

California State University,
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THE IMPACT OF AT-RISK STUDENTS ENROLLED
IN ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES
ON A HIGH SCHOOL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine student, teacher, and administrator perceptions of AVID students participating in advanced placement courses in high school. Access to advanced placement courses has been limited. Nevertheless, the numbers of students participating in advanced placement courses from all learner groups is increasing. As more AVID students enroll in these courses, it becomes valuable to educational leaders to understand the perspectives of the administration, faculty, and students involved in such courses. The theoretical framework of this study was critical theory, with an emphasis on educational equity and school culture. An ethnographic study was used and included interviews, questionnaires, document review, and observations. Four major themes emerged: (a) past practices of inequity, (b) current practices against inclusion, (c) current practices for improvement, and (d) future action. Overall, the data indicated that, at the school site, past and present gatekeeping practices have restricted and continue to restrict student access to AP courses. Nevertheless, inclusive practices are gaining strength, and an increasing number of AVID students are taking AP classes.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

High school students who, in the past, typically participated in “college preparatory” classes are increasingly challenged to engage in higher-level academic courses. In keeping with this development in education, this research will examine the relevant perspectives. To this end, this chapter provides an introduction to the research. The chapter begins with one student’s story, followed by the problem statement, purpose of the research, significance of the study, research questions, limitations of the study, and definitions relevant to the research. The chapter concludes with an overview of the organization of the remainder of the dissertation.

One Student’s Story

Araceli grew up in an underprivileged Latino neighborhood in Orange County, California. No one in her family had ever graduated from high school, and she had no aspirations to attend college. As a student, she was characterized by each of her teachers as conscientious and hardworking. Generally, she was a “B” student, with a sprinkling of “As” and “Cs” from time to time.

When she enrolled in high school, her counselor suggested that she follow the typical college preparatory plan for graduation (i.e., average classes for

average students). Neither her counselors nor her teachers recommended that she enroll in advanced courses. Her status as an ethnic minority from a low-income family deemed her an “at-risk” student.

Nevertheless, her academic success continued during her first two years of high school, and, at the end of her sophomore year, Araceli’s history teacher took a special interest in her. She believed that Araceli could handle the curriculum and work load of an Advanced Placement (AP) course in United States History. Araceli enrolled in the course, passed the AP exam, and her success in that AP class spurred her to take additional AP courses in her senior year. When she graduated from high school, Araceli had earned a total of four semesters of college coursework. Araceli attended a private, out-of-state university, graduated with honors, and she is now a successful community college professor.

Araceli’s story illustrates the power of encouragement. A teacher urged her to take an AP course and the school culture supported her effort. Encouragement and triumph in one class boosted her confidence and led to greater academic achievement in others. This anecdote illustrates one high school teacher’s successful attempt to reduce the achievement gap between high-achieving students and at-risk students. One could speculate that Araceli’s experiences would have been different had she not been permitted to participate in AP courses.

Problem Statement

In the late 1990s, the U.S. Department of Education (Adelman, 1999) and, soon after, The College Board (Freedman & Krugman, 2001) sought to close the achievement gap by focusing on equitable access to AP courses for all students. Adelman sought to “ascertain what contributes most to the acquisition of a four-year college degree” (p. 11). Of the six contributions directly related to high schools, two relate to this study. Adelman noted:

The impact of a high school curriculum of high academic intensity and quality on degree completion is far more pronounced and positive for African American and Latino students than any other pre-college indicator of academic resources. The impact for African American and Latino students is also much greater than it is for white students. (p. 7)

He also noted, “AP course taking is more strongly correlated with bachelor's degree completion than it is with college access” (p. 7). In keeping with this, Freedman and Krugman (2001) stated, “We must focus on our commitment to equity, especially in access to AP and in support for AP preparation in schools. All students should have access to AP courses and have the chance to acquire the skills needed to succeed in them” (p. 4).

Research has shown that, when high school students participate in AP courses, their access to college is enhanced (Adelman, 1999; Powell-McMillian, 2005). At-risk students, however, have had inequitable access to AP courses (Adelman, 1999; Blasik, Dilgen, Leonard, & Till, 2003; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2003;

Metcalf, 2007). The inequitable tracking practices of counselors and teachers have contributed to these inequitable practices (Davis, 2006; Haury & Milbourne, 1999).

Inequities are a reality in high school educational practice. The U.S. Census Bureau (2000) found that, although the combined African American and Latino/Hispanic population is 25.4% of the total U.S. population, The College Board (2001) reported that, in 2000, only 14.1% of students in these ethnic groups took at least one AP exam. By 2006, the combined African American and Latino/Hispanic population had increased to 27.6% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006), but only 17.9% of these students had taken at least one AP exam (The College Board, 2006). The College Board (as cited in Borman, Stringfield, and Ruchuba, 2000) noted that African American, Native American, and Latino students “have a limited presence among top students at all levels of the educational system as measured by such traditional indicators as grades and standardized test scores” (p. xii). Since the 1990s, the racial composition of AP courses has remained relatively static despite growth in the population percentages of African American and Latino/Hispanic students at schools (Adelman, 1999; Cota-Robles & Gordon, 1999).

The developers of AP tests, The College Board, and accreditation organizations such as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) strongly recommend that more students be given access to the entire school curriculum, including AP courses and exams (Manzo, 2005; Metcalf, 2007).

Greater access is believed to enhance opportunities to develop higher level academic skills needed by students to be successful in college and beyond (Sheets, 1995). AP classes provide a level of rigor reminiscent of a college course and, therefore, provide a unique opportunity for high school students to experience the demands of the university.

Gandara and Maxwell-Jolly (1999) noted “discrepancies” that have caused variance in minority student academic achievement, including racism, stereotype vulnerability, segregation, poor quality of schooling, inadequate resources in minority communities and schools, lack of motivation on the part of students, and home environments that are unable to fully support the goals of schooling due to low education and income. (p. 7)

In this regard, the practice of utilizing prerequisites for admittance into AP courses remains common, and motivated minority students do not often meet minimum AP course requirements.

Davis (2006) also expressed concern about educational inequity, noting that some educators assume that students of color do not have the ability to go to college, which is a “dangerous and potentially limiting” assumption (p. 25). Grubb (2009) summarized national concerns, stating, “In the United States we have created a vicious circle between education inequality and social and economic inequality, each contributing to the other” (p. 13). In addition to the

large-scale concerns addressed thus far, similar issues are present at the school-site level.

The growth of AP programs is contributing to existing inequities in education. As noted above, high schools have limited access to AP courses (Adelman, 1999; Fincher-Ford, 1997; Oakes, 1995). The key issue is the denial of student access to the full curriculum, which critical theorists assert is “intellectually and morally irresponsible” (Noddings, 2007, p. 72).

Programmatic Responses

High schools today are in a competition with each other in many areas, especially in vying for the best students (Moran, 2007). In this regard, students will search for a school that meets their particular interests or needs, and to meet these needs, schools are offering unique programs of study (Greene, 2006).

Coupled with these programs is open enrollment, which is a policy allowing parents, once a year, to choose to enroll their students in any school in their district of residence. Open enrollment is a response to the request of students and parents to be allowed to choose a school. Many California K-12 and high school districts began the practice of open enrollment in the early 1990s. Since the inception of open enrollment, this competition has intensified.

Also of relevance is The College Board, the national organization that authors and administers AP courses and exams, which is seeking to increase the number of at-risk students taking AP courses and exams. At-risk students are identified by several factors such as their minority status, low socioeconomic

status (SES), or non-exceptional academic success (Pallas, 1989; Powell-McMillan, 2004).

By increasing the number of AP courses offered, Gilford County Schools in North Carolina has seen a rise in the number of students taking AP courses and exams (Grier, 2002; Swanson, 2007). Additionally, the district offers professional staff development and curricular review to ensure academic rigor (Karnes & Nugent, 2002). Such developmental activities were offered with the goal of increasing the number of minority students taking AP courses and exams so that, eventually, AP learner percentages would increase for at-risk, ethnic, and minority students in the school system (Grier).

The Local Problem

At the time of this research, the participating school site excluded students from participating in AP courses if their grade point average (GPA) was below 3.0. According to the school's lead counselor, the school must prioritize a high honors and AP test score average if students wish to participate. Advanced courses were limited to the "brightest and best" students (M. J. Wilson, personal communication, January 20, 2009). Little consideration was given to students whose motivation, maturity, or desire to learn improved from ninth to eleventh grade. Even less concern was given to developing academic support for students who demonstrated potential for enrolling in AP courses. This school site provides an example of a micro-view of the problem, which is also indicative of the

statewide mezzo-view. This site, not unlike sites across California's school districts, continues to experience what Oakes (1995) has described:

The harm that accrues to African Americans and Latinos takes at least three demonstrable forms: (1) unjustifiable, disproportionate, and segregative assignments to low-track classes and exclusion from accelerated classes; (2) inferior opportunities to learn; and (3) lower achievement. In both systems, grouping practices have created a cycle of restricted opportunities and diminished outcomes, and exacerbated differences between African American and Latino and white students. (p. 689)

Increasingly, school administrators at this site are becoming aware of the discriminatory practices reported in the popular press and the professional literature. While administrators are in the process of expanding minority students' access to AP courses, teachers and school counselors remain reluctant to recommend students for this program. Central office administrators are encouraging high school administrators, faculty, and counselors to set new goals that increase the number of minority students admitted to AP courses (Giokaris & Fancher, 2008). One school in the district was recently added to *Newsweek's* Challenge Index, the yearly list of the nation's top 1000 high schools. Improvement occurred largely because of its focus on a campus "academy" and the school's Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program that provides academic support to middle-achieving, college preparatory students.

The principal has actively sought to increase the number of AP course participants and is striving to change the culture of the school so that faculty support this practice.

Additionally, one teacher at the site attempted to challenge the barriers that prevented many excellent mid-level, college preparatory, motivated students access to AP/honors courses. Each year, he recommended that several of his best at-risk students be permitted to participate in an honors or AP course. These students, he believed, had the aptitude, motivation, and ability to participate in an honors class.

Each time he made a recommendation, however, it was rejected. The teachers and coordinators, who were the gatekeepers, prevented access. The gatekeepers used three placement exams to determine student placement into advanced courses. These exams were restrictive; if a student did not achieve a certain score on the exam, he or she was not allowed into advanced courses and access to AP courses was permanently denied. Only a few, handpicked students who excelled on the exams were permitted to take advanced courses. In a recent interview, the school's lead counselor stated that the school is in competition for students with other schools and must present the highest test score average possible to attract other high achieving students (M. J. Wilson, personal communication, January 20, 2009).

The restrictive policy of the school supported a closed system of student participation and hinged on sustaining high AP exam score averages. The criteria

for acceptance into the advanced programs of the closed system included math, English essay, and English vocabulary entrance exams. A former honors coordinator even went so far as to “manipulate” the data in the reporting of results to artificially inflate the overall test average of the school.

In response to district admonitions and relevant research, the principal has a strong resolve to open access to all classes to all students. His goal is to allow any student at the school, if he or she desires, the opportunity to take an AP or honors course. To this end, he has made some changes at the site. For example, AP course placement criteria now include a writing comprehension exam, a reading comprehension exam, California Standards Test score review, and recommendations from junior high school teachers and counselors. In this regard, junior high school recommendations provide insight into the students’ work ethic, a factor that would remain unknown in a list of test-scores.

Even if a student does not meet the new criteria for participation in an AP or honors course, however, if the student can demonstrate a strong desire and motivation, that student can be admitted into an advanced course. This has led to more honors course offerings, the inclusion of AVID students into honors classes, an increase in the school’s overall population, the hiring of new, highly qualified teachers, and a greater involvement in the scheduling process for individual students by their counselors and program coordinators.

Data from recent entrance exams showed that over 450 students from as far away as Riverside and Huntington Beach participated in the exam. This

represents more than double the number of exam-takers from any previous year, demonstrating that student interest in rigorous courses exceeds prior limiting evaluative measures.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of at-risk students taking AP courses on the culture of a high school from the perspectives of site administrators, AP teachers of English, Social Science, and Visual Arts department courses, and the students themselves. It is important to note that the inclusion of at-risk students taking AP courses is a relatively new phenomenon at the school site under study. The practice began in the 2006-2007 school year and continues to the present. The student participants in this study are drawn from the AVID population at the site. According to the definition provided by the AVID program, AVID students are considered at-risk (Pallas, 1989; Powell-McMillan, 2004).

In particular, the purpose of the study is as follows: (a) to examine AVID teachers' perceptions about AP enrollment; (b) to examine AVID students' perceptions of taking AP courses and exams; (c) to examine high school administrators' perceptions about expanding AP programs to students of color and allocating resources to support this new direction; and (d) to identify the impact of AVID students' participation in AP courses on the school's culture. At the time of this study, only three curricular areas at the school enrolled AVID students in AP courses: English, Social Science, and World Languages.

Like Araceli, the students participating in this study may be considered at-risk. AVID has concluded that at-risk students would benefit from taking AP courses (Powell-McMillan, 2004) because, as more students take these courses, positive results occur. For example, the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) of the high school may increase (Mathews, 2007), individual students are better prepared for college coursework (Adelman, 1999, 2006; Oberjuege, 1999), and curriculum development, instruction methods, and differentiated assessments are all improved for AP courses (Karnes & Nugent, 2002). Additionally, students are better prepared for college by having the experience of participating in college-level courses (Oberjuege).

Some educators believe that strategies for enrolling more students into AP classes increase the academic rigor of high school programs and challenge more students to take honors/AP courses (Hale, 2007; Pascopella, 2006). Research has shown that, when taking such courses, students learn and achieve at high levels and are better prepared for university and college coursework because they have subject matter knowledge and the ability to apply cognitive skills to solve problems. Oberjuege stated, "AP instruction and the AP curriculum create an academic atmosphere that benefits potential college students and the entire school campus . . . The AP experience challenges not only the student, but also the teacher to go further academically" (p. 264). This research sought to understand the impact that this practice has on a high school culture.

Significance of the Study

School districts are seeking innovative ways to increase the number of students taking AP courses and exams (Hurst, Tan, Meek, & Sellers, 2003; Giokaris & Fancher, 2008). As an increasing number of students take such courses, they and their teachers need more support. In this regard, this research will provide information relevant for school leaders when making decisions regarding curriculum, student placement, and academic student support. It also will provide information relevant to professional development and administrative support for teachers who need to enhance instruction, curriculum, and assessment.

Finally, it is often recommended that schools initiate, develop, and enhance academically challenging programs. Moreover, schools and districts also seek to include greater numbers of all students in AP classes. This research will contribute to the scholarly knowledge base on how the experiences and academic success of at-risk students affects the school culture.

Research Questions

The primary research question this study investigated is as follows:

What impact does AVID students' participation in AP courses have on the high school culture?

The secondary research question this study investigated is as follows:

What are participants' perceptions of the educational equity of the AP program in terms of how power is managed, modified, or shifted within the culture under study?

Definition of Terms

At-risk refers to K-12 students who have been formally or informally designated as English learners, Special Education, 504, low achieving, low motivated, learning disabled, racial minority, ethnic minority, low SES, physically disabled, mentally disabled, under-supported, homeless, or in foster care (Pallas, 1989; Powell-McMillan, 2004).

Advanced placement (AP) refers to advanced high school course offerings that provide college credit to students who pass an exam taken near the end of the school year. The courses are generally accepted by colleges and universities for credit. The courses are offered in a variety of subject areas, including, but not limited to, English, Math, World Languages, Social Sciences, Science, Fine Arts, and Performing Arts.

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is a college-preparatory program designed to provide at-risk students with the necessary guidance and support to participate in a more challenging curriculum. AVID students are challenged to engage in a more rigorous college-preparatory curriculum while at the same time providing academic support in the form of an elective course with tutoring and skills instruction (Powell-McMillan, 2004).

Open enrollment, which is found in many school districts, is a policy in which parents, once a year, are provided with an opportunity to choose to enroll their student in any school in their district of residence. Open enrollment was adopted as a response to the requests of students and parents to be allowed the ability to choose a school to attend. Many school districts across the U.S. began the practice of open enrollment in the early 1990s. Open enrollment became an official policy in California in 1994 when Education Code 35160.5(b) was enacted (Kemerer, Sansom, Sansom, & Kemerer, 2005).

School culture is defined as the way things are done in an organization. The culture reflects the values, traditions, and language accepted by those who comprise it (Crang & Turner, 1996).

The College Board is the overseeing organization of the AP program. The College Board provides support for AP curriculum, assessment, professional development, research, and administrative support.

Limitations of the Study

1. AP teachers' honesty and transparency may be limited because the researcher evaluates the AP teachers at the school. To address this limitation, the researcher made arrangements with the administrative team to evaluate only AP teachers not connected to the study.

2. The study involves at-risk, AVID students at one high school in Southern California.

3. The researcher's role as a school administrator may limit the degree of candor and openness on the part of the students and teachers interviewed and observed. To address this limitation, the researcher has asked the principal to assign the researcher to conduct teacher evaluations only for teachers who were not involved in the interview phase of the study.

Organization of the Remainder of the Dissertation

This chapter provided an introduction to the dissertation, the purpose of which is to examine the impact of at-risk students taking AP courses on the culture of a high school from the perspectives of site administrators, AP teachers of English, Social Science, and Visual Arts department courses, and the students themselves. Chapter 2 is a critical review of the relevant literature, including the gaps in the literature that the current study addresses. Chapter 3 includes the methodology used in this ethnographic study, while Chapter 4 presents the findings, particularly the emergent themes. Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation and includes the conclusions drawn from the findings, implications, and recommendations for changes in educational practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of the relevant literature. The chapter begins with the literature on advanced placement as an equity issue, followed by a critique of AP programs, sustaining at-risk students' participation in AP programs, addressing barriers to student participation, and access to AP courses. The chapter concludes with a discussion of gaps in the literature.

Advanced Placement as an Equity Issue

Adelman (1999, 2006) has stated that the single most important predictor of college success is completion of a rigorous high school education, which would include AP courses. Students understand the value of the AP curriculum. A student in an AP program, stated, "After my AP courses, I knew that I could handle a heavy workload in college and balance my time. And I was prepared to think analytically" (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2003, p. 14). Another former AP student stated, "I have always believed that the AP was excellent preparation for university. I had little difficulty organizing my university study since I actually found it to require less organizational aptitude than the AP" (Pound, 2006, p. 178).

AP courses give students more options in their high school education. These options can provide motivation for at-risk students to stay in school and

complete their high school education. Success in an AP course may additionally encourage students to enroll and participate in college. With counseling, teacher and parental oversight, and administrator support AP, participation by AVID students can diminish stereotypical attitudes held by stakeholders regarding educational achievement (Fincher-Ford, 1997). Enrolling in high school courses that offer college credits is one of the ways that students can exercise choice in their educational experience (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2003). Course preference allows students to decide on options that they deem are relevant to their daily lives (Fincher-Ford).

Davis (1996), an AP teacher from a Texas high school, understands that AP courses are beneficial for students and schools. He stated, "Again, AP objectives are vital for raising high school standards and for offering opportunities to a broad range of students" (p. 36).

Parents understand the positive influence that AP courses have on their children. AP classes afford an advantage in the college admission process. Colleges realize that students who have taken AP courses have a proven track record of success in rigorous classes (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2003). Parents also value the financial savings that these courses bring (Davis, 1996). College tuition savings can be substantial if a student is able to earn up to one full year of college credit in free high school courses (Hurwitz & Hurwitz). Parents believe that their children receive better access to the enriched curriculum, better

instruction, and an assurance that high rigor will be utilized in the courses (Clarenbach, 2007).

Educators often seek opportunities to teach AP courses. The opportunity to intensely study invigorating course content, work with the brightest students, and “become learners” as they teach provide a unique experience for classroom teachers (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2003). Teachers also have become experts in curricular areas. Each teacher has much knowledge to contribute to enhance student learning. AP teachers are allowed greater opportunity to cover curricular depth and breadth in AP courses. Teachers are afforded the opportunity to utilize an advanced and more interesting curriculum (Keiser, 2002). Teachers have also reported that enhanced job satisfaction is a result of teaching AP courses and advanced students (Hale, 2007).

At Binghamton High School, in New York State, the AP teachers view their AP program as an equal-access curriculum. They do not have “gate-keepers” or policies designed to exclude students. They believe that AP is not to be limited to gifted students. They also note the compatibility of classes within the AP program and that many of these courses work in concert with each other (Gazda-Grace, 2002).

In addition to these benefits, schools may also receive national, state, and district recognition for improved test scores, higher levels of student college acceptance, or increasing school rankings from government and other organizations (Mathews, 2007). When schools adhere to educational law,

student equity in schools is increased, and the achievement gap is reduced (Adelman, 1999; Student Assignment in Elementary and Secondary Schools & Title VI, 1998; Wirt, 2002).

Several advantages exist for students participating in and completing AP courses that are documented in the literature. AP students are exposed to an enriched curriculum when compared to lower-track classes (Burriss & Welner, 2005; Conchas & Rodriguez, 2008). Oakes (1992) asserted that lower-track students, when provided with adequate support, thrive on an enriched curriculum. Students also receive the benefits of highly qualified, experienced teachers whose expertise is aligned with the subjects taught and who typically possess advanced degrees in the curriculum area. The result of the enriched curriculum and experienced teachers is that a consistent high level of rigor will be maintained for the AP courses. Additionally, both the College Board and AVID organizations assert that an effective way to prepare students for college success is to provide them with the experience of taking a college course, particularly an AP course (Cota-Robles & Gordon, 1999; Swanson, 1997).

Solorzano and Ornelas (2002) noted three benefits to participating in AP classes: (a) AP courses indicate a high quality curriculum; (b) students receive an extra grade point on their GPAs; and (c) if students receive a score of 3 or better on the AP exam, their reward is college credit for the course. Students also benefit from avoiding the antiquated course-tracking system that had been criticized since the 1970s (Haury & Milbourne, 1999).

Critique of AP Programs

In 1955, the AP program was implemented as a collaborative effort between high schools and colleges to ensure that college-bound seniors would not have to relearn important content in their first year of college. The program began with 104 high schools and 130 colleges, with approximately 1000 students who took ten different courses (Pascopella, 2006). This program has evolved to such an extent that, in 2006, approximately 15,000 high schools and 3600 colleges and universities were participating in the AP program (Pascopella), and the growth continues.

In the mid-1960s, there was a growing focus on ways to improve educational awareness and outcomes for at-risk students (Cota-Robles & Gordon, 1999; Metcalf, 2007). However, the percentages of minority and lower SES taking AP courses changed little until the late 1990s (Cota-Robles & Gordon; Fincher-Ford, 1997; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2003; Metcalf, 2007). During this same decade, the U.S. Department of Education commissioned a study that found that at-risk student enrollment percentages in AP courses had remained virtually the same since the 1960s. Compared to the percentages of other student population groups taking AP courses, these percentages demonstrated an underrepresentation of the at-risk student participation.

The study recommended that the College Board, the Department of Education, colleges and universities, and K-12 districts nationwide investigate ways to increase at-risk student participation (Adelman, 1999; Grier, 2002;

Swanson, 2007). As a result, the College Board decided to broaden access to AP courses for all students nationwide, particularly at-risk populations (Cota-Robles & Gordon, 1999). An example of the implementation of this recommendation was proposed by then-U.S. Department of Education Secretary Richard Riley. He stated that every high school in the nation should offer, at a minimum, ten AP courses by 2010 (Freedman & Krugman, 2001). Although this goal has not yet been fully realized, the number of high schools offering AP programs and courses has increased (Powell-McMillan, 2004). With more course offerings, more students in all groups have been encouraged to participate in AP classes (Hale, 2007).

The number of at-risk students taking an AP exam is increasing. For example, in California, from 2001 to 2004, the number of Latino/Hispanic exam takers has risen 20%, and the number of African American exam takers has risen by 17%. In Texas, from 1998-2003, the number of AP exam takers rose 122% (Powell-McMillan, 2004). A report in the *Washington Post* stated that, even with increased numbers of at-risk test takers (from 160 students taking exams in the 1999-2000 school year to 1112 in the 2007-2008 school year), the districts' schools have maintained high rankings from state and national organizations (de Vise, 2008).

Vail (2006) reported that, while more students nationwide are taking AP classes, minority students taking AP courses and exams are "underrepresented." Vail also noted that educators are leery of the increased availability of AP

courses, believing that a “watering down” (p. 6) of the curriculum will eventually occur. Cota-Robles and Gordon (1999) examined the recent history (1990-1999) of AP programs. Although the study confirmed that greater numbers of students are taking AP courses, diverse groups of students, particularly African American, Latino/Hispanic, Native American, and the urban and rural poor are underrepresented. They stated, “When a great many individuals—and entire groups of people—do not have a genuine chance to develop their academic talents fully, our society is much poorer for their lack of education opportunities” (p. 5).

Freedman and Krugman (2001), in their study of the College Board, urged greater access to AP classes, stating:

Offering AP in every school carries with it a commitment of quality and support. If every school offers AP so that no student who is ready to take on the AP challenge is denied access, then we have a *mandate* to help ensure that students, teachers, and schools are prepared to succeed . . . We must confront this situation by emphasizing AP access for all students, and as with the commitment to quality, a commitment for equity in AP requires a commitment by all—the College Board, schools, colleges, and local, state, and federal governments. (emphasis added, p. 5)

Sustaining At-Risk Students in AP Programs

One of the fundamental concepts of the school improvement movement today is that schools are better when students are allowed opportunities to be

academically challenged (Adelman, 1999; Conchas & Rodriguez, 2008). An important focus of school improvement is to provide more course opportunities for students (Adelman, 1999; Burris & Welner, 2005; Holton, 1998). If schools are looking out for the student's best interests, students should be free to choose the courses that they desire. Administrators have claimed that AP teachers unreasonably limit the number and type of student who takes their courses, primarily to guarantee higher pass rates, therefore ensuring a reflection of a successful teacher (Sunny Hills High School, 2007; M. J. Wilson, personal communication, January 20, 2009). Teachers counter by claiming that one reason that administrators want more students to take AP courses is to elevate the school's rank in prominent nationwide publications such as *Newsweek Magazine* (Sunny Hills High School).

Other school leaders believe that, if at-risk students take AP courses and exams, teachers will be forced to water down their curriculum (Burris, Murphy, Welner, & Wiley, 2007). They wonder how students with weaker academic skills can pass AP courses. They assume that the answer is to weaken the academic rigor of the course. However, there already are students with a range of different academic skills in every class. Any student with lower-than-average academic skills needs additional support, and curricular, instructional, or assessment practices may need to be modified. This places a higher work demand on the teacher who may be unwilling to put forth this additional effort (Sunny Hills High School, 2007).

Professional Development

As early as 1972, administrators, teachers, and university personnel developed all-inclusive programs to prepare students for college through the use of AP courses. The Syracuse University Project Advance (SUPA) began as a pilot project at six schools. In 1985, the project had grown to 80 schools (Daly, 1985). SUPA supported students through course selection counseling, revolutionary professional development for teachers, supporting materials, excellent curriculum and instruction, relevant and timely evaluation, and tracking of students beyond high school. Daly found that “the students agreed that the courses had served them well and that their grades had predicted accurately their subsequent college performance” (p. 33).

The College Board recognizes that instructional and curricular professional development is a critical piece for the support of minority students (Burton, Witman, Yepes-Baraya, Cline, & Kim, 2002). Burton et al. used questionnaires, focus group data, and student data to identify characteristics of successful AP teachers of minority students, stating, “Professional development activities are the principal way of improving existing teachers’ subject area and professional knowledge, and recent research has established a connection between teacher professional development and student achievement” (p. 1).

Burton et al. (2002) found several important characteristics of successful teachers of at-risk students. Specifically, teachers are enthusiastic and apply high standards to all students, have strong content knowledge and teaching

skills, ensure that content and skills in the AP curriculum are covered, use different approaches and styles and employ a wide variety of teaching techniques, and supply information about college and college level work.

Burton et al.'s (2002) research was designed to examine the differences between the students of teachers who regularly employ many of these instructional characteristics and the students of those who do not. The results indicated a significant positive correlation between teachers who exhibit the important characteristics of successful AP teachers and the success of their students on AP exams. As teachers explicitly utilize more of the positive teaching characteristics, more students are successful both in coursework and on AP content exams.

As more students acquire access to the AP curriculum, students are in need of effective strategies designed to enhance learning in rigorous courses. Additionally, because the number of AP course offerings is increasing, teachers are needed to fill these classrooms. To help meet these needs, The College Board offers professional development under two major umbrellas. The first is the Building Success program, which centers on detailed learning strategies intended for utilization in classroom instruction (Freedman & Krugman, 2001; Karnes & Nugent, 2002). The other is AP Vertical Teams training, which consists of ongoing staff-development training and curricular development sessions for content-area instructors (Karnes & Nugent). The teachers of eighth grade students are also beginning to realize the importance of being trained in and

participating in “pre-AP” vertical teaming workshops. They have engaged with high school teachers at these workshops to better prepare students for the future rigors of AP coursework (Davis, 1996).

A Florida study that examined the effects of professional development on AP exam participants provides an illustration of AP Vertical Teams (Patterson & Laitusis, 2006). The authors found that many districts in the state employ this professional development training for new teachers and that, for each additional AP teacher that a school employs, the school administers 40-50 more AP exams. Professional development seems to have a positive effect on increasing the enrollment of at-risk students in advanced classes and the number of students taking the AP content exams.

Administrators prepare professional development activities that seek to promote school improvement (Pascopella, 2006), and teachers are expected to make the needed changes to help students learn. However, when teachers fail to implement these changes, perhaps the issue of authority, control, or power is present (Conchas & Rodriguez, 2008). Teachers may be more concerned about their own efforts than what is best for their students (Hale, 2007).

The College Board

The College Board is committed to increasing the accessibility of AP courses to more students (Cota-Robles & Gordon, 1999). The Board has additionally increased their commitment to pre-AP training so that more students will be prepared for the rigorous academic coursework demanded in AP courses

(Karnes & Nugent, 2002). Hurwitz and Hurwitz (2003) noted that “successful completion of AP courses [is] a critical factor in raising the college graduation rate for African American and Latino students” (p. 14).

The College Board has begun an auditing process of individual AP courses to ensure uniformity of rigor across the AP continuum nationwide (Vail, 2006). The College Board also actively seeks to discourage the teacher practice of “gatekeeping” their courses with difficult-to-meet prerequisites. Boothe Kinlaw, the College Board’s Associate Director for AP Equity and Access, stated, “The teacher should make all students aware of the difficulty level of the course and let the student decide, with the parents’ involvement” (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2003, p. 16). The College Board discourages the use of previous course grades and teacher recommendations to determine the course populations (Hurwitz & Hurwitz).

The College Board publishes many support documents for the AP program. One such paper, “Opening Classroom Doors” (The College Board, 2001), outlines strategies for schools to expand AP courses to draw from a more diverse range of students. The teacher can thus examine how similar schools are attempting to “open their curriculum” to more students and a more varied collection of learners.

With the increasing numbers of at-risk student in rigorous courses, the challenge shifts from opening greater access to AP courses to providing support for AP teachers and students. Throughout their educational experience, at-risk

students may not have had the curricular support necessary to prepare them for difficult classes (Powell-McMillan, 2005; Stringfield & Land, 2002). The College Board commissioned a study to provide recommendations for improving the academic achievement of at-risk students (Cota-Robles & Gordon, 1999). The report identified five factors that influence the achievement differences between groups of students: economic circumstances, education of parents, racial and ethnic prejudice and discrimination, cultural differences and peer influences, and school resources (Cota-Robles & Gordon).

Educational leaders quickly understood that, as the numbers of at-risk students in AP classes increases, teacher and school support becomes even more important. While this support can take several forms, it centers on the need for instructors and curricular professional development. Schools and The College Board are continuing to address curriculum, instruction, and support (e.g., peer tutoring and guidance support) (Cota-Robles & Gordon, 1999; Davis, 2006). The AVID program, in particular, has partnered with The College Board and contracted with the State of California to provide support measures for at-risk students (Negroni, 2006; Powell-McMillan, 2005; Stringfield & Land, 2002).

Policy

Educational leaders at the national, state, district, and site level understand the need to increase the number of at-risk AP exam takers as a component of closing the achievement gap (Adelman, 1999; Giokaris & Fancher, 2008; Grier, 2002; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2003). The former U.S. Secretary of

Education Richard Riley challenged schools to increase the accessibility of AP courses. He recommended that, in general, high schools should add one AP course per year, starting in 2001 for the following ten years (Blasik et al., 2003).

In Guilford County, North Carolina, schools, the district leadership began working directly with the College Board toward the objective of closing the achievement gap. They discovered a link between a PSAT score of 51 or higher and success on AP exams. Subsequently, a profile identifying these students was developed and used to target students who had potential to succeed in an AP course. Students were then encouraged to take AP exams after consulting with parents and teachers. Grier (2002) found that many more students scored above the 51-point range than were enrolled in AP courses. Consequently, the district formulated a plan to reach more of these students.

This district planned a two-pronged initiative to increase the number of AP students. First, principals were told to increase the number of AP courses offered at the high school (Grier, 2002). Second, the district offered professional staff development and curricular review to prevent a watered-down level of rigor (Grier). Goals were established to raise the level of minority students taking AP courses and exams so that eventually AP learner percentages approximated the percentages represented in the total school system (Grier). With these two directives established, the increase in AP student population led to the need for more teachers to teach AP courses. Grier noted that some teachers were

hesitant, but the district responded with increased staff development for improved instruction and curricular development.

Ancillary Approaches or Programs

Additional programs and strategies proposed by the teachers themselves offer pathways in collaborative activities such as cohorts, curricular and instructional modifications, and tutoring opportunities. Educational leadership also seeks ways to increase the numbers of students in AP courses without a reduction in rigor or expectations. For example, earlier skill preparation of students, advanced use of technology, and sophisticated teacher preparation and training for teaching AP courses are some of the strategies employed.

Teachers of AP students have employed innovative strategies to help all of their students succeed on the exams. At DeSoto High School in Texas, teacher Davis and his AP colleagues have noted that non-gifted, AP students have a vast range of abilities (Davis, 2006). This issue generates a different focus for the AP teacher. AP teachers must direct their efforts toward reinforcing needed skills and drilling students rather than exploring the curriculum with deep meaning and application. They have perceived that these students need help augmenting their critical reading, writing, and thinking skills (Davis).

Wakefield High School in Arlington, Virginia, took a team approach to support students as AP course enrollment increased (Beitler, Bushong, & Reid, 2004). The majority of these new students were male Latino/Hispanic and African American students. The teachers viewed their task of educating students as

serving as coaches, leading their teams. The teachers challenged their students while creating a sense of passion and push for excellence (Beitler et al.).

The AP teachers at Wakefield began the process by carefully selecting students during their middle school years. Specific criteria (strengths in math and English) were used in choosing these students; however, no student who had a desire to enroll in an AP class was turned away. The teachers and students began to call themselves a cohort, emphasizing the relationship-building aspect of the new program (Beitler et al., 2004). For this purpose, members of the group were asked to participate in weekly lunch meetings and other events such as a college trip, an outdoor education experience, and a parent-son banquet. The cohort also built upon the idea of students challenging other students to succeed. In this way, the program's focus was on the students. The teachers at Wakefield understood that this program would be in constant flux, adapting to the unique needs of students (Beitler et al.).

Hale (2007), an AP teacher at a Florida High School, approached the issue of higher numbers of at-risk students in his classroom in a unique and effective way. He did not focus on what these students did not know but on what they did know. He also approached the curriculum with a "thinking-outside-of-the-box" solution. Instead of using a standard, AP-suggested curriculum, he used sources with which the students would be more familiar that still met the goals of the AP program. Because he taught a predominantly African American class, he used the literature of African American authors and educators (Hale). He

concentrated on creating successful situations for his students. He stated that he “never led them into a learning situation in which they would feel a cold failure” (p. 3).

Davis (2006) shared a similar experience. Her high school’s English Department had a policy that students must maintain a 3.0 GPA as a requirement for participation in a college-level composition course (p. 26). As part of a pilot study, African American “C” average high school students who had never been enrolled in college or honors level courses and with GPAs below the minimum 3.0 were placed in this course. David found that, at the conclusion of the course, the scores of these African American students were comparable to the scores of Caucasian students with “A” and “B” averages. This experience “forced her to rethink” past assumptions regarding the abilities of at-risk students (p. 26).

One of the key aspects of the College Board’s goals was to increase the number of AP courses (and by implication the number of students in AP classes). The district reports that, after three years of implementation, student enrollment in AP classes has increased, curricular rigor has been augmented, and new improved instructional methods have been developed (Swanson, 2007).

The Broward County Public Schools in southern Florida also decided to increase AP student participation. An important goal of this increased interest in AP courses was for the ethnic composition of the AP programs to emulate the composition of the district populace as a whole (Blasik et al., 2003). The district

leadership wanted to create a core set of AP and honors courses designed to be available to all high school students in the district.

Other approaches developed by districts to support AP programs include (a) requiring half of the AP teachers at a school site to have a master's degree, (b) requiring that teachers attend The College Board's AP training before initially teaching a course (Karnes & Nugent, 2002), (c) requiring that veteran AP teachers attend retraining courses every three years (Grier, 2002), and (d) eliminating enrollment barriers to AP courses (Grier).

Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) examined the wide disparity of college-choice activities between socioeconomic groups. Important tasks were identified by the authors as essential for at-risk students to complete during their pre-college years, which included student enrollment in challenging courses as early as eighth grade. Even enrollment in a single honors-level course before the junior year of high school increased college enrollment numbers by 32%.

Broward County Public Schools in Florida supports increased student participation in AP courses in several ways (Blasik et al., 2003). First, they have sponsored district-wide research projects designed to identify potential AP students. Additionally, they have provided funding for the increased need and utilization of technology, both for the recognition of prospective students and for curricular support for instruction in AP classes. They also created a distance learning program for students in high schools that do not offer the AP courses that relate to their strengths and interests. These courses allow students to have

access to AP curriculum and testing, even though they are not enrolled in a specific AP course.

This program also provides teacher collaboration to improve instructional practices. Further, the district established a monitoring process for AP programs as a district priority using disaggregated data to improve instruction and curriculum and to increase enrollment. Finally, the district provides an electronic review process for students who complete coursework in the fall semester. By the time that the AP exams are taken in May, these students have reviewed the necessary material and are prepared for the exam (Blasik et al., 2003).

AVID

AVID was developed in 1980 by Mary Catherine Swanson, an English teacher at Claremont High School in San Diego, California, to assist her school with the influx of academically less-prepared students, following court-ordered desegregation. Her belief in her students' potential and expectancy for their success led to ideas and interventions that form the basis of the AVID program today. The AVID program's primary goal is to prepare students for college acceptance, attendance, and graduation (Negroni, 2006 Stringfield & Land, 2002). AVID has embraced student participation in AP programs as an integral factor in determining student success (Negroni; Powell-McMillan, 2005; Stringfield & Land).

AVID is a college-preparatory program designed to provide at-risk students with the necessary guidance and support to participate in a rigorous

college-preparatory curriculum to prepare for acceptance and attendance at a college or university. As of fall 2008, AVID figures showed that the program had grown from the original one-school model to serving approximately 3,500 schools in 45 states and overseas (Negroni, 2006; Stringfield & Land, 2002). AVID asserts that the best way to prepare high school students for college is for these students to take college-level courses in high school (Negroni; Powell-McMillan, 2005; Stringfield & Land). AVID also focuses on providing necessary supports for AVID students in all of their classes. The AVID elective course provides assistance by training students in study and meta-cognitive skills as well as by offering in-class tutoring several days each week.

AVID has been instrumental in providing a professional development support plan for teachers of at-risk students. AVID's influence has had a powerful effect in over 500 California schools (Powell-McMillan, 2005). Powell-McMillan found significant levels of improvement for AVID students in AP courses and in passing rates on AP exams.

Access and Rigor

As noted above, teachers, administrators, and counselors have participated in practices such as tracking that have limited AP course student enrollment. These practices are often propagated as a matter of institutional practice (M. J. Wilson, personal communication, January 20, 2009). As schools broaden access to AP classes, minority students are encouraged to take high-level courses that interest them. Latino students enrolled in AP Spanish, for

example, achieve a level of success that positively affects their choices when deciding on future advanced classes (Sheets, 1995). Some schools modify prerequisites for taking AP courses (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2003). These modifications do not relax the requirements of the course; rather, they allow for more options when decisions are made for AP enrollment (Burriss et al., 2007). These same schools also spend an increased amount of time counseling at-risk students (Burriss et al.). These sessions with counselors, teachers, and coordinators provide students with the knowledge that an advocate at the school is looking out for their best interests.

Pre-high school counseling and course selection are a crucial step in the process of developing a successful AP student (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2003). It is important that future AP students have a rigorous curriculum before they enter high school, particularly in math and science courses (Burriss et al., 2007). If the junior high or middle schools that feed students into a particular high school are unaware of the preparation that learners need for advanced courses, students are disadvantaged. It will be difficult for the at-risk and average student to make up this gap in learning high-level curriculum.

As has been noted, teachers are concerned that increasing enrollment in their AP courses with less prepared and skilled students might cause test scores and overall achievement to go down (M. J. Wilson, personal communication, January 20, 2009). However, the College Board, districts, and principals are encouraging teachers to utilize teaching strategies that keep their standards high

(Swanson, 2007). At-risk and average students may need more support, but, when motivated, they have the ability to be successful in advanced courses (E. Atkinson, personal communication, January 9, 2009; Oakes, 1992). The course workshops sponsored by the College Board have helped to alleviate teachers' apprehensions about including lower achieving students in AP courses (Burriss et al., 2007).

According to the College Board, teachers are realizing that increased numbers of at-risk students in AP classes demand pedagogical developments, suitable materials, and advanced strategies for maintaining rigor while supporting these students. These innovations will benefit all students in AP courses, not just at-risk learners (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2003).

Blasik et al.'s (2003) study of increased AP student participation in the Broward Public Schools in Florida found that AP course content and rigor have not been diluted by the addition of at-risk learners. The results also indicated that all minority students (except African American) have produced AP exam pass rates comparable to the percentages of Caucasian students on these assessments.

It is important to note that the College Board, districts, schools, and instructors are dedicated to maintaining and increasing the rigor of AP courses (Metcalf, 2007). In this movement to increase AP course participation, the commitment is to increase access without compromising the rigor that makes AP a unique program.

The number students of color taking AP exams in the Broward County School District, Florida, from 2000-2002 has increased. The percentage of Latino/Hispanic students taking AP courses rose from 21% in 2000 to 23% in 2002. Over the same time period, African American student participation in AP courses rose from 12% to 14%, and Asian students in AP courses increased from 6% to 8% (Blasik et al., 2003). The district high schools of Broward County affirm the commitment to the rigor needed for the AP courses. Greater numbers of minority students have access to this district's AP courses; high standards have been maintained while simultaneously increasing access.

Gaps in the Literature

One of the most significant gaps in the literature on AP programs is that the vast majority of the research used a quantitative methodology. The only qualitative study was conducted by Conchas and Rodriguez (2008), who utilized a single high school for their work, similar to the methodology of this study.

Quantitative and qualitative methodologies offer different types of results. Quantitative tools that are used to understand the implications of at-risk students participating in AP courses produce data largely related to results. These data cannot provide an understanding of the "real-life experiences" of students. Quantitative methodologies, in contrast, provide data that reveal how students feel or how they achieved or accomplished an objective. Qualitative research can help explain, for example, why a practice that, in theory, should work does not work in a specific setting. Qualitative research provides the educational

community with an opportunity to perceive how administration, faculty, and staff perceive and deal with educational issues. Finally, qualitative research offers the opportunity to study a school's culture as well as the individuals that comprise it.

The research presented lacked an explanation for why schools fail to enact changes to improve the opportunities for at-risk students. It also did not address the failure of programs in schools that attempted to implement new policies regarding the AVID student in AP courses. Moreover, research on the experiences and practices of the AVID student and teacher in AP programs are lacking. The methodology used in the present study, as described in the following chapter, sought to address these gaps.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology. The chapter begins with a restatement of the research questions, followed by the conceptual framework and a discussion of critical ethnography and its relationship to the research questions, the context of the study, the research design, the role of the researcher, data collection methods, and data analysis and interpretation. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Restatement of the Research Questions

The primary research question this study investigated is as follows:

What impact does AVID students' participation in AP courses have on the high school culture?

The secondary research question this study investigated is as follows:

What are participants' perceptions of the educational equity of the AP program in terms of how power is managed, modified, or shifted within the culture under study?

Conceptual Framework

Qualitative research, as described by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), has five important characteristics: (a) research is conducted in the context of the natural setting; (b) research data are descriptive, often in the form of words and pictures;

(c) research is concerned with a process rather than a product or outcomes; (d) research is grounded in inductive inquiry and analysis; and (e) meaning is lifted from participant perspectives. The conceptual framework for the present study has two lenses: critical theory and school culture.

Critical Theory

Critical theory, as described by Kincheloe and McLaren (2000), is “an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within society” (p. 291). Critical theorists understand the problems that schools encounter from the viewpoint of the oppressed (Noddings, 2007). In this vein, Kincheloe and McLaren stated that “schools, as venues of hope, can become sites of resistance and democratic impossibility” (p. 280).

Critical theorists shed light on the business culture’s influence over education. Capitalism is criticized for its lack of humanity and narrow focus on economic advantages (Ozmon & Craver, 2008). In education, this narrow focus has affected policy and curriculum to such a degree that the power of the existing elite is sustained (Adler, 1982; Ozmon & Craver). In contrast, critical theory promotes a sense of social transformation, a seeking of humanitarian change (Gramsci, 1971). It also provides a mirror of society so that a critical examination of inequities is not overlooked (Ozmon & Craver). Theory and practice are melded together to provide motivation and action for social progress (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002), particularly focused on educational equity concerns with regard to race and racism.

One of the foundational issues of this study comes from research regarding “tracking.” Tracking is the practice of separating students into different courses or course sequences based on a past level of achievement or proficiency, as measured by a pre-established test score or course grade (Haury & Milbourne, 1999). Dornbusch (1994) noted that tracking is a practice that has created inequity in education. Further, Grubb (2009) stated:

The evidence indicates that low-performing students suffer not as much from inadequate revenues as from inadequate resources, including ineffective teaching, low-quality curriculum tracks, and detrimental school climates—again, the kinds of resources that cannot be readily bought with money alone. (p. 10)

Specifically, greater proportions of at-risk students have been placed in lower - achievement track courses (Oakes, 1992). Research also has provided evidence that the benefits of placing students in lower track courses are negligible and that the opportunity to participate in higher-level courses increases achievement for all students (Burris & Welner, 2005).

In regard to critical theory, Noddings stated:

Perhaps it would be better, they (critical theorists) suggest, to insist on forms of education designed for the varied and particular needs of students. At the theoretical level, educators might question the educational value of the present curriculum instead of accepting it as a given and trying to give all children access to it. The debate over the curriculum and

privileged knowledge may be one of the most important issues that the educator of today encounters. (pp. 75-76)

Apple (1995) noted that "it has become increasingly obvious that our educational institutions may serve less as the engines of democracy and equality than many of us would like" (p. 27). McLaren (1999) expressed his vision for combating inequity:

Critical educators must always ask themselves tough questions: What is the hidden history of otherness contained within our narratives of liberation? Whom do they exclude, marginalize, repress? How can we regather what has been lost and fill the empty space of despair with revolutionary hope? Hope stipulates an Other who stands before us. (p. 34).

According to Shields (2004), educational leaders must drive the focus on educational equity in schools. This is accomplished by initiating moral dialogues that engage multiple voices in questioning and improving existing systems and values. Coleman (1990) and Beck (1994) emphasize that education revolves around individual students and their present and future roles in society.

School Culture

School culture is the second lens of the theoretical foundation. Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2003) believe that, to combat injustice in schools due to race, gender, and ethnicity, school leaders should examine school culture. School culture refers to the way things are done in an organization, and the

culture reflects the values, traditions, and language accepted by those who comprise it (Crang & Turner, 1996). Moreover, research indicates that teachers and administrators in contemporary school cultures hold high expectations for students, value quality instruction, and promote higher-level thinking (McEwan, 2003). In a school culture that offers an AP program, increasing numbers of students are held to even higher standards in course content, writing, and thinking, as evidenced by the demands of complex homework assignments. When a school offers an AP program, it changes the culture of the school by raising student and teacher expectations.

Davis (2006) further developed the concept of culture, using the term cultural expectations, which refers to the hidden rules of a culture. These rules help “keep outsiders outside and insiders controlled” (p. 4). Culture, from this perspective, has a feature of power, restricting “outsiders” and restraining “insiders.” These rules, however, can set up a potentially limiting equilibrium, as seen a dialogue between a counselor and Davis:

While teaching a workshop on the (achievement) gap, I suggested that the school staff in the upper-middle-class suburban district where the workshop took place have the ability to prepare all of their students for college, notwithstanding those with severe mental disabilities. A counselor vehemently disagreed saying, “Not all of our kids have the ability to go to college.” I then asked the counselor the following question: “You have two children—do you expect them to go to college?” The counselor answered,

"Well, yes," in an exasperated tone. Then why shouldn't all your parents have the same expectations for their children? I replied. The next morning the counselor announced to the group that she had something to say. She told the group that she had never thought of the college question in quite the same way it had been asked. She now understood that her blanket assumption that some kids don't have the ability to go to college was dangerous and potentially limiting to students in her care (Davis, 2006, p. 25).

This conversation illustrates the type of problem that this research aspires to address. Whether by a lack of knowledge or an unintentional attempt to keep the status quo of "hidden rules" in place, this phenomenon is real and is occurring in our schools today. In conclusion, Davis (2006) stated, "The school culture determines, in part, the academic achievement of its students" (p. 27), placing a large portion of the responsibility on school administrators who must act to ensure equity and fairness. Davis' conclusion speaks to the need for a critical ethnographic study aimed at understanding these perceptions.

In this study, culture has two important meanings. First, culture refers to values and beliefs as reflected in the policies of the school, whether they are obvious, written, spoken, traditional, underlying, or hidden (Geertz, 1973). The business of school depends on policies; they govern the decisions and choices made every day. Second, culture refers to the practices and behaviors that are exhibited throughout the school (Sewell, 1999). In this sense, policy is

meaningless without practice, and practice is not effective without policy. The two are inseparable and harmonious.

Lindsey, Roberts, and Campbell Jones (2005) believe that once leaders are more aware of cultural influences at their schools, they are better able to enact new policies and practices to right past inequity and injustice. They stated, "Equitable, inclusive and socially just practices, as manifested in the behaviors of individuals and groups, are critical aspects of a culturally competent and proficient school environment" (p. 17). Thus, school leaders must rely on the merging of policy and practice to produce more effective schools. As Bustamante, Nelson, and Onwuegbuzie (2009) explained:

Educational leadership preparation programs can encourage school leaders to develop the knowledge and skills to advocate for policies and legislation that support inclusive and culturally sensitive practices, rather than accept and enforce policies at face value without questioning and observing whether outcomes are equitable and socially just. (p. 819)

Further, Apple (1999) observed that, without effective practices employed in schools, pedagogy remains at the "theoretical or rhetorical" level. It is in action, he stated, that "the politics of curriculum and teaching must be enacted" (p. 215). These educational theorists, researchers, and experts advocate for the importance of analyzing school culture from the perspective of practice.

Schools that promote an atmosphere of high expectations are healthy schools (Hoy & Feldman, 1999). While high school athletics, school clubs, and

special programs have served as vehicles for promoting equity, access to equity in academic programs has lagged behind. Research indicates that average students, if motivated, can and do achieve academically and can narrow the achievement gap (Davis, 2002; Hall & Hord, 2006). Students accepting the challenge of an AP course are afforded increased opportunities for college participation and success (Adelman, 2006).

Critical Ethnography Methodology

This research used the qualitative method of critical ethnography for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This method provides a vehicle for in-depth examination of the aspects of school culture that influence the participants. While the increasing numbers of AVID students participating in AP courses and taking AP exams could be studied using quantitative measures, this approach would not reveal how AVID students construct personal meaning from the experience of taking AP courses, would not determine whether AVID students feel that they are being well prepared or under-prepared for college by taking in AP courses, and would not determine the extent to which AP teachers are modifying curricular, instructional, and assessment practices to increase the probability that AVID students will pass AP exams.

Further, a quantitative study would not provide thick, rich descriptions of administrators' underlying assumptions about the AP program or document the actions that administrators are taking on behalf of minority high school students to encourage them to pursue higher education. Thus, this study examined the

cultural aspects of one high school's AP program by holistically exploring the multiple perspectives of Social Science and World Language teachers, AVID students enrolled in AP courses during the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 academic years, and school administrators who oversee these innovative programs.

This research was intended to identify, beyond the simple reporting of AP exam results, how AVID students are coping day by day in their advanced classes and reveal how and why students are achieving the course objectives. A critical ethnography as a method of research allows the researcher the opportunity to discover the inner workings of the culture on a high school campus.

Critical theory, as described by Kincheloe and McLaren (2000), is "an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within society" (p. 291). This theory, when combined with the discipline of ethnography, creates the critical ethnographic method of research. Quantz (1992) described critical ethnography as "a discourse, a form in which a researcher utilizing field methods that place the researcher on-site attempts to re-present the 'culture,' the 'consciousness,' or the 'lived experiences of people living in asymmetrical power relations'" (p. 448). Thus, critical ethnography is a method of research that enables the researcher to discover the inner workings of a culture.

Historically, ethnographies have focused on the cultures of schools, public health organizations, and urban development conditions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Ethnography as a method of research was first developed by social

anthropologists who sought to portray a rudimentary description of peoples and races (Geertz, 1973). Fetterman (1988) stated, "Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture; the description may be of a small tribal group in an exotic land or a classroom in middle-class suburbia" (p. 3), while Wolcott (1987) stated, "The purpose of ethnographic research is to describe and interpret cultural behavior" (p. 43). Genzuk (2003) asserted that ethnographic studies focus on "any human arena" (p. 1).

Critical ethnography goes a step further. Critical ethnographies analyze the power dynamics existing within a culture, including the factors of resistance, dominance, or exploitation. The school culture to be examined in this study may have, purposefully or unwittingly, engaged in limiting equal access to resources that would enable individual students to fully develop into their highest potential. This study critically examines whether students were limited access to AP classes based upon unfair assumptions regarding their at-risk classification.

The critical ethnographic approach is defined by Quantz (1992), who stated:

Whereas the traditional ethnographer understands the ethnographic project as either complete or in itself as a part of the idealist project of ethnology, the critical ethnographer sees the ethnographic project as an aspect of critical theory, which must eventually be completed in political and social action. (p. 467)

These definitions provide an understanding of the critical ethnographic method and why it is appropriate for this study, in which the culture of the school is critically examined.

Context of the Study

The high school that was studied is one of six comprehensive high schools in a district that serves three different communities. Each of these communities has a population of over 59,000 individuals. Central High School (CHS) was established in 1959 and has a long-standing reputation for providing students with an academically rigorous curriculum that successfully prepares them for post-secondary education. Their Academic Performance Index (API) has increased 46 points (807 to 853) over the past three years (2005 to 2008).

For the 2008-2009 school year, the school had an enrollment of 2,632 students. There are 117 teachers on staff, all of whom provide instruction in their credentialed area and who meet the *No Child Left Behind* “highly qualified teacher” requirement.

The demographics of the student body are as follows: 55% Asian or Filipino, 24% Caucasian, and 19% Latino/Hispanic, with the remainder comprised of a mixture of multiple ethnicities. Of CHS students, 43% report English as their home language. Additionally, there are more than 30 other languages listed as the primary home language, including Korean (34%), Spanish (9%), Mandarin (3%), and Vietnamese (2%). Eight world languages are taught at the school.

Of the students, 36% are identified as Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) students. This percentage has been shrinking over the past five years, however. Most of these students participate in honors classes, AP classes, and/or the IB Program.

In the English Language Learner program, 191 students are English Language Learners (ELL). Campus-wide, 1,260 students are designated as Fluent-English Proficient or Re-designated Fluent English Proficient. The school has a special education department for mild to moderate special education students. There is also a growing Engineering Program, which is unique in the district.

The high school has a successful AVID program, which has been in existence for three years, with 165 students in six classes distributed in two support classes for freshmen, two for sophomores, and two for juniors. The majority of students take a college preparatory curriculum. Students interested in participating in the AVID program must apply, be interviewed, attend a general meeting with their parents, and sign an academic contract before being allowed into the program. Of the AVID students, 97% receive a "C" or better in all of their classes. In the past two years, nine students have either been removed from the AVID program due to poor grades or due to a lack of interest in remaining in the program; their parents have opted to remove them.

AVID students are challenged by their teachers, tutors, and advisors to pursue a challenging curriculum. For the 2008-2009 school year, 13 of these

students enrolled in six different AP courses. Eight are enrolled in AP United States History, one in AP World History, one in AP Art History, one in AP Psychology, one in AP Human Geography, and one in AP Spanish Language (one AVID student is currently enrolled in two AP courses, AP United States History and AP World History). In the 2007-2008 school year, two AVID students took AP Art History. One of these students took the AP Art History exam, receiving a score of 2 (college credit not awarded); the other student opted not to take the exam. The AVID and AP programs have begun the process of modifying instruction, curriculum, and assessment to provide a supportive and appropriate environment for all students in AP courses, without decreasing the rigor of the curriculum.

It is interesting to note that all of the administrators and 85% of the teachers were Caucasian, with the remaining 15% of Asian heritage. The racial composition the students who participated in the study were Asian, 50%; Hispanic, 38%; and Caucasian, 12%.

Research Design

This study, although largely qualitative, employed both quantitative and qualitative tools. A quantitative tool, the questionnaire, was used to gather the perceptions of a larger sample of the participants than those who participated in the qualitative portion. The questionnaire was used first to establish the preliminary views of administrators, teachers, and students at CHS. The

qualitative aspect of this research included document review, interviews, and the researcher's own perceptions.

Participants

The participants for this study included one high school principal, two assistant principals, one high school counselor, one AVID coordinator, the entire high school faculty (including 29 AP teachers), and 100 students attending the school. The school granted permission for the researcher to conduct this study at the school site (Appendix A). Only administrators (Appendix B), teachers (Appendix C), and students who volunteered (Appendix D) participated. Their participation required parental consent (Appendix E) and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix F).

Administration

A questionnaire was distributed to the school administration (one principal, two assistant principals, the school's AVID coordinator, and the counselor overseeing the AVID program), inquiring about their perceptions of AP as a means to gather data about the collective values, attitudes, and beliefs of the high school culture (Appendix G). The administration of CHS is comprised of five individuals: the principal, three assistant principals, and a dean of student services. The researcher, who has been at the school for five years, is one of the assistant principals and is responsible for overseeing instruction and student affairs. Other CHS staff members administer programs at the school, for example, the AVID and the AP programs.

The administrative team holds a weekly meeting in which each administrator offers information about and insight into the operations and culture of the school. During these discussions, important points relevant to this study were offered, particularly in regard to the cultural “power plays” that occur on campus. As a supervisor at the school, the researcher regularly visits classrooms and evaluates faculty. This has enabled the researcher to observe firsthand every classroom and teacher at the school, including the AVID and AP classrooms.

Three school administrators were interviewed with a semi-structured interview (Appendix H). These administrators include the school’s principal, the coordinator of the AVID program on campus, and the counselor overseeing the AP program. These educational leaders are the most knowledgeable because their responsibilities include oversight of the AVID program. During the interviews, the principal, the AVID coordinator, and the AP counselor were given the opportunity to elucidate any responses that are not clear to the researcher. The three administrators are described below.

Ms. Smithson, AVID Coordinator. Ms. Smithson is an energetic, dedicated educator in her mid-40s. She has been a teacher and an administrator at CHS for the entire 20+ years of her tenure with the district. She is assigned to the Business Department and is the department chair. Four years ago, she was approached by the principal to begin an AVID program at the site. She embraced the idea with passion and purpose. As a keen observer, she has witnessed and

experienced both the years when students and parents wanting to enroll at the school had to be turned away for lack of room and the more successful years. However, she has also seen the school decline in recent years. Although still highly successful, CHS is no longer the most highly desired school in the district. There are many reasons for this decline; the primary one is that students in the “middle,” the non-AP, college preparatory students, did not receive sufficient attention. The academic programs at the school tend to serve the needs of the learning disabled student or the advanced, honors, AP student.

The AVID program was designed for the low- to middle-achieving-level student, usually a student from an at-risk category, who wants to be challenged and wants to learn. These are the students that Ms. Smithson has sought to serve. She was so successful in the past four years that the AVID program at the school has become a county model.

The interview with Ms. Smithson took place in two phases. Initially, because she was hospitalized for approximately ten days, an e-interview was conducted. The interview questions were emailed to Ms. Smithson; when she felt better, she responded to the questions in a return e-mail. The second phase took place in her classroom. We met after school in November 2009. We sat at two student desks in her student-friendly classroom, which is filled with examples of student work. As we began the interview, Ms. Smithson’s enthusiasm became obvious. She is committed to the success of her students, which includes assisting her AVID students in the process of applying to college. When a

student is accepted at a college, she has a classroom celebration. As we talked, Ms. Smithson was animated, using different inflections as well as her hands and facial expressions to show her knowledge of and interest in the school culture, the AP program, the AVID program, and her students.

Her responses to the e-interview were concise and clear. Then, when we talked face to face, we concentrated on questions related to power issues at the site. Power issues permeate many of the responses found in all the interviews. We first discussed examples of past inequitable practices. Ms. Smithson's perceptions of past practice at the school were candid and revealing. She did not attempt to use "politically correct" language to describe the school.

Ms. Jones, AP Counselor. Ms. Jones is the counselor assigned to oversee the AP program. Her responsibilities include advising the other four counselors regarding the placement of students in AP courses, overseeing the entire AP testing process, analyzing and disseminating the results of the AP testing information, advising teachers on best practices for AP curriculum, instructional, and assessment practices, and advising and placing (or not placing) students in her AP courses.

Ms. Jones is a former honors math teacher and has worked at CHS for approximately nine years. She is professional and has a pleasant demeanor. She understands the issues that face schools, teachers, students, and parents in regard to AP courses. The interview was conducted in her small office at the school. She often smiled when answering questions; however, her facial

expressions revealed uneasiness when certain questions were asked. She is very close to the former lead counselor, Mrs. Campenella, who was removed from that position in the summer of 2009. One significant reason that Mrs. Campenella was removed was that she believed in maintaining the exclusive nature of the AP program. Her limiting views were not in line with those of the administration regarding opening access to AP courses to greater numbers of students. It is also interesting to note that Mrs. Campenella was the former AP counselor and that she had trained Ms. Jones in her present role as AP counselor. As the interview progressed, Ms. Jones revealed that she believes that access to AP courses should be limited. This is the same stance to which Mrs. Campenella adhered and the same stance that created the exclusionary school culture of the past.

Mr. Brownlee, Principal. The third administrator interview was conducted with Mr. Brownlee, the principal of CHS. Mr. Brownlee, a good-natured man who has a great sense of humor and is a celebrated storyteller, has been the principal for four years. As an educational leader, Mr. Brownlee adheres to the simple adage, "If you use power, you lose power." Simply put, Mr. Brownlee's leadership style is to create opportunities for those involved in the process and decision making, in whatever the topic may be, to meet, discuss the circumstances, and work together toward a decision. He rarely dictates his wishes to the staff. His true genius is that he works behind the scenes to inject questions and different points of view on the issue under review. He also seeks to promote and support

to key influential positions on the campus the individuals that he believes agree with his stances on important programs.

When he became the principal of CHS, one of the first shortcomings at the school of which he became aware was the lack of academic attention given to the average-achieving, at-risk student. He recruited a highly qualified, motivated, and learning-centered teacher, Ms. Smithson, to institute the AVID program at the school. He allowed her to create the program as she wanted, knowing that Ms. Smithson's priority would be to meet the needs of the students rather than to take advantage of the AVID program to promote her own personal ambitions.

Faculty

A questionnaire (Appendix I) was distributed to the entire school faculty, inquiring about their perceptions of AP as a means to ascertain the collective values, attitudes, and beliefs of the high school culture. Additionally, three AP faculty members were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix J). These three teachers were selected by experience; specifically, the AP teacher with the greatest amount of AP instructional experience, least amount, and an average amount were chosen. During the interviews, the individual teachers were given the opportunity to elucidate any responses that were unclear to the researcher. Interviewing teachers with these three experience levels provided an understanding of long-standing teacher perceptions regarding the educational equity aspects of this study. It also provided insight into the strength of any resistance to including lower-achieving

students in their courses. Observations of these three teachers in the process of working with AVID students also were conducted.

As noted above, the teachers were selected, in part, by their years of experience as AP teachers. One teacher has many years of experience as an AP teacher, another has an average amount of experience, and one teacher is a relatively new AP course instructor. The first teacher interviewed was the one with the least experience. These instructors may teach the Social Science, English, Math, and Visual Art courses in which AVID students are enrolled and which include AP United States History, AP World History, AP Human Geography, AP Psychology, AP Art History, AP English Composition, AP Statistics, and AP Art. The three teachers are described below.

Mr. Hawkins, Teacher. Mr. Hawkins, who is in his late 30s, is an English teacher at CHS and has been teaching at the school for 13 years. In the past, he was assigned exclusively non-AP, college preparatory courses. However, for the 2008-2009 and the 2009-2010 school years, he was assigned to instruct AP English Language Composition. Students seem to enjoy his classes, and the standardized test scores of his students reveal that the students in his classes are learning at above-average rates when compared to the students of the other teachers at the school who teach the same courses. He teaches with a comfortable, "laid-back" style. He often can be found discussing lessons with his students from his large desk chair.

Mr. Hawkins is not a teacher who arrives early or stays late. Of all the teachers interviewed, his interview took the shortest length of time. Although his answers tended to be short, they were succinct. The interview was conducted in his classroom, after school. Although follow-up questions were asked, and Mr. Hawkins was offered a chance to elaborate on his answers, he did not add information. When asked each question, Mr. Hawkins paused and contemplated his answer before speaking. As revealed in his answers, he understands the perspectives of his fellow teachers. He appreciates their concerns and why they are reluctant to work with a student of lower ability who needs differentiated instruction to achieve success. To the outsider, Mr. Hawkins appears to be willing to assist the at-risk, AVID student with improved instructional and assessment methods; however, the researcher, as a site administrator, has not witnessed a variety of instructional teaching strategies employed in his classroom. Nevertheless, his quotations present a noteworthy view of the school culture.

Mr. Garrison, Teacher. Mr. Garrison is an important educational leader at CHS. He is a graphic arts teacher, an AP and IB teacher, a coach, the Fine Arts department chair, and the IB Coordinator. Having taught at CHS for 22 years, his knowledge and understanding of school culture were invaluable for this study. He has taught an AP course at the school for 21 years. The 45-minute interview took place in this researcher's office at the school. Mr. Garrison spoke with a passion for students; he is a true advocate for what best benefits students. The discussion lasted long after the questions were answered.

Mr. Garrison is in his mid-40s and displays a laid-back, “surfer dude” personality. He is, however, a highly intelligent and knowledgeable professional educator. More than two-fifths of his daily responsibilities are dedicated to his role as IB Coordinator. This high-profile position at the school oversees a program that draws many students to CHS. For example, at recent (January 9 and 23, 2010) Honors/Pre-IB Entrance Exam days, over 425 eighth grade students came to CHS to take the three-hour exam. Mr. Garrison, as a school leader, understands the key concerns of the AVID and AP programs. As will be illustrated by his perceptions, he knows the past cultural practices at the school and the recent best practices research, and he has an idea of where the focus of change and improvement should lie.

Mr. Farley, Teacher. The final teacher interview was conducted with Mr. Farley, who has been a social science teacher at CHS for 14 years. Eleven of those years have been spent as a teacher of AP United States History (APUSH). APUSH is the course that has the highest enrollment nationwide of any AP course, which is true at CHS as well. The interview with Mr. Farley took place in his classroom, after school. Like Mr. Hawkins, he made little elaboration to the questions asked. He spoke with little emotion, in a “matter-of-fact” style.

Students

After parental permission was granted, a questionnaire was distributed to a sampling of students via a sealed envelope (Appendix K). The students were asked to return the questionnaire within 48 hours. The students participating in

the study are high school seniors, juniors, and sophomores. AVID students who are enrolled in their AP courses were observed. AVID students make up 12% of the freshman class, 11% of the sophomore class, and 6% of the junior class. The results of the questionnaire and observations are utilized to understand student perceptions of the AP courses in which they are enrolled. Student grades and transcripts also were accessed and utilized in the course of the study. The students chosen for observations were selected based on their affiliation with an at-risk economic, racial, or ethnic group.

Additionally, five AVID students enrolled in AP courses for the 2009-2010 school year were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix L). These five students were randomly selected after utilizing the above-noted criteria. Ethnographers utilize the standard of “judgmental sampling” to decide on the numbers of subjects to interview (Fetterman, 1998). Initially, two AVID students who had taken an AP course and passed an AP exam were selected. According to the judgment of this researcher, these five students provide a sufficiently representative sample of the perceptions of students who have experienced a complete year-long AP course. These five students represent approximately one-fourth of the AVID students who passed their AP exam.

Of the five students interviewed, one student was chosen from each of the courses instructed by one of three AP teachers who were selected to be interviewed. This enabled a fuller understanding of the impact of these courses

on the school's culture. Teacher and student perceptions of the same course strengthen the validity of the research. Because the number of AVID students enrolled in AP courses is small, these students provide a representative sample of approximately one-fifth of the AVID students enrolled in AP courses. The interviews with these students provided an emerging viewpoint of the impact of their participation in an AP course on the school culture. The students provided rich, full descriptions of their experiences. They were also observed as they participated in their AP classes. These students were enrolled in the Social Science, English, and Math courses in which AVID students are enrolled.

Of the AVID students at CHS, students who were enrolled last year and are currently enrolled this year in an AP course have the greatest exposure to and experience with the school culture that is related to the AP program. Their experiences of meeting with counselors and AVID coordinators in the enrollment process, participating in an AP course from beginning to end, taking the AP exam, and then again enrolling in another AP course lend validity to this project. The five students interviewed are described below.

Carlos, Student. Carlos, who is Hispanic, is a senior at CHS and has been an AVID student since his freshman year in school. This year's senior AVID class is the first class that includes AVID students who will graduate from CHS. Last school year, Carlos took the APUSH and the AP Art History courses and passed both of the exams. Currently, he is participating in the AP Psychology course. He plans to take the AP exam for this course. Carlos is a pleasant young man, who

was willing to help with this study if it meant improving the school. Carlos's interview took place in the researcher's office after school.

Natalie, Student. Natalie and all of the student participants have much in common. They have all been enrolled in the AVID program for all of their high school year. Each participated in an AP course last school year and is currently enrolled in an AP course for this school year. Like Carlos, Natalie is also Hispanic. Natalie, different from the other student participants, is a junior. Last year, as a sophomore, she participated in an AP Social Science course and an AP Human Geography course and passed the AP exam for that course. Natalie's present AP course is AP Psychology. The interview took place after school in the researcher's office. She offered thoughtful answers to each of the questions and revealed her awareness of the school's culture.

Laura, Student. Laura, who is of Asian heritage, is a senior at CHS. Similar to the other students who were interviewed, Laura participated in two AP courses last school year, the APUSH course and AP Psychology and passed the AP exam for both courses. This school year, she is enrolled in AP Human Geography and is expected to take and pass the AP exam for this course. Laura was eager to help with this research project. Like several other student participants, she felt that if her participation could help to improve CHS, then she wanted to participate. Laura's interview was brief; however, she offered important perceptions.

Flora, Student. Flora, a senior who is Hispanic, is a friendly and pleasant young woman. During the previous school year, Flora participated in two AP courses, APUSH and AP Psychology, and passed the AP exam for both of these courses. This year, she is enrolled in the school's AP Human Geography course. The interview was conducted after school in the researcher's office.

Samuel, Student. Samuel, who is Asian, is a senior at the school and, last year, participated in an AP Psychology course and passed the AP exam for the course. This school year, he is taking the difficult AP Statistics course. His interview was the shortest in terms of time and the number of words. Many of his answers to the interview questions focused either on how the AVID program helped to prepare him for college or on ways in which he coped with the rigors of engaging in an AP class. These subjects, albeit important, are not of foremost interest in this study. Of all the students interviewed, Samuel seemed to be confused by a number of the questions. Attempts to help Samuel to understand the questions were, in most cases, futile. Nevertheless, Samuel offered important perceptions.

Role of the Researcher

Past experiences as a Social Science teacher, AP course teacher, and department chair, as well as the researcher's current position as an administrator lend credibility to the researcher. The researcher expected to observe, analyze, and interpret the data collected from an insider's perspective, an emic viewpoint, which is a key feature of the ethnographic method of research. Qualitative

research recognizes that all perspectives are situated and that unbiased perspectives are not possible. The researcher is an advocate for the at-risk student. Although many at-risk students will never see the inside of an AP classroom, the researcher believes that all students deserve access to AP programs. Past practices of AP course “gatekeeping” methods in the researcher’s district were, in the researcher’s view, oppressive and discriminatory. Examples of oppressive practices tacitly endorsed by the school culture include minimum scores on prerequisite exams, minimum grades in prerequisite courses, teacher recommendations for participation in AP courses, subjective counselor or teacher judgments (or lack thereof), and cumulative GPA. Critical theorists scrutinize situations in which power imbalances occur and explore discriminatory practices that prompt material transformation, beyond mere symbolic and theoretical change (Quantz, 1992). The school site under study is in need of this transformation.

The researcher’s position as assistant principal at the school is primary; therefore, the researcher is obligated to perform the roles and responsibilities for which he was hired. To account for this limitation, the researcher asked the principal to assign evaluations done by the researcher only to teachers who are not involved in the interview phase of the study.

The researcher has a compilation of significant notes that were generated as part of the research phase. Most of the remarks were noted either as observations of the school culture or as memos of the reflections on the data

collected. The embedded nature of the researcher's role in the school's culture and his position as an administrator establish the validity of the perceptions.

Data Collection Methods

A wide variety of research tools can be used to collect data in ethnographic research. They include, but are not limited to, field notes, observations, recordings, life histories, photography, documents, questionnaires, and surveys (Fetterman, 1998; Grbich, 2007; Peirce, 1995). For the purpose of this study, participant observations (in the form of descriptive field notes and reflective field notes), semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and the review of school and student transcripts and class work documents will be employed.

Observations

It is difficult to enumerate a precise number of observations. Due to the researcher's role as an administrator at the school site under study, observations could occur as frequently as daily. Ethnographic research design was chosen because the researcher is immersed in the school culture, and relevant data may occur spontaneously. Informal observations occurred as the subject matter arose, whether in administration meetings, leadership meetings, casual conversations with staff, or at any other time. Scheduled observations occurred in Social Science, English, and Math department classes. At the time that the study was conducted, the course most AVID students enrolled in was APUSH. Other courses observed were AP English Language and Composition, AP World

History, AP Human Geography, AP Psychology, and AP Statistics. The purpose of these observations was to gain an understanding of the modifications that teachers and students make when students with less academic preparation and fewer skills are participating in high level courses as well as to gain an understanding of the school culture.

Ethnographic Interviews and Questionnaires

Ethnographic interviews have become a commonly used qualitative methodology for collecting data (Aronson, 1992). The ethnographic interview, as defined by Spradley (1979), is “a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants” (p. 58). Spradley noted that the three most important elements of the interview are its explicit purpose, ethnographic explanation, and ethnographic questions. The critical ethnographic interview begins with establishing rapport with the participant. It then moves to what Grbich (2007) described as going beyond classical observation and interviewing to draw out more in-depth perspectives regarding an issue. The interview may even move to a more action-based tone, whereby the researcher may alert the participant of possible power imbalances or inequalities, with questions seeking their perspectives on these concerns.

The questionnaire items were designed to provide the researcher with a cursory understanding of the school culture as gleaned from their perceptions (Fetterman, 1998). Initially, questionnaires were utilized as a vehicle to ascertain

preliminary perceptions regarding AVID students enrolled in AP courses at CHS. They were used first in the data collection process and were distributed to the participants in the first 45 days of this phase of the study. The first part of the questionnaire contained Likert-scaled questions. The second part asked the participants to answer open-ended questions in their own words. When the questionnaires were collected, they were separated by the three groups. When this phase was completed, the responses of each group were compiled to create wide-ranging impressions for each of the answers on the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was distributed via email, and a paper copy also was distributed via placement in the teachers' mailboxes at the school. The questionnaire was given to the teachers in October 2009, and they were asked to return the questionnaire, in a sealed envelope, within one week.

Additionally, 100 students were asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire. These students were drawn from a random sample of AVID students on the school campus. The students were selected using a table of random numbers. Students were assigned a five-digit number by the school, and the student was selected by matching the number from the table of random numbers to the fourth digit of his or her student number. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher.

The questionnaire, contained in a sealed envelope that the student took home, was given to the selected students in their AVID class period in September 2009. Students were asked to return the questionnaire within one

week of its distribution. All responses were confidential, voluntary, and anonymous. No student names were used in the collection of data.

Once the questionnaires were completed, the interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal, the AVID Coordinator, the AP Counselor, and three AP teachers. Fundamental questions were as follows: How do teachers respond to the recommendations of the site administration to modify curriculum, instruction, and assessment in AP courses with AVID students? What modifications are made by both teachers and students when AVID students struggle in AP courses?

Five AVID students also were interviewed, using a semi-structured protocol. Appointments with the students were made, with parental consent, after school hours in a public office location at the school. The responses from this interview regarding student perceptions as they participate in AP classes were compared to the questionnaires completed in October. During the interviews, the individual students were given the opportunity to elucidate any responses that were unclear in the understanding of the researcher. The additional collected data were analyzed.

Documents

The documents proposed for collection and analysis for this study included the site AP exam results for the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years, individual AVID student in AP course exam scores (if available), AVID student transcripts, AVID student grade reports, AVID student progress reports,

AVID student test results and scores, and AVID student class assignments and scores. The District Course Catalogs for the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years were also utilized.

These documents provide additional data that were used to address the research questions. The documents enabled the researcher to gain a better understanding of the effect of AVID students' participation in AP courses on the school culture. The documents also provided information regarding the management and modification of the program. Combined with other data, the documents revealed shifts in power relationships in the school culture.

Genzuk (2003) explained that the ethnographer relies on personal experience as data are collected. These experiences may include a blend of historical, observational, and interview methods that utilize five types of data collection: interviews, observations, recordings, photographs, and excerpts of documents. One of the important guidelines for research is to "cross-validate and triangulate by gathering different kinds of data" (p. 5).

In a critical ethnography, the researcher must be aware of and include in the report evidence on how power is managed, modified, or shifted within the culture under study. He or she should disclose the attitudes and biases operating from within the community and those that are derived from his own experiences and perceptions. The critical ethnographer should be willing to wrestle with the complexities and diversities of a culture as a byproduct of conducting research and advocating for a position.

The ethnographer should be aware of his own biases and preconceived notions about behavior. He or she should consider the positive and negative aspects of bias. The ethnographer can sharpen the focus of the study if biases are explained. The study should maintain quality control through the use of “triangulation, contextualization, and a nonjudgmental orientation” (Fetterman, 1998, p. 2). Informed consent acquired beforehand is foundational for the legitimacy of research. The ethnographer should take great pains to ensure that the goals of the research are clear to the stakeholders involved in the data collection process (Genzuk, 2003).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The critical ethnography is a viable and accepted qualitative research design that fits the purpose of this research. The human culture of AP programs in high schools can be observed, questioned, and reviewed in such a way as to collect and analyze factual material that provides a framework for growth, learning, program improvement, and positive change that benefits students. The application of ethnographic data collection tools (interviews, observations, questionnaires, and document examination) can be achieved within the setting of the study. The description and analysis of the data collected will be valuable to the subjects under study to affect greater self-cultural understanding. The research is also useful for the collective educational community as a whole because information supplements the body of knowledge regarding educational improvement (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The analysis of the data collected in this research study is grounded in a reflective examination of the information. Thinking about the data in meaningful and purposeful ways from the very beginning of research is critical for the ethnographic researcher (Fetterman, 1998). Coding techniques were utilized in a search for patterns, documented records, and cultural knowledge for the purpose of ascertaining associations that exist between data (Spradley, 1980). Fetterman asserted that the ethnographer begins his analysis with a focus on relevant and manageable topics. Selectivity must be utilized to remain focused and consistent in data analysis. The data must be “refined” so that the powerful themes of the culture emerge (Fetterman).

Data analysis centered on the following areas: (a) the perceptions and classroom practice of the teaching faculty in AP courses in regard to the level of cultural support or resistance to the inclusion of AVID students their AP courses; (b) the perceptions and support measures of the administration at the site regarding developing a culture conducive to change so that a greater number of advanced courses are open to AVID students; (c) perceptions and experiences of the at-risk students themselves regarding the inclusive or exclusive nature of the school.

Phases of Data Analysis

Coding the raw data was the initial step in data analysis. Observations (in the form of descriptive field notes and reflective field notes), interviews, questionnaires, and documents were analyzed, and this process occurred in

three phases. Phase one was preliminary data analysis and involved the researcher's first interaction with the data (Grbich, 2007). As the data were collected, they were carefully read and re-read. Symbolic analytical markers were utilized to define and categorize raw data according to codes that emerged from the data. The interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents examined provided large amounts of information to sift through, and a code book was created. The coding process provided guidance in the search for patterns and relationships between the individuals and groups in the culture. As data are collected, sorted, coded, and recorded, the process of discovery begins. After this initial discovery phase, verification or "testing" is implemented, and, as a result, problems, perspectives, and themes begin to emerge.

Interim data analysis occurred in phase two (Grbich, 2007). In this stage of analysis, the data were cyclically reviewed with new data added to the existing codes and themes. Codes were revised, and new codes were developed. Codes were reconceptualized into broader categories that identified relationships between the codes, achieving the goal of data saturation. In other words, newly collected data did not alter the current codes, analysis, or interpretation.

The final phase was thematic analysis (Spradley, 1979). Emergent themes were identified, and a holistic depiction of the analysis became evident. Pattern matching was employed to develop a sense of the potency of each theme. Conceptual mapping was utilized to provide logical groupings of the data. Themes were then interpreted from the standpoint of the researcher's role in the

study and as an educational leader. The impact of the analysis of the emergent themes was examined in the light of its potential to change practice. As strong relationships between the emerging themes were established, triangulation occurred.

Thinking or reflecting was employed throughout the research.

Triangulation was used to verify the data. Patterns became evident throughout the coding process. Matrices also were developed through the use of coding. Documents examined and coded provided content analysis and the themes were refined, concentrated, and, if applicable, merged through the memo writing and reflection process. These procedures allowed the researcher to follow Spradley's (1979) procedure of collecting and reviewing data in line with symbols or themes and then searching for relationships among these concepts.

A cyclical process was utilized in the data collection process. Interviews, observations, and documents were conducted, which produced factors that related to the three general areas of focus (or themes) listed above. New and modified themes emerged as data were collected. Coding provided a tool used to identify associations and interactions between the themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Validity

To establish the validity of this paradigm, accepted ethnographic procedures were utilized. First was the use of triangulation, which was used to test one source of information with another. Fetterman (1998) stated that

triangulation is at the “heart” of the ethnography. Spradley (1979), Grbich (2007), and Bogdan and Biklen (2007) present triangulation as a key component of ethnographic research. Creswell (1998) characterized triangulation as a practice wherein “researchers make use of multiple and difference sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (p. 202).

Triangulation offers a fuller explanation of the facts. Data from several sources were utilized and synthesized in the triangulation process. Data from questionnaires, interviews (individual), observations (general, meetings, and classrooms), and documents were employed to triangulate the data sources. The utilization of interviews to determine the perceptions of teachers and students that are engaged in the same AP courses also strengthened validity (Creswell).

The entire data collection process demanded that the researcher maintain a contemplative stance toward the information, pondering the data and subsequent analysis. The continual use of memo writing was employed to develop this necessary function. Memo writing was utilized to (a) record and reflect upon emerging codes, (b) modify codes as necessary as new data were collected, (c) provide a vehicle for introspective reflection, (d) clarify relationships among codes, and (d) provide a starting point for in-depth reflection in regard to the culture in the school under scrutiny. As memo writing is utilized, the reliability of codes can be established. The accuracy of the coding validates the analysis.

The thinking processes of the researcher can be understood in light of the data as well as a continual grounding in reality. Memos include handwritten as

well as computer-generated reflections organized by date. The memos were coded separately from the raw information but utilized the same themes that emerged from the data. Memo writing followed accepted standards and traditions of qualitative ethnographic research as a data analysis tool in the data collection process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Data Coding

As the data were collected, the initial coding process was conducted with each document, interview, observation, or memo. As additional data were collected, the codes were refined, added to, renamed, and deleted. In some cases, new codes were created. A reflective approach was used as more and more data were collected.

The data collected were transferred to the *Atlas.ti* software package. *Atlas.ti* is a qualitative research tool that allows a researcher to form connections between data. Primary documents for the data collection were analyzed by *Atlas.ti*. From these documents, 409 relevant quotations were identified. Then the participants' quotations were codified into 16 codes. These codes were then grouped together into code families that emerged from the data. Next, connections or links were made between the documents, quotations, and families by the researcher. This process was repeated several times to help refine and focus the data. *Atlas.ti* uses these connections to show density and the grounded nature of the quotations, codes, and families.

Links between quotations and codes were developed, and the grounded and dense nature of the codes emerged. These links were connected using terms that demonstrated the connectedness of codes and quotations. Four key code “network views” or themes emerged from the coding process. These network views provided a vehicle that allowed both the researcher and readers to better understand what the codes mean. These network views later became the four key themes.

The fact that data are both grounded and dense verifies their reliability and validity. An examination of the list of codes, groundedness, and density (Appendix M) establishes this validity. Triangulation, using documents, interviews, observations, and memoing, occurred during this phase of the research.

As the coding process continued, saturation occurred during the collection phase, and there was no longer a need for new codes. Additionally, codes no longer needed to be refined, revised, or deleted. Additional data collected repeated itself; no new significant data were detected, and information was merely added to existing codes. This strengthened some codes, which were supported by the large amount of the data.

Summary

This chapter presented the methodology of critical ethnography and how it was applied to this study. The chapter included a presentation of the participants, the role of the researcher, phases of data collection, the steps of data analysis,

and the process used to establish validity. The data collected and analyzed in this critical ethnographic study give a voice to individuals located within the culture. The findings of this study, presented in the following chapter, may offer insight into methods and means of improving the AP program as well as the school culture.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the data analysis. The chapter begins with a presentation of the four emergent themes and their supporting data, in the form of participant quotations, followed by the findings related to power and the culture of the school. With these findings in mind, the research questions are addressed, followed by a summary of the chapter.

Emergent Themes

During interim data analysis and after much reflection, it became apparent that the data placed into codes suggested two overarching perceptions. The first perception was a tendency of the participants to either support the recent changes at CHS to include more AVID students in AP courses or to resist this change and seek to maintain the status quo. The second perception was chronological in nature, involving the past or the present. The participants led me through time, from past practices, to present occurrences, both good and bad, and ultimately into thoughts on how to improve this aspect of the school in the future. Placing each of these elements into a simple grid helped me to create the themes for this study (Figure 1).

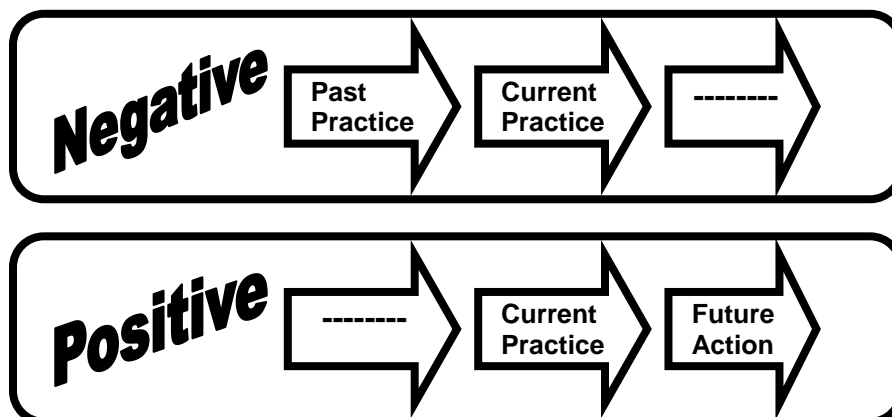


Figure 1. The two overarching perceptions.

As a result of thematic analysis, four themes emerged from the data: past inequality practices, current practices against inclusion, current practices for improvement, and future action. The data were not intentionally placed into codes to reflect these phenomena. They were simply placed in a relevant code and through analysis and reflection, the four comprehensive themes emerged. Each theme is therefore a collection of several like codes that fundamentally reflect either the positive or negative perceptions of the research participant from past to present to future at CHS.

In reference to the electronic codebook, the researcher assigned each quotation that was coded two reference numbers separated by a colon, for example 21:14. The number before the colon refers to the number of the primary document that was coded for this research. The second number indicates the quotation number within the primary document.

Theme 1: Past Inequity Practices

Past English Department heads viewed themselves as “gatekeepers” in regard to who was allowed to teach and what students were allowed to participate in an AP course. (CHS teacher, 21:14)

The study’s purpose was to understand the impact that AVID students enrolled in AP courses have on a high school’s culture and practice. One needs to understand past practices to have a perspective on current ones. This first theme focuses on the past; the participants had much to say about past inequitable practices at the school.

Figure 2 shows the connections between codes and codes as well as between codes and themes for theme 1. As can be seen in the figure, there are six codes.

A code title is located within the boxes. Each box also contains a numerical reference to the frequency of the code (the number before the dash) and the density of the code (the number after the dash). Arrow lines with “equal” signs also illustrate the interconnectivity of the codes.

As noted above, the theme was expressed in the six codes. Of the 481 quotations and observations that comprise the 17 codes that emerged from the data, 152 were directly related to the six codes that make up this theme, which is 33% of the total data collected. Data from these codes were taken from all of the

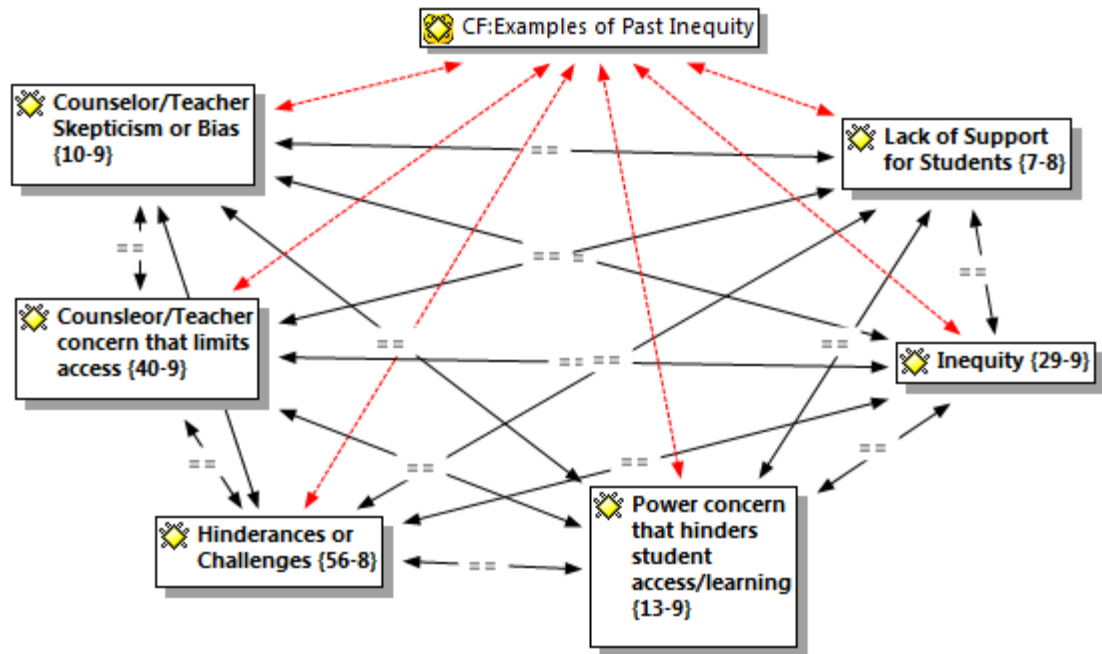


Figure 2. Connections between codes and codes as well as codes and themes for theme 1.

data collection instruments that this study utilized, including the questionnaires, interviews, observations, and document review. This hindrances/challenges code was the most prevalent code in the study. This code was utilized whenever data reflected evidence of past or current action that served as a barrier for students or that exhibited a gatekeeping practice.

The questionnaires revealed a clear perception from the administrators that, based on their knowledge and observations, there were and are students who aspire to take AP courses but were not and are not allowed. This point demonstrates that past limiting practices regarding student course choice were still present at the time of the study. Although this past practice may be

weakening, as additional perceptions will indicate, when compared to five or ten years ago, students are still restricted when they do not quite measure up to the requirements for taking AP courses. One administrator stated, “Honors entrance exams, staff who are not open to access for AP students, lack of support that would ease teachers’ concerns over ‘borderline’ students in AP programs” (13:13) are all factors that have hindered past access to AP courses at CHS.

Students’ open-ended responses from the questionnaires indicated that AVID students experienced hindrances when seeking to take AP courses. Similarly to administrators, students perceive limiting practices at the school: “Roadblocks would be most likely be the entrance exam” (19:8); “Yes, my ‘C’ in English was a roadblock” (19:13); and “I consistently do my homework and try my hardest, but my grades always average to a low ‘C’ or high ‘C’ and that makes it hard for me to get accepted” (19:5). Another student commented that, even though she was allowed to take an AP course, she and other AVID students experienced inequalities in the AP class. She stated, “I believe that, as a whole class, we got unfair treatment. The teacher was more willing to help the other class [an AP class without any AVID students enrolled] than our class” (19:3). Finally, one student stated, “I think some teachers won’t want to treat AVID students in AP courses equally” (19:4), implying that the learning needs of AVID students would not be considered.

Interviews were conducted with administrators at CHS, including the AVID coordinator, the AP counselor, and the principal. In reference to the oversight of

the AP program, Mrs. Smithson, the AVID coordinator, cited a key concept that was noted above: “I believe that the AP teachers and counselors have been the gatekeepers of this process” (20:4). This statement in and of itself is not problematic; however, in light of recent research, it is important. The AP teachers and counselors remain the gatekeepers at the site, and the majority of these individuals want only the top academic students in AP classes. This point is further illustrated by Mrs. Smithson: “The teachers will not want those students [AVID or at-risk students] in their classrooms, thus creating the barriers to rigorous courses, that we are trying to break down” (20:39). The main point is: “Unfortunately, there are still faculty members that believe if the student is not an ‘honors’ student, they have no business taking an AP course” (20:19).

The comments of Ms. Jones, the school’s AP Counselor, regarding past inequitable practice, also reveal an exclusionary attitude. Ms. Jones might be classified by some as a gatekeeper at CHS. Her initial statement was: “I truly do not make the connection between AVID and AP” (23:1). This statement was surprising, considering the recent site changes that have moved toward including AVID students in AP courses. She also revealed a lack of knowledge about the AVID program across the campus. When the AVID program was introduced at the site, informational meetings were held for all staff that introduced the goals and practices of the AVID program. Ms. Jones attended these meetings, yet she stated, “I did not know that the teachers changed the way they taught their courses because of the AVID students” (23:13).

One of the core elements of the AVID program is to promote the idea that, with support, AVID students can be successful in virtually any program (Negroni, 2006; Powell-McMillan, 2005; Stringfield & Land, 2002). The following comment illustrates the reluctance of Ms. Jones to allow at-risk, AVID students in AP classes: “I would probably encourage the AP teachers if it did not affect their ability to teach all of the curriculum required to allow all of the students to pass the AP exam” (23:3). Her use of the word “if” indicates an important condition that must be met before the concept of having AVID students in AP courses receives her support. Her condition is that AVID student support must not hinder the ability of all students to pass the AP exam. She implied that the support needed to help AVID students might slow down the teacher’s efforts to complete the AP curriculum; therefore, she does not promote permitting AVID students to enroll in an AP course. Finally, despite the fact that Ms. Jones does not support the AVID student’s wish to take an AP course, she recognized the following inequity at the school: “It is true that some ethnic groups are very underrepresented in AP courses” (23:7).

The Principal, Mr. Brownlee, as the educational leader of the school, offered many pertinent insights in his position as a staunch advocate for the at-risk student. As a member of the administrative team at the school, the researcher had many conversations with Mr. Brownlee, individually, before the interview for this research was conducted. These conversations confirmed that

he places the needs of the students first. His views coincide with those of the AVID Coordinator, Ms. Smithson.

Student learning is a critical element in Mr. Brownlee's overarching strategy to improve the school. In his experience during the four years of his principalship, Mr. Brownlee, more than any other administrator, comprehends the issues from the past, the concerns facing the present, and the actions needed for future growth as the merger between the AVID and AP programs moves forward at CHS. He stated:

Any student deserves the opportunity to participate in the most rigorous academic courses available to him or her, understanding that students will self-select out of the program if it does not meet their expectations or if they are unable to successfully complete the classes. This does not mean, however, that access in and of itself ensures academic equity. Students, especially at-risk students, must be afforded support resources that enhance their AP experiences, including tutoring, differentiated instruction and assessment, and counseling services. Importantly, such students need teachers who understand their potential and work to provide a learning environment that supports their potential for success. (30:18)

Mr. Brownlee's demonstrated in-depth knowledge of past inequitable practice, stating, "I know that some teachers have openly questioned and even complained about the enrollment of AVID students within their classes" (30:1). The context of these teacher complaints comes from their desire to maintain the

status quo at CHS. The inclusion of AVID students in their classes has essentially created more work for these teachers.

The theme of inequitable past practices was also prevalent in teacher interviews. Mr. Hawkins repeats a perception expressed by Mrs. Smithson, the AVID Coordinator: "In the past, AP teachers of classes with low average test scores had the AP course taken away from their teaching assignment. Past practice in the English Department was restrictive in this manner. Past English Department Heads viewed themselves as 'gatekeepers' in regard to who was allowed to teach and what students were allowed to participate in an AP course" (21:15). Important to note is that Mr. Hawkins also repeated the significant concept of gatekeeping. An element of school practice included former and current core academic department heads advocating for the teachers in their departments.

Over the past several years, department heads took on the role of liaison between the counselors, who assign students to classes, and the teachers, who controlled the entrance requirements to the AP courses. The departments would develop AP course prerequisites, of which a key element was often a difficult entrance exam. The exam would be given to students, typically when they were still in the eighth grade. Those students who met the minimum score requirement, which, according to the previous lead counselor, was arbitrarily set at a high level, would be allowed to take the course (M. J. Wilson, personal communication, January 20, 2009). Second chances on the exam were not

permitted. If the exam was not passed, the student was never allowed into the AP course or into the AP or honors program.

Finally, a student “pass list” was created and given to counselors for course assignment. Students such as the AVID students of today would never be allowed to take an AP course unless they had met all of the difficult prerequisites. These practices are verified by the observations of the researcher as an embedded participant in his position as an assistant principal at CHS.

Additionally, Mr. Garrison shared examples of past inequitable practices. He mentioned the practice of tracking students into particular academic programs or pathways: “For a long time here we’ve, we’ve been, uh, you know, kids have been tracked” (34:3). He shared Mr. Hawkins’s observation on past exclusiveness in the AP program, stating, “I think there’s been a sense of elitism here, or there was” (34:16). He also agreed with the principal’s focus to increase the numbers of students in AP courses: “The AP program needs to be much more inclusive than it has been” (34:34).

An important exchange took place during the interview. Mr. Garrison commented on a past restrictive practice, described above, that prevented students from participating in advanced courses if they did not pass the Honors Entrance Exam. He implied that today, after changes have been enacted, a more inclusive procedure is utilized at the school. The entrance exam is not the only criterion used to determine entrance into AP courses. Several other tools are now included in the evaluation process. However, this was not always the case.

Mr. Garrison: The door's not shut if you don't pass that one-day test, you know, so, you know, and I think . . .

Interviewer: Where in the past, that was . . .

Mr. Garrison: If you didn't pass that test, it's over (34:22). The saddest thing that I'm finding out is that I'm meeting people that, you know, went to Valley [High School] or other places and, and, uh, mainly 'cause the door was shut on them, and these are great students that we lost. (34:23)

Mr. Garrison referred to the elitist nature of the past school practice. Mr. Farley, although friendly and popular, exhibited to this researcher some aspects of this elitist persona. Although he was willing to participate in this research, when observations were made of this classroom practices and of his interactions with administration and counselors, he portrayed a propensity towards elitism. For example, even though he purported to agree with the administration's goal of opening greater access to AP courses, he failed to make any modifications to his lesson planning, curriculum, instruction, or assessments to take into account the needs of AVID or at-risk students. It is safe to say that his instructional methods have changed very little in the 11 years he has taught an APUSH course. Mr. Farley admitted to me that an APUSH course he taught in 2009 and one that he taught in 1999 have very few differences.

Although intangible, Mr. Farley's attitude toward students, fellow teachers, and administrators displays a hint of arrogance that is disconcerting. He stated, "I do not change any of these [curriculum, instruction, assessments] for my AVID

students” (29:4). Further, “Again, to be honest, I really do not feel that we, as teachers, have a clue as to what we ‘should’ be doing to modify our classes for AVID students” (29:5). His truthfulness reveals an important concept—that many teachers at CHS do not know how to conduct effective instruction practices to reach the lower-achieving student.

Additionally, the students who were interviewed had important perceptions regarding this theme. Carlos noted examples of a past inequitable procedure at the school at which the counselors practiced. He mentioned that he was aware of a minimum grade that must be achieved in a prerequisite class before students could enroll in an AP course: “Yeah, and you have to get a ‘C,’ like a ‘B’ or better in your English class” (24:3). He expanded on this limiting practice, stating, “I think if you want to take the class, I think you should be able to ‘cause sometimes there’s certain circumstances that you didn’t get, like, maybe you got a ‘B-’ instead of a ‘B’ in your English class, and it kinda stinks just because you got a ‘B-’, they won’t let you in a class” (24:10). His perception clearly illustrates that the school practice was especially strict in terms of which students would be permitted to take an AP course.

Like Carlos, Natalie noticed the past unfair practice of grade prerequisites for AP classes. The standard that she observed was that a student had to achieve a minimum standard of an ‘A’ in an English class to enroll in an AP course: “Yes, I was aware of that because, like, you needed to get an ‘A’ in

English in order to be put in an AP class” (25:5). She provided evidence of the harshness of the standards for participating in AP courses.

Laura also provided relevant perceptions of past inequitable practices. She demonstrated an ability to perceive the real foundational concerns of best practices in regard to AP classes. In keeping with the comments of Carlos, she stated that students should be given the opportunity to participate in the AP experience: “Yes, I think it’s unfair because I think they would like to challenge themselves and they, no one will really know what will happen until they try” (27:5). With this statement, she captured one of the core issues with limiting access to AP courses. She added: “I don’t think it’s fair that they’re excluded, is that right?” (27:7). Past research answers her question. No, it is not right that students are excluded and treated unfairly at schools. Students placed in “tracks” or excluded from specific parts of the curriculum have received inequitable treatment. Laura innately understands this characteristic of the past school practices of CHS.

Evidence of past inequities was also apparent in the researcher’s observations. Meeting as an administrative team in the late summer, we discussed a crucial visit that was to occur in March 2010. The school was to receive an accreditation visit from three representatives of WASC, which is the foremost accrediting agency for virtually every public high school in the western United States and Hawaii. Three years previous, a full WASC team came to CHS and completed a full review of the school. As a result, the school received a six-

year accreditation term. This was very good news. However, along with this six-year accreditation came a requirement that a three-member team would come at the halfway point of the term to make a progress report. As our team discussed this visit and progress report, the researcher made the following observation: "In 2007 [at the full WASC review of the operations and programs of the school], the school was chastised for the existing gatekeeping practices that were denying or restricting access to AP scores for public use or for public publication" (8:12). The following is a statement from the WASC Committee:

This Visiting Committee recommends that the school staff re-examine the current prerequisite requirement of program participation in light of their belief stated in the mission statement that all students at Central High School have the potential to learn and succeed. (Evers, 2007)

This observation is significant for this research, as an outside team conducting a three-day visit to the school noted this restrictiveness. This observation reflects the limiting and restrictive aspects of the school's practice that had already been noted by administrators, teachers, and students. Although the exact term was not used, the important concept of gatekeeping was expressed by the WASC team. In addition to the findings of recent research that many at-risk students, with support, can achieve at high levels, this WASC recommendation provides confirmation and motivation for the school to continue to improve the process of opening access to AP courses to AVID students and to

other motivated students who are members of groups that may have been denied access in the past.

The researcher also observed examples of this theme. While engaged in a conversation about AVID students with the previous lead counselor, the researcher made this observation: “She was hesitant to place AVID and at-risk students in advanced placement courses” (8:1). Because a counselor assigns students to classes, and she was hesitant to assign an AVID student to an AP course, this is an example of a gatekeeping practice at the school.

This theme is also seen in an observation made in a summer administrative meeting:

The administrator overseeing the guidance department commented how the former head counselor had worked with AP teachers to limit class size so that the classes were artificially small, once again limiting access to students; denying students access to these courses in order to artificially keep AP class sizes low. (8:9)

This practice ensures that AP test pass rates will remain high, which was an important goal of the former lead counselor and AP teachers. High AP exams scores are desirable but not at the expense of limiting student access to courses in which they wish to participate. The lead counselor was removed from her leadership position soon after this observation was made.

The researcher also made the following observation regarding a teacher’s comment made during a brief meeting held in the researcher’s office:

In the past, three or four years ago, the school practice was the opposite, a much more restrictive practice. Back then, we would only have the top 10% or 20% allowed in AP courses, so it shows that today, the school is changing. (8:13)

This teacher's comment verifies past limitations and illustrates his perception of past school procedure, which, fortunately, according to this teacher, is changing.

Past inequitable practice was also noted during an administrative meeting at CHS. This is the story as told by the assistant principal who oversees the guidance department:

On December 6, 2009, a parent came into the office interested in sending four of her children to CHS. She stated that she had one child at Valley High School (VHS). Mr. Thomas, CHS Assistant Principal, inquired why one child was at VHS and why she was interested in sending the other four to CHS. She explained that she lived in CHS' attendance area and her children wanted to attend CHS. However, she stated that her oldest child, as an 8th grader, after taking the IB entrance examination, had not tested high enough to be allowed to enter the CHS advanced program. She missed the cutoff by one point. The parent wanted to meet with the IB Coordinator [Mr. Johnson, who has since resigned] to discuss the close score and request that an exception be made for her child. He refused to meet with her. VHS was happy to take her child. (8:19)

Finally, in regard to this theme, the researcher wrote a memo after an interview with one of the teacher participants:

Aspects of power and control are joined as this study progresses.

Teacher's comments point to their desire to maintain control of their courses. Their resistance arises from either a lack of knowledge on best practices in the AP world or from a conscious need to maintain the status quo that arose from past practice in selecting students for AP courses.

(8:22)

Teachers appear to view student selection for their AP course as something to which they are entitled. Perhaps as more teacher education and training occur, the minds of some teachers can be changed to be better aligned with best practice. However, many AP teachers staunchly hold on to this aspect of power in their practices, even though that power is being whittled away.

In summary, the opening quote regarding gatekeeping from this section epitomizes this first theme. This perception from Mr. Hawkins offers an accurate glimpse into the past practice at the school under study. Mr. Hawkins utilized a key term, gatekeepers, in this study as past practice at the site is scrutinized. His statement clearly presents an example of past restrictive practice at the school. The next section of this chapter examines whether this practice continues at CHS.

Theme 2: Current Practices Against Inclusion

The saddest thing that I'm finding out is that I'm meeting people that, you know, went to Valley [High School] or other places and, uh, mainly 'cause the door was shut on them, and these are great students that we lost. (CHS teacher, 34:23)

The second theme was current practices against inclusion. Overall, it is believed that the inclusion of AVID students in AP courses would have a negative impact. Most AP teachers resist such inclusion and maintain the cultural "status quo."

Some data express evidence of two themes. Because several quotations relate to both the past (hindrances/challenges) and present (current practices against inclusion), they were utilized in two different themes. An example of this is seen in a quote from Mr. Garrison. He stated, "I think there's been a sense of elitism here, or there was" (34:16). When this quote was coded, it was placed into two codes (hindrances/challenges and current practices against inclusion). Then, during the data analysis phase, as codes were linked and relationships developed, it was discovered that this quote was significant for both themes. This attitude had been and continues to be part of this school's practice. Overall, 72 of the quotes were included in two themes.

Figure 3 provides a visual representation of the current practices against inclusion theme. It also shows the connections between codes and codes as well as between codes and themes.

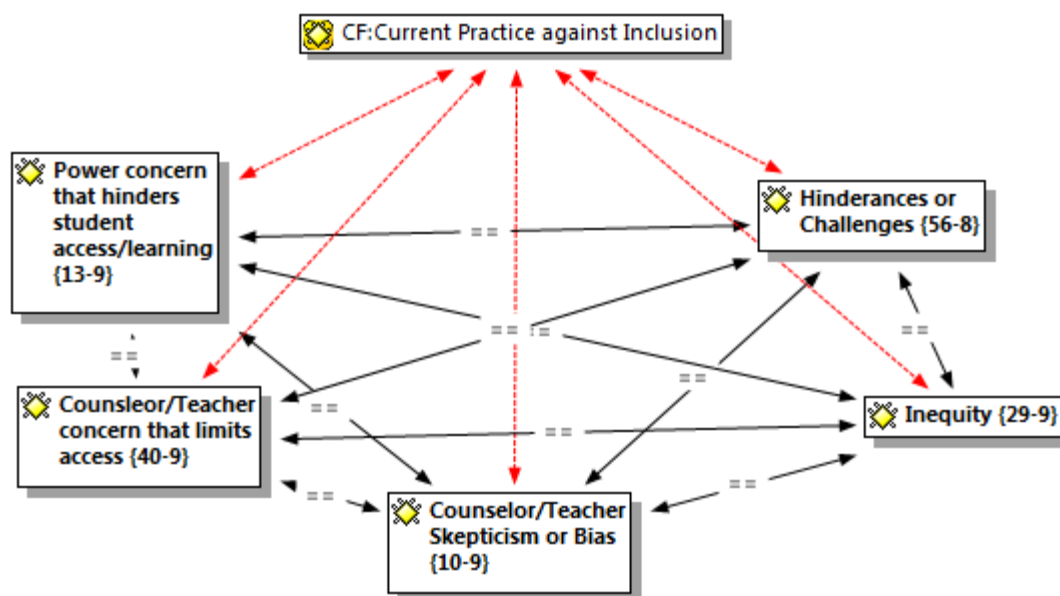


Figure 3. Connections between codes and codes as well as codes and themes for theme 2.

As seen in Figure 3, this theme was expressed in five codes. Of the 481 quotes and observations that comprise the 17 codes that emerged from the data, 143 (approximately 30%) were directly related to the five codes that make up this theme. Data for these codes were taken from all data collection instruments, including the questionnaires, interviews, observations, and document review. Similar to what was seen for the previous theme, the hindrances/challenges code was the most prevalent code.

The administrators' responses to the questionnaire for this theme concentrated largely on instructional practices and inequity in course choice. The strongest comments were made in regard to modifying instruction to meet the needs of differing types of learners. AVID students may need a variety of

curricular, instructional, and assessment practices. The administrators' comments regarding the teachers' practices strongly indicated that the teachers do not modify their courses when AVID students are enrolled. The same amount of homework is assigned, and neither instruction nor assessments are modified to better meet the needs of AVID students.

Administrator comments on the open-ended questions revealed their attitudes toward AVID students. First, they wanted to limit AVID students' ability to enroll in or to be successful in an AP course. One administrator (the AP counselor) stated that, before being allowed to enroll in an AP course, "students must earn high enough grades in prerequisite courses" (15:4). She added that students must meet these prerequisites: "previous grades, previous coursework, counselor, parent support" (15:10). Another administrator stated that the faculty included "staff who are not open to access for AP students" (15:5). Another claimed that students "are being denied access to some courses" (15:3). The principal stated, "My perception is that the AP teachers, most of but not all, believe AVID students are not the type of student who should be taking an AP course" (15:11).

Teachers also provided comments related to this theme. The initial perceptions of the teachers, as seen on the questionnaires, indicated several important notions. Of the teachers, 68% strongly made the point that they do not modify their courses and that 95% assign the same amount of homework when AVID students are enrolled in their courses. Nevertheless, 100% of the teachers

commented that they support the idea that all students should have access to all courses at the school, while 56% indicated that they were less sure about whether equal access to all courses is the actual case at the school. Additionally, 64% of teachers commented that it is difficult for AVID students to enroll in AP courses. While there is a belief that AVID students can participate in AP courses, these teachers generally do not make academic modifications to accommodate these students.

Teachers indicated only weak agreement with questionnaire statements about modifying lesson plans, instruction, and assessments. It appears that teachers understand that AVID students need differentiated instruction; however, as indicated above, they are unwilling or unable to change their practices to improve AVID student learning. Nevertheless, the teachers also noted that they are student-centered practitioners who make student needs the focus of their instruction. Finally, the teachers stated that, when AVID students are enrolled in their courses, they are somewhat successful. Despite the difficulties of taking an advanced course, students find a way to learn and achieve.

Like administrators, the responses of the teachers to the open-ended questions demonstrated two lines of thought. Teachers' responses reflected the limitations on students' opportunity to participate in AP courses as seen in the following: "Students first have to meet the prerequisites" (17:16) and "There are prerequisites that must be met to be enrolled in an AP course" (17:15). In regard to participation of at-risk students in AP courses, one teacher stated, "It seems

counselors may discourage it” (17:49). Two teachers reflected on gatekeeping practices at the site as follows: “Teachers strongly recommend against it” [the inclusion of AVID students in AP courses] (17:18) and noted that other limiting practices include “grades in other like courses, counselor roadblocks, teacher roadblocks, staffing enough AP classes, perception of classes and teachers, the lack of encouragement from other teachers” (17:29). Additionally, a teacher stated that there are “mixed feelings by the staff. Some want to make AP more exclusive” (17:47).

Students also talked about current practices against inclusion. Results from the questionnaires showed that 57% of AVID students feel frustrated in their AP courses. Additionally, 63% noted that they are not evaluated with multiple types of assessments, and 75% indicated that their AP teachers do not modify instruction to better meet their needs. Although most of the perceptions from students were positive in regard to their opportunity to participate in AP courses, there is an underlying lack of support by their teachers, who do not appear to change their courses to better link course objectives with the needs of AVID students.

Administrator comments provide important data regarding teacher attitudes related this theme. Data from the questionnaires and the interviews present similar findings. Ms. Smithson, the AVID Coordinator, commented on current practices that exclude students. During her interview, she described a surprising action taken by teachers: “If the teacher feels like they have to do

more work just because an AVID student is sitting in their classroom, I believe they will counsel the student to drop the class when they are struggling instead of working with the student to help them through the rough spot” (20:50). Ms. Smithson observed that “AP teachers don't necessary know how to support these students or want to spend the extra time with them” (20:46). Finally, she indicated an understanding of the issue of power in this process: “They don't see that just providing the opportunity for these students to take the exam as good; they are just concerned with pass rates and how that makes them look” (20:48). Her statement indicates that the teachers at the school appear to practice what is best for them rather than what is best for students.

Another administrator, Ms. Jones, presented similar views:

It is my impression that the school administration may support an open access policy but some AP teachers may not. I do not believe that an AP teacher will welcome all students into their courses if they see their pass rates decrease. (23:5)

This statement also reveals her understanding of a “power” issue at the site. In her view, teachers have the power to refuse or discourage students from taking the opportunity to enroll in an AP course. She expressed a cultural characteristic of the site—that the concerns of the teacher outweigh the needs and requests of students. Additionally, another statement reveals her understanding of the desire of teachers to hide AP score results from the public.

Teachers place an enormous amount of importance on the testing results to validate whether they are a good teacher.

Since scores and class averages may become available to the public and since some parents in our community may think that a teacher with low average AP test scores equates to a poor teacher, I can understand why some teachers may be a little reluctant to add certain students in their classes (36:1).

Few schools fail to publish their AP test results. CHS continues the practice of keeping the results of the AP tests out of the public eye. The school administration is currently developing a new policy on this matter.

Mr. Brownlee also addressed current practices against inclusion. He noted that teachers appear to be unwilling or unable to adapt their teaching methods to help the at-risk student, stating, "AVID students face the challenge of a general lack of differentiated instruction in Advanced Placement classes" (30:7) and "Few provisions exist to support capable students who, with support, can successfully navigate the AP curricula" (30:11). He also provided an example of an inequity: "I do believe that Hispanic/Latino students are underrepresented in the AP program at CHS" (30:19).

Additionally, Mr. Brownlee presented his concern over an issue of "power" at the site. He noted that leadership often must cope with the fact that staff might, on a surface level, agree to follow a policy, however, in reality, choose to continue with practices that contradict that seeming agreement. The teachers,

intentionally or unknowingly, may be revealing beliefs that go against what has been established to be in the best interest of students. He stated, “Currently, many of the staff members at CHS maintain a bias that precludes at-risk students from participating in AP classes” (30:22). He continued this thought while also setting the stage for what he believes to be a solution:

I don’t know if I would say that students from specific ethnic groups are being discriminated against; however, the narrow interpretation of success ascribed by the staff of CHS, especially those teachers of AP classes, has not opened access to these students. (30:26)

Mr. Hawkins, a teacher, also commented on current practices against inclusion that occur at the school, stating, “Teachers are lazy. They understand that to truly help at-risk kids learn requires more work with planning, instruction, and assessment. These aspects of teaching must be modified and that is hard work” (21:12). He noted that teachers have been overheard to remark that AP courses require a large time commitment for grading and that differentiated instructional practices often take more preparation time than typical teaching methods such as the lecture-and-note-taking approach to learning.

Mr. Garrison, a teacher, commented on unfairness at the school, stating, “Yeah, absolutely. Um, and, and when you say do I perceive educational inequity, do I perceive that is something that’s happening here” (34:15). He also spoke about community and parental perceptions about AVID students in AP courses:

I think there's some people out there who believe that, you know, uh, because of their level of intelligence—I'm talking about parents that I've spoke with—that those (AVID) kids don't belong in there. They're (AVID students) holding the class back basically, and my kid isn't getting the full, um, challenging experience that they should because they've got to, they gotta, you know, stop and help these kids who need help, so there, there's definitely some people in the community. The resistance, you know, from staff members who don't want it. (34:27-30)

Mr. Farley noted the reluctance of the faculty to include AVID students in AP courses, stating, "There is some resistance in that there is a potential for an AVID student to get a lower grade in an AP course" (29:7). He added, "But it can also lower AP results for the school as a whole" (29:9). He observed:

The lower the academic achievement of a student, the more likely that student is to bring down a teacher's overall pass rate for the classes. This can be a discouraging factor for some teachers who pride themselves on high pass rates. (37:1)

Students also offered important perceptions. Carlos observed the racial/ethnic imbalance in his AP class. "When I look around in my Psychology class, there's a high, um, percentage of [under his breath] Asian people, and, like, I kinda, I don't know, I was, like, US History last year I was, like, whoa there's a lot" (24:11). He also noted that students must strictly meet minimum

grade standards to enroll in an AP course, stating, "I think if they don't have the grade then they're not accepted in, basically" (24:18).

Natalie also noted the racial/ethnic imbalance in AP classes, remarking, "Most kids in AP levels are, are Asians and, um, Whites. I, I don't see too many Hispanics or Blacks in there, so it's kind of, I wouldn't say, it's kind of a little bit of prejudice" (25:13).

Flora's interview responses reveal her perceptions of school practices. Initially, she stated:

Last year I had a little bit of difficulty in, I wanted to join the AP Geography class, and I didn't get it the first time and I had to come to request it again, and at first I thought it was because of my grades. (28:3)

She had to wait an entire year before she was allowed to take this course.

Similar to Natalie's comments regarding other students' difficulties in enrolling in an AP course, she experienced a barrier to entering an AP course. Later in the interview, she remarked that one group of students of color on the campus are unrepresented in her AP history course: "Um, for this year, the, there's a less amount of minor . . . there's a minority in, like, Hispanics in, like, my history class; there's probably only two" (28:8).

The school's population includes approximately 30% Hispanic or Latino students, indicating that a reasonable number of Hispanic students in an AP course should be 9 in a class of 30. On the same theme, she remarked, "We've actually kind of made jokes about that, 'cause when we've looked around, it's

true, there was, that was the minority” (28:9). Flora is Hispanic. The underrepresentation of Hispanic students in her AP course was significant enough for her and her friends to notice. She concluded her perceptions of school practice as follows: “They need a little bit more help to stay on task; that’s why they’re not being allowed to” (28:14). Although she stopped mid-sentence, her point is clear. Because AVID or at-risk students need assistance to achieve academic success in rigorous courses, gatekeepers of the school’s practice, in the past, have placed limitations on their being able to participate in an AP course.

Additionally, the researcher observed examples of practices against inclusion. One early observation illustrates the attitude of the AP counselor regarding at-risk students:

AP Counselor, Ms. Jones, has had a strong resistance to opening access to AP courses for lower achieving students; the comment was made that she does not want to offer payment vouchers to these students that needed them to prevent them from taking those exams. (8:3)

This facet of the school’s practice is disturbing. The AP counselor, who is responsible for all aspects of the AP program at the site, resisted giving financial help to students wishing to take an AP exam. As background, payment vouchers are available for students designated as lower socioeconomic status (SES), and often, at-risk students are from low SES groups. Their ability to take an AP exam was limited by another gatekeeper at the school.

The researcher stated:

I discovered that there were several incidents in the counseling office related to the head counselor change that occurred over the summer and that the counselors are unhappy with some of the new policies that have to be implemented to open access to AP courses to allow greater numbers of students including avid students in AP courses. (8:6)

One such incident was a luncheon arranged by the former lead counselor with the other counselors and did not include the new lead counselor. The unstated goal of the luncheon was to complain about the change in the lead counselor position and to strategize on ways to resist this counselor. Later, regarding the AP counselor, an administrator stated, "Mr. Johnson reported that the AP counselor has continued to resist opening AP courses to new students, some who could be classified as at-risk" (8:7). This occurred at the school during the 2009-2010 school year.

Finally, the researcher noted:

Another report occurred that a social science AP teacher refused to allow new students who have entered his AP courses after the beginning of the school year to make up any of the work that they missed when they were not enrolled in the class. (8:8)

Often, students' schedules change in the first few weeks of the year. A student might be given the same course but in a different time slot with a different teacher. The motivation for such a policy is unclear to the researcher. It is difficult

to see a benefit for students in this policy. This is another example of a limiting practice at the school that makes the course more difficult than it needs to be. The students who would struggle the most from this procedure are generally at-risk or AVID students.

One final perception illustrates the hindrances to student access to school programs at CHS. The researcher observed the following while participating in an administrative team session. At a recent meeting with Mrs. Gaston, the Parent Teacher Association President, the principal stated that parents also understand that gatekeeping practices still permeate the school. Mrs. Gaston “feared that teachers at the school were continuing the practice of gatekeeping in regards to hindering the school’s new direction of seeking to increase access to more courses by more students at CHS” (8:26).

The researcher’s observations of a story that Mr. Thomas recounted, as presented above, provide an example of such gatekeeping. An intelligent student was eager to join the honors program but was rejected. He missed a passing score on the only assessment used to place students in honors courses by a mere point. The honors program director refused to meet with the parents regarding their son’s score. The young man decided to go to another school. Had he chosen to stay, he most likely would have been placed in courses in the college prep curriculum, in which the majority of students participate. However, he decided to leave for another school in the district so that he could take higher-level, honors courses. The program director’s refusal to communicate or to make

an exception for students such as this young man is an ongoing practice at the site.

Theme 3: Current Practices for Improvement

There's a lot of people here I think who are coming around to, like, you know, this is really what teaching's all about. (CHS teacher, 34:18)

As seen in this theme, the views of the participants were not limited to the negative perceptions noted in regard to the second theme. Despite the efforts of gatekeepers at CHS, AVID students are enrolled in AP courses, in ever-increasing numbers. For example, in the 2007-2008 school year, 3 AVID students were enrolled in an AP course; in 2008-2009, 13 students were enrolled in an AP course; and in the 2009-2010 school year, there were 45 AVID students participating in an AP course. AVID students being enrolled in AP courses has led to further positive school practices as well. For example, instructional practices are improving, teachers are critically analyzing what and how they teach, and opportunities for greater access to AP and honors courses at the school are increasing for all students.

These changes are just beginning and are relatively small at the time of this writing; nevertheless, practices at CHS are changing for the greater benefit of all of its students. This theme includes both the changing perceptions of the participants and an elementary view of the transformation taking place that includes improving access to the AP program for AVID students. A total of 151 quotes were taken from the collected data for this theme.

Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the current practices for improvement theme and the connections between codes and codes as well as between codes and themes.

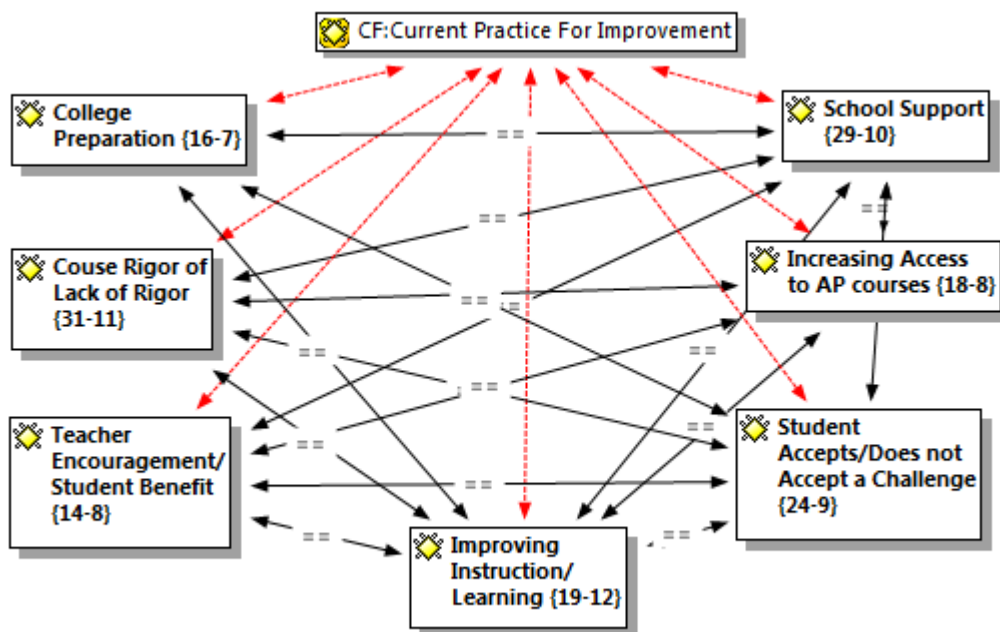


Figure 4. Connections between codes and codes as well as codes and themes for theme 3.

The responses to the questionnaire revealed perceptions of improved practice. The results showed that 76% of students indicated that the current school practice provides support for them in their classes. Specifically, 75% of students feel that all students have access to AP courses. All students (100%) also indicated that teachers treat and grade all students equally in AP courses. According to the student participants, enrolling in AP courses was not difficult.

Additionally, 100% of the teachers stated that the AP course that they teach enables students to improve their ability to think critically. Additionally, 100% of administrators specified that AP courses help AVID students to be independent learners and that AP courses challenge AVID students.

Two encouraging comments were found in the responses to the open-ended student questions. One student stated that her learning was enhanced in the AP course, noting, “We learned to work together and study together for exams in our AP exam” (19:2). Another student stated, “There were no roadblocks when I enrolled in an AP course. I didn't perceive any type of unfair or unequal treatment. No, the other students didn't receive preferential treatment” (19:6).

The interviews also revealed important perceptions regarding school improvement. From his perspective, Mr. Brownlee offered two comments that illustrate knowledge of site attitudes regarding including at-risk, AVID students in AP courses, and assisting these students to achieve academic success in their high school experience. He commented, “I believe AVID students are very capable of successfully completing AP coursework” (15:1). He added that the school is undergoing changes by “opening the door to AP/honors classes to all students” (15:12).

Teachers also offered perceptions that reflect a positive view of AVID students enrolled in AP courses. One remarked, “I have learned some AVID strategies from other teachers and applied to regular class” (17:40). Another

observed that there is a “growing awareness that all students (not just ‘honor’ students) can excel in rigorous courses given the right motivation and support” (17:26). One teacher realized that learning is enhanced when at-risk students are enrolled in AP classes. She stated, “It makes teachers think more critically about how they teach” (17:38). Finally, another teacher notes with a positive outlook, “I approach them (AVID students) as I do all my students—with optimism and a belief that they can be successful” (17:36).

Additionally, Ms. Smithson commented that positive changes are occurring that underscore the view that schools should seek ways to do what is best for students first and foremost. She remarked:

I believe having these students participate in AP courses has opened the eyes of many AP teachers; they are seeing that all kinds of students can be successful in rigorous courses, not just those students who have tested into “honors.” (20:3)

She added:

Honors/AP courses have traditionally been for students who have tested into the honors program. As we place more and more AVID students in the honors/AP courses and they are successful, the practice of the school is changing to embrace the inclusion of AVID students in honors/AP courses (20:17).

These changes also affect the students. In this regard, Ms. Smithson stated:

As for changes on campus, students are beginning to see that they can be successful in rigorous courses and achieve their dream of being eligible for college. Non-honors students are finding a place at CHS, a place that provides support, monitoring, and encouragement as they challenge themselves in rigorous courses. (20:51)

In most cases, the students that she is describing are AVID students. As the success of the average academic student is celebrated, it is hoped that other students, both AVID and those not in AVID, will want to participate in an AP course as well.

Mrs. Smithson also provided grade results of AVID students enrolled in AP courses for the first semester of the 2009-2010 school year. Her results indicated that 90% of the AVID students enrolled in an AP course are passing the AP class with a C or better.

Teacher interviews also provided observations on current practices for improvement. Although Mr. Garrison's perceptions showed how restrictive and limiting practices at CHS have been and continue to be, he also remarked that ethnic discrimination is not found at CHS, stating: "I've never sensed anything where, where some ethnicity was, you know, uh, there was some different treatment of somebody because of their ethnicity, I've never seen that" (34:24). He also noted the improved differentiated instructional methods that are being used by a few teachers at the school, stating (as noted earlier), "There's a lot of

people here I think who are coming around to, like, you know, this is really what teaching's all about" (34:18).

Mr. Farley indicated his apparent willingness to change his practice. He was agreeable to working with any student enrolled in his AP course, stating, "I am not against anyone who wants the chance to try out an AP class if they so desire" (29:1). He also stated, "Staff have to deal with students whose academic skills may be slightly below students they have dealt with in the past and so, therefore, they must adapt instruction at times" (29:12).

Students also offered significant perspectives. When asked how the school practice has changed now that AVID students are participating in AP courses, Carlos stated, "I don't think it's different, like, AVID students are treated the same" (24:2). In regard to instructional modifications in his AP courses, Carlos, in regard to his teachers, noted, "Everyone treated me the same" (24:9). Previously, he commented that some students were excluded from AP courses because they could not achieve a minimum grade requirement; here, he appears to contradict himself, stating, "I've never really heard of people (AVID students) getting excluded from it, from AP courses" (24:22). Here, Carlos has clarified his perception which is that AVID students are treated fairly as they go through the process of enrolling in an AP course.

Natalie perceived encouraging aspects of the school's practice as well. She stated, "Yes, I was treated fairly and equally" (25:4) as a student in her AP course. She also observed that "AVID students are not excluded in AP courses"

(25:25). This practice is relatively new at CHS. The AVID program began only four years ago, and AVID students began taking AP courses three years ago. Two AVID students participated in an AP course as sophomores.

Natalie also perceived a critically important element of the school's practice that benefits all students in AP courses—improved instructional practices in the AP classroom. She stated:

AVID students should not be excluded in AP courses because of, like, the extra help they receive, but the extra help that they receive could be beneficial to the, to themselves and to other students who are in their AP courses. (25:27)

Samuel's interview produced three comments regarding this theme. Initially, he remarked, "I don't feel any, like, unfairness when I take the course" (26:4). It is encouraging to see that he was treated equally by his teacher in his AP course. He also stated his perception that AVID students' participating in AP courses is good for all students. This experience challenges students to achieve higher goals. He remarked, "I think it opens up a lot more opportunities; it definitely makes, like, the student feel like they can do more things" (26:5). Finally, he makes this statement on equity: "I don't think the school really resists us at all" (26:8). His perceptions reveal that he has been treated fairly and has been challenged to do more as he engages in his AP courses.

Additionally, Flora commented on cultural improvements at CHS. She observed that more students are entering advanced courses: "I think the school's

probably changing not only specific students, like IB or Honors, that are taking those classes. I think, you know, it's more of, like, general students trying to challenge themselves" (28:2). She repeated a perception shared with the principal, Mr. Brownlee, that students may choose to disenroll in an AP course if it is too difficult. She stated, "If it's too hard or it's just, it takes up too much time, they drop it, but I mean, they've tried at least, and I don't think there's any discrimination" (28:10). A key point is that students should be allowed the choice of entering or leaving a rigorous course. The decision should be made by students and their parents. Gatekeepers should be eliminated and student choice given preference. If this policy is followed, any charge of discrimination is silenced. She added, "More AVID students are included in AP courses, you know, they kinda have, they're just open minded to except that it's only, it's not only just Honors students and perfect grades and all 'A's" (28:11). The school is broadening access to AP courses. Finally, Flora stated:

I think just, just they're kind of open and willing to teach the, the teachers to teach . . . any students, I think, um, pretty much, I've noticed, like, in my AP classes, even though we have a minority of cultures, there's, it's very diverse. (28:12)

Flora's experience indicates that her AP teachers were willing to work with students from any background. Although she may have contradicted an earlier comment made regarding the number of Hispanic students in her AP class, her point is that the ethnic and racial makeup of her class is diverse. Hispanic

students may indeed be underrepresented; however, there is still a diverse makeup of students in her AP courses.

The embedded role that the researcher experiences at the school allows him to perceive positive changes. School practice is slowly improving to the greater benefit of students, principally at-risk and AVID students. One momentous change that occurred was that “the lead counselor position that was previously held by Mrs. Campenella has been changed, and she's been removed from that position” (8:2). Since this change occurred over the summer of 2009, the new lead counselor has been instrumental in opening access to all of the school's courses to all students. If students have the desire and the will to participate in an advanced course, such as an AP course, they should be allowed to take the course.

Additionally, on the subject of providing broader access to AP courses, Dr. Benson stated:

Why don't we accept them all? In other words, the IB students, freshmen, which are coming into CHS, are tested. Some of those students do not pass the tests and do not make it into the program . . . In the past, three or four years ago, the school practice was the opposite; much more restrictive practice. Back then, we would only have the top 10% or 20% allowed in AP courses, so it shows that today, the school is changing.

(8:13)

Dr. Benson's idea to allow all students into advanced courses, however, is flawed. For example, there are many students unwilling to accept the increased rigor and workload of an AP course. However, important here is his realization that the school practice is changing and that more students are being placed in AP courses and are achieving success. In this regard, the school principal, at an administrative team meeting, stated, "The district understands its role to open access to advanced placement courses, and counselors should encourage students to take AP courses and exams" (8:4). The belief is that, if a student has the motivation, willingness, and desire to take part in an advanced course, he or she should and will be given the chance.

Mr. Garrison, in the quote presented earlier, stated, "There's a lot of people here I think who are coming around to, like, you know, this is really what teaching's all about" (34:18). He is referring to the teachers on campus, largely younger teachers, who apparently understand that student learning is crucial and that, if students want to take a more difficult course, they should be given the opportunity. Teaching is a challenge, and student learning should be one of the most important rewards for the teacher for a job well done. No teacher wants to set up a student for failure. However, with the right interventions and tools, a student can be successful in high-level or AP courses even though he or she might not have qualified for the course by passing an entrance exam.

Theme 4: Future Action

For equity to exist fully, the stakeholders will need to reexamine the philosophy of the AP program as a whole and address the issues of access and define what constitutes success. (School Principal, 30:6)

The final theme is future action. Many of the participants reflected on actions that might be undertaken to move away from the past and current exclusionary practices to a school culture that seeks ways to improve and enhance equity. Figure 5 provides a visual representation of the future action theme and the connections between codes and codes as well as between codes and themes.

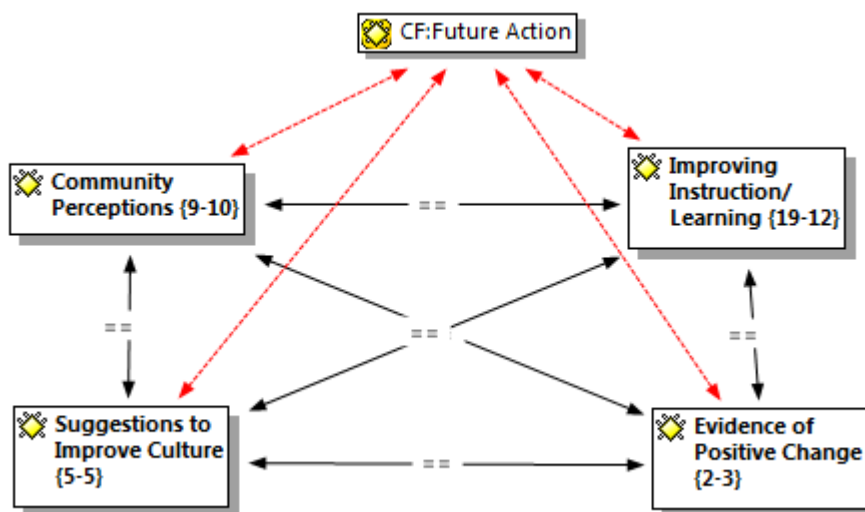


Figure 5. Connections between codes and codes as well as codes and themes for theme 4.

It is interesting to note that some of the participants wanted to talk about a future direction for the school despite there being no interview questions on that

subject. A total of 35 quotations were utilized for this theme. Although this theme was not referenced as often as the other themes, the importance of its message cannot be overstated.

The data collected for this theme came solely from the interviews. The conversational nature of the interviews provided a forum for the participants to elaborate on their perceptions of the past and present and their vision for the future of CHS. Two administrators and two teachers had important points to make regarding what CHS should do to improve practice and culture so that greater numbers of students could achieve academic success.

The AVID coordinator, Ms. Smithson, commented on her perceptions of future action for the school. She stated, "I believe that AVID students can be successful in AP courses given the right support and encouragement" (20:1). That support should, and must initially and primarily, come from the individual teacher. She added, "Yes, I believe that if you challenge a student, they will rise to the challenge. If a student wants to take on the challenge of an AP course they should be allowed to enroll in the course" (20:13). Ms. Smithson wants the school to increase the access to AP and honors courses for students who desire a challenge. She understands that most academically average and below-average students will never want to take a difficult course. She advocates for allowing students who, in the past, would have never had the opportunity to participate in an AP course but who have the motivation to do so.

The principal of CHS, Mr. Brownlee, also offered several essential suggestions for future action at CHS. He clearly appreciates the value of challenging students with advanced courses, stating:

An AVID student that takes multiple AP classes over his or her high school career, even if he or she does not pass every AP test with a score of 3 or higher, is much better prepared for college-level courses than he or she would be if access to AP was not afforded. (30:14)

He expects teachers to adapt the way they teach, when working with lower-achieving students, stating, "I believe that all teachers, including AP teachers, must modify their curricula to meet the needs and learning styles of their students to be successful" (30:15). He stated his belief that some teachers are beginning to "get it" when it comes to modifying courses to meet the needs of every student enrolled in a class:

The school culture is beginning to support the inclusion of AVID students in AP courses in that some teachers demonstrate a willingness to embrace AVID students in their AP classes and, more importantly, possess the understanding that AVID students require different methods of instruction and support than non-AVID students. (30:20)

These perceptions allow for a greater understanding of the past and existing school practices and for coping with the transformation of AP classes that is occurring at CHS.

Mr. Hawkins, a teacher, offered one comment regarding the improvement of the school culture. Answering a question about the reculturing of the school, he stated, "I see less elitism in the English Department" (21:6). These changes benefit the AVID student taking part in an AP course.

Additionally, teacher Mr. Garrison noted what should be expected as the school continues to move ahead with its plan to increase support of AVID students in AP courses. He explained:

Well, I think instruction's different in that you can't just, um, teach to the highest level, I mean, you've got to take into account that, um, there's people in your class that are gonna need a lot more, I guess you could say, hand holding. (34:7)

He repeated this observation later in the interview, stating, "I think on the teacher side, um, there, there has to be a lot more individual support" (34:11). Support for the AVID student is, in most cases, necessary. Moreover, these support measures, in the form of differentiated instructional methods and assessments, will benefit all students in the class.

In conclusion, Mr. Garrison offered an important observation about teachers. The assumption is that most teachers choose their profession because they care about their students. They like, or perhaps even love, "their kids." Teaching as a vocation is never easy; however, the rewards can be gratifying. Mr. Garrison stated:

But, um, you know, the benefits are, you know, the satisfaction of a—you know, it's great to see that high achieving kid that does most everything, you know, and would've done it without you, but the kid that you actually, like, helped, you know, surpassed their . . . what their perceived limitations were, and, and reach, you know, a level, you know, that wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been without you, you know, that those, that's why we're at this job, you know, whether it's students, secretaries here, or teachers, or administrators, I mean, that's, you know, it's hopefully what we're about. (34:29)

This final perception is indeed noteworthy. This theme demonstrates the caring and professional nature of many of the educators at CHS. It is not enough for them to simply implement a new policy; they actively seek ways to fashion a better school environment for students.

Power and the Culture of the School

Based on the researcher's observations, it became apparent that, at CHS, many teachers perceive a benefit to teaching AP courses and seek to continue as instructors of AP courses. Because themes 1 and 2 concerned the inequities that existed and continue at CHS and that the conceptual framework is based in critical theory, it is relevant to inquire whether AP teachers may be exhibiting unfair expressions of racial bias. It is important to note that all but two of the 33 AP teachers at CHS are racially White. The two exceptions are the instructors of AP Korean Language and AP Chinese Language, both of whom are of Asian

descent. As gatekeepers, decisions, made unknowingly or purposefully, may have resulted in racially inequality in regard which students were allowed to participate in AP courses. For example, 80% of pertinent department chairpersons also teach an AP course. If school leaders, such as department chairs, are involved in unfair practices that allow them to retain control over course and student selection, then their reasons for wielding that power come into question.

Although AP courses take much preparation and the diligent grading of student work, the reality is that the students in AP courses are generally the “cream of the crop.” AP classrooms are full of “smarter” students, students who are not discipline problems and who are motivated to learn, and the class sizes are smaller. Additionally, the results have shown that AP teachers have been able to select the students for their courses. At CHS, these students are typically either White (32%) or Asian (62%).

Based on the above factors, teaching is perceived as less stressful in the AP classroom, particularly relative to classroom management issues; and, in general, planning for innovative instructional methods has been unnecessary. Their classrooms tend to focus on a very limited number of teaching styles (the lecture-homework-review style or student-project style) in which students are expected to glean information as it is presented. However, current AP teachers may be overlooking how and why their students are learning.

In the past, teachers and counselors have worked together to create a culture that maintained advanced course populations that were made up of only the very best and brightest students. “Borderline” and late blooming students, if they failed to meet initial entrance requirements, were not given the opportunity to participate in advanced courses. It is apparent that there is a strong belief, held largely by the older teachers (at least 45 years of age), that the school does not need to change and that the problems that arise can be blamed on the students. These older teachers are seeking to hold on to past positions of power, such as department chair positions, making them able to hand select the students placed in their courses and to work with the guidance staff to achieve that end. With the “best” students in their courses, they don’t have to be as responsible for student learning; they don’t have to work as hard. As Mr. Hawkins stated, “Teachers are lazy.”

Addressing the Research Questions

This dissertation sought to answer two research questions. The primary question was “What impact does AVID students’ participation in AP courses have on the high school culture?” The secondary question was “What are participants’ perceptions of the educational equity of the AP program in terms of how power is managed, modified, or shifted within the culture under study?”

The answer to the first question is found in the four themes presented above. CHS has and continues to restrict and hinder access to AP courses for many students, and many AP teachers would prefer this practice to continue.

However, there are a number of stakeholders who wish to change these limiting practices and to increase access to AP courses to any student who would like to attempt an advanced course. The culture of practice at CHS has and continues to resist change. Yet, positive, equitable change is occurring and receiving support, and reasonable suggestions for future improvement are being offered.

The second research question concerns participants' perceptions of the educational equity of the AP program in terms of how power is managed, modified, or shifted within the culture. The participants perceive that, in the past, AP teachers and counselors at CHS have managed the power of course choice and student selection. The ability to assign what course a teacher is to instruct is powerful. Culturally, teachers at CHS understand the benefits of AP courses, and the counselors and department chairs have supported veteran AP teachers in their wish to continue with an AP teaching assignment. However, a few AP teachers have been removed from an AP teaching assignment. The former criterion for making this decision was the yearly report of AP exam pass rates. To ensure that AP exam pass rates remain high, teachers have figured out that their AP courses must be comprised of the very smartest students. Then AP exam pass rates will remain high, with the anticipated result that teachers will retain their AP teaching assignments. AP teachers, counselors, and department chairs have worked together to maintain this power at CHS, but these practices are inequitable.

This power is shifting, however. Administrative directives from district and site levels have begun the process of modifying this particular aspect of power at CHS. Additional criteria are being implemented to evaluate the effectiveness of AP teachers. To combat inequities and provide greater opportunities for students, more average-achieving students are being enrolled in AP courses. The site administration is closely observing instructional practices and implementing new standards with which to measure academic success. Driven by the need for student academic success, this aspect of power at CHS is indeed changing in favor of students.

Summary

The findings of this chapter provide a unique look into how the beliefs of the participants play a critical role in how AVID and AP policy is acted out, particularly relative to lower-achieving students and students of color at CHS, a successful, high achieving, and sought-after high school. Students, parents, and staff all consider themselves fortunate to experience CHS's benefits. The perceptions of administrators and students have demonstrated a school with steadfast beliefs from the past that are difficult to overcome. These past values have created a culture of inequity for some students and student groups at the school. Perhaps due to a lack of knowledge or a certain reluctance, students encounter barriers that have continued to hold back some students from achieving their academic goals. Although professionals, teachers, counselors, and administrators have expertise on what is academically best for students, if

student choice is limited and if students are held back from achieving higher expectations, these practices must be considered inequitable. Thankfully, CHS is slowly improving in this area. The AVID and AP programs can begin to work together to push the motivated student to achieve higher academic goals with instructional practices designed to assist and support students.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter provides a discussion of the findings. The chapter begins with summary of the findings, followed by the conclusions. Then implications for scholarship, research, and practitioners are presented. The chapter concludes with recommendations for additional research and for changes in educational practice.

Summary of the Findings

The findings indicated that at CHS, inequitable treatment of students existed in the past and continues to exist, as seen in the first two themes: past practices of inequity and current practices against inclusion. Students at CHS were eliminated for participation in advanced courses through the use of, for example, an entrance exam given to eighth grade students aspiring to attend CHS. They were also limited by gatekeepers, including counselors, department chairs, and teachers who wanted to maintain high AP exam scores.

The findings also addressed how power is managed, modified, or shifted at CHS. Importantly, AP teachers had and wanted to continue to have the power to hand pick their students. The advantages to teaching an AP course for the AP teacher include smarter students who work and complete assignments, fewer discipline concerns, personal satisfaction from teaching a high-level course,

smaller class sizes, and motivated students who want to learn. Gatekeepers promote unfair and inequitable practices for the sake of the teachers and the school's overall AP exam pass rate. The power of the teachers at the school was and continues to be formidable. Unfortunately, this power has hindered the access of AP courses to motivated and willing average-achieving students. Fortunately, however, CHS is beginning the process of change to more equitable practices. Along with this change, these lower-achieving, often at-risk students will need genuine, quality, effective instruction to learn.

Conclusions

The findings confirm the ideals of critical theory, which is to shed light on past or current unfair treatment of the oppressed. The fact that at CHS there has been and continues to be an underrepresentation of at-risk students and students of color attests to the concerns of critical theory. These students enter school as ninth graders and are placed in rigid academic programs designed to fulfill the minimum requirements for high school graduation. To deviate from this plan at CHS is difficult. In the past, the former lead counselor and the current AP counselor have not encouraged academically average students to advance themselves with more rigorous courses. Because students in the past at CHS have been tracked, they have not been exposed to the best curriculum and teaching that CHS has to offer. Critical theory as applied to education purports to enlighten the educational community of the concepts of equitable and fair treatment of all students as a method to remove academic and social obstacles

placed before many of the students that attend our nation's schools. This study has revealed examples of these obstacles and now purports to enlighten the educational community.

The findings also confirm the importance of culture as practice in schools. The findings illustrate how intensely the participants feel about the day-to-day practices of the educational processes at CHS. Administrators, teachers, and students each provided examples from the past and present that exemplify educational practices at the school, both good and bad. Future actions are also based in how practices can improve to increase opportunities for motivated students to excel. Culture in schools does not simply reflect the beliefs, values, and policies of the school; it also reveals itself in the practices of those engaged in the learning process.

The use or abuse of power is an important aspect of the findings. If teachers are allowed to hand pick students for their AP courses, then high test scores do not reflect student learning and quality instruction. If teachers are told that their test scores must remain high and that they are allowed to choose the students in their classes, then they can unfairly manipulate the system to achieve high test scores.

The academically advanced student will learn in almost any environment. Differentiated class experiences, however, allow opportunities for students of all ability and aptitude levels to learn the important aspects of the curriculum. Greater effort is needed to improve planning, curriculum, instruction, and

assessment so that students in AP classes, despite the fact that they may not all have high academic ability levels, may be given opportunities to learn advanced subject content. Certainly, teaching this type of course will take more planning and effort. The students at CHS and at every high school across the nation, however, deserve this effort.

Strengths of the Study

The greatest strength of this study was that the voices of the participants were heard. Although the questionnaire and interview questions were limited to AVID students participating in an AP course, the responses were authentic and went beyond the topic. Additionally, because the researcher is embedded in the school culture, the observations and interpretations have validity. Another strength of this study was its use of the critical ethnographic method. This study gave precedence to the perceptions of the persons living the day-to-day realities of participating in courses, instructing classes, and overseeing programs. Because the findings of this study confirm the findings of previous research on this subject and on improving schools, this research adds to our knowledge of what benefits students.

Weaknesses of the Study

This dissertation has several weakness that must be considered. First, there was a limited number of participants. Second, although the questionnaire elicited the perceptions of a large number of students, teachers, and administrators, it offered only a cursory assessment of the issues. Third, although

the interviews provided more depth, only 11 interviews were conducted. Nevertheless, the comments and remarks offered by those interviewed offered an authentic view of CHS practice, both past and present. Fourth, this research was based at a single school location, and, as such, the generalizability is limited. The study of the perceptions of students, teachers, and administrators in a variety of locations across the state would be a valuable extension of this study.

The researcher, as an embedded member of the school culture, contributed to the validity of this study. However, this aspect of the study also can be considered a weakness. All of the data were filtered through the researcher. Although the researcher sincerely attempted to be objective, it may be possible that his attitudes, opinions, and biases may have affected his interpretation of the findings. Further, the interpretation of findings was limited by the researcher's adherence to the theoretical context of the study. Overall, however, he consciously sought to provide honest, unbiased, and objective perspectives on the topics of this research.

Finally, the researcher's role as an evaluator at CHS may have hindered the ability of the teacher participants to be honest and transparent. No teacher who participated in the study has ever been evaluated by the researcher. Additionally, despite the researcher's efforts to assure students that participation would not affect any aspect of their education, they may have felt limited in being completely truthful in their responses.

Implications

The data collected are relevant to educational leaders, as new understandings emerged from the perceptions of the participants. For example, an important finding was how strictly the school practiced restrictive policies that limited student participation in advanced coursework. Another important finding was the power of certain faculty in regard to course choice and student selection, which resulted in restricting opportunities for certain students. The findings both confirm past research on school practice as well as offer new insights into the culture of a high school striving to best serve its students.

For Future Scholarship and Research

The findings of this study hold an important place in scholarly research. We understand more completely that inequities indeed exist in public high schools. We also appreciate that this school is attempting to improve its practices and what its administrators, teachers, and students believe to be steps needed for improvement. However, this is not the complete picture. Additional studies of this nature are needed at a wider variety of high schools, with a greater number of participants. Questionnaires and interviews could be utilized by site or district administration to elicit perceptions regarding at-risk students, such as AVID students, who are enrolling in AP or other advanced courses in ever-increasing numbers. Understanding their point of view on this subject could serve as a stimulus for self-improvement.

Other possible studies could be based solely on the voices of administration, teachers, students, or other stakeholders at school sites. Studies such as these could be conducted to gain a more in-depth understanding of the concerns and challenges of each of these different groups. Brought together, these studies could provide significant insights that could be used to yield improved outcomes for schools.

For Practitioners

Practitioners may find value in this study in that the perceptions of those directly participating in the site's improvement process were revealed. Administrators can use the findings of this research to work more effectively with school leadership, teachers, and counselors to create school practices that are more conducive to learning and to student opportunities. Site leadership could utilize the perceptions of the participants as a research base and to guide the implementation of policies. For example, site leadership meetings often depend on relevant research related to the topics at hand. When the concern is the inequitable treatment of students, the findings of this research have particular relevance. All levels of stakeholders benefit from a greater understanding of the issues and concerns at schools. Additionally, this dissertation adds to the body of knowledge that underlies the improvement of schools nationwide.

To realize success, high schools such as CHS may need to reexamine the philosophy of their AP program as a whole, address issues of access to advanced courses, and redefine the definition of success for the AP teacher and

student. AVID students can be successful in AP classes with modifications to curriculum, differentiated instructional strategies, innovative assessment practices, and an understanding that success is not solely determined by the score that a student receives on his or her AP exams. AVID students, for example, may not bring to an AP course the same personal experiences and academic background that high-achieving students may naturally bring to such classes.

Consequently, it is important that the AP teacher understand the learning gaps that may exist for AVID students and provide opportunities for these students to develop the foundations necessary to be successful in AP classes. Increasing access to AP courses is pointless if effective support resources are not available to maximize student potential for success. AP courses are rigorous, and the entire CHS community must embrace the need for greater support services to meet the needs of AVID and at-risk students given access to rigorous courses of study.

Recommendations for Changes in Educational Practice

This research has implications for educational practice, particularly because the composition of the classroom is changing. A greater variety of students are entering advanced classes. Their previous schooling may not have prepared these students for rigorous content, yet these students will be in advanced courses. Districts, schools, and teachers need to determine the support needed by these students to be academically successful.

Importantly, there must be a commitment by the district leadership and school board to provide support for teachers and students in AP courses. Financial and human resources must be available and must focus on all students enrolled in advanced classes. Districts should consider providing an ongoing plan of collaborative, peer-led professional development. The College Board and the AVID program provide ample resources for initiating a professional development plan. Resources are also available for districts that have established protocols for staff development to provide advanced training for teachers of AP classes. Financial resources should be committed to provide the latest curriculum for the courses. Both the College Board and AVID offer off-site training, often utilizing five days or more to provide professional development training for new and established teachers. Districts should allow for the financial support of teacher travel to and attendance at these trainings, workshops, and conferences.

Teachers as well should consider the research on best practices for AP programs and courses. It has often been the case that, as teachers have had the privilege of being assigned to teach AP classes, they have enjoyed having the best and brightest students in these classes. This is changing, and less-prepared and lower-achieving, at-risk students are enrolling in AP classes. All students in these classes are expected to have high motivation and a strong work ethic. To support these students, teachers need to broaden their instructional practices and methods. The challenge is to comprehensively accept these students into the advanced classes, maintain rigorous standards expectations, and modify the

ways and methods of instruction and curricula. Continued administrative, parental, and community support is also essential if students are to learn and achieve in difficult courses. In this regard, Jeong (2009) stated:

It may be that more collaborative efforts among teachers, school, and government agencies will improve the success of the under-privileged and thereby reduce the gaps in the preparedness for college by race/ethnicity and social class. (p. 363)

At-risk students will be in advanced courses in high schools across the nation every school year. How will their educational needs be met every day in the classroom? The answer lies in the commitment and dedication of concerned educators for the academic success of their students. As we learn more about this matter from research such as this dissertation, students will benefit.

Conclusion

The opening story of this dissertation presented the story of Araceli, a bright high school student who appeared to be following a typical track of courses for average-achieving students. A caring teacher took a chance and encouraged Araceli to seek a rare opportunity, which was to enroll in an advanced AP course. Although there are many factors that influence student academic success, her success in this class contributed to her overall academic success in college and then to achievement in the workplace. Students such as Araceli should be afforded greater opportunities to achieve their academic goals and dreams. Let the “gates” of course choice be opened. If students are motivated and willing to

accept a rigorous academic experience, they should be supported, encouraged, and challenged in their efforts to succeed.

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APPENDIX A
IRB DISTRICT PERMISSION LETTER



FULLERTON JOINT UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

1051 West Bastanchury Road • Fullerton, California 92833-2247

(714)870-2883

FAX (714)870-2892

www.fjuhsd.k12.ca.us

Human Resources

January 15, 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

The purpose of this letter is to give permission to David Posthuma to conduct research for his doctoral dissertation entitled: *The Impact of At-Risk Students Enrolled in Advanced Placement Courses on a High School Culture*. This critical ethnographic research will focus on information gleaned from interviews, observations, surveys, and the review of documents utilizing the administration, faculty, and students of Sunny Hills High School. The research will be conducted on the campus of Sunny Hills High School. The purpose of this research is to complete the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree that will be acquired from California State University, Fullerton.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "George Giokaris".

George Giokaris
Superintendent
Fullerton Joint Union High School District

APPENDIX B

ADMINISTRATOR CONSENT FORM

Researcher: David Posthuma, Telephone: (714) 626-4207
email: dposthuma@fjuhsd.net

Dear (administrator's name):

My name is David Posthuma and, in addition to being the Assistant principal of Sunny Hills High School in the Fullerton Joint Union High School District, I am a doctoral student at California State University, Fullerton. I am working on dissertation research in which I hope that you will consent to participate.

The purpose of this research is to determine the impact on Sunny Hills High School of including AVID students in Advance Placement courses. The study will provide information that can be used by educators and families to help students achieve at higher levels, by teachers to provide appropriate modifications to planning, instruction, and assessment, and by administrators to make suitable decisions based on accurate data.

This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life. The only foreseeable risk is a small potential for a breach of confidentiality due to the audio-taping of the interview.

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire that will take about 20 minutes and an interview that will take about 45 minutes that will ask about your perceptions of the school practice of including AVID students in advanced courses. I will not identify you by name in my study, and there is no way that anyone would be able to determine how you responded to the interview questions. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent allowed by law.

All collected information that identifies you will be removed and replaced with a code. A list linking the code and your identifiable information will be kept separate from the research data in a locked cabinet. The data will be stored electronically on a secure computer, with password protection, or in a locked file cabinet. The audio-recordings also will be stored in a locked file, then transcribed and destroyed as soon as possible. The data will be kept until the Lead Researcher's dissertation is completed and approved. Names will not be used in any report or publication resulting from this study.

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. **Participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your current or future relationship with the Sunny Hills High School, the Fullerton Joint Union High School District, or CSU Fullerton.

Please review the Student Consent Form below. If you would like to participate, please sign and return one copy of the form within one week (due date in bold) in the enclosed envelope. Keep the second copy for your files.

Please contact me at (714) 626-4207 if you have any questions. I hope that you will consider participating in this important study that will provide valuable information for teachers, counselors, and administrators that will help them to meet the needs of students.

Sincerely,

David Posthuma
Assistant Principal
Sunny Hills High School

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

I agree to participate in the study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Participant's Printed Name

Researcher Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Researcher: David Posthuma, Telephone: (714) 626-4207
email: dposthuma@fjuhsd.net

Dear (staff person's name):

My name is David Posthuma and, in addition to being the Assistant principal of Sunny Hills High School in the Fullerton Joint Union High School District, I am a doctoral student at California State University, Fullerton. I am working on dissertation research in which I hope that you will consent to participate.

The purpose of this research is to determine the impact on Sunny Hills High School of including AVID students in Advance Placement courses. The study will provide information that can be used by educators and families to help students achieve at higher levels, by teachers to provide appropriate modifications to planning, instruction, and assessment, and by administrators to make suitable decisions based on accurate data.

This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life. The only foreseeable risk is a small potential for a breach of confidentiality due to the audio-taping of the interview.

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire that will take about 20 minutes and an interview that will take about 45 minutes that will ask about your perceptions of the school practice of including AVID students in advanced courses. I will not identify you by name in my study, and there is no way that anyone would be able to determine how you responded to the interview questions. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent allowed by law.

All collected information that identifies you will be removed and replaced with a code. A list linking the code and your identifiable information will be kept separate from the research data in a locked cabinet. The data will be stored electronically on a secure computer, with password protection, or in a locked file cabinet. The audio-recordings also will be stored in a locked file, then transcribed and destroyed as soon as possible. The data will be kept until the Lead Researcher's dissertation is completed and approved. Names will not be used in any report or publication resulting from this study.

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. **Participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss

of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your current or future relationship with the Sunny Hills High School, the Fullerton Joint Union High School District, or CSU Fullerton.

Please review the Student Consent Form below. If you would like to participate, please sign and return one copy of the form within one week (due date in bold) in the enclosed envelope. Keep the second copy for your files.

Please contact me at (714) 626-4207 if you have any questions. I hope that you will consider participating in this important study that will provide valuable information for teachers, counselors, and administrators that will help them to meet the needs of students.

Sincerely,

David Posthuma
Assistant Principal
Sunny Hills High School

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

I agree to participate in the study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Participant's Printed Name

Researcher Signature

Date

APPENDIX D

STUDENT ASSENT FORM

Researcher: David Posthuma, Telephone: (714) 626-4207
email: dposthuma@fjuhsd.net

Dear (student name):

My name is David Posthuma and, in addition to being the Assistant principal of Sunny Hills High School in the Fullerton Joint Union High School District, I am a doctoral student at California State University, Fullerton. I am working on dissertation research in which I hope you will consent to participate.

The purpose of this research is to determine the impact on Sunny Hills High School of including AVID students in Advance Placement courses. The study will provide information that can be used by educators and families to help students achieve at higher levels, by teachers to provide appropriate modifications to planning, instruction, and assessment, and by administrators to make suitable decisions based on accurate data.

This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life. The only foreseeable risk is a small potential for a breach of confidentiality due to the audio-taping of the interview.

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire that will take about 30 minutes and an interview that will take about one hour that will ask about your perceptions of the school practice of including AVID students in advanced courses. I will not identify you by name in my study, and there is no way that anyone would be able to determine how you responded to the interview questions. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent allowed by law.

All collected information that identifies you will be removed and replaced with a code. A list linking the code and your identifiable information will be kept separate from the research data in a locked cabinet. The data will be stored electronically on a secure computer, with password protection, or in a locked file cabinet. The audio-recordings also will be stored in a locked file, then transcribed and destroyed as soon as possible. The data will be kept until the Lead Researcher's dissertation is completed and approved. Names will not be used in any report or publication resulting from this study.

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. **Participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer

any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your current or future relationship with the Sunny Hills High School, the Fullerton Joint Union High School District, or CSU Fullerton.

Please review the Student Consent Form below. If you would like to participate, please sign and return one copy of the form within one week (due date in bold) in the enclosed envelope. Keep the second copy for your files.

Please contact me at (714) 626-4207 if you have any questions. I hope that you will consider participating in this important study that will provide valuable information for teachers, counselors, and administrators that will help them to meet the needs of students.

Sincerely,

David Posthuma
Assistant Principal
Sunny Hills High School

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

I agree to participate in the study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Participant's Printed Name

Researcher Signature

Date

APPENDIX E

PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Researcher: David Posthuma, Telephone: (714) 626-4207
email: dposthuma@fjuhsd.net

Dear Parents/Legal Guardians (parents' names):

My name is David Posthuma and, in addition to being the Assistant principal of Sunny Hills High School in the Fullerton Joint Union High School District, I am a doctoral student at California State University, Fullerton. I am working on dissertation research in which I hope you will consent to have your child (student's name) participate.

The purpose of this research is to determine the impact on Sunny Hills High School of including AVID students in Advance Placement courses. The study will provide information that can be used by educators and families to help students achieve at higher levels, by teachers to provide appropriate modifications to planning, instruction, and assessment, and by administrators to make suitable decisions based on accurate data.

This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life. The only foreseeable risk is a small potential for a breach of confidentiality due to the audio-taping of the interview.

If you agree to participate in this study, I would like to ask you to complete a questionnaire that will take about 30 minutes and to interview you for no longer than one hour in the main office at Sunny Hills High School. Or, if you prefer, I can come to your home and speak with you both for the same amount of time. I will tape-record the interview for my purposes only. The written transcript of the tape recording will not be shared with anyone else. It will be destroyed after my study is completed. I will not identify either of you by name in my study and there is no way that anyone would be able to determine how you responded to my interview questions. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with me or the institution. Please discuss the purpose of this study with your son or daughter. If you are both interested in participating in a one hour interview, each of you must indicate your consent by signing the attached consent form in the spaces provided.

I would also like to interview your son or daughter's AP teacher and AVID coordinator regarding his or her academic performance. I will need your consent to do this. Your signature at the bottom of this letter also gives me your permission to interview your son or daughter's AP teachers and AVID coordinator. All names will be changed in the final dissertation to keep all participants anonymous.

Please review the Parental/Guardian Consent Form below. If you would like your child to participate, return the attached consent form within one week (due date in bold) in the self-addressed, stamped envelope. Your completion of the attached consent form


APPENDIX F

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

***APPROVAL NOTICE***

From the Institutional Review Board
California State University Fullerton

Date: May 18, 2009

From: Ron Oliver PhD, Chairperson
CSUF Institutional Review Board 

To: **David Posthuma**
Department: Education Leadership, CP-520

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research Project entitled:
The Impact of At-Risk Students Enrolled in Advanced Placement Courses on a High School Campus

The forms you submitted to this office regarding the use of human subjects in the above-referenced proposal were reviewed by the California State University Fullerton, Institutional Review Board ("CSUF IRB") at their full committee meeting held **May 8, 2009**. Your proposal is approved.

The CSUF IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required.

If the above-referenced project has not been completed by **May 7, 2010** you must request renewed approval for continuation of the proposal.

It is of utmost importance that you strictly adhere to the guidelines for human participant and that you follow the plan/methodology/procedures described in your research proposal. Any change in protocol or consent form procedure requires resubmission to the CSUF IRB for approval prior to implementation. Additionally, the principal investigator must promptly report, in writing, any unanticipated or adverse events causing risks to research participants or others.

Please be advised that if you are seeking external funding for this proposal, the above-referenced title should match exactly with the title submitted to the funding sponsor. Any change in project title should be submitted to the CSUF IRB prior to implementation.

By copy of this notice, the chairman of your department (and/or co-investigator) is reminded that s/he is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human participants in the department, and should review all protocols of such investigations as often as needed to ensure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institutional policies and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections. The Assurance Number is FWA00000135.

Cc: Dr. Wayne Au
Application No. HSR-09-0155

APPENDIX G
ADMINISTRATOR QUESTIONNAIRE

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

**The Impact of At-Risk Students Enrolled
in Advanced Placement Courses on a High School Culture**

Name and Title of Lead Researcher: David Posthuma, Doctoral Student
Department: CSU Fullerton, Department of Educational Leadership
Telephone: (714) 258-4023 e-mail: dposthuma@fjuhsd.net

Study Location: Sunny Hills High School

| QUESTION | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | SOMEWHAT AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE |
|---|-------------------|-------|-------------------|----------|----------------------|
| 1. I am providing leadership to encourage the courses can be modified to meet the academic needs of students. | | | | | |
| 2. AP courses are too difficult for AVID students. | | | | | |
| 3. Teachers assign the same amount of homework for AVID students as not-AVID students. | | | | | |
| 4. AVID students spend more time preparing for exams in AP courses than non-AVID students. | | | | | |

| QUESTION | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | SOMEWHAT AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE |
|--|----------------|-------|----------------|----------|-------------------|
| 5. AVID students feel frustrated about the AP courses they take. | | | | | |
| 6. AVID students are satisfied with the AP courses they take. | | | | | |
| 7. AP courses challenge AVID students. | | | | | |
| 8. AP courses help AVID students to be independent learners. | | | | | |
| 9. AP courses help AVID students to think critically. | | | | | |
| 10. AVID students are becoming more responsible for my own learning in the AP courses they take. | | | | | |
| 11. AP courses are more rigorous than any other courses AVID students have taken. | | | | | |
| 12. AP courses have caused AVID students to become more organized. | | | | | |

| QUESTION | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | SOMEWHAT AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE |
|--|---------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 13. Teachers evaluate AVID students with five or more different types of assessments. | | | | | |
| 14. Teachers treat AVID students with equity in their AP course. | | | | | |
| 15. Teachers treat all students academically the same in AP courses. | | | | | |
| 16. Some students at CHS want to take an AP course but are not allowed. | | | | | |
| 17. Students at CHS have equal access to all courses. | | | | | |
| 18. Teachers modify instruction to better meet the needs of AVID students. | | | | | |
| 19. Teachers modify lesson plans to account for the learning needs of AVID students in AP courses. | | | | | |
| 20. AVID students are successful in AP courses. | | | | | |

| QUESTION | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | SOMEWHAT AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 21. The administration of CHS supports AVID students in AP courses. | | | | | |
| 22. I would like to see more AVID students in AP courses. | | | | | |
| 23. It is difficult for AVID students to enroll in AP courses. | | | | | |

Open-Ended Questions:

What perceptions do you have regarding AVID students participating in AP courses on the campus of CHS?

How is our school different now that AVID students participate in AP courses?

If a student desires to take an AP course, what factors are present (if any) at CHS that prevent that student from access to that AP course?

APPENDIX H
ADMINISTRATOR, AVID COORDINATOR, AND
AP COUNSELOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Administrator Semi-Structured Questions:

1. What perceptions do you have regarding AVID students participating in AP courses on the campus of CHS?
2. How is our school different now that AVID students participate in AP courses?
3. Are students treated fairly and equally in the process of being placed in an AP course?
4. What challenges do AVID students face in their current AP course?
5. How are instruction/assessment/lessons different when AVID students participate in AP courses?
6. How do teachers respond to the admonitions of the site administration to modify curriculum, instruction, and assessment in AP courses with AVID students?
7. What modifications are made by both teachers and students when AVID students struggle in AP courses?
8. Do you encourage/admonish AP teachers to modify their lesson planning knowing that at-risk students will be participating in AP classes?

9. Do you encourage/admonish AP teachers to modify their instruction knowing that at-risk students will be participating in AP classes?
10. Do you encourage/admonish AP teachers to modify their curriculum development knowing that at-risk students will be participating in AP classes?
11. Do you encourage/admonish AP teachers to modify their assessments knowing that at-risk students will be participating in AP classes?
12. Do you perceive educational inequity as an issue if motivated at-risk, lower achieving students are not allowed to participate in AP courses?
13. Do you have a perception/comment regarding the ethnic/minority makeup of your courses?
14. How does the school culture support the inclusion of AVID students in AP courses?
15. How does the school culture resist the inclusion of AVID students in AP courses?
16. What are your perceptions regarding the support measures of the administration at the site regarding developing a culture conducive to change so that a greater number of advanced courses are open to AVID students?
17. Are some ethnic/minority groups represented on campus being discriminated against by not participating in AP courses?

18. What effect has the decision to allowing more students into honors/AP and IB courses had on our campus and in classrooms?
19. How has the staff recultured since AVID students have been included in AP courses?
20. How has the community recultured since AVID students have been included in AP courses?
21. What have been the benefits to students, staff, and administration of including AVID students in AP courses?
22. What have been the challenges to students, staff, and administration of including AVID students in AP courses?
23. How did the AVID students in AP courses meet or not meet your expectations?

APPENDIX I

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

**The Impact of At-Risk Students Enrolled
in Advanced Placement Courses on a High School Culture**

Name and Title of Lead Researcher: David Posthuma, Doctoral Student
Department: CSU Fullerton, Department of Educational Leadership
Telephone: (714) 258-4023 e-mail: dposthuma@fjuhsd.net

Study Location: Sunny Hills High School

| QUESTION | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | SOMEWHAT AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE |
|--|-------------------|-------|-------------------|----------|----------------------|
| 1. I modified my AP course to meet the academic needs of AVID students | | | | | |
| 2. I think AP courses are too difficult for my AVID students. | | | | | |
| 3. I assign the same amount of homework for my AVID students as not-AVID students. | | | | | |
| 4. I would support all AVID students having equal access to all courses. | | | | | |
| 5. I think AVID students find the AP course I teach too challenging. | | | | | |

| QUESTION | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | SOMEWHAT AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE |
|---|-------------------|-------|-------------------|----------|----------------------|
| 6. I am modifying my instruction in the AP course I teach in response to administrators' suggestions. | | | | | |
| 7. AVID students are satisfied with the AP course I teach. | | | | | |
| 8. My AP course challenges AVID students. | | | | | |
| 9. My AP course helps AVID students to be independent learners. | | | | | |
| 10. My AP course helps AVID students to think critically. | | | | | |
| 11. AVID students are becoming more responsible for their own learning in the AP course I teach. | | | | | |
| 12. AP courses are more difficult than any other course AVID students have taken. | | | | | |

| QUESTION | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | SOMEWHAT AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE |
|--|----------------|-------|----------------|----------|-------------------|
| 13. The AP course I teach has caused AVID students to become more organized. | | | | | |
| 14. I evaluate AVID students with five or more different types of assessments. | | | | | |
| 15. All students at CHS have equal access to all courses. | | | | | |
| 16. I am a student-centered teacher and place the needs of the students at the focus of instruction. | | | | | |
| 17. I think more students would take AP courses but are not permitted to do so. | | | | | |
| 18. I observed that AVID students spend more time preparing for exams for my AP course than non-AVID students. | | | | | |

| QUESTION | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | SOMEWHAT AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE |
|---|---------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 19. I modify instruction to better meet the needs of AVID students. | | | | | |
| 20. I modify lesson plans to account for the learning needs of my AVID students in my course. | | | | | |
| 21. My AVID students are successful in AP courses. | | | | | |
| 22. The administration of CHS supports AVID students in AP courses. | | | | | |
| 23. I would like to have more AVID students in the AP courses I teach. | | | | | |
| 24. It is difficult for AVID students to enroll in AP courses. | | | | | |

Open-Ended Questions:

What perceptions do you have regarding AVID students participating in AP courses on the campus of CHS?

How is our school different now that AVID students participate in AP courses?

If a student desires to take an AP course, what factors are present (if any) at CHS that prevent that student from access to that AP course?

APPENDIX J
TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Teacher Semi-Structured Questions:

1. What perceptions do you have regarding AVID students participating in AP courses on the campus of CHS?
2. How is our school different now that AVID students participate in AP courses?
3. Are students treated fairly and equally in the process of being placed in an AP course?
4. What challenges do AVID students face in their current AP course?
5. How are instruction/assessment/lessons different when AVID students participate in AP courses?
6. How do teachers respond to the admonitions of the site administration to modify curriculum, instruction, and assessment in AP courses with AVID students?
7. What modifications are made by both teachers and students when AVID students struggle in AP courses?
8. Do you encourage/admonish AP teachers to modify their lesson planning knowing that at-risk students will be participating in AP classes?
9. Do you encourage/admonish AP teachers to modify their instruction knowing that at-risk students will be participating in AP classes?

10. Do you encourage/admonish AP teachers to modify their curriculum development knowing that at-risk students will be participating in AP classes?
11. Do you encourage/admonish AP teachers to modify their assessments knowing that at-risk students will be participating in AP classes?
12. Do you perceive educational inequity as an issue if motivated at-risk, lower achieving students are not allowed to participate in AP courses?
13. Do you have a perception/comment regarding the ethnic/minority makeup of your courses?
14. How does the school culture support the inclusion of AVID students AP courses?
15. How does the school culture resist the inclusion of AVID students AP courses?
16. What are your perceptions regarding the support measures of the administration at the site regarding developing a culture conducive to change so that a greater number of advanced courses are open to AVID students?
17. Are some ethnic/minority groups represented on campus being discriminated against by not participating in AP courses?
18. What effect has the decision to allowing more students into honors/AP and IB courses had on our campus and in classrooms?

19. How has the staff recultured since AVID students have been included in AP courses?
20. How has the community recultured since AVID students have been included in AP courses?
21. What have been the benefits to students, staff, and administration of including AVID students in AP courses?
22. What have been the challenges to students, staff, and administration of including AVID students in AP courses?
23. How did the AVID students in your AP courses meet or not meet your expectations?

APPENDIX K

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

**The Impact of At-Risk Students Enrolled
in Advanced Placement Courses on a High School Culture**

Name and Title of Lead Researcher: David Posthuma, Doctoral Student
Department: CSU Fullerton, Department of Educational Leadership
Telephone: (714) 258-4023 e-mail: dposthuma@fjuhsd.net

Study Location: Sunny Hills High School

| QUESTION | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | SOMEWHAT AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE |
|---|----------------|-------|----------------|----------|-------------------|
| 1. My AP course is more difficult than any other course I have taken. | | | | | |
| 2. I spend more time doing homework for my AP course than any other course I have taken. | | | | | |
| 3. I spend more time preparing for exams for my AP course than any other course I have taken. | | | | | |
| 4. I feel frustrated about my AP course. | | | | | |

| QUESTION | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | SOMEWHAT AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE |
|---|-------------------|-------|-------------------|----------|----------------------|
| 5. I am satisfied with my AP course. | | | | | |
| 6. All students have equal access to honors/AP classes. | | | | | |
| 7. The school culture provides support for me in my difficult classes. | | | | | |
| 8. My AP course helps me to think critically. | | | | | |
| 9. I am learning valuable content in my AP course. | | | | | |
| 10. I am more responsible for my own learning in my AP course than any other course I have taken. | | | | | |
| 11. My AP teacher evaluates me with five or more different types of assessments. | | | | | |

| QUESTION | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | SOMEWHAT AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE |
|---|----------------|-------|----------------|----------|-------------------|
| 12. My AP teacher grades me fairly in comparison to other students in my AP course. | | | | | |
| 13. I am treated equally by my teacher in my AP course. | | | | | |
| 14. I feel some students want to take an AP course but are not allowed. | | | | | |
| 15. I think students have equal access to all courses. | | | | | |
| 16. My AP teacher changes instruction to better meet my needs. | | | | | |
| 17. As an AVID student, I am successful in my AP course. | | | | | |
| 18. I have observed administration supporting AVID students in AP courses. | | | | | |

| QUESTION | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | SOMEWHAT AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE |
|---|----------------|-------|----------------|----------|-------------------|
| 19. I experienced difficulty enrolling in an AP course. | | | | | |

Open-Ended Questions:

Why should AVID students participate in AP courses?

Why should AVID students not participate in AP courses?

What changes have you observed since AVID students began participating in AP courses?

As you considered taking an AP course, were there any road blocks to your entry into the AP course? Did you perceive any type of unfair or unequal treatment? Did other students receive preferential treatment?

APPENDIX L
STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Student Semi-Structured Questions:

1. What perceptions do you have regarding AVID students participating in AP courses on the campus of CHS?
2. How is our school different now that AVID students participate in AP courses?
3. Were you treated fairly and equally in the process of placing you in an AP course?
4. Were you aware of the past practice of strict entrance requirements into AP classes at the school?
5. Is your AP course rigorous?
6. How do you compare taking an AP social science/world language course with participating in a non-AP social science/world language course?
7. As you were deciding to take an AP course, did you consider the challenges you would encounter? How did you plan to meet these challenges of taking a more rigorous AP course?
8. What challenges do you face in your current AP course?
9. What do you find challenging while taking the AP course?
10. How are instruction/assessment/lessons different? What is different?
11. Do you perceive educational inequity as an issue if motivated at-risk, lower achieving students are not allowed to participate in AP courses?

12. Do you have a perception/comment regarding the ethnic/minority makeup of your courses?
13. Are some ethnic/minority groups represented on campus being discriminated against by not participating in AP courses?
14. What effect has the decision to allowing more students into honors/AP and IB courses had on our campus and in classrooms?
15. How has the staff recultured since AVID students have been included in AP courses?
16. How has the community recultured since AVID students have been included in AP courses?
17. What have been the benefits to students, staff, and administration of including AVID students in AP courses?
18. What have been the challenges to students, staff, and administration of including AVID students in AP courses?
19. How does the school culture support the inclusion of AVID students in AP courses?
20. How does the school culture resist the inclusion of AVID students in AP courses?
21. What are your perceptions regarding the support measures of the administration at the site regarding developing a culture conducive to change so that a greater number of advanced courses are open to AVID students?

22. What are your perceptions and experiences regarding the inclusion of

AVID students in AP courses?

23. What are your perceptions and experiences regarding the exclusion of

AVID students in AP courses?

24. How did your AP course meet or not meet your expectations?

APPENDIX M

CODES

| <u>Code</u> | <u>Grounded</u> | <u>Density</u> |
|--|-----------------|----------------|
| ✦ College Preparation | 16 | 7 |
| ✦ Community Perceptions | 9 | 10 |
| ✦ Counselor/Teacher Skepticism or Bias | 10 | 9 |
| ✦ Counsleor/Teacher concern that limits access | 38 | 9 |
| ✦ Couse Rigor of Lack of Rigor | 31 | 11 |
| ✦ Cultural Equity Improvement | 54 | 9 |
| ✦ Hinderances/Challenges | 55 | 8 |
| ✦ Improving Instruction/Learning | 19 | 12 |
| ✦ Increasing Access to AP courses | 18 | 8 |
| ✦ Inequity | 28 | 9 |
| ✦ Lack of Support for Students | 7 | 8 |
| ✦ Power concern that hinders student access/learning | 12 | 9 |
| ✦ School Support | 29 | 10 |
| ✦ Student Accepts/Does not Accept a Challenge | 24 | 9 |
| ✦ Suggestions to Improve Culture | 5 | 5 |
| ✦ Teacher Encouragement/Student Benefit | 14 | 8 |