argue the students’ practices of collaboration, explanations of difference, discourses about “success” and discipline, and relationships with each other and the interns revealed ways in which Individualism was more prevalent in the program than the program generally acknowledged; Individualizing and non-Individualizing

³⁷ I once found written on the whiteboard “[Food Justice] is not fun, it’s just a waste of time.” Another intern quickly erased the writing and, at least visibly, the sentiment.

influences in the program worked together to produce students' experiences and understandings.

Valuing Individual and Group Work

The students valued the promotion of community and collective work in the program, but also were happy to feel the effects of more Individualist notions in the program. Individual attention, small group work, and whole group reflection were all critical to the program structure and to the project-based learning model on which it was based.

A key feature of the project-based learning model is group "collaboration and negotiation" (Cockrell et al. 2000:355). Small group work and discussion are crucial to project-based learning model practices (Dolmans et al. 2000:855). As I previously mentioned, the program often involved small group work, which most program members did not see as taking from the collective work of the larger program group. The students I interviewed all said that they appreciated this aspect of the program structure. One intern, Pete, described breaking up the students into small groups and allowing them some choice in activity:

Not everyone's together like all the time and I think that makes a huge difference in having some people in the garden, having some people inside and outside so they can kind of migrate to where they want to be. And maybe open up just around a smaller group of people rather than in front of everyone all the time.

The general sentiment of the interns was that breaking up the high school students into different, small groups each day allowed them room to breathe away from the unified mass of CDS students, voice individual concerns, explore personal interests, work in partnerships, and see themselves as part of a large, interconnected group. Though the last point may seem oxymoronic, we felt that working in these small groups allowed the

students to see how the singularities of the group, functioning in somewhat disjointed activities, were part of the whole, a whole that worked toward at least some common goals. Students who began a program period not interacting with their pre-chosen fellow group members often ended it working together, teaching each other skills they were still picking up themselves or helping each other out with tasks they may have liked better or been able to do more precisely. Students who began the period quietly working on discrete activities as if they were multiple-choice tests suspended in space would often soon be asking questions about how the plants another group ripped out became the compost they were shoveling, or how that compost fertilized the raised plant beds where another group spread it. They sometimes began to extrapolate from the tasks that were set out for them and connect them to the larger group activity or project, fulfilling a main goal of project-based learning.

The director told me a story about the fall semester when a group of girls learned from an intern that they could eat the dried grapes still on the vine. The girls loved the sweet, sun-dried raisins, and quickly “had a spark of realization” as they ran to the fig trees to collect dried figs, which they handed out to the group. This led to conversations with the larger group of students about dried fruit, canning, and a variety of other topics. Students bounced ideas off each other and appreciated their interconnection in the garden and kitchen groups and their varied ideas. Using small-group discussion led by a tutor or mentor to facilitate integration of new and prior knowledges and promote active consideration of new problems and possibilities is central to the project-based learning model and greater peer-sharing of ideas (Dolmans et al. 2000:885).

But, students still tended to drift towards their friends as activities waned or supervision relaxed.³⁸ Interns and directors did not discourage this too strongly after the tasks set out for the day were at least mostly completed and the students had participated. However, students were required to join the larger group at the end of the program period each day. Coming together at the end of the day gave us time together to reflect and communalize. Allowing for time to cultivate communality helped to break down the “traditional” classroom dynamics that teach and test students as individual, decontextualized units.³⁹

The work the program did to promote collective action through the project-based learning model was productive in further deconstructing the “traditional” success-failure classroom framework. Loretta said that, in the program, “if you need help, everyone’s here to help you” and that she felt the interns were “here to help us [the students] more than anything, and that’s good.” This aspect of the program reflected a key feature of the project-based learning model, that “students perce[ive] of group members as resources” (Cockrell et al. 2000:355). Pete, an intern, thought that:

The best part that’s happened is that I know what some of their interests are. Like for example, [Nelson] really likes fish, and I know that he’s going to love [it] once I order

³⁸ There were numerous times when I’d start weeding or harvesting and chatting with three students and suddenly realize that the conversation had dwindled and that there was only one student left beside me. A major part of each day was devoted to negotiating the division of tasks between the students and trying to keep them engaged in the tasks at hand. We gave the students some leeway with on what task they would work and with whom and where, but conflicts often arose when all the students wanted to work on one small task or a group of students would fight when working together in certain activities. Many students did not want to be part of any of the activities available, which required further negotiation that sometimes led to the student agreeing to work for a short amount of time on a project and then becoming engrossed in it and arguing with other students about getting a turn to work. Some students who did not want to take part never became engaged with any task, and the interns would try to find something they would agree to work on for a bit.

³⁹ Though, as I said, even in the full group settings, interns worked to break up what we saw as cliques. The interns and directors tried to balance supporting feelings of whole group communality with their abilities to exercise authority over the students.

these aquaponics parts. [...] We've learned little bits of different students' interests and how we can engage them based on what they already like and further that knowledge.⁴⁰

In the Food Justice program, students who preferred cooking or gardening could elect to do mostly that activity, and could often pick from amongst various cooking or gardening sub-activities. While project-based learning is considered a collective teaching method, it also allows for lessons tailored to the individual because each student can decide which part of the larger project suits that particular student best. Corey enjoyed the structure of the program, in which:

Everybody does their own separate thing with interns and it's, and it's cool to like be with those interns and kind of get to see how they're about, you know, and it's really cool. You can kind of switch from each one and, at the end, everybody kind of comes in and cooks together. I think that's really cool.

Both the more individual work at the beginning of program time and the more collective work at the end were important to Corey. Multiple students mentioned that the more individual gardening time was part of the larger, collective activity that culminated in preparing snack together. Again, this highlighted how space for somewhat autonomous and fluid individual movement and choice in the program complemented collective reflection at the end of each program period to promote collaborative goals. Students could also choose how much group interaction they wanted based on individual preferences; for instance, Cynthia preferred the individual attention of working on her own with an intern, while Loretta said, "I like the whole group thing, I like doing stuff as a group more than doing it by myself." Loretta therefore tended to participate in activities that were more group-focused, such as cooking together in the kitchen, while Cynthia usually chose to garden with an intern when they were given more options to choose their activities. But even in the more solitary moments, students noted, they were contributing to the larger program projects. Corey noted that he "somewhat" felt a part of the process

⁴⁰ This also touches on the activation of prior knowledge that is so key to the project-based learning model.

of program activities because “you’re kind of with everybody, so it makes you feel like you’re a part of the group,” but that the lack of continuity throughout the week created by having the program only on Wednesdays was detrimental to his feeling that way.

The students also often liked to take credit for the work they personally did within the larger program projects. For instance, two girls with whom I planted some garlic early in the semester were always excited to see how tall the plants had gotten, partly because they were interested in how quickly the plants grew and partly because they felt a sense of individual accomplishment in having planted those specific plants. They called them “our” garlic plants and liked to check their progress regularly. Even in this example, though, the students referred to the small group with which they worked rather than to themselves singularly.

One day, Marcus began to pull up what he thought was a weed, and I explained that it was in fact a carrot and that he could pull it the rest of the way up to see. He and a couple other students around him were surprised by how large the carrots had grown beneath the ground. Soon, five students were around me pulling up carrots and comparing their sizes and I was frantically trying to keep them from uprooting the entire garden. We had a conversation about leaving the carrots in the ground then so that they would get bigger and we would have more to share later and use for the fundraising dinner.⁴¹ A few times throughout the following weeks, I would hear students telling other students not to just pull out any vegetables they wanted from the garden, but to leave some for others and to let the plants grow so that there would be more food later. The carrot experience was an example of the students learning the long-term goal-setting of project-based learning and starting to discuss collective use and enjoyment of the garden

⁴¹ Then we had a quick activity about replanting root vegetables.

produce. Another project that incorporated similar lessons common to the project-based learning model was the mosaic we created for the outdoor classroom. The mosaic was started by the program the previous semester, but was largely redesigned in the spring semester and we worked together on fitting and gluing the pieces of broken, donated ceramic before grouting the entire piece. Many students helped in at least one part of the mosaic construction and, when it was completed, the middle of the floor in the outdoor classroom sported the Food Justice name and logo, a turnip with the continents of the world mapped on it like a globe.⁴² These long-term projects that were meant to benefit the larger group were central to the project-based model of the program.

But another aspect of project-based learning, connecting “practical” experiences to broader concepts through discussion, was often missing from the program. Students could not give very complete answers to questions about what food justice is over halfway into the program. Most gave short answers about “go[ing] green” or eating more fruits and vegetables, but not much else.

The one time we had spoken extensively about food justice issues was on a day when we were supposed to watch a video in the computer lab at Santa Adela, but we couldn’t get it to play. We pulled our chairs into a large circle and Marcy asked the students what they knew about food justice. The students seemed uninterested, though a few offered suggestions, such as organic food or treating farm animals well.

Suddenly, Nelson, a generally upbeat but often disengaged student, perked up, “That reminds me of—we were learning in science yesterday—remember? Pigs, when they’re getting transported, they need toys or they die!” Nelson explained that they had

⁴² Highlighting the program’s intention to broaden the scope of program curricula from the garden to larger issues in the world.

learned in science the previous day that pigs kept in captivity or on the way to slaughter often die because they lack stimulation. The other students corroborated and soon a din of excitement rose as students discussed what they knew about animal cruelty.

Nelson continued to call out answers to questions the director and interns posed throughout the discussion. He felt that pesticides were harmful to humans, that cattle should be treated better, and even had suggestions for documentaries we should watch in the program.

“Farm to Fridge!” he called out, and others agreed.

“Okay, Farm to Fridge, let’s write it down,” Marcy said. The directors and a couple of us interns tried to discuss the conditions of banana plantation workers with the students, but they were much more interested in animal rights, so we switched back to talking about the meat industry. When Marcus brought up something he’d heard about chicken cages being stacked atop one another, so that, when the chickens defecated, it would contaminate the cages below, Marcy tried to play devil’s advocate by asking, “So what?” Marcus, impassioned, asked her, “Well, would you want someone pooping on your head?!” We couldn’t contain our laughter. Beside me, Tony, a usually less responsive student, quietly answered questions posed by the interns, directors, and other students. I encouraged him to contribute his answers to the whole group, which he cautiously did. Many of the students who were usually less participatory got involved in the conversation.

After that discussion, the interns and directors were thrilled that the students had gotten excited about a food justice issue, and that we’d had a group discussion that, while

heavily prompted by the interns and directors, was held in large part by the students. We wanted to have more discussions like that in the future.

But we never had another major large group discussion about food justice after that. We never watched the film Nelson recommended. One intern, Kaitlin, said that and other such suggestions made by students were “well-received” but not “followed through on.” That event ended up being unique as a collaborative discussion relating to larger food justice issues in which students were able to shape the discussion along with the interns and directors and have (or almost have) input in future program curricula.

Loretta asked that, in addition to learning more about larger food structures, the program more thoroughly teach the students about the garden in which they worked; she felt that she did not have a working knowledge of which plants were in the garden and how to care for them, which kept her from feeling like she was a full part of the process. She and multiple other students also felt that having the program only once a week disrupted their abilities to learn in the program and to foster a deeper sense of community and collective action. Loretta also asked for more input in activity planning:

I think we should all come to, to an agreement on what we want to do. (...) But like switch it up. Different types of stuff. We should all come to—cause I think if we all come up with something that we all like, then it will be better and more people will participate. (...) And it's hard to get, you know, most of our students in our class to [always participate.]

Loretta wanted more communal agreement on the content of program activities and the types of food the program cooked, but she also more implicitly pointed to a broader issue with program structure. During this part of our interview, she, like many of the other students during their interviews, wondered why they were not allowed to suggest meat dishes in the program. This was just one of the aspects of the program in

which the reasoning behind program decisions and choices were not explained to the students.

By not explaining the reasoning behind the structure and content of various parts of the program, the interns and directors kept the students from participating more collectively with us and gave the students the impression that decisions were made based solely on intern and director preferences. In the example of why meat was never included in Food Justice cooking or snack items, most students assumed this was because of a preference for vegetarianism on the part of the interns and directors, particularly for health reasons. While some of the interns did not include meat in their own diets and health was one concern in the decision not to use meat in the program, other, much larger concerns were related to price and health code concerns, program goals concerning using sustainable and cruelty-free products, and a commitment to using produce grown in the garden. This was a missed opportunity for a discussion with the students about food justice politics, a chance for the program as a whole to weigh the pros and cons of an issue and make a decision together, and demonstrated one way in which the program struggled to connect what happened in the program to larger structural issues outside of it.

Other questions from students pointed to a lack of communication and explanation in the program, as well as a lack of connection to issues outside of the program. Even late into the semester, students often asked me why we interned in the program, if we were paid (or assumed we were), and which colleges we attended. Other interns reported similar conversations with students. Not only did these questions express a dearth of understanding and explanation about the interns, but were exemplary of larger

program issues in which more discussions about the structure of the program and its problem-based learning model were absent. Less directly, the lack of representational conversations about our experiences in college in relation to the program typified the lack of conversations about the educational and other social and cultural conditions that brought together the members of the program in the ways they did.

This lack of communication is demonstrative of the more Individualizing model of learning typical to the larger school system; a solution to this lack of communication and discussion can be found in the project-based learning model. The project based learning model relies on “free-flowing communication” (Cockrell et al. 2000:355). In the model, student groups work to identify problems surrounding a topic and “activate [...] students’ prior knowledge” as they pull from many sources to integrate new knowledges as they are developed (Dolmans et al. 2001:885). This model was present in the initial organization of the program, but not as much in practice. At the beginning of the semester, interns and directors discussed ways to bring issues of food justice into the classroom and to promote application and integration of that knowledge (Dolmans et al. 2001:844). Videos, lesson plans, and group discussions were supposed to link work in the garden and kitchen to broader political issues in food politics, as well as to the students’ other curriculum areas, such as Science and English. As I’ve explained, interns wanted to discuss issues of class and race with the students; we hoped to pull from the students’ own experiences and to incorporate them into discussions to prompt the students to ask questions, especially about the program itself. One director said that part of the reason for the lack of these sorts of conversations was that the program was “overly burdened with maintaining a program of production,” especially in the spring semester when the

program was busy preparing the garden for the fundraising dinner. The lack of discussion about program goals and connections between program activities and their broader applications shaped students' experiences during our semester in ways that did not promote the non-Individualist notions of group collaboration and consideration of social conditions.

The program began to try to challenge this Individualizing lack of discussion at the very end of the semester. On my last day of observation and three Wednesdays from the end of the spring semester program, we decided to try a lesson plan that might help us to better connect our work in the program to larger issues with the students. Pete and Susan broke us up into three groups, with a few students and a couple interns in each group. They handed out sheets of paper with a story on them, which they recited out loud. The story was about a small town where townspeople were suddenly being pummeled by rocks from the mountains above. They find out that a group of billionaires are throwing the rocks to get the townspeople to leave the town so that they may build a resort there. The Red Cross comes to the town, sets up a rescue operation, and builds a giant net to catch the falling rocks. However, the net breaks, and all the rocks fall on the town, injuring many townspeople. Some villagers want to go up the mountain to confront the billionaires, but others say all help is needed to tend to the injured and repair the town. The townspeople become divided on the issue.

On the back of the sheet were questions that the groups were supposed to discuss together. Each group was then supposed to choose one "spokesperson" to explain the group's strategy to the larger group. Our group was that of the billionaires. The students had tons of ideas about what we could do to achieve our goal of building the resort. We

finally decided on framing the group going up the mountain as abandoners and offering those still in the village an opportunity to live and work at the resort. After the resort was built, we would tell the townspeople that anyone not willing to work at the resort would be forced to leave. Corey was the spokesperson of our group. He enthusiastically baited the townspeople, who responded with a mix of anger and intrigue. Some students were outraged that we would try to buy them off. Nelson was excited to live at a resort. The other two groups, blindsided by our offering, had to renegotiate their strategies. Once all the spokespeople had presented their strategies, we revealed that we planned to kick anyone off the property who did not want to work for the resort. This sparked another huge discussion, and soon almost all of the students were debating the best way to deal with the issue.

Susan and Pete tentatively brought up the ways in which we might see the activity as a metaphor for the strategies groups use to fight and protect themselves against violences from other groups like corporations. The students brought up a couple examples in which they could see this happening in the world. Xavier was enthusiastic about the connections that were being made and kept trying to encourage more by offering other possible examples. Marcy tapped him on the shoulder and mouthed to him to “let them go with it.” The students were busy discussing the issues themselves.

Marcy then brought up the term “civil disobedience,” and asked the students if anyone knew what it meant. A few students gave some preliminary answers, and Marcy agreed with them and augmented their definitions to say that civil disobedience is refusing to obey certain laws for political reasons. We asked the students whom they could think of who’d used civil disobedience. They brought up Rosa Parks and Cesar

Chavez, and we discussed the tactics they'd used. On the board, Susan wrote the tactics the group had discussed throughout the activity, from violence, to threats, to boycotts, to strikes, to changing community consciousness. Marcy told the students to "use a little bit of political imagination." The students excitedly began thinking of ways the townspeople could use these tactics to save their town from the billionaires.

By the end of the activity, nearly every student had made at least a couple contributions to the discussion. Susan and Pete asked the students to keep track of the tactics the townspeople could use and to think about them in the following few weeks, because we had plans to have more discussions about food justice issues going on in the world, even nearby Santa Adela. Interns and directors thought that the activity had encouraged good group discussion and connection of program topics to larger political issues. The activity used the project-based learning model to encourage students to work together in small groups, under the direction of mentors, to solve issues, and to have larger group discussions about the broader applications of what they'd learned in the activity. Yet while the activity did minimize some of the Individualizing effects of the previous lack of these sorts of discussions in the program and encouraged communal problem solving, nothing about the activity encouraged the students to position themselves or others in the program, let alone the program itself, into the larger frameworks with which they were working. The activity touched on broader social and cultural conditions, but did not acknowledge the ways in which those conditions might affect the program members. Even in this highly collaborative example, what turned out throughout the semester to be the most difficult aspect of Individualism to challenge—disconnection from social conditions— was present.

Maida describes a program similar to Food Justice, also located in Southern California, in an article he wrote for the *Anthropology of Work Review* (Maida 2005). The program was founded collaboratively by Pacoima Beautiful and Project GRAD, Los Angeles to provide “learning activities for ‘off-track-students’” that attempted to “promote a sense of the ‘interactivity of learning’ through a mix of cognitive, social, and affective activities that develop communicative and cultural competencies, successful learning and organizational skills, time management and planning” (Maida 2005:17). Collective program activities included “environmental science service projects, including hazardous waste, air quality, soil lead, watershed conservation, atmospheric science, environmental advocacy, and mural design, from which the students could choose” (Maida 2005:18). Some main goals of the program were to develop “a way of seeing college as a pathway for quality of life” and “to cultivate career confidence and competence through work with mentors, including university students and professionals” (Maida 2005:17-19). Maida describes the activities in the program “as ways to reorient students” through “practice-oriented learning experiences” (Maida 2005:19). He says these experiences are especially important for the youth of Pacoima, many of whom come from transmigrant families.

Like the Food Justice students, the Pacoima students were part of a project-based learning program with more and less Individualist goals. While the activities in both programs were themselves collective and promoting a greater sense of communality was an objective, similar goals between the two programs, such as developing “career confidence” and encouraging students to choose certain educational pathways, reflected Individualist influences (Maida 2005:19). Another similarity between the two programs

was the work with mentors who were university students, advised by university faculty. Maida says that “involving university faculty and students, high school youth, and residents in collaborative partnerships was key to increasing social knowledge” and “cultivat[ing] career confidence and competence,” as well as exposing the high school students to new career and educational opportunities (Maida 2005:19).

In the Food Justice program, the high school students saw relationships between the interns and students as a main feature of the program and a fundamental way in which the program differed from their other classes. These relationships allowed interns to better tailor program activities to individual students. The students’ experiences in the program were affected by both individual attention and personal relationships as well as larger group work through the project-based learning model. While the program generally promoted more explicitly collective practices, program members appreciated the ways all of these aspects of the program worked together to constitute the actual program structure.

Discussing Difference

In comparison to the students’ other classes, the Food Justice program focused more on collective work and collaboration. However, despite these non-Individualizing efforts, students often described difference in Individualistic terms that located reasons for difference within the individual. They felt that difference between interns and students and among students shaped their experiences in the program. Like the interns, the students hoped for more discussion of difference to promote such collaboration.

A major issue that came up when I asked students about the interns was that the students did not know what to make of us at first. Marcus said that when he met the interns, he thought, “What is this?” but that he soon was working well with us, which made his experience in the program “so much better.” Most of the students said that, over time, the interns and students became more a part of the same collective effort. However, difference between interns and students was still very visible to the students. Cynthia felt that the interns had different lives from her, because our lives entailed more “freedom”:

Cynthia: I think [the interns], in their lives, they can do whatever they want, you know? And like, in my life, I can't do whatever I want. I have to, like ask what to do or to, to go somewhere. Yeah.

JW: Why, why do you think it is? Why do you think there's that difference?

Cynthia: I dunno, I just, I just feel that way. I feel like you guys seem like, “Oh, I wanna go here.” And then you guys just go. And then over there, it's like, “No, you can't go. Your grades.” You know? Stuff like that. So, you guys are kind of like free to do whatever you want.

JW: Cause of our grades?

Cynthia: Yeah.

JW: Like our grades in school, like doing well?

Cynthia: Yeah.

Cynthia connected our autonomy and agency to our educational performance in terms of good grades, the same measures of “success” that kept her and the other students at Santa Adela and under the tight watch of the CDS program. There may have been less specified or oft-spoken measures to which Cynthia alluded, such as socioeconomic class, that related to our grades and our access to autonomy through college. But Cynthia described this difference in choice-based, Individualistic terms—it was our own individual school success that afforded us our freedom.

Cynthia similarly described other visible differences between the students and interns in terms of individual choice. Speaking about when she first met the interns, Cynthia said:

I didn't really like any of you guys. To be honest with you. I thought you guys were like snooty. Like you guys are really nice. [...] I dunno, [it was the interns'] looks. Like the way they look.

Cynthia explained that it was our personal styles that she felt made us look “snooty” and visibly different from the high school students.

Cynthia and I also talked about the ways in which we may have seemed strangely similar to the students on that first day to have been in a place of authority:

Cynthia: You guys actually looked like high school students!
(laughing)

JW: Yeah? We looked young?

Cynthia: That's why it was like, like you know, “What?”

JW: Was it weird to have people close to you in age--

Cynthia: Teaching.

JW: --being, like interns.

Cynthia: Yeah, like teaching me. Yeah, it was.

As I discussed in my previous chapters, while there was some discussion of racial, gender, economic, educational, and other social contexts among the interns and between the interns and directors, this never seemed to reach the students on any program-wide level, and rarely even one-on-one. The interns may have spoken with each other about the practices of students as being bound by the “always already there” conditions in which they found themselves and the ways in which the school system might work to shape them in particular, and not always positive, ways, but when it came to talking to the students, conversations mainly centered on the students' choices and disregarded social and cultural contexts. We did not speak with the students about how our educational conditions afforded us authority in the program.

Another visible difference about which I spoke with students was not among program members, but between the Food Justice program and their other classes. Corey said that he felt that “there's a lot more group work at [Food Justice] than there is in

[their] normal classes.” Marcus agreed that, in Food Justice, we worked “way more” as team than in his other classes:

Like in, you know, [another teacher’s class], we don’t like work together as a team, we just like do individually. But right here is where we work as a team, all of us, you know, and where we accomplish making goals for the day.

Yet Marcus’s answer was seemingly incongruent with his earlier answer to if and how the program differed from his other classes:

Very different. And, cause [Food Justice] is about nature and stuff that people could have at home, as in like, nature. [...] For science and all that, different types of subjects, it’s for like what job you might be in the future and what you will need to succeed. [Food Justice] is something more likely to happen at home. So, like I could grow something—I could work by myself and grow my stuff.

Marcus touched on two important topics in his description of this difference. Firstly, he mentioned the ways the program inspired individual work and self-accomplishment, despite the fact that, in the program, we “work[ed] together as a team” and did less individual work than in his other classes. Secondly, Marcus mentioned the ways that the Food Justice program did not focus on Individualist notions of success and instead focused on “accomplish[ing] goals for the day” collectively. His comment is even more interesting because he explicitly mentioned education for future employment as something the program did not entail, despite the fact that guest teachers had taught job-related skills in the class and specifically mentioned employment opportunities associated to these skills.⁴³ Marcus did not see Individualist notions of career success as a program goal.

In fact, none of the students who participated in the study felt that the program contributed directly to decisions about what they would do after high school, but that it did better motivate them to come to school and to complete tasks. Students described skills they acquired that had to do with working together to complete a larger project

⁴³ Marcus was particularly fond of the day we learned knife skills from a professional chef.

rather than fulfilling individual interests. Marcus said that it was difficult for him to “focus [on] the activities we’re doing. It’s so hard to do one thing and wanting to do another at the same time.” He said that it was difficult to stay on task and keep the larger group project in mind, “because, let’s say I’m helping with the peas, and I like want to do a mosaic at the same time.” Learning to work effectively as a group instead of focusing on individual concerns also came up when I spoke with students about program social dynamics. Loretta said that the program differed from her other classes because there was a focus on putting “all the arguing and stuff aside and just learn[ing] how to work together.”

Also noteworthy were the comments by students who did not see great difference between the Food Justice program and other classes. Emilio felt that the program was “boring just like all [his] other [classes.]” For him, it was just another part of the school day, another time when he was made to do “stuff [he did]n’t want to be doing.” Small added measures of autonomy or collectivity did not fix that. Loretta said the program was similar to her other classes in terms of structure:

I learn things the same. Cause it’s like, we have a teacher, which is Miss [Marcy], and she teaches us how to cook just as well as our teachers teach us how to do the subjects that we’re supposed to do.

What was particularly interesting about Loretta’s comment was that, to my knowledge, Marcy was never described to the students as their teacher.⁴⁴ This was something many students transposed from their other classes, which exemplified the ways in which the more common classroom structure pervaded the Food Justice program space, even when the program explicitly attempted to subvert it, and the ways in which the program supported teacher-directed learning despite explicitly promoting student-directed

⁴⁴ Nor was she ever introduced or referred to as “Miss” Marcy by anyone other than a student, though that was how all the students referred to her.

learning. Again, the Food Justice program could never fully escape aspects of the school system, even when it ostensibly rejected them.

While some students brought up topics they'd learned in other classes during Food Justice program sessions, students interviewed said that they did not bring anything they learned from the Food Justice program into their other classes; however, they did talk about the ways they'd brought what they'd learned in the program into their homes. Some students discussed bringing knife skills or recipes from the program into their family kitchens, others said they were having more discussions with family members about eating healthy foods and incorporating more fresh vegetables into their diets. Some students were even starting to garden at home. Marcus said that he talked to his grandmother about what he learned in the program:

She's really happy that I'm in this program because it's teaching me more and more and more stuff. And, yeah. So, when I saw you guys grow something, [...] we went to Home Depot to buy some seeds. So, yeah— we're trying to grow an orange tree. We talked about the time it takes to grow a tree, and Marcus was excited to come back

in a few years and say, "I grew that." Marcus extrapolated from something he'd learned in the program and brought it into a different setting. However, many students in the program did not have a stable enough home environment or available space to garden outside of the program. One student told an intern that he was frustrated by a director telling the students that they could grow a vegetable in their windowsill, because he did not have a window at home. Cognizance of this difference in home experience was crucial to locating students within broader socioeconomic contexts, because students were applauded for completing tasks such as gardening at home that might be impossible for other students.

Students also felt that the program should work to foster more of this awareness among students in the program. Marcus said that other students in the program often “put people down and [they] don’t know what’s happening in their homes,” and he asked that interns have more discussions with students about differing experiences and difficulties.

The students saw a visible difference between students and interns from the first day, but, at the same time, noticed that the interns were not always as different from them as the program made us out to be— for instance, we were quite close in age to the students. Also, the Food Justice program promoted cooperation and collaboration among the students and interns, and students hoped to see more of that and more open discussions about difference in the program. While the program tried to overcome difference through collective work, it was unable to completely subvert Individualistic understandings of difference fostered by the school system.

Individualism in Disciplinary Practices

Discipline in the program was often less rooted in Individualism than in the students’ other classes, but sometimes was Individualistic (even more than in the students’ other classes) in more subtle ways. Students had mixed reactions to discipline in the program, but most were happiest with discipline that did not punish the entire group for one or a few students’ actions, yet pressed the students to work together as a supportive, collective unit. Every student who participated in the project mentioned difficulties with staying with the same group of students all day, every day in the CDS program. Many students felt relieved at the end of the day to have interns in the classroom to mix up the dynamic or to have the opportunity to work one-on-one with an

intern, away from the others. As I've discussed, interns did not feel that this undermined collective efforts, and students felt similarly. Some students seemed to feel that they were better able to work collectively under these circumstances, because they otherwise felt that they had to assert their individual identities.

Cynthia and Marcus told me in their interviews about an incident that had occurred earlier that day in which some older boys from the CDS program who attended Food Justice had called Marcus names and thrown things at his face. Marcus was still upset by the incident when he arrived at the program that afternoon. When Cynthia described the incident to me during her interview, she said, "We got in trouble. I don't know why I got in trouble." I asked her about the CDS students being disciplined as a group, and she said, "Oh, yeah. Yeah. Like, the teachers yell at me if it's not even my mistake." I asked:

JW: Is that—I mean that—that seems like one of the hard things about you guys being together in class all day, is that like—

Cynthia: Every single day, second of the day.

JW: Yeah.

Cynthia: Even at lunch we have to see them.

JW: Yeah.

Cynthia: I try not to see them.

Cynthia was much happier to work "just [her] and an intern" in the program than in the larger group, because she could spend some time away from the others and get more individual attention from an intern. She and the other students I interviewed liked having the time to tell the interns about themselves and to ask questions about the plants, recipes, and about college. Corey said that he also enjoyed asking interns questions about their lives, and hearing about their interests and backgrounds. Many of the students felt that, by learning more about the interns, they were better able to connect to them and enjoy working with them and to see the ways in which the interns could help them. Some

students wanted more of these conversations earlier on in the semester, but others felt that it took time to build some trust between the students and interns and that these conversations should happen informally, as they did. Marcy, one of the directors, told me that a crucial component to the program was “the opportunity to be able to have those deep connections” between students and interns and that these connections had “worked in very interesting ways. It’s when kids have been in crisis, you know, interns have stepped up and that one-on-one relationship has literally saved kids.”

Corey was also glad that the program did not discipline students collectively:

I don’t really see a lot of discipline. I see, I see it all going well as it is. But, I don’t, I don’t really know. It doesn’t really affect everybody, though, if somebody gets disciplined. It affects one person. Which is, which is good.

As Corey said, he did not see much discipline being enacted in the program, especially group discipline. Group discipline was instead, as I argued in the previous chapter, enacted more invisibly by enforcing Individualizing norms that compelled students to control their own behaviors. But while many students, whom I was not able to interview, expressed disdain for the disciplinary practices in the program in which students were forced to perform under normative behavioral standards, the students I interviewed mentioned many ways in which they felt they and the group had benefitted from these practices.

Marcus brought up the activity in which we had created our community values and implemented the “five nice things” rule. Marcus said that the activity had been helpful in discouraging “negativity” amongst the students, even in their other classes, despite the incident that had happened that day. I asked Marcus how the interns might help with future situations, and what conversations we could have in the program about them, if we should have conversations at all. He said “just to talk about people that—you know, like we got to stick together [...] We have like eleven kids and we should all stick together and to, uh, don’t say bad stuff.”

Marcus asked us to promote student communality in the hopes that, rather than single him out for bullying, the students could work together to foster common positivity

and support.⁴⁵ Cynthia also felt that it was necessary that the interns mediate student interactions to promote communality. When I told her that the interns did not want to intervene in disputes and discipline students too frequently, she quickly told me, “You should. You should stop us. Or else we’re gonna, like fight.”

Students who insulted or fought with other students in the program were often told to say “five nice things” to each other by the director, Marcy, as per the decision made during the community values exercise. Marcy would tell them that she didn’t want to hear anything about other students from them unless it was nice, because we were all responsible for making the program atmosphere a safe one in which to work. Marcy was encouraging “accountability to the group,” an important feature of the project-based learning model (Cockrell et al. 2000:355). In addition to being held accountable for the work they did in helping to complete projects, students were held accountable for the ways in which they treated others with whom they worked. Marcy felt that the program was “a learning process” and that “over time, the kids have gotten more of a sense that we’re a, you know, that, whether we’re working in the garden or working in the kitchen, that we’re involved in a project that involves one product but many hands.” She explained her philosophy of discipline in the program as one that promotes community:

You know, the, when people do things like leave their individual mess for somebody to clean up, I think rather than saying, you know, ‘We’re gonna dock YOU a grade’ or whatever, you know? I think saying, ‘Hey, we’re a team, you know? And we, we all pitch in. We don’t do this to each other.’

Obliging the students to say five nice things to another student or to clean up a mess they left for others were further examples of the gentle discipline characteristic of the program, though these disciplinary practices were more visible than many of the

⁴⁵ However, the methods by which he asked for this communality were based on the more Individualistic disciplinary practices performed in the program.

disciplinary practices in the program. They connected, however, to the less visible practices that compelled students to behave in certain ways, some of which were based on non-Individualist notions, like encouraging accountability to the group and not recording behavioral transgressions, and some of which was, sometimes simultaneously, heavily rooted in Individualism, like focusing blame for behaviors on individual students and their personal choices. But the less visible forms of discipline in the program stretched beyond disciplining behaviors to disciplining ideals of success.

Success and Failure Now and in the Future

As I saw with the intern group, I saw again when speaking with the students that program experiences sometimes fit well into the success-failure framework in that they Individualized success, obscured the contexts of measurements of success, and posed success as absolutely dichotomous to failure. Students in the program reiterated this Individualist framework in discussing their own educational success and failure. The program attempted to thwart the framework by locating success outside of the individual and promoting a project-based model of success and accomplishment.

Many students in the program expressed aspirations to college and some to graduate education one day. All of the students I interviewed felt that this was a topic about which they could speak with the interns, and often did. Students also spoke with us about their fears regarding their having been labeled as academic failures and what that would mean for their future educational careers, as well as the possibility of them not being able to get back into a successful educational track. Marcus said that he told the interns about wanting to go to college, but that he was scared he wouldn't "make it."

When I asked him what he meant, he said “How I was failing school.” He expressed Individualizing, choice-based reasoning about getting to college:

My fear is that I wouldn't make it to college, you know? But, I'm pretty sure I will, cause I have a lot of faith in myself, you know? (...) Might as well just like continue—cause I wouldn't have really tried school at one point, but then now I've looked, I've looked at myself several times in the mirror and thought about that, like I could do this, you know?

Marcus said that “there's no giving up.” For Marcus, Individualism was key to his faith in getting to college. He had told me before that other people thought that the students couldn't get to college, implying that their race, class, or educational status made people think that, for whatever reason, they wouldn't be able to reach goals of higher education. But by believing in his own individual capabilities and ability to choose his own path regardless of circumstances, he could envision possibilities of reaching that goal. He saw his “failing school” as due to his own choices, and felt that he could similarly make choices to change his situation.

Most of the students discussed their transition from academic failure to success as a matter of having faith in themselves, taking responsibility for their actions, and staying committed to school. As in the community values exercise, discourse about school success was centered on individual will and character. Loretta said:

I ask a lot of questions. I ask about how, how is it in college? I ask, um, how do you know, like how do you know that you're supposed to—I ask a lot about the plants and stuff we grow and like they give me the answers, too. So, it's mainly like I ask a lot of questions and they just tell me that, um, to go in college and whatever I want to do, you know, do it.

Students said that many conversations between them and the interns were about going to college, and that the interns encouraged them to attend. As with Cynthia, other students often saw the college students as having freedom. They talked about all the activities and opportunities the interns had told them were possible in college. Loretta

said that she was talking to a few interns “and they [we]re telling [her] how fun college is.” She said, “I didn’t want to go to college, but then I did. I was kind of like, ‘Mm... I don’t know.’ And now it’s like, ‘I want to go to college.’” Loretta explained to me that “there’s a lot of like opportunities, there’s a lot of stuff you can do on the road, so, you might as well take it now, because not everybody get as much opportunity as, as we did.” She said, “Since we got it, we might as well run with it.” Loretta did not describe the way her social conditions might construct opportunities for her, but she did mention some of the privileges she’s had that could help her get to college, another example of the mix of Individualist and non-Individualist influences present in conversations in the program about going to college.

Pete told me that the students were “always amazed by just the range of things we can do, or study, or participate in.” He said:

I think that really motivates them, because right now they might be in a spot where they’re pretty confined to certain curriculum and activities, and whenever we talk about what, like what I’m doing at school or what clubs I’m involved in, like the bike program, for example, they’re like, ‘So, that’s part of your school or is it in [town]? Cause that sounds like something that’s in [town].’ And I’m like, ‘No, you really do get more options once you get past this.’ And I think that’s been pretty motivating for some of them. Or exciting, very exciting.⁴⁶

Pete’s explanation reflected the choice-based rhetoric used in the program, though he did mention that, in his discussions with students, he noted the ways in which the students’ educational situation constrained them.⁴⁷

These conversations also reflected the ways in which program members reiterated certain understandings of success within the program. Though the director often said the

⁴⁶ Pete then laughed and said, “Then I always explain to them how exciting the [Food Justice] program is for me. And I’m like, ‘Well, I never got to do this and this is probably the coolest thing I’ve done lately.’ And they’re like, ‘What?’ They’re like, ‘Come on.’”

⁴⁷ What was not present was a discussion of the ways in which Pete’s conditions could have constructed educational opportunities for him, as well as the ways the students’ could have for them.

program shouldn't endorse college as the only viable option for the students and many interns also expressed this principle, we found it difficult to implement it in practice. It was especially difficult because the interns' roles seemed to include having discussions about college with the students, and because the interns knew our own experiences, which included attending college, best. When we had conversations with the students, both parties tended to talk about their own lives and experiences, and so college was a major topic. We also never wanted to discourage any students who expressed an interest in college. Academic success was therefore often associated with attending college in program discourse, and when we encouraged the students and said that they could, in fact, "make it" to college, we set up "not making it" as the objective and dichotomous opposite. This focus on end results and individual success was a reiteration of the school system's Individualizing influences within the program. It was not an explicit intention of the program to set up going to college in this way. No intern to whom I spoke wanted, at least explicitly, to transmit to the students that college was the only option for success. Marcy told me directly that "frankly, they don't have to go to college, [but] I don't want them to think that it's closed off, so those interns being there are about, like talking with kids about possibilities and different kinds of paths to get to where you want to get to."

Students' grades in the program were based only on general class attendance and participation in the end of the year fundraising dinner. There was little room in program grading for differentiating individuals.⁴⁸ Students told me that their Wednesday afternoons were a break from the testing that was a major part of the rest of their school week. One intern, Pete, said:

⁴⁸ And, therefore, little room for homogenizing them towards a norm of achievement or ability.

No one's getting like tested on them and there are like definitely multiple approaches to do everything that we do, like either planting or pruning is very like free-form. And I think that whole approach to being open to multiple ideas from like within our interns, like we all have different perspectives on how to approach the situation, but also like having the students throw in their own ideas.

Pete was describing the way that interns and students would collaborate within the project-based model of the program; rather than graded testing, which would have promoted more Individualist notions of success and failure as oppositional and the only two outcomes of an activity, activities in the program promoted understandings that opened up opportunities for various approaches to problems and some collective decision-making. This difference from the students' other classes was critical to the program's use of the project-based learning model and challenges to the success-failure framework. The interns and students hoped to incorporate more of these sorts of understandings into program practice in the future, because they were not always present in every aspect of the program.

The program could escape Individualizing discourse of the success-failure framework neither externally nor internally. It was not difficult to hear this in the ways the students would talk about themselves and each other. After an intern commented that a student, Thomas, had cut up vegetables well, another student joked, "Thomas actually did something good? That's the only time he's ever done something right in his life."

Even though the comment was made in a joking manner, it alluded to something found again and again in the students' discourse about success and failure—that they were failures and therefore could not do things well. There were no grades on the cut vegetables, no way to explicitly distinguish whose vegetables were whose once they were all in the pot, but notions of success and failure taken from other school experiences pervaded the activity. If the only two paths were success and failure, the students felt

they'd gone down the latter. Thomas being able to cut vegetables well was, in this instance, not seen as part of the complex processes that constituted the class cooking a meal together, but an individual act in direct contradiction to his usual classroom failure. Pete said that he noticed many instances in which the students reiterated "the idea that like success is something you can get to and if you don't like succeed in this task or whatever's going on, then you failed at it."

The program itself also had to constantly prove its own success. The program received support in two ways; financially, much of its support came from local donors through a catered dinner and silent auction held at the end of the year. Donors also provided many of the supplies and equipment necessary for program activities. The district was the other means of support. Without the district, the program would not have had access to the students, the program space, the school curriculum, nor administrative support. Both donors and the district had been very helpful in maintaining and improving program activities and experiences through their support.

The program gained this support by forming descriptions and reports of program activities within the success-failure framework. The program was "a success" rather than "a failure," and its activities and curriculum were "successful" rather than "failing." This is not to say that merely calling the program successful framed success and failure dichotomously. The tenuous nature of the support, however, in that the program had to constantly prove its success or cease to exist, meant that the success of the program existed in direct opposition to potential failure. Furthermore, the program had to bring students who were academic "failures" into some sort of systemically recognized

“success,” changing not just the conditions of the students but the individual students themselves.

The program did not use these terms, and indeed recognized much of the nuanced and manifold ways the students and the total program shaped each other’s practices and opportunities. Nor did district officials necessarily understand the program and the students in only these terms. But the school system forced all involved to flatten the complexities of practices and experiences within the program, because the institutionalized educational activity was discursively recognized through the success-failure framework. The framework has become, even when people can see its flaws and recognize further nuances, “common sense,” so that it becomes difficult to see “how success and failure came to be the only pathways to which school people could orient, and actively and relentlessly so” (Varenne and McDermott 1998:168). The obfuscation of this process is itself Individualizing and reifies the terms of and the commonsensical ways in which we funnel certain kids into certain terms without acknowledging the cultural processes that allow and promote that particular funneling.

My interactions with the students and stories of the directors’ and other interns’ interactions with the students helped me to understand the ways in which Individualism played a more complex role in the program than I had previously thought. Students valued collective work and communal goals, but also a focus on the individual and individual choice, and did not necessarily see these various aspects of the program as irreconcilable. Instead, Individualizing and non-Individualizing influences in the program together worked to constitute the experiences and understandings of the students. Individual attention from interns, small group work, and large group discussions all were

part of the project-based learning model used in the program. Gentle disciplinary practices worked to promote collectivity and accountability, but also individualized students by not faulting the students as an indistinct group when behavioral norms were transgressed. Also, while the program explicitly promoted collaborative work, it contained individualizing understandings of difference and “success.”

The way students spoke about the individualistic and non-individualistic aspects of the program, they did not seem to view them as two sides of the program, but rather as part of the same processes that shaped program culture. The Santa Adela students in the Food Justice program explicitly described the program as more collective and group-oriented than their other classes, but they also highlighted many of the ways in which the individual was the focus of many aspects of the program. All of the students I interviewed appreciated features of the program that reflected more individualist influences, such as in disciplinary practices and some facets of the program structure, in addition to the features in which individualism was less present in the structure and in program activities and goals. Alternative educational settings such as the Food Justice Program cannot escape the individualizing influences of the school system; however, these influences interact with the non-individualizing ones prevalent in such programs to construct the experiences and understandings of program members in complex ways that differ significantly from those found in the larger school system.

Chapter 5:

Conclusion

It's mid-March, and we are working together to make pa jun, Korean vegetable pancakes. I stand next to Corey, who drops ladlefuls of batter and vegetable shreds into a bubbling pan of oil. Cynthia mixes another bowl of batter to my left. Other students and interns chop vegetables and begin to clean up. A couple students decide to open up a jar of our homemade kimchi to go with the pancakes. They serve the other students and the interns as we walk past them with our pa jun. We all sit together and eat and talk about our days and how delicious the food is. One student tries to convince another to try the kimchi. Corey happily continues to fry pancakes. In moments like these, I feel like we are not individuals so much as collective participants of some larger project, beyond cooking and eating pa jun.

But that feeling is continually broken by the students' assertions of their individual identities. Cynthia claims credit for the pancakes because she mixed the batter. Another student says that they do not want to be part of eating the kimchi. One student calls another an idiot for not knowing something about a vegetable. They remind me that they want to be taken seriously as individuals who make choices about their lives.

Neither sort of influence, Individualizing or otherwise, was wholly constitutive of the Food Justice program structure. The complex dialogue between these various influences affected the experiences of all members in the program. It was often difficult to tell which sort of influence was most prevalent in any given instance in the program, as both were often simultaneously present and their effects shaped each other. Non-

Individualizing influences in the program not only counteracted, but interacted with Individualizing influences to shape the experiences and understandings of program members.

One student, partway through the semester, was stuck trying to remember some of our names. Co-director Marcy assured him that it was okay that he didn't yet know our names because there were a lot of interns and we were always working with different students. Another student chimed in that it was also because "it [wa]s not about names," but about the work we were doing together. Marcy told me that she felt that the dichotomy between the individual and the community was problematic, and that "even the word individual isn't important, but one-on-one relationships. Like, what [the students we]re talking about is not them as an island."

Both student populations involved in the Food Justice program were inherently transient. The Santa Adela students are a mobile population, but the interns, too, come and go with each semester. Even the interns who stay from semester to semester eventually graduate, and most leave the Southern Californian town. But Marcy felt that the program's greatest accomplishment was that after four years, the program was still running and that plans were being made to strengthen program infrastructure for future semesters of students and interns. She said that "it's not just about keeping the garden, it's about being present."

Marcy and Alyssa had many plans for the future of the program. In the short term, Marcy was working with interns to develop program curricula to better discuss difference in the program and connect program activities to large food justice movements in the local and global community. As evidenced by the group activity about the rocks falling

on the town, the program began to develop and implement such curricula even in the semester I observed. The directors also planned to create scholarships and food preparation and other certificate training programs in the Food Justice program to offer the Santa Adela students more opportunities to further their education, whether in college or in the workforce. The directors also had many plans to give the interns more training and input, but, as Marcy said, “decentralized organizing is a really hard thing to do.” The directors also planned “to switch to more ‘traditional school assignments’ for assessment.” These plans for the future reflect the complex mix of Individualizing and non-Individualizing elements already constitutive of the program structure.

The complex meanings and ideals of Individualism played out in the ways in which the program could never truly escape Individualist notions, and in the ways in which not all program members wished to escape them completely. Both Individualizing and non-Individualizing influences shaped the experiences and perceptions of experience of program members.

Individualism was present in many forms in the Food Justice program. The success-failure framework of the school system was an Individualizing influence in the program that was often thwarted through an explicit absence of recorded measurements of student actions that corresponded to a success-failure dichotomy. The lack of recorded measurement also spoke to the ways in which the gentle disciplinary tactics of the program were not always Individualizing; however, they often were in their practices of normalizing student behavior. Students were glad that these disciplinary practices promoted accountability to the group but did not punish the group for individual transgressions of normalized understandings of behavior, which came from the success-

failure framework of the school system. The Individualizing success-failure framework was also confronted in the program by its use of the project-based model of learning, which encourages collective work and communal problem solving, as well as application of short- and long-term projects to broader issues. However, the program did not always follow the model absolutely, and even within employment of the model there were spaces for aspects of Individualism. For the interns and directors, the most explicit goal was to care for the students in whatever ways seemed best in each situation, whether that meant engaging Individualist or non-Individualist notions.

The program attempted to challenge many of the Individualizing features typical of the American school system. The context of the program was shaped by the Individualizing conditions of the school system both in the ways the program challenged and in the ways it promoted various facets of Individualism. Interns constantly negotiated the Individualizing influences of the school system and challenged them with non-Individualizing influences in the program, such as not measuring and recording the students' behaviors and promoting collaborative work. Our more explicit challenge and subtler promotion of Individualism helped shape the complex structure of the program. The conditions of the school and program and the experiences and understandings of the interns both revealed the ways in which Individualizing and non-Individualizing influences in the program were more intertwined than they appeared, but the students' actions and comments most illustrated the ways in which these influences worked together to produce experiences and understandings of program members. It is reasonable to suggest that in such alternative educational settings, where Individualism is ostensibly challenged, there is really a more complex interaction between Individualizing and non-

Individualizing influences.

I hope that my research illuminates some of the ways that an alternative educational setting can seem or attempt to promote one thing, when the experiences and needs of the students are more complex. I also hope that this research highlights some of the ways that those involved in alternative educational settings must negotiate sometimes conflicting messages and ideas when trying to make the experiences of the program fruitful for themselves and those around them. By understanding these findings, members may be better able to structure their programs in the future knowing the needs and realities of those involved. Analyses of educational settings should take into account the complex ways that practices, relationships, discourses, and values of the members do not just effectively or ineffectively challenge Individualism in the school system, but incorporate its Individualizing influences as they simultaneously challenge them. By understanding this more complex structure, we can begin to analyze the ways that similar programs shape the experiences and understandings of their members. If I were to have time for more theoretical work in this thesis, I would hope to incorporate the differing ideas of the individual and the singularity, and possibilities for singularities within communities, the basis of which I think is present in this thesis.

Working with the Food Justice program in the spring of 2014 was a difficult and rewarding experience for me. The students, interns, and directors of the Food Justice program taught each other many lessons throughout the projects of the semester, from knife skills to building relationships in a community. I am glad I had the chance to observe and analyze the program in this way and hope that future uses of my data will bring the program the resources it needs to continue and to continue to improve. Room

109 should remain a place where Marcus and other students can feel they are a part of something.

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