

Understanding Alternative Education: A Mixed Methods Examination of Student Experiences

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Susan Glassett Farrelly
California State University, Fullerton
Erika Daniels
California State University San Marcos

Alternative education plays a critical role in the opportunity gap that persists in the US public education system. However, there has been little research on alternative schools. Scaffolded by a theoretical framework constructed from critical theory, self-determination theory (SDT) and student voice, this research examined how well students in alternative schools were being served. The purpose of this mixed methods study was to document, describe, and analyze the student experience at alternative school. The first phase used self-determination theory and extant data to describe students attending an alternative school. Distinct groups of students were established using cluster analysis. These groups provide a vehicle for maximal variation sampling of participants in the second phase, a narrative inquiry. This study found that SDT predicts which students are on track to meet their educational goals, and that these students experience personalized education and develop strong student-teacher relationships. The student stories establish the importance of alternative schools but also reveal the need to change the ways our educational system employs alternative programs. This study suggests a path that can ultimately lead to effective alternative education.

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Introduction

Disparities in school performance among various groups of students were first dubbed the “achievement gap” in 1963 (Walker, 1963). The achievement gap refers not just to a gap in standardized test scores, but graduation rates, discipline, data - an “opportunity gap” (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Alternative schools (the terms alternative school and alternative program, used interchangeably throughout the literature reviewed, are used interchangeably in this paper) play a pivotal role in all. Serving students labeled “at-risk” of educational failure, alternative programs operate “with a relatively high degree of autonomy” (Lehr & Lange, 2003, p. 60), ignored and exempt from accountability. The number of alternative schools and students is growing, the result of increases in suspensions and expulsions, pushing students out of their traditional schools and into alternative schools (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009).

There is no standard definition of alternative education (Aron, 2006). Most researchers and the US Department of Education agree that alternative education serves students labeled “at-risk” of educational failure (Lehr et al., 2009). These students may be disruptive, truant, involved with the juvenile justice system, failing academically, pregnant, or already parents. (Carver & Lewis, 2010). They are disproportionately students of African American, Latino, or Native American descent, have low socioeconomic status (SES), and often have special needs (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Smith, 2003).

Many alternative schools warehouse problem students and ineffective teachers (Kelly 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr & Lang, 2003; Warren, 2007). Alternative schools are often created for the benefit of the traditional schools, which use alternative programs as holding pens for their disruptive and underperforming students (Brown, 2007; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr et al., 2009; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Muñoz, 2004; Warren, 2007). Through the overuse of suspensions and expulsions, disadvantaged youth are marginalized. Zero-tolerance policies and an increased focus on accountability in traditional schools lend rationale to exclusionary discipline policies (Brown, 2007; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Lehr et al., 2009; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009).

Poor students, students of color, and those with disabilities are disproportionately disciplined and disenfranchised (APA, 2008; Martinez, 2009; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Most of these students drop out or end up in alternative schools (Advancement Project, 2010; Arcia, 2006). Alternative schools can be supportive places. (de la Ossa, 2005; Poyrazli et al., 2008; Quinn, Poinier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006; Saunders & Saunders, 2001). However, even in these programs, “at-risk” students are viewed as deficient, and given an easier route to graduation, making success in post secondary education or careers less likely (Atkins, Bullis, & Todis, 2005; Darling & Price, 2004; Fairbrother, 2008; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Washington, 2008).

Previous studies have rightly emphasized the need to incorporate student voice into the research (Brown, 2007; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; de la Ossa, 2005; Loutzenheiser, 2002; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009), since little is known about how alternative schools meet student needs. Do alternative schools reengage students? How does learning, academic achievement, and personal development compare to the outcomes at traditional schools? Is alternative education really an alternative, or just a place to hide and hold disenfranchised students? Alternative program students are the best source for answers to these questions. This research sought to authorize the student perspective, by making meaning of their experiences. This

research captured how alternative schools affect the lived educational experiences of their students. In their own voice, students explain why alternative programs are important, and how they can be improved. It is hoped that these stories will compel more research and catalyze changes in policy, procedures, and instruction for alternative schools.

Purpose of the Study

All aspects of alternative education need research, especially concerning student outcomes (Atkins et al., 2005; Brown, 2007; Foley & Pang, 2006; Kelly, 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr & Lange, 2003; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Muñoz, 2004; Quinn et al., 2006; Warren, 2007). The purpose of this research was to examine student experiences in alternative schools to determine if their educational needs were being met and if opportunities for improvement existed.

This study analyzed student experiences in an alternative school. The two-phased, explanatory, mixed methods study gathered and analyzed quantitative data from a sample of the students, and then examined the reasons behind those results by interviewing a subset of the participants. The first phase made use of student surveys and records to identify and purposefully select participants for the second phase. The second qualitative phase, a narrative inquiry into student educational experiences, was emphasized because this study wanted to understand the lived experiences of students in alternative schools.

The overarching questions that guided this study were: Do alternative schools provide a real alternative for the students who attend them, and how can alternative schools better serve their students? The specific questions this research explored in order to answer the larger questions were:

- 1) Who attends alternative school?
- 2) What is the lived student educational experience before, during, and after attending alternative school?

Understanding who attends alternative schools, how they came to be enrolled, and their experiences helped answer the question of whether or not students are provided an equitable educational alternative. Listening to the perspective of students provided essential input to improving alternative education practice.

Theoretical Framework

Because the existing research is ambiguous and/or inconclusive, it is important to situate an understanding of this type of education within a theoretical framework. Three theories guided the development of this study.

Critical Theory

Examining alternative schools to determine if they provide a *real* alternative necessitated an investigation focused on collecting and analyzing data with an interpretive framework that accepts complexity, conceives knowledge as being socially constructed, and plays particular attention to the role power plays. Is it a *real alternative* that provides students with a fair and

equitable education, as opposed to a *reasonable solution* when viewed through the lens of a dominant White culture? This research embraced critical theory's goals of critique and transformation, restitution, and emancipation (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The literature suggests using a critical theory or a social justice lens to highlight student experiences in alternative education (Brown, 2007; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Muñoz, 2004).

Student Voice

Student voice was this study's *raison d'être*. Students are capable of expressing their views about their learning and school experience (Groves, 2010; Kruse, 2000; Storz, 2008). The voices of students are essential to successful school reform efforts (Fielding, 2001; Fullan, 2007; Mitra & Gross, 2009).

Student perspectives are important to understanding how attending alternative school affects student academic, social and emotional wellbeing (Brown, 2007; de la Ossa, 2005). The voices of students help researchers appreciate how school contexts shape student behavior, and contribute or discourage persistence in school (de la Ossa, 2005; Loutzenheiser, 2002; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). Students identify factors that contribute to or hinder motivational classroom experiences, thereby influencing their academic achievement (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; de la Ossa, 2005; Loutzenheiser, 2002).

Self-determination Theory

Most students arrive at alternative schools disengaged from the educational system, often described as unmotivated, and bringing very little energy or commitment. Understanding student self regulation and motivation are central to the analysis of student outcomes. This study used self-determination theory (SDT) to provide a scaffold for that understanding (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

SDT posits that humans have three basic innate and universal psychological needs. The three are autonomy – feeling ownership for choices and behaviors, competence- feeling effective, and relatedness – feeling connected to others. An environment that satisfies these needs supports engagement in and mastery of skills and concepts within it (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Substantial research has linked basic needs satisfaction to student classroom behavior, academic achievement, cognitive learning, and persistence in school (Hardre & Reeve, 2003; Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth, 2007). This is true across gender, age, and cultures (Chirkov, 2009; Guay, Ratelle, & Chanal, 2008; Jang, Reeve, Ryan, & Kim, 2009). Support of these basic psychological needs correlates to intrinsic motivation, which in turn is associated with student engagement and academic achievement (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryzin et al., 2007).

Methods

This study identified, documented, and analyzed students' lived educational experiences. The methodology used was a two-phased, mixed methods design. The first quantitative phase drew upon SDT, using student surveys, to answer the question: Who attends alternative schools? A narrative inquiry grounded in student voice followed in the second phase, to answer the central research question: What is the lived student educational experience before, during, and after attending alternative school? An analysis of narratives combined the results of both phases.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study was conducted at a school operated by a County Office of Education (pseudonyms were used for all organizational names and specific locations) in the southwestern United States, with eight locations, and 300 – 450 sixth through twelfth grade students on a 245-day school year. A quarter of the students were enrolled in independent study (IS), the remainder attended small (20 – 25 students) multi-grade classrooms.

Participants. The student population was highly mobile. In the 2010-2011 school year, the official enrollment for the school was 336, but 1,024 different students were enrolled at some time. The average mobility rate was 77%, with fewer than 30% attending for more than one year. Students were referred to the school by 22 local school districts, the probation department, and social service agencies. Most had been expelled from their local school districts, many transitioning into or out of the juvenile justice system. In the 2010-2011 school year more than 81% of students identified as Hispanic or Latino, while County enrollment was 44% Latino and enrollment for the 22 districts was 39% Latino. Special education students, and students with low SES were also disproportionately enrolled.

Phase One - Quantitative. The data collected in Phase One were obtained from student records and a student survey that utilized a Basic Psychological Needs Scale (BPNS) as its central component. Data were demographics, enrollment dates, perceived basic psychological needs satisfaction, self identified goals, and students' assessment of their instructional environment. After parent and participant consent forms were obtained, a convenient sample of students attending CCS completed a survey indicating how they felt about the school, their learning, and the instruction they receive.

Instrument. The survey was a modified version of the Basic Needs Satisfaction at Work Scale (BNSW-S), one version of the Basic Psychological Needs Scale (BPNS) (University Of Rochester, 2008). Two versions have been used in educational settings: BNSW-S (Brokelman, 2009; Gillison, Standage, & Skevington, 2008) and the Basic Needs Satisfaction in General Scale (BPNG-S) (Lovett, 2009; Wei, Shaffer, Young, & Zakalik, 2005). The BNSW-S was used because it is more established, context specific, and the reported reliability was higher.

The BNSW-S has 21 items: eight autonomy items, six competence items, and seven relatedness items. Participants respond on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by (1) not true at all to (7) very true. An adapted version of this scale was piloted with a total of 122 students. The instrument used in this study reflected the results of factor and reliability analysis in the pilot study.

Quantitative data analysis. Data from student records and the survey were coded and entered into SPSS. Totals for each subscale and BPNS were calculated, normality confirmed and outliers removed. The researcher checked the reliability of the instrument by looking at the internal consistency of the BPNS and its subscales. Using confirmatory factor analysis, the researcher also verified the theoretical subscale structure of the BPNS. The strength and direction of relationships between demographic variables such as age, grade, gender, time enrolled, instructional assignment, special education status, and free and reduced lunch qualification were determined by correlational analysis. Additionally, correlations between demographic variables and the BPNS were analyzed.

The researcher used cluster analysis to build student profiles. Cluster Analysis was used to group participants based on the BPNS subscale scores. Consistent with

recommendations made by Hair and Black (2004) and studies done by Mouratidis and Michou (2011) and Vansteenkiste, Sierens, Soenens, Luyckx, and Lens (2009), a Ward's hierarchical cluster analysis with an agglomeration schedule was used to explore the possible clusters, followed by a k-means clustering (Gore, 2000). Following the cluster analysis, the researcher used a double-split cross-validation procedure to examine the stability of the cluster solution (Breckenridge, 2000).

Phase Two – Narrative Inquiry. Consistent with maximal variation sampling, two individuals were purposefully selected from each cluster based how close to the center they were statistically. Qualitative data collection consisted of multiple one-on-one, 30 to 60 minute taped interviews with each participant over a six-month period. To reflect quantitative data results and data captured in previous interviews, the researcher amended interview protocols throughout the interviewing process.

Narrative analysis. Interview data were used to construct each participant's story. In this phase, narrative was the form of inquiry, reasoning, and presentation. The result was each student's unique account of their school experiences, told in their own words.

During pilot interviews, the researcher found that it impossible to capture all the richness of the voice recordings in a transcript. Therefore, the researcher created and coded voice clips creating an audio restorying for each participant by assembling selected clips in chronological order. As each story was constructed in auditory form, a transcript was created to facilitate the analysis of narratives.

Analysis of narratives. In the final stage, the researcher compared participant and cluster demographics, and performed a sequential event-state analysis on the narratives, comparing each participant's chronology of events. Commonalities and differences in the stories were integrated, with the results of Phase One to form profiles of each cluster. Using plot analysis and In Vivo coding the data were segregated, reduced, grouped, and regrouped. Themes emerged from patterns that the researcher identified and described.

Each theme was examined to determine how it explained or was explained by the quantitative results from the first phase. The researcher connected the results from the quantitative and qualitative analyses, and examined the results in relationship to existing literature using the lens established in the theoretical framework. The goal was to not only provide answers to the research questions, but to address the overarching questions with pragmatic prescriptions for improvement.

Summary of Key Findings

Quantitative Results

The data collected in the first phase were obtained from one hundred and eighty-three students, 54% of enrollment. The demographics of the survey participants were consistent with the school's population (see Table 1).

Table 1
Demographic Comparison between Survey Participants and School Population

	Survey Participants	School Population
Latino	81%	81%
White non-Hispanic	11%	11%
African American	6%	4%
Special Education	18%	19%
Limited English Proficient	47%	64%
Free or Reduced lunch	86%	79%
Female	17%	20%
Independent Study	25%	25%

The reliability of the instrument was substantiated, and a principal component analysis of the subscales confirmed the theoretical subscale structure. Correlational analysis showed a strong correlation between age and grade and a medium correlation between age and instructional assignment, indicating that students assigned to independent study (IS) were older.

As expected, all the subscales and the total for the BPNS were highly correlated. A two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) showed a significant correlation, with a medium to large effect size, between instructional assignment and BPNS, after controlling for age and grade. The BPNS totals were higher for students assigned to independent study.

Using the BPNS subscales, a cluster analysis established four significantly different groups (see Figure 1). Cluster membership had significant associations with grade level, instructional assignment, and how students responded to the question: "Do you learn more or less at this school compared to other schools?" Cluster membership also had a significant association with educational goals. Over 50% of Cluster #3 indicated they intended to pursue post secondary education.

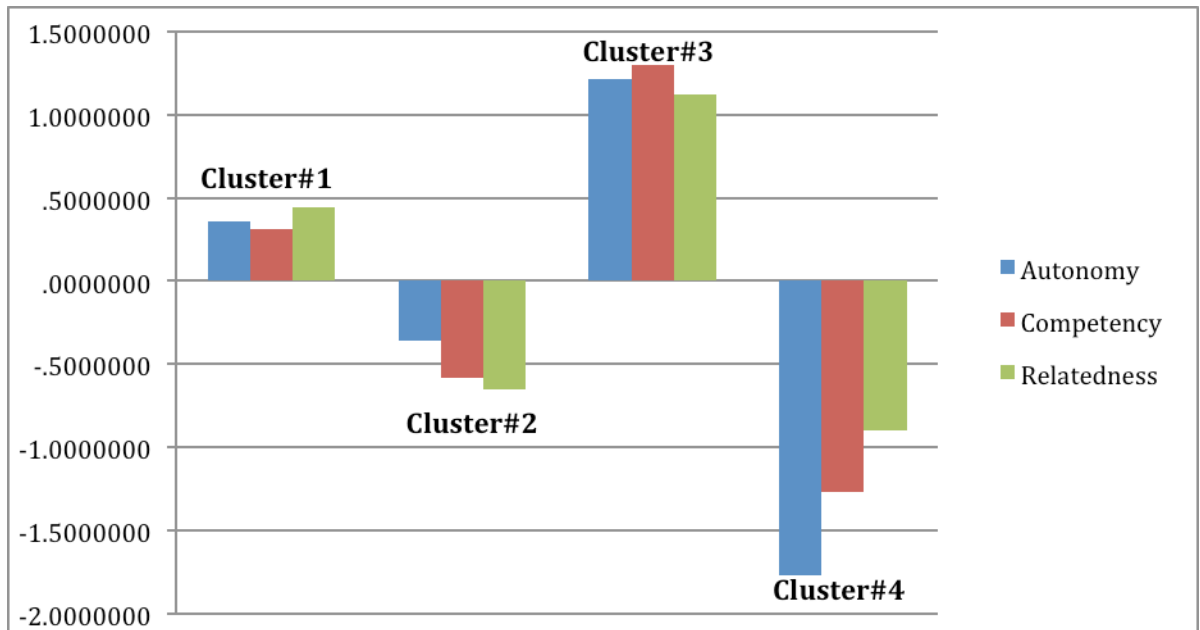


Figure 1. Z score means for autonomy, competency, and relatedness in each cluster

Narrative Analysis

The clusters facilitated a maximal variation sampling of the survey respondents. The researcher selected two students with subscale totals closest to the means for each cluster to interview. Narratives telling each participant’s educational story in their own voice were assembled from the interview audiotapes (the students’ stories are available in their audio form and transcribed in Glassett Farrelly (2013).

Analysis of Narratives

After completing the narrative analysis, the researcher compared participant and cluster demographics, performed a sequential event-state analysis on the narratives, and used commonalities and differences in the stories to integrate the results of both phases. This process identified a different set of traits for Cluster #1 and Cluster #3 compared with Clusters #2 and Cluster #4. These differences proved important because Cluster #1 and Cluster #3 had BPNS means higher than the average means for the whole sample while Cluster #2 and Cluster #4 had BPNS means lower than the sample mean. Referencing Figure 1, the researcher refers to these groups of clusters as “above the line” and “below the line”.

Clusters #1 and #3. The stories for the participants in the above the line clusters have characteristics consistent with SDT. These students were optimistic and they took responsibility for their past decisions. All four stories reference specific teachers by name who the students built a relationship with, and developed strong positive feelings for. None of the below the line stories contain a reference to specific teachers with whom the student felt connected.

All the above the line cluster members were successful academically, and were well on their way to accomplishing their educational goals. Two had graduated, one fulfilled all his graduation requirements and needed only to pass the state exit exam, and the fourth was returning to his traditional school for his senior year with a 3.8 grade point average.

Clusters #2 and #4. The below the line stories lacked positive, specific personal educational experiences. This was consistent with their low relatedness scores, which were not significantly different between the two clusters. The students in the below the line clusters were behind academically, and did not take personal responsibility, or expressed regret, for past decisions. They painted themselves as victims.

Using plot analysis and In Vivo coding, the researcher identified four themes:

- ***Middle school – the beginning.*** Each story had a critical turning point that occurred in middle school.
- ***Alternative school – individual attention.*** The most significant positive attributes of the alternative schools were personalized instruction and individual attention.
- ***Alternative school – academic expectations. Participants described learning environments that were*** less rigorous than that found at their traditional schools.
- ***Intended destinations – building social capital.*** Students' career objectives were dominated by law enforcement and indicated inadequate social capital acquisition.

Who Attends Alternative School?

Students who attended alternative school were disproportionately male students of color (in this study Latinos) who qualified for free or reduced cost federal lunch and had extensive discipline records. A disproportionate number needed special education services. They were not a homogenous group. A profile of their basic psychological needs satisfaction showed a normal distribution, some motivated, academically successful, and possessing a positive sense of well being, while others felt controlled, unable to determine their own destiny, and disengaged from school. They all had a goal of high school graduation. Many dreamed of education after high school.

What is the Lived Student Experience?

Each story was unique and provided valuable insight into the alternative school experience. Examining all the stories together, the qualitative phase of this study established four themes. For most, the journey to alternative school began in middle school. While attending alternative school, the small classrooms and independent study options allowed students to receive individualized, differentiated instruction and attention. Some students were able to build supportive relationships with teachers. However, there was evidence the alternative schools lacked the academic rigor of the traditional schools and failed to help students acquire necessary social capital.

Discussion

This research presented vivid examples of what previous literature established. The student stories illustrated a need to integrate disparate concentrations of research into a pragmatic course of action. The recommendations for practice are summarized here as implications for educators in alternative education, educational leaders, and researchers.

Implications for Educators in Alternative Education

This study provides specific suggestions for administrators, curriculum designers, counselors, staff, and especially teachers who are involved in alternative education. Educational reform is moving to personalized instruction, facilitated by an integration of educational technology (U.S. Department Of Education, 2010). Alternative education needs to be at the forefront of this transformation. This requires reimagining both the concept of independent study and classroom instruction. It embraces a learner-centered rather than teacher-centered approach, and puts a premium on student flexibility. Researchers have documented that learner-centered approaches are successful for at-risk students (Alfassi, 2004; McCombs & Quait, 2002). Alternative schools successfully employing a personalized learning approach exist (Steinberg & Almeida, 2010; Watson, 2011) and can be used as models. The results of this research showed that examining student basic psychological needs satisfaction can help implement a personalized learning approach, by identifying opportunities for program improvement and aiding in student placement and intervention.

The key to academic rigor is maintaining high expectations. Alternative schools often have cultures that categorize their students from a deficit rather than a strength-based perspective, leading to lower expectations and less rigorous instruction (de la Ossa, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Muñoz, 2004; Washington, 2008). Teacher expectations, communicated through verbal and nonverbal cues, instructional practices, and feedback, can influence how students perform (Rosenthal, 2002; Weinstein, 2002). Expectations are particularly important for underserved students who suffer a systemic tendency toward lower expectations, which often produce a significant self-fulfilling prophecy effect, accompanied by learned helplessness (de Boer, Bosker, & van der Werf, 2010; Weinstein, 2002).

Implications for Educational Leaders

Policy makers at the Federal, State, and local levels must both improve alternative education and address the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline practices. Studies show that schools with higher suspension rates have lower academic quality and school climate ratings (Losen & Skiba, 2011). Suspensions and expulsions have not proven effective in making schools safer or improving the learning environment (APA, 2008). Suspensions and expulsion rates are positively correlated to lower school-wide student achievement (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). These facts should lead Superintendents, Board Members, and site administrators to discourage the discretionary use of suspensions and expulsions, implementing instead, programs identified by research as effective at keeping students in school while still maintaining safe environments (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Gagnon & Leone, 2001).

Absent federal or state legislation, most alternative programs go unmonitored (Lehr et al., 2009; Martin & Brand, 2006). Alternative schools need to be held accountable if improved student academic outcomes are to be realized. It is imperative that legislators and policy makers understand the systemic role alternative programs play. National, state, and local educational leaders cannot allow their fervor for increased test scores in traditional schools to sweep alternative students under the rug. They must avoid using alternative schools as off the record warehouses for disruptive and academically challenged students, keeping them away from established interventions and reporting systems in the traditional schools. Almeida, Le, Steinberg, and Cervantes (2010) warned of “a sea change in state policy and practice” that is needed to help alternative education establish itself “as a viable, proficiency-based pathway for the millions of young people who are failing to thrive in more traditional settings” (p. v).

Implications for Researchers

Alternative Education. Professors and doctoral students in Educational Leadership programs need to pay attention to alternative education. It is a critical component to addressing opportunity gaps within the US public educational system. All aspects of alternative education need further research. National and state databases need to be examined to determine accurate enrollment numbers. Demographics of alternative school student populations need to be compared to the student populations in the traditional schools from where students are referred. State and national test score data bases should be mined for student achievement data in alternative schools.

There is a need to incorporate student voice into research and alternative education reform efforts (Brown, 2007; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; de la Ossa, 2005; Loutzenheiser, 2002; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). In this study students have offered insight into what enhances their educational experiences, and what detracts from their success. Students have useful things to say about their education, what engages them, and what impedes their learning. The authors of this paper agree with past research suggesting more longitudinal studies highlighting student experiences need to be conducted using a critical theory or social justice lens, thereby empowering the marginalized student population in alternative education (Brown, 2007; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Muñoz, 2004; Poyrazli et al., 2008).

Also needed is further research measuring student outcomes in alternative schools (Atkins et al., 2005; Brown, 2007; Foley & Pang, 2006; Kelly, 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr & Lange, 2003; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Muñoz, 2004; Quinn et al., 2006; Warren, 2007). Research objectively measuring academic achievement and student learning is necessary to inform leaders at alternative schools. This study suggests that educators in alternative programs need not only to create caring, supportive environments but also to guard against watered down separate and unequal academic programs, which severely limit their students’ future choices. Future research “requires an adaptive philosophy of inquiry that neither sacrifices rigor for sensitivity or accuracy for appearances” (Muñoz, 2004, p. 15).

Methodology. The methodology developed for this study, in segments or its totality, is generalizable and useful to future doctoral research in education. It provides a theoretically informed mechanism for rigorous maximal variation sampling of participants in a narrative inquiry and includes both narrative analysis and an analysis of narratives. Audio files were the data source for the narrative analysis in this methodology. Creating stories in the participants’ own voice preserves the impact and meaning of their experience. Using this approach offers

researchers an opportunity to document diverse experiences and identify common aspects of experience for the phenomenon being investigated.

Conclusion

This research had two overarching questions: Do alternative schools provide a real alternative for the students who attend them, and how can alternative schools better serve their students? No one can listen to the students who provided their educational stories in this study without appreciating the importance of the alternative programs they attended. Alternative schools do provide an alternative education path, without which many students' goals of a diploma and continuing education would not be attainable. It was in alternative school that the participants of this study received individual attention, and were able to chart out a path to either graduation or a return to their traditional schools. Many came to value an education for the first time. Students who had believed they were incapable of learning were able to build a relationship with caring supportive teachers. These teachers guided the students in taking responsibility for their own learning. This study, however, casts doubt that alternative education levels the playing field for underserved, marginalized students.

It is necessary to take a systemic view when answering the second question, how can alternative schools better serve their students? Research clearly lays out a path for building upon the strengths found in alternative education, to reach the goal of a real alternative - an alternative that confronts and closes the opportunity gap. The path starts with new discipline policies and procedures. Educators need to recognize the first discipline referral or poor citizenship grade as an opportunity for successful early intervention, not the beginning of a paper trail that ultimately results in removal. The menu of interventions must include alternative programs that provide an opportunity for personalized learning in an environment that supports the creation of caring, nurturing relationships with teachers. Teachers trained and practiced in behaviors that foster these relationships, establish and maintain high expectations, and support the growth and maintenance of student social-capital. Teachers, schools, districts, states, and the federal government must become accountable to each other and the students they serve, not simply with standardized test scores, but with measures of student goal attainment, and basic psychological needs satisfaction. It is time to let alternative education out of the closet, and focus on what it can be. When educators follow this path, then the system will offer a real alternative for all students.

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