

A Collective Pursuit of Learning the Possibility to Be:

The CAMP Experience Assisting
Situationally Marginalized Mexican
American Students to a Successful
Student Identity

Reynaldo Reyes III
University of Texas at El Paso

fFor too many situationally marginalized¹ Mexican-descent students in 21st-century schools, hope often diminishes through the daily struggles they endure outside of school walls. Even within those walls, the hyper-segregated schools they attend continue to fail to address their needs (Faltis & Arias, in press; Frankenberg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003; Orfield, 1999). Thus, a number of these students of Mexican descent may not have sufficiently experienced what is necessary to provide the trajectory toward learning how to be academically successful. Trueba (2002) suggested that students who must contend with dueling linguistic and cultural identities in the process of acculturation and/or assimilation

1 Situationally marginalized in this study will be rooted in the definition for marginalized, which is “to exclude or ignore, especially by relegating to the outer edge of a group or by diverting the public’s attention to something else” (Webster’s New World Dictionary, 1991), but emphasize that it is something that occurred *to* the students based on their personal and/or schooling situations, and does not attribute any characteristics to or define who the students are.

Many students of Mexican descent must learn how to be successful students. This study describes 5 students of Mexican descent from situationally marginalized lives who were a part of a support and retention scholarship program (College Assistance Migrant Program—CAMP). These case studies document how they perceived their learning and how they changed as students after their first college experience and involvement in CAMP. Through her involvement in CAMP, Laura, a high school dropout without a supportive home or school environment, came to see herself as a successful student. As an English Language Learner, Cristina felt ill-prepared to begin a college career; however, by experiencing successes in her first year of coursework and being involved in CAMP, she gained self-confidence. Maria, a teen mother with two children, saw college as the only way out of poverty. She exhibited resiliency and the desire to use the experience to gain insightful and practical knowledge about herself as a student and mother. During high school, the continual relocation between Mexico and the United States negatively affected Luz's ability to be successful. Through CAMP, she gained confidence in her ability to relate with others, particularly with teachers and professors. Ruben, a former gang member, struggled in his first semester as he acclimated to the structured environment of a classroom. Despite this struggle, the CAMP staff and his professors saw growth in Ruben's social behavior. These case studies show that students who would not normally be considered "college material," when given the opportunity and appropriate support, can become successful. This success hinges on their new perspective of themselves and their participation in a community of practice.

Summary

have a resource from which they can fuel resilience. However, we must also address the issues of those who may not be as resilient and continue to be marginalized in school and society. Prescribed pedagogical approaches and theories describing how to work more effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse student populations still are not as effective as they could be with students of Mexican descent (Bartolomé, 1994; Bartolomé & Trueba, 2000; Reyes, 1992) at all grade levels.

Sociocultural contexts, the interactions that occur between the student and those involved within those contexts, impact one's identity as a successful student. Understanding these contexts is integral in creating successful teaching-learning dynamics for situationally marginalized student populations. Engaging with others in a community that works, struggles, and experiences academic support and success enables students to learn how to be successful students. Engaging in "doing college" and "being in college" aids in the acquisition of knowledge and the development of a successful student identity. In addition to being with others in a community that engages in the practice of being a college student, this often requires working within a teaching-learning context with others who are more knowledgeable about schooling success and who have experienced what is required to achieve academically. For instance, those who already have experienced and successfully completed college may serve as role models. Furthermore, even before dealing with the rigors of academic work, engagement with such communities and contexts is integral in the learning process and the development of characteristics of a successful student. Cummins (2000) believed that academic achievement is very difficult to attain if marginalized students cannot perceive themselves as potentially successful students.

The College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) is a program that provides students with human resources and networks of instructors, counselors, administrators, mentors, and other students who offer academic and personal wisdom, knowledge, and information. This study examined the thoughts and reactions of 5 students through case studies of their experiences in

college with the CAMP program. I describe how these 5 students, after one academic year of participation in college through the CAMP program, express what they have learned and how they have changed as students. For triangulation purposes, the perspectives of their instructors and CAMP advisors and/or support staff are also included in the findings and discussion.

Situational Marginalization for Mexican-Descent Students

The Hispanic population in the year 2002 was 37.4 million, 13.3% of the U.S. population, with the Mexican-descent population comprising 66.9% of the total of all Hispanic groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). More importantly, the heterogeneity that exists within the Mexican-descent population creates various subgroups that manifest “different experiences and different adaptations and strategies to life in the United States” (Matute-Bianchi, 1991, p. 209). Suárez-Orozco (1991) argued that these distinct populations require further study of the *differences* of their educational adaptation because they “face different issues and should be understood as such” (p. 37). In other words, students of Mexican descent in U.S. schools have different learning experiences because of their different life situations. Educators, policy-makers, and researchers must stop broadly categorizing their theories and findings from research in “Latino,” “Mexican,” or “Hispanic” communities because not all of these students experience schooling similarly. When there is an assumption of similar experience in school, there is a tendency to find the “one right method” to fix any problem that is associated with effectively working with and teaching that population (Bartolomé, 1994; Reyes, 1992). That is why I use the term *situational marginalization* in my work. This term helps to pinpoint more precisely a particular student subpopulation, naming that which is afflicting their efforts in school.

Students of Mexican descent historically have experienced greater educational inequities and lower academic achievement

or success, compared to other Hispanic populations, as well as to Anglo students and other ethnic groups (Garcia, 2001; Moreno, 1999). As in the past, many students of Mexican descent continue to remain on the margins of their schooling and social existence, not getting the opportunities to engage in collaborative and positive practices of teaching and learning in and outside of schools. This marginalization may be from institutional inequities; the cumulative effect of sociohistorical events in their lives, such as crime, poverty, and lack of positive adult role models; or the impact(s) of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999), which takes away their academic aspiration, as well as the cultural and linguistic assets that make them who they are. "Hobbled at the outset by a history of poverty and disadvantage, most Chicanos/as fall victim to the hurdles and, calculating the odds against winning, take themselves out of the race" (Gándara, 1999, p. 169).

In this study, I use the term situational marginalization to highlight what is occurring to particular subpopulations of students of Mexican descent. Situational marginalization is a state of temporal and spatial existence and struggle that relegates such students to the margins of school, community, and society. Situational marginalization stems from the influence of outside forces on one's life and self-determination, over which they have little control or power, eventually negatively impacting self-perception and impeding social and educational mobility. In addition, situational marginalization is rooted in one's particular life situation, such as teen pregnancy, antisocial behavior such as gang activity, or poverty (Reyes, 2006).

There is often a stigma attached to Mexican-descent students who live various situationally marginal existences; this may be exacerbated by today's anti-Mexican/anti-immigrant climate. Such students are sometimes further marginalized in their own schools when teachers and administrators isolate them from other students who have been successful in school and the communities that are conducive to contributing to successful student identities (Romo & Falbo, 1996; Smith, 2000). Beyond the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences that the mainstream utilizes to label peoples of Mexican descent as "other" (Acuña,

1996; Oboler, 1995), situationally marginalized students of such background may have to endure further negative associations because another negative label such as poor, pregnant, or ESL is consciously or subconsciously influencing the educators' perceptions and interactions with these students (Cummins, 2000). These students' relegation to the margins of school may be due to the "structurally and culturally-based social conflict that arises from a school's organization, teachers' perspectives, and students' identities and values" (Smith, 2000, p. 256).

Furthermore, underprivileged Latinos across the U.S. are attending more segregated schools (Orfield, 1999). In integrated and academically heterogeneous schools, there would be an increased chance of interacting with more academically successful students who have learned to navigate school systems effectively by tapping into institutional resources, personnel, and other students who could assist them in their pursuit of academic achievement (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Students who are situationally marginalized are in that state because of particular life situations that they have little or no control over, and they may not know how to effectively manage or cope with their marginalization or fully understand what has put them in that situation. In addition, the role of hegemonic forces in school and society may have a great deal of power and/or influence over their life trajectories (Reyes, 2006). Although others may adopt a deficit perspective (Valencia, 1997) and blame the student him- or herself, I use the term situational marginalization to view the student as having potential and it provides for the possibility of academic success.

Latinos in Community Colleges

Integration into the social and academic systems of a college directly impacts whether minority students persist toward a college degree (Tinto, 1993). Tinto found that disadvantaged African American and Hispanic students "tend to face greater problems in meeting the academic demands of college work, in finding a suitable niche in the social and intellectual life of the

college, and perhaps in obtaining sufficient financial resources” (p. 75). Nora (1990), in her study of low-income, Mexican American students in community colleges, described two programs, *Puente* and *Enlace*, that provided financial assistance and academic support to ensure that the students had a chance to continue with their college education. These programs helped to ensure retention and completion of core courses and to support transfer to a 4-year university. They involved people who worked well with this student population and provided the guidance and skills to overcome obstacles (Avalos & Pavel, 1993).

In one particular study involving how students viewed themselves in a community college context, Shaw (1999) found that community college students, in contrast to what is often considered a more “traditional” student, encompassed a life that included working part-time or full-time, having children, possibly having financial constraints, and looking for a way to improve their present life condition. She found that community college students saw themselves as multifaceted, “faced with a myriad of roles, both assumed and imposed” (p. 167). She found that the students in her study did “choose which identities will take precedence at particular points in time” (p. 168).

In higher education, completion of 2- and 4-year degrees has become almost as problematic as the high school dropout situation for students of Mexican descent. Enrollment for Latinos/as in postsecondary institutions is very high, but fewer are actually completing degree requirements and graduating. According to a government report by Fry (2003) only 16.4% of Hispanic foreign-born, second, and third generation students attain their bachelor’s degree compared to 36.5% for White students and 20% for Black students. Because the retention of students of Mexican descent in college requires attention, the main objective of a program like CAMP is to ensure that the students involved are given the opportunities to learn the skills and have the experiences necessary to continue their postsecondary education. Part of this process is being able to see oneself as a successful student. The College Assistance Migrant Program integrates unique aspects of sociocultural

interactions within a community of teachers, learners, counselors, and peers that work together to ensure success of the students involved.

Theoretical Framework

Legitimate Peripheral Participation: Learning, Person, and Identity

Legitimate peripheral participation is a social-psychological construct that examines learning that occurs in interactions in communities with more knowledgeable others, or others who have knowledge of how to engage in a particular practice. When one is in the process of learning a particular field or acquiring skills, he or she begins to take on characteristics of those who are farther along the continuum within that sociocultural context of learning and development. “Peripheral participation is about being located in the social world. *Changing* locations and perspectives are a part of actors’ learning trajectories, developing identities, and forms of membership” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 36). The nature and dynamics of one’s participation in a practice and engagement framework subsumes the role of one’s self-perception, defined and created by past historical, educational, political, and cultural experiences.

As an aspect of social practice, learning involves the whole person; it implies not only a relation to specific activities, but a relation to social communities—it implies becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of person. In this view, learning only partly—and often incidentally—implies becoming able to be involved in new activities, to perform new tasks and functions, to master new understandings. Activities, tasks, functions, and understandings do not exist in isolation; they are part of broader systems of relations in which they have meaning. These systems of relations arise out of and are reproduced

and developed within social communities, which are in part systems of relations among persons. The person is defined by as well as defines these relations. Learning thus implies becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations. To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53)

As participants' identities develop through their participation, they gain a better sense of their role and ability in that learning situation. The nature of the student-teacher interactions determines not only the degree of learning that occurs but also the valence of self-perception (or identity) that develops (Cummins, 1996). Teachers can empower students to feel capable of learning and advancing, or they can teach students in a manner that inculcates a negative self-image and identity.

When students' developing sense of self is affirmed and extended through their interactions with teachers, they are more likely to apply themselves to academic effort and participate actively in instruction. The consequent learning is the fuel that generates further academic effort. (Cummins, 1996, p. 2)

Those new to the community of practice (learning to be and become successful students) must move beyond peripheral places in order to develop their identities as learners.

Because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming—to become a certain person or, conversely to avoid becoming a certain person. . . . It is the information of an identity that learning can become a source of meaningfulness and of personal and social energy. (Wenger, 1998, p. 122)

For newcomers to a community of practice, “shifting location as they move centripetally through a complex form of practice creates possibilities for understanding the world as experienced. Denying access and limiting the centripetal movement of newcomers and other practitioners changes the learning curriculum” (Wenger, 1998, pp. 122–123). Furthermore, “viewing learning as legitimate peripheral participation means that learning is not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). Identities are “long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice. Thus identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). In this sense, learning and a sense of identity can be seen as one in the same phenomenon.

Study Site Context and the Students

The College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) is a federally funded scholarship program that is designed to provide opportunities for students from migrant, agricultural, and/or lower income families to attend college. It offers first-year college support in the form of tuition assistance, funds for books, a monthly stipend, and a curriculum and program design that offers a community of academic and personal support by all those involved with the program. The CAMP program highlighted in this study took place at Next Step Community College (pseudonym) in a small, rural town approximately 30 miles east of Boulder, CO.

The CAMP program in this study offered a number of programs and services that were designed to meet the various academic and personal needs of the students. There were courses offered in a learning community format where CAMP students took two courses in one (e.g., psychology and English) as a cohort for one academic quarter, and biweekly meetings with the program director and/or other CAMP personnel who had administrative and supportive positions in the program. They provided information on scholarship opportunities, financial aid, study tips,

and time for students to discuss struggles and successes. Mentors from the community and a local university supported the CAMP students via e-mail. There were also social gatherings at which mentors mingled with CAMP students; professors at the college who invested in support system of the CAMP program; tutoring and academic support, either by tutors outside of the college, instructors holding tutoring sessions, or by other students within the CAMP program; social gatherings and events; team-building activities and ropes courses to build camaraderie and trust among CAMP students; and personal and academic advising available on a daily basis by CAMP staff and personnel.

The 5 students highlighted in this study were part of a larger cohort of 22 students (68% Mexican descent, $n = 15$, 32% Caucasian, $n = 7$). All 5 students profiled in these case studies were of Mexican descent. The students qualified for the CAMP program through provisions that allowed for parents or family members to work or have worked in green houses or nurseries, dairy farms, meat packing plants, or farms and ranches. Many students also qualified through their participation in the High School Equivalency Program or the federal job training act (WIA), where many of the families and students come from low-income situations.

All of the CAMP students came from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, which also impacted their life and schooling situations. The CAMP students in this study experienced social, personal, educational, and/or psychological life situations that impeded their ability to be successful in school prior to enrolling in the CAMP program. Table 1 provides information on the students highlighted in this study.

Methods

The present study sought to answer the following research question: After one year of college mediated by the College Assistance Migrant Program, what sense of learning, development, and aspirations of being a successful college student did the CAMP participants present to themselves and others?

Table 1

Student Case Study Information Table

	Age	Sex	Self-Label	Place of Birth	Language(s)	Education	Marginalization Situation
Laura	20	Female	Hispanic	Denver, CO	English	GED	Isolation from teachers, peers, school
Cristina	18	Female	Chicana	Brighton, CO	Spanish, English	High School Diploma	Low self-perception on academic abilities
Maria	20	Female	Hispanic	Loveland, CO	English, Spanish	GED	Teen motherhood
Luz	18	Female	Hispanic	Denver, CO	Spanish, English	High School Diploma	Little/no family support for schooling
Ruben	21	Male	Mexican	San Pedro, CA	English	GED	Former gang member

This qualitative case study (Merriam, 1998) of 5 student participants used narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and ethnographic methods (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999), such as interviews, participant observations (Spradley, 1980), and document gathering. The principal forms of data were from structured and unstructured interviews; field note observations; and documents, such as transcripts, class schedules, student journals, and course work and writings. Data-gathering took place over the course of one academic year (October to October). I interviewed each of the students four times throughout the year—at the beginning of the year, in the middle, at the end of the year, and during the days following the summer of the completion of their CAMP experience.

Sampling was purposive (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The student participants were asked to participate in this study based on the following criteria:

1. they were of Mexican descent;

2. personal and schooling histories indicated some sense of school, personal, socioeconomic, or social marginalization;
3. they were taking college coursework for the very first time; and
4. they were willing to commit to this study for one full year.

As a participant observer in this study, I participated in many of the functions of the CAMP program while conducting research. All students (both study participants and nonparticipants), CAMP administrators, and instructors were aware of my role as researcher while participating in CAMP courses, events, and meetings, as well as my role as a participant and assistant in many of the CAMP activities and functions.

Along with analyzing the stories (narrative analysis) told by the students and others from the interview data, I used a constant-comparative method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which is commonly used in case study research (Merriam, 1998). This involves a continuous comparison of chunks of data to others while themes and categories began to emerge throughout the various stages of data collection. This evolved into what Spradley (1980) called domain analysis. One of my coding systems of domain analysis consisted of color-coding particular words and expressions found in the interview transcripts, field note observations, documents, e-mails, and student work and journals. I mainly examined the students as individual case studies; however, because there were multiple case studies, I also did a thematic analysis of the data from students and other significant players in the CAMP program, such as the instructors, CAMP advisors, and coordinators. For triangulation purposes, a thematic analysis of what the CAMP officials said about the learning and development of the 5 highlighted case studies is discussed (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005).

Findings

Laura

High School Experience. Laura was marginalized because teachers, students, or even friends could not really understand her and accept her as she was. She was extremely shy, people ridiculed her, and she never felt like she could be a part of a community. She dropped out of high school her freshman year. Laura did not have the self-confidence and skills to do her school work in high school, and the lack of attention from her teachers contributed to her problems. She would constantly get behind in her work but was afraid to seek the help she needed because she thought it would make her appear deficient in some way. She felt that the people she admired were essentially giving up on her and not encouraging her in her academic efforts. This made her not care about school. She was conflicted about her role and efforts in her education and those that adult figures played in it. It was a cycle that eventually led her to leave school. She said,

I couldn't keep up with it. I used to miss a lot of days. I don't think the teachers cared if I was there or not. It had to do with me not wanting to be there a lot. Maybe I was lazy . . . or I wasn't pushed that much by parents or teachers or anyone. (Laura, interview, January 28, 2003)

Although she partially blames herself for leaving high school, she also felt that she could have benefited from being in an environment at home or school that created opportunities for her to engage in school more effectively. Because she believed that others did not care about her schooling, this had a great impact on her desire to continue with her schooling and her ability to care about it. Laura felt that she “blew” her chance for college when she dropped out of high school.

Before starting college and the CAMP program, she was scared “cause I thought it was gonna be hard. . . . I thought I guess before I thought it was far from my reach like I couldn't,

you know, possibly be here” (Laura, interview, January 28, 2003). She admitted she was afraid because of her low self-confidence in doing school work. She did not feel that she was adequately prepared to do the work required for college, admitting that it was “maybe low self-esteem or because I was out of school for so long. I didn’t think that, I guess, I didn’t have the brain power I guess to do it” (Laura, interview, January 28, 2003).

Going into college and the CAMP program, Laura still had fears of whether she had the motivation and ability to push herself beyond what she was accustomed to in her educational efforts. There was still a lingering fear that others would not be there to “push” her, so she would have to create this sense of agency on her own.

CAMP Experience. Overall Developmental GPA ²: 3.61; Overall College-Level GPA: 3.61.

Laura thought about how she saw herself as a successful or potentially successful student in terms of stages. She felt she needed to identify first with simply “working hard,” and then she adopted notions and identities of success as she met goals and completed her work. She said that, “I think it’s starting cause as a college student right now I guess I see myself as working hard, I guess that’s my identity . . . as a hard worker. And, and I guess . . . just maybe figuring it out.” Part of this task encompassed her “as being a student . . . now trying to . . . see my future or see my goals.”

Laura said, “I think I’ve changed a lot. In the beginning, I was really quiet, but now, I’ll talk a bit more, more openly, not much, but I’m getting there. I can be more confident in myself. If I get stressed out, I can handle it better.” Although still quiet and whisper-like in her conversations, Laura seemed more confident and optimistic. She commented that being in the CAMP program was helping her to see a positive future. She said that this was a place and a time that was positively contributing to her movement toward her goals. She found herself open to new opportunities, ones “that will help me in the future. Well, this

² All CAMP students had to take developmental courses to address academic deficiencies in English and/or mathematics. I calculated developmental course grades separate from college-level course grades.

opportunity. It will help me because when I graduate, I'll be able to get better jobs and pursue what I want to do. No one telling me I'm not successful" (Laura, interview, March 4, 2003).

This process included engaging in the work required to get to the next step of her education, recognizing that her identity as a successful student would take on its own shape and process as she continues. She said, "I need to, you know, it'll be you know, to figure it out. It'll progress, I guess, as I go on" (Laura, interview, July 15, 2003). She told me that she felt this identity as a good and positive student emerged from underneath layers of her past, with the present experience helping to initiate this change. She said in regard to her identity as a student,

I think it before was like, like hidden I think. But now that, that I've gone through this and I've seen that, that I can, by doing hard work hard and you know just sticking to it, I can do it. (Laura, interview, July 15, 2003)

When asked if she changed after one year of attending college through the CAMP program, she admitted that

I became more confident about schoolwork and outside of school. I spoke up more. I don't know, it just makes me feel confident to try to succeed in school and in the world. I can do a lot more, learn a lot more. It's helped me to learn more about the world and about life and school. I feel like I can do anything. (Laura, interview, October 7, 2003)

Instructor Perspective. After having had Laura earlier in the year in his English class, then in a later class, an English instructor, William [pseudonym], noticed quite a change in her personality and the overall way she presented herself. He noted change in her confidence, which he felt was needed for her success in a college environment.

She's a changed person. She finishes a sentence. She sits up and speaks in a perfectly normal voice without

hesitation; she has become more comfortable being here, being in college, and probably being in an English class too. It's a major transformation that I've seen with her. Obviously, this term has just started, so I don't know what her work is going to be like. But just the personality that she brings to the classroom, it's a whole transformation, she's a different person. And that's something that needed to happen. She probably realized that first of all she needs to be able to stand up and be herself in order to survive here, but also I think she's realized that this isn't such a scary place after all, and she's become more used to it and aware of what it can do for her. It's somewhat speculation, obviously, but the transformation just that I can see in her is amazing. (William, instructor interview, April 2, 2003)

From William's perspective, Laura's persona made a dramatic change during the year. She presented a new sense of self that transpired into her participation in the classroom. Although a part of her student identity, this aspect of her personality was an integral part of her ways of engaging in and communicating with the outside world, including school. William felt that Laura was developing a sense of herself as a student, and developing that identity was necessary for her to ultimately to be a successful student.

CAMP Staff Perspective. In terms of Laura's persona, Lisa [pseudonym] noted that:

When she first came, you couldn't even hear her talk in the interview. We'd ask her a question, she would answer, and it was so low and she'd barely open her mouth so that you could barely understand her. Then, to have her come in my office and make a joke, or stand there and laugh with the other kids, that's incredible . . . for her to ask for help and say, "What do I need to do for this, etc." (Lisa, staff interview, June 23, 2003)

Laura's transformation of personality and ways of expression were one way that she changed. Lisa also saw significant change in how Laura participated in the CAMP program and college community, exhibiting more confidence in her ability to navigate the college schooling landscape. Lisa said,

She already registered for fall. She's on top of it now. She's not this little shy, step-on-me. . . . She's a tough person and has grown a lot. So I think getting that self-confidence is very evident in that girl. You can really tell that she's grown a lot personally. She has self-confidence, she talks, you can understand her and hear her now, she drives around and has friends. (Lisa, staff interview, July 23, 2003)

From Lisa's perspective, Laura seemed to be a more empowered and enabled student and person, illustrating a move from her peripherally situated sense of self upon entering the program toward the process of continuing to work to do well in school.

Cristina

High School Experience. Cristina felt her academic potential was limited, partly due to English being her second language, and she never thought she could be college material. Yet, she did well in school overall. However, at some point in her life and schooling she was socialized to believe that college would not be an option for someone like her (Mexican and an ESL student). Cristina loved school, but for what seemed to be a lack of interest or ability to tap into her potential, her high school experience did not provide a schooling experience and curriculum plan that would nurture her desire to learn and succeed beyond high school:

When I was growing up, I wanted to do different stuff. I really wanted to go to college, but deep down inside I knew that college wasn't an option. As a little girl, graduating (from high school) would be my biggest goal; that would be the best thing I could do for myself. College was

not even in my thoughts. (Cristina, interview, January 28, 2003)

High school was an experience that she simply wanted to escape and finish because she felt “I wouldn’t get a scholarship so I wasn’t coming to college. I just wanted to graduate, and it didn’t matter” (Cristina, interview, January 28, 2003). Cristina did not perceive herself as a possible college student when in high school. She was never informed about the importance of preparing for postsecondary education. Cristina attributed her belief in the inaccessibility to college to the fact that her high school did not foster a schooling experience that encouraged students like her to pursue higher level and more challenging courses that provided preparation for college. In looking back on her high school experience, she felt she could have done more to be better prepared for college. She felt that her school should have actively informed and encouraged students like her to “take more requirements” to better prepare for college because she “just did the basics and missed out on so much” (Cristina, interview, January 28, 2003). Although contradictory, she suggested “I know it’s my fault, but I know they [the high school] could have done something, and try to get you more involved, and make you understand” (Cristina, interview, January 28, 2003).

CAMP Experience. Overall Developmental GPA: 3.50; Overall College-Level GPA: 3.52.

Cristina remembered that “When I started college, at the beginning I was really scared I wasn’t going to make it. I didn’t have that courage.” This changed as she looked back on her successes and failures that year, most notably the fact that she made good grades and completed her first year of college. She said that “now I feel like, I know I’m going to become successful. Before, I was just scared and uncertain, really scared” (Cristina, interview, June 17, 2003). However, her eventual confidence came from having had the opportunity to engage in practices that allowed her to have opportunities to struggle, learn, accomplish, and “become.” Cristina not only developed new academic and cul-

tural sensibilities about college, but a new sensibility of self and how this new way of being could work to her advantage in college in other arenas.

Early in her college career, Cristina didn't see herself as a successful or potentially good and successful student. Because of her hard work and dedication to school, she eventually saw herself differently and in a positive light.

Before, I didn't feel like I was very much [of a good student]. Now, I feel so proud of myself, now I feel like I am so much and can become so much. I don't know, all this college stuff is very important to me. It's changing my way of seeing myself. Now I see myself like I could accomplish anything, and I could do it. Before, I had good grades but for basic courses, I never took college classes and stuff in school, so I see myself differently. I see myself like . . . before, I knew I had pretty good grades in school so I just felt happy for myself. But now I feel so great, like I'm really accomplishing a lot. I feel proud of myself. I think that I have worked very hard in college for everything, so I see myself very differently. I see I've accomplished so much for myself. . . . (Cristina, interview, June 17, 2003)

Instructor Perspective. James [pseudonym] initially saw Cristina as lacking in self-confidence, but saw tremendous change at the end of the year when he had her in his second psychology class. He said, "I felt like she was more confident in herself towards the end. It's like 'I can do this. I don't have a problem with this.'" He thought she was more relaxed about doing school work and exhibited confidence in her abilities, suggesting that she doesn't have to pay attention to every single detail and she'll still do quite well (James, instructor interview, June 13, 2003). According to James, Cristina presented a way of being a student that allowed her to understand and assess her daily situations in an effective way. She took on characteristics of a student who learned how to

navigate college and its requirements, shown through her confidence and good grades.

CAMP Staff Perspective. Lisa thought Cristina learned the intricacies of making her way through college, and how it would require time and life management at a level that affected every aspect of her life.

I think Cristina thought she could work full-time and that was a realization that came right away. We said, “We don’t let you do that,” so she had to cut back hours. That was hard at home because she was a major contributor to the family income, but her mom let her do it because she knew school was a priority. And Cristina learned how to adjust and she realized how much of a time commitment college was. I don’t think she was really thinking it was going to be that much time. She’s grown so much and taken on responsibilities. (Lisa, staff interview, June 23, 2003)

Cristina was a student who quickly realized the need to prioritize and balance life commitments. She presented a student identity that showed growth and maturation in managing the trajectories in which she was engaged—at home and at school.

Maria

High School Experience. Maria was a teen mother. At the time of this study, she was 20 and already had two young children. She was having a difficult time handling school and raising them, but she knew a college education would be the only way out of poverty. Maria felt she could have done better in high school if she had had more individual help. She found it helpful when someone explained the work by showing her how to do it. This type of help was not common or available to Maria in high school. She said that “they just wanted you to hand in the work, whether it was right or wrong. If it was wrong, they would try to explain, but

it was hard without a tutor” (Maria, interview, January 28, 2003). Naming it “having a tutor,” Maria just needed one-on-one help with her coursework to explain difficult concepts, suggesting a lack of resources in the school from where she came.

In school, no one ever encouraged Maria to go to college or take the courses needed to enter college and be prepared. Her mother was the only one who discussed the value of attending college and getting an education. Maria said that she really was not “pushed” by anyone to excel in school or to pursue what was required to enter college. She said “I thought it was hard to get in, but I didn’t know about the financial aid, scholarships, anything like that.” She told me that she didn’t remember any positive experiences in high school. Her pregnancy and all that surrounded it in her family was a critical time in her life and changed her forever. She said, “When I got pregnant, I just wanted to stop. I didn’t want anything. I didn’t want to do anything” (Maria, interview, June 17, 2003). Because her father was devastated by her pregnancy and angry, it created a rift in their relationship. She received no support from her father, but her mother was there to help in various ways. Maria, though, knew she had made a mistake.

CAMP Experience. Overall Developmental GPA: 2.75; Overall College-Level GPA: 4.00.

Maria had to withdraw from all of her courses in the spring quarter because of personal and family issues. In her first quarter in the CAMP program, she earned a 4.0 GPA in her college-level courses (a computer course, a physical education course, and a career planning course), which are calculated separately from developmental courses (courses that must be taken in order to make up for academic deficiencies in math or English). Maria’s 4.0 had a great impact on her self-confidence and the possibilities open to her because she experienced success. She said that “It made me think that I could do it. I shouldn’t stop myself. . . . But now that I’ve experienced it, I know that I can. I know that I can keep going” (Maria, interview, June 17, 2003). However, the 4.0 was accomplished in courses that did not deal with the

content with which she struggled (math and English), and may have misled Maria to believe that college-level coursework could be accomplished in the manner done with the other courses.

After attending for two academic quarters, she felt like she was only partly successful because she had to withdraw from the last quarter. She began to cry when thinking about what she accomplished and what she could have accomplished, had she not left the program early to attend to her family obligations.

I've succeeded because I'm happier and because I know . . . quitting . . . I'm like half and half. I don't consider myself successful. No. Because I quit. Just that it's hard. It's not hard for everybody, but in my position, I think it's hard, with my kids and all. I just quit, I didn't finish my whole year. I don't think that's successful, quitting. (interview, Maria, June 17, 2003)

Sounding determined though, she said that she would continue with her education. Having participated in college and understanding the realities of it, she felt prepared for any adversity she could encounter the next time she attends because she said,

I see what it's like now, I didn't consider it was going to be that hard. Having my kids and all. I went through the beginning okay, then it was getting harder and harder. So I know what it's like now. (Maria, interview, June 17, 2003)

Maria felt that having experienced success and failure on various levels in this first college experience, she learned insightful and practical knowledge about herself as a student and mother. She said, "I feel proud of myself. I actually went to college" (Maria, interview, October 7, 2003), but insisted that she would use this experience to come back and continue on her trajectory toward being and becoming a student:

I think it's because I've already experienced it and then I quit and I took some time to think about it. Now I know that I can. I don't think that if I come then I'm going to let myself down again, because I have to take it slow. I can't do some things like take three classes when I know I can't, so I'll maybe try two or one with something that I'm going to be comfortable with and be able to do it so I don't just quit. I don't want to quit. (Maria, interview, October 7, 2003)

Instructor Perspective. Maria's math instructor, Jane (pseudonym), talked about how Maria struggled with the content in her class, but expressed that she eventually saw change in her. She said that Maria

had a hard time with math. She really struggles with it. At the beginning she was just blowing it off and saying, maybe it's too hard for me, I just won't come in to class. But she's kind of had a different change of attitude this quarter. Now she says, I know I have to get this done, I know I have to work harder on it than I did before. So she's becoming more focused on it, working harder on it. (Jane, instructor interview, May 7, 2003)

Maria exhibited resiliency in the face of academic difficulty. Jane noticed that Maria realized she needed to make positive decisions that would allow her to maintain her developing sense of self and student and remain a part of the CAMP community of practice in order to become successful.

CAMP Staff Perspective. Lisa felt that Maria, through her successes and struggles in school, learned more about the nature of managing the difficulties and responsibilities of college, and what she needed to do in order to pursue her career goals. She said that Maria

did grow a lot as far as understanding what she needs to do to go, where she wants to go. She did take steps to become a dental assistant, apply for a job, so she's trying to get her foot in the door for the thing that she wants to do. So I was proud of that. She took lots of good steps. She grew in understanding the plan, what she needs to do, the vastness of it, she kind of got a grasp of that. (Lisa, staff interview, June 23, 2003)

Maria understood the need to map her life and school career effectively. She was developing a sensibility of self that recognized the need to tap into various networks and sources of information in college and beyond.

Luz

High School Experience. Luz was marginalized by her extended family in Mexico because of her ambitions to get a college education. Luz did not always think that she was college material, even though she made good grades and was always complimented by her teachers on her academic abilities. In middle school, she received As and Bs. Although her high school years were a bit more erratic, she still graduated with a GPA of 3.2 and a rank of 24 out of 146 students. She mentioned how her parents would move back and forth from the U.S. to Mexico, which took a toll on her academic performance and her ability to see herself as someone who was equipped enough to continue her education after high school. When asked if she thought she was college material before starting the program, she said, "No. I didn't think so. I thought it was only for smart people. I considered it hard, too, college being very hard." She did confess:

To me, when they said, do you want to go to college, for me college was just for rich people. Just for people who had money, maybe geeks too. People who liked school, I guess, doing homework. That's the way I saw college before. (Luz, interview, June 19, 2003)

When she first applied for the CAMP scholarship, she was very apathetic about the entire process, even pessimistic about the notion of winning an academic scholarship to attend college. She said,

In a way, I really didn't care . . . because I didn't think I would go to college. I applied . . . but then after the scholarship awards in high school and Angie [Next Step College/CAMP recruiter] announced my name, I was stunned, and I got also a prize. I was surprised because I had doubted I would get it. (Luz, interview, March 11, 2003)

CAMP Experience. Overall Developmental GPA: 3.72; Overall College-Level GPA: 3.68.

One "skill" that Luz learned from her experiences in CAMP was being able to better relate and interact with the world around her. The CAMP experience seemed to open her up to communicating with others and feeling more comfortable and confident in being around people in her classes and in her surroundings in general.

Before, I wouldn't talk to teachers, or I wouldn't ask questions, I wouldn't talk to anybody who was sitting beside me. It was like, no, I never would talk to anybody. It was just me and I'd figure out things on my own. Now with CAMP, we were all together, we would ask questions to each other. . . . It just opened me up. Now that I'm at Front Range (another community college), I'm with new students and professors, and I ask them questions, I talk to them like it's nothing. And before I would never do that, so, that's probably what CAMP did for me. . . . That changed me totally . . . in communicating with other people. (Luz, interview, October 7, 2003)

For Luz, success was a matter of accomplishment. After completing a year of college, she was confident that she could continue to effectively deal with adversity and work hard to reach her goals.

Because the way I looked at it at the beginning of the year was that if I could get the year accomplished successfully, then I could go on after that. Now that I've done a year, now I know I can do three or four or five more. . . . If I could get through this year, then I could go on . . . because if I finish this year, why can't I finish the others? (Luz, interview, June 19, 2003)

Instructor Perspective. James felt that Luz evolved in terms of expressing herself in a mature manner, through her work and in her interactions with others. He said there were

some changes in maturity or the way that she would present herself. I felt in the first quarter, she was very reserved kind of in the background. And she relied on a small group of friends quite a bit to be a buffer or to defuse responsibility and things like that. (James, instructor interview, June 13, 2003)

To James, Luz was developing a sense of openness to the world; she no longer relied on hiding behind or within groups of others. She felt more comfortable in expressing her developed/developing sense of self in the classroom.

CAMP Staff Perspective. Lisa saw Luz change in her manner(s) of interacting with others. Initially, Luz was seen as someone who "thought she would be a total loner." However, Luz

found herself being asked for help and then I think she gave it and she figured out she was good at it. She became a Spanish tutor for Bobby [another CAMP student] and he asked her for help and she said, "Yes." She said, "Okay." She was good at it. She doesn't get close to people; she keeps her distance, she's tough. She did soften a little bit; I would say she did. (Staff interview, Lisa, June 23, 2003)

Luz developed as a more socially interactive person, who initially would close herself to most of the world. Through communication with others, she discovered new aspects of her personality and her capabilities as person, student, and teacher.

Ruben

High School Experience. Ruben had been in a gang most of his school life, from junior high through high school. Ruben's parents did not have much control over him during high school; he was almost always with his friends in the gang. His mother and father pushed him to get out, go to school, and become a better person. He rarely attended school during his high school years, and when he did, it was mostly to gather his friends from the gang to go out and sell drugs or just hang out. He expressed how "high school was a joke" to him, but admitted that he "did a lot of things I shouldn't have done" (Ruben, interview, June 5, 2003).

Ruben did not have a significant "formal" schooling experience. He felt he never belonged to school, indicating that he "didn't have a high school." He said that at the time, school wasn't important, and that he never really needed it because he and his friends had to "make money." His gang life and what it represented ran Ruben's life, causing him to ignore any other aspects of his life. School was meaningless to Ruben. He said that

during high school, education wasn't about anything; it was about what you already knew. Even in junior high I gang-banged a little bit, from age 11–12 until the time I turned 19, I was hard-core cholo, didn't care about school, didn't care about anything. All I thought about was making that money, representing my "hood." (Ruben, interview, June 5, 2003)

Ruben eventually ended up in an alternative high school where he would show up at noon and work in an open and casual classroom environment at a pace with which he was comfortable.

As long as he showed up for class, he did not have to go back to the juvenile detention center he was assigned. He would go to class and work for a passing grade of a D. The great majority of his experiences with teachers as an adolescent were negative. Ruben dropped out of high school when he moved to Colorado. Ruben began working at a warehouse, and eventually enrolled in a GED program, where he heard about the CAMP program and the possibility of attending college.

Ruben suggested that he could have done more in his education before college; however, he did place some blame on his high school and its ineffective system of informing and encouraging students to pursue college and postsecondary opportunities.

They could have helped me with a lot more shit. But maybe the counselors, I never had a counselor talk to me about going to college, or you know, you could get financial aid here to get, you know, I never had any of that during high school. So I mean, that might have helped maybe, and maybe if I, and I can't really blame it all on the school either you know, 'cause maybe if I would have went to school more, I would have been in college a whole long time ago. (Ruben, interview, January 27, 2003)

CAMP Experience. Overall Developmental GPA: 2.0; Overall College-Level GPA: 1.33.

Ruben struggled with school for numerous reasons—family obligations, peer pressure, inability to balance commitments, and a lack of schooling experience that socialized him to know how “to be” in regular classroom settings like in college. His early grades reflected his lack of effort in his core courses; however, in the second quarter he regained confidence, which translated into improved work, attendance, and ultimately better grades. He withdrew from two core content courses, which he did not complete. The last quarter indicates that the numerous pressures and responsibilities in his life took a toll on his efforts in school. He said he enjoyed the idea of college and what it could do for him, but admitted,

I don't recommend it if somebody's having struggles. You got to come here with a clear level head before you can even enter here. Because if you don't, and you don't get shit straightened out in your life, you're going to be struggling, like me. (Ruben, interview, June 5, 2003)

Although Ruben did not complete the requirements for the last quarter's courses, he symbolically "completed" the academic year by continuing to attend CAMP activities, such as the end-of-the-year CAMP Family Bar-B-Q, and receiving recognition for having participated in the CAMP program. He was proud to receive this recognition.

Ruben struggled in his transition into college—socially, culturally, and academically. His participation in the CAMP community of practice toward learning and being a successful student fluctuated between the periphery of his old world and ways of being and this new schooling experience of college. A number of others factors also impacted his struggling self in school. He came from an unstructured and undisciplined schooling experience in high school, which contrasted with the structured and rigorous academic communities that typically define college coursework and classroom participation.

Ruben also was highly influenced by his peers outside of CAMP; this conflicted with the positive peer influence, and academic, personal, and social support provided by CAMP program. There also were high family expectations to contribute to the family finances, which forced Ruben to commit to jobs that would meet those needs. Ruben was caught between several worlds, pulling him in different directions. Before, Ruben was accustomed to committing to one identity—that of being in a gang and being a "cholo" gang banger. He had been isolated and estranged from his family. School and doing school work had never been a priority. He was committed to being and becoming one identity within his gang and peer culture. Enacting that one identity was in contrast with the multiple identities he had to enact while in college through the CAMP program.

After completing most of the academic year, Ruben felt he was changing, but was unsure about the ways he saw himself in the college world and being a college student. He confessed that the transition of coming from a “cholo gang life” and attending college was “weird, because I’m feeling like an outsider in both areas now” (Ruben, interview, June 5, 2003). He admitted that he learned from the CAMP experience and being in college. To him, though, it was more about simply being there that contributed to a positive sense of self and what he was doing with his life. He said, “I saw myself as a changed person. I see it not as a college student, but as a person trying to succeed in life, not only succeeding in college” (Ruben, interview, March 4, 2003).

He suggested that this past year was making him more focused in his direction in school and life, feeling more confident in his abilities and the possibilities:

Even though I was struggling, it was good. You know, college? Even though I didn’t make perfect grades, I learned a lot from it and felt like I did well for all the shit I was going through, I did well for what I could do, and it opened my eyes up to see once I feel confident in myself with my foundation, I know I can do it, now I know I can. Now that it’s there, that’s what I’m saying, it’s because the CAMP Program has taught me a lesson of what to look for when I go back. (Ruben, interview, October 10, 2003)

Ruben expressed a deeper knowledge of his struggling identity of self and his developing student identity through adversity in school and life. Because he experienced college in this way, he said that “now I know what college is and what I really need to do, what mind frame I need to be in” (Ruben, interview, October 10, 2003).

Ruben said that the people involved in his experiences as a first-year college student influenced his perception of the potential that people have. He realized that people can change, despite

their history or background, and can learn how to accomplish goals:

It was the people that were involved. Also the fact that I knew that, no matter where you come from, you can still go to college and better yourself. You can do things and still come up. It taught me a lot of things. I learned actually some responsibility, you know what I mean? Having to go to school every day, that wasn't like me, so I learned a lot of responsible things from going to college. (Ruben, interview, October 10, 2003)

One of the most important things that Ruben took from his experiences in the CAMP program and his first year in college was, despite what the world may think about people, success is still possible when they accept who they are. He realized that everyone in the CAMP cohort accepted each other, and worked and contributed to a trajectory toward a different life or educational goal.

That's what I pretty much learned from them, like everybody was different, everybody got along, so many different people got together and they made something. They were all kind of going for the same goal . . . an education. (Ruben, interview, October, 10, 2003)

Instructor Perspective. James talked about how he saw Ruben change slightly: Ruben began to understand the nature of college. However, James admitted that Ruben still needed to learn about the responsibility of coursework, suggesting that “on a practical level there wasn't a whole lot of change . . . how he went about managing himself in terms of the coursework was very similar in the first quarter to this quarter (James, instructor interview, June 13, 2003). Ruben mishandled his work responsibilities in school. Ruben wavered on the outer edge of the periphery of the community of practice of learning to be and become throughout the entire year, not showing much growth. James felt that Ruben

exhibited the same habits throughout the year, and was not able to maintain a stable sense of doing the work necessary to be successful in his class.

CAMP Staff Perspective. Lisa knew that Ruben was not academically successful in this college experience, but suggested that she thought he might have taken away some other valuable lessons that became a new and profound aspect of who he was becoming:

It was a learning experience, whether academically it wasn't fully successful, I think the social part of it was valuable. When you're in a gang, your social skills just aren't what they are supposed to be for regular life, and I think that what he gained out of the year was really valuable reality social skills. With real people, everyday life, how to treat people, how to talk in regular situations, in a classroom, so I think he grew a lot that way. Because he didn't know how to do that stuff. When he first came he was really abrasive, loud, and didn't know how to control himself. I think he learned a lot about that. And he softened a lot. You saw him with Bobby's little girls, he was just so fun with them and kind to them, and I think having to be tough all the time was hard on him, he grew up way too early. (Lisa, staff interview, June 23, 2003)

Instructor Reflection on the CAMP Program Experience

William, the English instructor from the college, provided his insight on the CAMP program based on what he had observed of the program and the students in his classes.

I'm not a psychologist, I can't say that. It seems to me pretty evident that something is helping these CAMP students advance more visibly than some of our regular students. And maybe some of that involvement, after all this is a nonresidential campus, we don't have sports, we

don't have activities, we have nothing. We're a commuter campus and I think some students, many students, they walk in the door, they take their classes, and they walk out of the door. They may have improved their writing skills some, but I think too often they leave the same person they came in. . . . I think what I'm saying is that some CAMP students are having, they're good at doing that personal transformation that they need, it's not just academics, it's a whole mindset, a whole self-perception, and whole self-understanding has to change. I think the CAMP program is making a major difference. That has to be part of an explanation. . . . There has to be something about the CAMP program that has promoted that kind of transformational change in some of these students. (William, English professor, interview, April 20, 2003)

Discussion

This study assumed that the learning of being and becoming a successful student may be influenced by the sociocultural aspects of a teaching-learning environment. If designed and implemented effectively, such an environment may provide various forms of contexts of interactions and community support to create dynamics that promote and encourage practices that lead to individual and group success. This study discussed the sociocultural influence of participation within a community of practice (college through CAMP) that engaged the students in doing, being, becoming, and learning the foundational characteristics of a successful student, beyond just academic performance. The following are particular points to consider based on the idea of students engaging in practices that allow them to learn and construct a successful student identity.

Who Is College Material?

Based on traditional academic preparation and coursework that prepares a student for the rigors of college, none of the students in this study would be considered “college material.” None were in a college-preparation track. Only Luz was encouraged by high school teachers to pursue college. The other students did not have the same exposure to supportive environments and human resources to fuel a desire or even plant the thought of the possibility of pursuing higher education. With the supportive and encouraging context that CAMP provided throughout their first-year college experience, the students were given the opportunities and resources to scaffold their efforts throughout the year. The CAMP program design and recruiters looked for students with promise and potential to become college material. CAMP gave them access and opportunity to engage in practices with tremendous support that allowed them to learn and acquire skills and experiences that contributed to their developing sense of becoming a successful student.

Schools need to look more closely at who is defining what is college material in culturally and linguistically diverse students, especially those coming from situationally marginalized backgrounds. Aggressive efforts must be taken to create schooling and classroom environments so that *all* students can successfully pursue higher education. This involves culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000) and an empowering education that instills a spirit of hope and possibility (Darder, 1991) in students. Educators who are aware of the schooling and personal histories of their entering students can practice a humanizing pedagogy that moves beyond the standard curriculum and approaches that are typically taught to prepare today’s teachers. Seeing all students as college material provides an investment of confidence in students who may not have had the opportunity to interact with educators who could contribute a sense of agency and hope.

What Is Success?

My interpretation of the findings is that all of the students were successful on some level. Some were more academically successful than others. Because of the college experience gained through CAMP, all of the students learned something about college and what would be required to make their way through it. When viewed from the perspective that these students initially knew little of what was required to be successful in college, partly because of their marginalized situations, this could be defined as some level of success.

All of the students mentioned that the opportunity to participate in college taught them about being and becoming a successful college student. They began to understand success. Each student's performance in college and the program differed. The students involved in this study were at different points in their schooling trajectories, as well as their place of development in their knowledge of being and becoming successful students. Because the students demonstrated different levels of knowledge and comfort with their identities as college students, their performances stemmed from their level of realization of the "self" in school and how to manage the personal, family, cultural, and educational worlds in which they functioned, struggled, and succeeded.

The actual practice of being a student was crucial in their development as students, through failures and successes. They learned how to be successful, which contributed to their agency, and they gained momentum in their educational trajectory. Even if they did not succeed in their practice as a student, they still learned valuable skills in what *not* to do, which provided a point of reference for future endeavors as a student. If they had not had the chance to do so, they would not have learned. This mirrors Lave and Wenger's (1991) assertion that "denying access and limiting the centripetal movement of newcomers and other practitioners changes the learning curriculum" (p. 123).

Learning a Successful Student Identity in a Community of Practice

There is no single approach to creating a community that engages students into a trajectory toward becoming successful as individuals and as students. A community of practice can be between a teacher and student, between peers within a cooperative learning group activity, or among students and teachers within an entire school. Such communities are based in a philosophy of “practice,” the act of doing while learning, and learning while doing. Practice also entails a way of being in the world that does not indicate a final and fixed version of someone who has learned and then “is.” Instead, one who is in the process of being and becoming someone who has potential to develop into a positive way of being (Reyes, 2007).

This knowledge can have major implications for students of color and/or students from situationally marginalized backgrounds and their teachers. Their marginalization has kept them from participating in a community of practice. However, if an effective and responsive educator recognizes their marginalization, then participation in a community is never too late. For example, in her study of students of Mexican descent who overcame adversity to become professionally successful, Gándara (1995) found that some of the students were not academically oriented until someone (a teacher) recognized and cultivated their potential and suggested that they could be successful in academic pursuits. For some students, this occurred late in high school. This illustrates a community of practice model because a teacher or more knowledgeable other gives a student access into a world of others (practitioners) who know and practice a positive sense of self and academic achievement.

The students had different understandings of the skills, knowledge, and self-understanding “as student” that were involved in navigating the difficulties of the cultural, social, and academic landscapes of schooling in general, and higher education in particular. Each identity emerged from experience, success, adversity, failure, and simply having known the world of college. Their

identities also emerged from the sociocultural influence of interactions with participants and more knowledgeable others in this schooling context. The people involved contributed their skills, knowledge, and encouragement to the developing students.

Conclusion

By participating in a program that promoted a philosophy and action of being successful by engaging in the various activities, classes, interactions, and relationship within the CAMP community of practice, the students practiced (or attempted to) not only what was required of the program to be successful, but what was required of themselves to go beyond educational, personal, and societal margins of their existence. Developing an identity and acting on that developed identity were two inseparable parts of learning in situated contexts through legitimate peripheral participation. Doing and being are one in the same because the students were becoming as they were doing, going beyond the margins, the periphery, or where they were before they began to engage in that act. When the students engaged in that act, they performed it (some more so than others). Students took on various characteristics of the identity of being and becoming a student. All of the students in the study seemed to find success in various aspects of their performances as students (whether they failed or succeeded), taking that away from the experience as a new and developing part of who they were and what they could be.

Beyond just academic performance as reflected by grades or test scores, being a successful student begins with establishing the roots of what is required to become a successful student. Granted, this eventually will require actual academic success in the form of completing homework assignments, performing well on tests, and knowing how to do class projects. However, academic success begins with students' believing that they can be a part of a community of other academically successful students. Interactions with those students then evolve into engaging in

practices of successful students, which leads them to practice and be academically successful by performing well on the usual indicators of academic success. Educators in colleges working with students from historically marginal lives should work to erase any assumptions they might have about such students and their ability to perform academically. Believing in such students, investing in their potential abilities, inviting them to engage with others who are successful students, and providing wisdom and insight into the ways of being in and doing college will launch them on a path to a successful student identity and the practices that are part of such a life.

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