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Perceptions of Latino Students who enrolled in the Adult Basic Education/Under-aged General Education Development Program: Searching a Caring High School Experience

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Perceptions of Latino Students who enrolled in the Adult Basic Education/Under-aged General Education Development Program: Searching a Caring High School Experience

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership
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Keywords: Hispanics, Latina/Latino Critical Race Theory, Latino Diaspora, Secondary Education

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Dedication

To my spouse, Georgene, who supported me with all her heart throughout this project. It would not have come to fruition without you.

To my parents who were my initial inspiration for engaging this challenge. It is with much regret that I was unable to complete the project before my mother’s passing.

To my children, Rachel, Roxane, and Carlos who I hope to inspire to realize most of life’s obstacles can be surmounted.

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Abstract

The increasing number of Latino students presents unique challenges to and infinite possibilities for the educational system. Significant numbers of second-generation Latino students are considered at risk for completing a high school credentialing program. Latino students in public and private high schools were more likely to drop out than their White counterparts, and this has curtailed the advancement of Latinos into post-secondary settings. Ultimately, this impacts economic upward mobility. Furthermore, males are more likely than females to drop out of high school, are more frequently disciplined, suspended, and/or expelled from school than their gender counterparts (Perkins-Gough, 2006; Sacks, 2005; Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

This phenomenologically informed multi-case study was conducted to report the recollections of second-generation Latino high school students involved in one high school credentialing option, the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program. The study relied primarily on gathering data via semi-structured interviews yielding audiotaped transcripts, engaging in recording personal notes in a journal, and amassing pertinent documents for analysis.

The results of the study revealed that alternative programs such as the ABE/Under-aged GED program serve an important purpose. Students, who require a more structured environment with a lower student to teacher ratio and greater academic focus than the traditional high school context, can earn a high school credential despite obstacles which
have cast them in the category referred to as *at risk*. Such was the case with the five Latinos who were the subjects of the study. They all successfully navigated the program, mastered the curriculum and earned a General Education Development credential. In order to accomplish this feat, these Latinos demonstrated resilience, persistence, and tenacity in the face of peer-pressure, poverty, illness, single-parent family dynamics, and self-doubt.

Moreover, the development of positive relationships with and among all stakeholders must be a priority for everyone in the school building. Schools which create a culture that is caring, consistent, and comprehensible have positive influences on all school stakeholders. A school culture and climate that fosters positive student-teacher, student-administrator, and teacher-administrator relationships provides an environmental protective factor that increases the likelihood of academic and personal resilience for students.

The conclusions which were constructed utilized an inquiry framework based upon a critical perspective, primarily in the Latina/o Critical Race Theory tradition. The interwoven concepts of Leadership for Social Justice and the Ethics of Accountability Practice were paramount in searching for the real-life possibilities of how educational leadership is capable of enhancing and/or hindering the educational experiences of these Latino students. A greater number of questions rather than answers were generated regarding what can be done to aid a rapidly expanding student population and even more specifically, the issues associated with Latino males who struggle to succeed in attaining a high school credential at an alarming rate.
Chapter One

Introduction and Purpose

I am an educator and a Latino born in the city which is the setting of this research. Naturally, the educational experience of Latinos identified as second-generation and/or third-generation in the United States is of personal interest. Therefore, I conducted a phenomenologically informed multiple case study about former Latino high school students and their recollected experiences. I was seeking to answer this overarching question: What may the recollected experiences of second-generation Latino students during the enrollment process in an Adult Education (ABE)/Under-Aged General Education Development (GED) program reveal regarding the factors which contributed to their enrollment, to the resulting impact of having opted to enroll, and to the roles/practices of the educational leaders who presented the program option to them? As a result of this study, I have gained personal insight into the process by which they became involved in an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program.

Statement of the Inquiry

During the past 10-year period (2000-2010) the Hispanic (Latino) population of the United States has grown from 35.3 million (13% of the total population) to 50.5 million (16% of the total population) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). As this segment of the
population continues to grow as well as disperse and settle into non-traditional areas of Hispanic concentration; federal, state, and local governments are increasingly attempting to answer the following query: In what ways will the Hispanic population growth impact the public school system? Kochhar (2009) stated, “Hispanics are not only the largest minority population in the United States, they are also the youngest” (p.13). The increasing number of Latino students presents unique challenges and infinite possibilities to the educational system. In particular, second-generation Latinos’ population estimates intimate various consequences impacting education in U.S. public schools. Suro and Passel (2003) have defined second-generation Hispanics as those having been born in the United States to at least one foreign born parent. They believe the growth and predominance of second-generation Latinos will have immediate consequences for the nation’s schools:

The number of second-generation Latinos aged 5 to 19 years old is projected to more than double from 2000 to 2020, growing from 4.4 million to 9.0 million people. About one-in-seven of the new students enrolling in U.S. schools over these 20 years will be a second-generation Latino (p.7).

Latino students identified as second-generation are of greatest interest to me. Seemingly nationwide, a significant number of second-generation plus Latinos are considered at risk for completing a high school credentialing program while factors such as nativity, English fluency, and/or bilinguality point to potential for scholastic success (Farley & Alba, 2002; Hernandez & Nesman, 2004; Kohler & Lazarin, 2007). In some cases, the choice to leave the traditional high school setting in favor of a non-traditional
completion option has curtailed the advancement of Latinos into post-secondary settings. Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) commented, “Latino male students are “vanishing” from the American education pipeline, a trend that is especially evident at the secondary and postsecondary levels” (p.54).

Factors affecting this population’s educational success, such as poverty, low parental educational attainment, and family stressors pose challenges to accessing quality educational opportunity and to potentially succeeding in school as well as increasing the likelihood of dropping out which ultimately impacts economic upward mobility. In public and private high schools, Latinos were more likely to drop out than their White counterparts and are dropping out at a greater rate than Latinas (Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Based upon the aforementioned demographic indicators, it is seemingly apparent that the educational fate of Latinos in the United States is one of challenge, risk and resilience. Therefore the graduation, completion or non-completion of a high school equivalency credentialing program by Latinos remains a phenomenon worthy of investigation.

**Secondary Educational Options**

The secondary educational options which may be pursued by students as they transition from middle school to high school are varied. Most high schools in the United States have and continue to offer a choice of vocational or college preparatory curriculum. In recent years, the development of specialized curriculum suited to varying interests has brought other options to bear and has taken root in the forms of magnet schools and other specialized schools (Ilg & Massucci, 2003). For example, some specialized public high schools are designed with curriculums to address Science,
Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education issues and attract students with matching educational and career interests (Subotnik, Tai, Rickoff, & Almarode, 2010). Other high school options which attempt to attract students with specialized curriculums and areas of focus that match educational and career interests are career academies. The Florida Legislature’s Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability (OPPAGA) states, “Career academies seek to simultaneously prepare students for college and the workforce by linking academic skills to career training” (OPPAGA, 2007, p. 1).

While nationwide non-traditional high school completion options such as magnet schools, STEM schools, career academies, the ABE/GED programs, or the performance based exit option offered at career centers in Florida provide alternative pathways to post-secondary educational opportunities: technical, vocational and/or gainful employment; the dropout or non-completion option is seemingly selected by a significant number of Latinos. Regarding the Latino high school experience, I have chosen to focus my research on the high school completion option known as the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program.

My Recollection

As an insider and a public-school guidance counselor in a diverse, urban high school, I had witnessed what I believe were relatively covert decisions and practices to encourage over-aged students, those projected not to graduate with their freshman cohort, from the traditional high school setting. I believe some of those practices were instituted in part to avoid the negative impact their presence in the school might have had on publicly reported accountability performance indicators such as dropout rates, attendance,
and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) results. In particular, practices that may have been designed to coerce over-aged, under-achieving high school students to enter an alternative high school credentialing program known as the ABE/Under-aged GED program located on high school campuses. What follows is the real-life scenario which prompted my desire to investigate this phenomenon and was the primary impetus for my selecting this student alternative pathway to serve as the subject of my research study.

Per school-district administration, school-based administration was provided a listing of over-aged, at risk students during the school year’s initial FTE (Full-time Equivalent) funding period accompanied by a directive to address the issue/s resulting from these students. The tacit directive was; in general, to find these students an alternative placement. School-district administration’s preference of placement was to its career centers. School-based administration responded by scheduling a staff meeting in which assistant principals and guidance counselors were assembled, detailed data was dispersed, and instructions were given to encourage these over-aged students into accepting the career center recommendation as directed. In addition, there was an accompanying aside to utilize the ABE/ Under-aged GED program when necessary to insure that these students found a new home. Assistant principals and guidance counselors assigned to students alphabetically by surname were directed to work in tandem to facilitate actions which on the surface appeared as a “win-win” for all stakeholders.

In my experience as a school counselor regarding the referral process associated with transferring students to the school-district’s career centers, I was aware that a
portion of the over-aged, at risk student criteria was acceptable within the student-profile recommended for enrollment in a career center. Yet, certain aspects associated with the over-aged students on the distributed list were generally not acceptable such as a history of disciplinary issues and/or high absenteeism. Furthermore, when referring students to career centers or adult programs, there were issues which were in most instances, problematic for students and families, i.e. the loss of free transportation and free lunch, the transfer of academic credits, and facilitative options in dealing with disciplinary issues.

Ironically, this particular traditional high school housed an ABE/Under-aged GED program on campus in portable classrooms which offered a relatively simple student change of placement transition as a working relationship had been established between the assistant principals, the ABE/Under-aged GED instructors, and program director during the program’s inception on campus. Further evidence of the collaborative nature of the relationship was the assignment of a traditional school assistant principal as a liaison between the traditional high school and adult education administration to facilitate student transition to the ABE/Under-aged GED setting and the aforementioned problematic issues became virtually non-existent. Conference upon conference, the assistant principal outlined the options with emphasis upon the ABE/Under-aged GED program option. The assistant principal described the ABE/Under-aged GED as equivalent to a standard diploma in practically every aspect including statements reassuring the parent that the diploma earned, although not from specific high school, was a high school diploma from the state entitling the bearer to continue post-secondary education at the community college level or enter into military service. Most
importantly, parental resistance to the change of placement was minimized by the familiarity of the setting in which the student was currently enrolled, and the student’s classmates remained adolescents rather than adults. Due to these aspects, it seemed apparent to me that the majority of the targeted students were to be directed towards the ABE/Under-aged GED program.

Upon perusing the list of students more extensively, two distinguishing demographics were apparent; these students were overwhelmingly students of color and predominantly males. As a result of this realization, I became curious about the demographic make-up of the students that were already enrolled in the ABE/Under-aged GED portable classrooms on campus. I discovered that while the traditional high school’s percentage of White student-enrollment was over 50 percent only 8 percent of the total student-enrollment in the ABE/Under-aged GED portable classroom was White. The ABE/Under-aged GED classroom was overwhelmingly composed of Latino and African American males (68 percent), many of whom had been previously identified as ESE (Exceptional Student Education) (44 percent) and ELL (English Language Learners) (28 percent) students. I began to wonder whether the dynamics around these placement practices were more beneficial for students or for public-school educational leaders. This mindset was also a significant contributing factor in my selection of this student alternative pathway to serve as the subject of my research study.

Research Questions

Due to the complexity in attempting to understand and determine the mechanisms, the how and why of phenomenon, researchers have commented qualitative, descriptive, in-depth studies are often most useful (Creswell, 2007; Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman,
2007; Merriam, 1998; Warren & Karner, 2010; Yin, 2003). This is a relevant approach in relation to my study which attempts to chronicle, analyze, and interpret the how and why selected second-generation Latinos students were advised and/or guided to enroll in an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program as well as the stories resulting from the recollected experiences of those selected second-generation Latino students who chose to enroll in the ABE/Under-aged GED Program.

The impetus for reviewing the literature regarding responses to the Latino dropout phenomenon was for the purposes of identifying, describing, and critiquing as well as highlighting pertinent factors common to Latino students that lead them to dropout of high school or select an educational alternative within the contexts of the United States, the State of Florida, and the local communities which are situated within a specific Florida school-district. That school-district will be referred to herein by the pseudonym, Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS). In reviewing the literature, I focused upon exploring an educational alternative, the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/ Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program. Therefore, I tendered the following research questions:

1. What participant identified factors contributed to second-generation Latino high school students opting to enroll in an Adult Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program?

2. What were the recollected experiences of second-generation Latino students during the enrollment process in an Adult Education (ABE)/Under-Aged General Education Development (GED) program?
3. What do the participants conceive has been the impact upon their lives as a result of having enrolled in an Adult Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program?

**Latino Student Enrollment in Flamingo County**

According to the 2000 Census, 60,029 Latinos between the ages of 5 and 19 (21.5 percent of the total population of the identical age group) resided in Flamingo County. It is reasonable to identify this group as school-aged. These children are enrolled or have had the opportunity to enroll in Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS). FCPS is the 8th largest school-district in the nation and the 3rd largest school-district in the state of Florida (Digest of Education Statistics, 2008). FCPS self-reports its 2009-2010 total school enrollment at 207,549 (FCPS, 2010). Hispanic student enrollment over a six year period, 2003 (44,268)-2009 (54,556) has grown steadily an increase of 18.9 percent to an overall 26.3 percent. Therefore, the academic achievement and success of Latino students, particularly in the area of high schools graduation, completion, or non-completion are areas relevant to the overall success of Flamingo County Public Schools in this era of school accountability.

**Latino High School Dropouts in the United States, Florida, and Flamingo County**

The estimated dropout rate by race/ethnicity finds that Hispanic students in public and private high schools were more likely to drop out than were White or for Black students. In regards to gender, the dropout rate has remained in a generalized pattern for a 30 year period with males dropping out at an estimated rate of 3.7 compared to females at 3.3 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). Reviewing the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD) event dropout rate
findings for the 2007-2008 school year, which can be rationalized as closely aligned with Florida’s calculation methodology, indicates that approximately 6,816 Hispanics were among those students who were considered dropouts. The high school dropout rates in Flamingo County Public Schools are comparatively more favorable than to those of the State of Florida which has been identified as possessing one of the highest high school dropout rates in the nation and are also reflective of the high dropout rates of Latino students (Fry, 2010; Greene, 2002; NCES, 2009; Swanson, 2008). In Florida and the Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS), Hispanic high school students are more likely to dropout before earning a regular high school diploma or an equivalent credential than their White counterparts, and Hispanic dropout rates exceed the overall state and school-district average rates. The rate totals demographically disaggregated over the 2008-2009 school year with respect to Florida and FCPS were Whites in Florida (1.6) and FCPS (0.7) with Hispanic rates in Florida (2.5) in FCPS (1.2) (FLDOE, 2010).

**Significance of the Inquiry**

Assuming the accuracy of current demographics and statistical information regarding academic achievement and dropout rates, Latinos are becoming a significant segment of the student population with the potential to impact the overall economic well-being of Flamingo County, the State of Florida, and the United States. High rates of student high school non-completion are relevant to the rates of unemployment, loss of productivity, and expenditures for social programs such as welfare (Clarke, Dorn, Kaufman, Letgers, Lillard, & Warren, 2003). Specifically in terms of education, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has expressly cited the reduction of the national dropout rate has a primary goal (NCLB, 2001). In this light, responses to the dropout
phenomenon and especially the Latino dropout phenomenon have begun to capture the attention of educators and educational researchers. Across the nation, various national and local programs are attempting to aid students identified as at risk of not graduating or completing requirements for a high school educational credential. The foremost widely recognized alternative high school educational credential continues to be the General Education Development (GED) (Fry, 2010; Smith, 2003).

**General Education Development (GED) response.** Fry (2010) stated, “The GED, or General Educational Development Tests, is the nation’s largest dropout recovery or second chance program” (p. 2). As with their white and black counterparts, Latinos have been introduced to this dropout prevention intervention. Yet, according to survey results complied by the U.S. Census Bureau (2008), only one-in-ten Latino high school dropouts has earned a GED, and this ethnic group is the least likely to do so. Admittedly, while the GED seemingly benefits Latinos in the labor market, Fry (2010) concluded that Latino students “… who end their education with a GED would have been better off staying in high school and graduating” (p. 2). While Hispanic dropouts with a GED generally fare better than un-credentialed Hispanic dropouts, their prospects, as with all GED credential individuals, are more limited as a group in regards to economic benefits, post-secondary education, and on-the-job training than Hispanic students who earn a traditional standard high-school diploma (Boesel, Alsalam & Smith, 1998; Cameron & Heckman, 1993; Clark & Jaeger, 2006; Fry, 2010; Smith, 2003; Tyler, 2003).

Although economic outcomes are important regarding the benefits a GED affords its recipients, there are indications that issues for further exploration regarding the GED are more so related to improved self-esteem, an enhanced enjoyment of life, improved
child-rearing and social skills which in turn may have positive consequences for both the individual, the family, and the community (Bourdieu, 1985; Kawachi, Kennedy, Lochner, & Prothrow-Smith, 1997; Neuman & Caparelli, 1998; Snider, 2010). Tyler (2002) stated, “Whether or not the GED affects outcomes such as parenting skills, health, citizenship, and involvement in crime are critical questions that have, unfortunately, not been addressed by the research community” (p. 3). Participant interview responses in my research study suggested such an area of future exploration and study is pertinent.

**Under-aged GED programs.** Of late, the General Education Development (GED) has been an intervention utilized to encourage high school aged students who may dropout to obtain an educational credential. Some states in the US have created programs for high school aged students traditionally considered under-aged in regards to GED candidacy. The 2009 GED Testing Program Statistical Report states, “Approximately 26.3 percent of all candidates in 2009 were 16 to 18 years old, ages at which many jurisdictions require additional documentation and permissions in order to take the GED Test” (American Council on Education, 2009, p. 11). In addition, the report states in 2009, regarding the three major ethnic groups, that 50.2 percent of all candidates who indicated their ethnicity were White, 24.7 percent African American, 20.1 percent Hispanic. According to the 2009 GED Testing Program Statistical Report, Florida’s largest percentage of GED test candidates were within the 16-18 year-old age group listed at 36.5 percent of the state’s 49,542 test candidates.

In Florida, the General Education Development (GED) and the standard high school diploma are, under certain circumstances, considered equivalent. The Florida Community College System (FCCS) recognizes the standard high school diploma and the
General Education Development (GED) as the minimum requirement for admission to an associate degree program. “Florida has one of the highest rates of GED attainment in the nation … and relies heavily on the GED to provide an alternative route to a diploma for students who dropped out of high school” (FCCS, 2002, pp. 1-3). Most pertinent to my research study was the academic status of the under-aged students in regards to obtaining the opportunity to be a candidate for the GED in the state of Florida and the Flamingo County Public School (FCPS) district with the institution of a program which is the subject of this study, the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED).

*Flamingo County’s Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) response.* In the face of an alarming increase in the high school dropout rate in 1986, the Flamingo County Public School (FCPS) district’s primary adult and community administrator implemented a concerted dropout prevention effort by facilitating and expanding the GED program option to high school students identified as dropouts (Froelich, 2003). This program continued as a part of the adult and community school program and required students to withdraw from a traditional high school setting and to enroll in an adult evening program at the high school of their choice. This option is identified as the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program more commonly known as the Under-aged GED. Students, ages 16 to 17, who want to take the GED test may attend an approved Under-aged GED program.

The ABE/Under-aged GED Program has been relatively recently conceived to provide the at risk high school students with a choice. The Under-aged GED program
provides a diploma option offered by the district’s adult education program to at risk students currently enrolled at the high school level on various high school campuses during regular day-school hours. FCPS and participating high schools have endorsed this diploma option program which is physically housed on high school campuses. The participating students are no longer enrolled in traditional high schools within the FCPS district, and therefore; do not count with respect to high-stakes accountability performance measures. Currently, there are 27 traditional high schools in the school district and 12 of these high schools house, in portable classrooms, an Under-aged GED program on campus during daytime school hours (Department of Adult and Community Education, 2007-2008). The ABE/Under-aged GED program is delivered in self-contained classrooms of 20 to 25 students and is housed on various high school campuses around the school-district. Subsequently, the GED test is administered to the students and after attaining the prescribed levels in the four core academic areas, students are granted a GED which is equivalent to a Florida High School Diploma.

While within Florida the equivalency of this option is recognized by the Florida Community College System (FCCS) as the minimum requirement for admission to an associate degree program, it has been my experience as a school-counselor that students and parents voice skepticism in regards to post-secondary education in other states, future employment opportunities, as well as, its acceptance as equivalent by institutions such as the military.

As a result of the relative novelty of the ABE/Under-aged GED programs housed on traditional high school campuses, the perceived advantage or disadvantage of earning a GED, and leadership practices that may serve to push over-aged students out of the
traditional high school setting and into these programs; I explored the perceptions of the experiences of the individuals who chose to enroll in this completion option, known as the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program, currently offered by Flamingo County Public School (FCPS) district’s adult education division on four high school campuses during regular day-school hours.

**Research Design**

I am an educator, a public school guidance counselor employed by the school-district in which I was a student from grade-school through high school graduation; the same public-school system which was purposely selected as the setting of this qualitative research study. As is the case with all such studies, I was the *research instrument*, the primary instrument that collected and analyzed the study’s data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Stake (2006) reasoned that since educational and other social service programs were not uniform across situations, “To understand complex programs, it is often useful to look carefully at persons and operations in several locations. The multicase project is a research design for closely examining several cases linked together” (p. v). Therefore, I engaged in a phenomenologically informed multicase investigation which was complex in nature. Via interviews of the selected participants from three selected schools and utilizing a protocol I had crafted; I collected and analyzed the narratives of five program completers regarding their decisions to enroll in the program, their recollected experiences in the program and their perceptions of the impact of having enrolled in the program. I sought to discover, question, and disclose my assumptions as I encountered them in a reflective journal, and I utilized a team of four critical informants to review, interrogate, and check the findings from my analysis of the
data I collected. The data collected and the subsequent analysis may shed light in regards to whose interest is best served by providing the ABE (Adult Basic Education)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program as a completion option some have regarded as low profile and may potentially limit further educational attainment.

Prompted by a critical perspective, three strands of literature were woven into a inquiry framework. Latina/Latino-Critical Race Theory (Lat-Crit) was the overarching personal perspective formulating the conceptualization in conjunction with other critically informed perspectives; specifically, Leadership for Social Justice (LSJ) and Ethics of Accountability Practice (EAP) which examine educational leadership practices. These intertwined relative strands were utilized to frame the study and analysis which have resulted.

**Data Collection**

I collected data utilizing two primary data collection techniques: interviewing participants, and analyzing documents that were germane to answering the research questions (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, my study relied primarily on gathering data via semi-structured interviews yielding audiotape transcripts, engaging in recording personal reflective notes in a journal, reviewing the input of the study’s critical informants, and selecting/amassing pertinent documents for analysis.

**Participant selection and recruitment.** The potential pool of participants was composed of literally hundreds of Latino students who were considered unlikely to meet graduation standards to complete a traditional high school credentialing program and opted instead for enrollment in an ABE/Under-aged GED program within a specified six-year period in the Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS).
Availing myself of professional and personal contacts with a number of the school-district’s adult and community school administrators, high school guidance counselors, and administrators, I narrowed the potential participant pool utilizing purposively selected criteria which are described in the passages that follow. A total of five participants from three purposively selected schools were recruited, selected, and interviewed. As is normally the case in research studies of this nature, pseudonyms were used to identify the participants in the study.

Second-generation Latinos. I selected second-generation Latino former high school students in an effort to comprehend through their recollected-experiences the what, why, and how each individual came to decide upon an alternative high school credentialing program, the ABE/Under-aged GED and their perception of what has resulted from the selection. While I have an interest in the educational fate of all students including immigrant and first-generation, Latina/os, a portion of the phenomenon I wanted to comprehend was why so many students that possess a relatively fluent grasp of the English language and an increased capacity for cultural competence in the United States are at risk for completing a traditional high school program.

Furthermore, I believe in regards to educating males there has been and currently remains a crisis. Males are more likely than females to drop out of high school, are more frequently disciplined, suspended, and/or expelled from school than their gender counterparts and with regard to Hispanics, Latinos are dropping out at a greater rate than Latinas (Perkins-Gough, 2006; Sacks, 2005; Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). This was my rationale for targeting, recruiting, and selecting this group as participants in this research study.
ABE/Under-aged GED enrollment, sites, and enrollment time-frame. The express purpose of selecting participants in this particular program was to compare the participants’ recollected experiences as it was related to their opting to enroll in an ABE/Under-aged GED program. In addition, I was seeking to compare the participants’ recollected experiences as it was related to the process, procedures, and roles/practices of high school-based administrators, counselors, and community school administrators (CSA) prior to and during their enrollment in the ABE/Under-aged GED program associated with the specifically selected school-sites. The four school-sites I purposively selected were traditional high schools which contain a sizeable Latino student-population and house an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program on campus.

With regard to the specified six-year period enrollment window of the study, the recruited and selected participants’ enrollment and respective participation in an ABE/Under-aged GED program must have occurred during the following school years: 2006-2007, 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012. This particular period was of interest to my study because of my professional interaction with school-based administrators, fellow counselors, and community school administrators (CSA) with regard to the enrollment process associated with the ABE/Under-aged GED program and the potential role this alternative high school credentialing program may or may not have played within this period of high-stakes accountability. Critical perspectives argue that accountability policies hold schools accountable to achieve high-stakes performance thresholds by rewarding success and punishing failure, and this may encourage educational leaders to engage in actions of performativity such as pushing Latino students
into ABE/Under-aged programs to garner a more favorable school grade and the accompanying financial incentives in place in Florida (Alexander, Anderson, & Gallegos, 2004; Diaz & Black, 2008; Dorn, 2007; Smith, 2004). It is important to note that with regard to the graduation rate, both high-school students and adult-students earning a GED were considered high-school graduates within the parameters of the calculated graduation formula utilized by the State of Florida in a substantial portion of the period under scrutiny in this research study.

**completers of the ABE/Under-aged GED.** One of the results of my research study is the emergence of responses indicating the potential benefits the GED affords its recipients. Participants identified social capital increasing the establishment of social networks that may well lead to an increase in human capital through employability. This may in turn increase the likelihood of individuals and communities reaping benefits such as healthier life-styles and economic prosperity. There are indications that this may be an area for further exploration. Therefore, the afforded benefits which are perceived and related by the selected participants resulting from the completion of the ABE/Under-aged GED program were documented within my study.

**Data Analysis**

I commenced initial data analysis during the data collection process. To that end, I reviewed, read, and re-read my reflective journal notating detailed relevant perceptions, observations, and suppositions with regard to each interview, reviewed the feedback with regard to my initial data analysis of the initial interview data forthcoming from the critical informants, as well as, any relevant documents suggested by the participant’s responses prior to engaging in the next participant interview session. I did so in an effort
to refine the interview protocol as was indicated by the collected data. By practicing in this manner, I facilitated the *give and take* between the collected data and the interpretation/theorizing regarding that data, as well as, facilitating the focus of the study (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992; Merriam, 1998; Schwandt, 2001; Warren & Karner, 2010). In an effort to achieve a sense of *triangulation*, as Stake (2006) penned, “… assure the right information and interpretations have been obtained” (p. 35), I utilized a team of critical informants to review my initial analysis, to aid in my subsequent analysis of the data, and to review the final analysis in order to report findings and derive interpretations pertinent to the phenomenon under investigation.

**Analysis of interviews, documents, and policies.** Upon completion of the interviews, I employed and remunerated a certified transcription service to transcribe the interviews. Subsequently, I analyzed the collected data from the interviews to identify recurrent themes utilizing a simple coding scheme. In doing so, my primary activity was to detect and record the commonalities and differences across the interview responses of the participants’ recollected experiences within my study. I began on-going analysis as each interview was completed for the purposes of identifying, cataloguing, and summarizing responses relevant to the study’s research questions; as well as, making modifications to interview protocols if deemed appropriate to further the investigative process. Observations were shared with the individual participants in the vein of *member checks* (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Subsequently, the critical informants and I engaged in an interactive discussion regarding the initial analysis obtained from the participant interviews for accuracy and alternative interpretations in the vein of *peer-debriefing* (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Consequently, I analyzed the
collected data based upon individualized and across participant interview responses in search of concurrences and deviations from the discussions and interviews to construct conclusions (Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 2007; Minor, 1997; Schwandt, 2001; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2003). Finally, the critical informants and I engaged in an interactive discussion to review, interrogate, and check the findings forthcoming from my final analysis of the data for the purposes of triangulation.

**critical informants.** I utilized a team of four critical informants primarily for their input and observations to qualify the reasonableness of my interpretations of the collected data and the subsequent analysis of that data. I have termed this process as a search for consensual reasonableness. The critical informants were unconnected to the study with regard to data collection and research design. The critical informants were selected based upon their professional knowledge and practical experience specifically with the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program within the Flamingo County Public School-district.

**Credibility.** The credibility of a qualitative study hinges upon the valid construction of the interviews, the quality of analysis attributable to the documents utilized, and the premise that the conclusions drawn by the research are anchored in the data collected (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Across various qualitative studies, the concept of credibility has been couched to in terms of trustworthiness, validation, and transparency. In order to fortify trustworthiness, I retained notes and recordings to ensure the transparency of the data collected (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Baxter and Jack (2008) stated, “Additional strategies commonly integrated into qualitative studies to establish credibility include the use of reflection or the maintenance of field notes and peer examination of the
data” (p. 556). This came to play as I recorded my thoughts in a reflective journal after each interview session and reviewed the journal prior to each subsequent interview. In addition, I recorded my reflections of the serendipitous conversations with parents which took place prior to and after the interview sessions.

It is my contention that the utilization of the critical informants established a consensual reasonableness which contributed to the credibility and trustworthiness of this study. To further fortify trustworthiness, a perceived threat to credibility has been addressed in my study by the cautious consideration in the selection process of both participants and school-sites to limit the effects of personal perceptions as an educator and by having had no previous contact or involvement with the selected participants or selected sites. Furthermore to this end, I freely disclose the inevitable influence of my life-experiences as a Latino and as a student in and an employee of the school-district and state under study.

**Definition of Terms**

Throughout this dissertation, I utilized terms of a specific nature. On occasion some of the terms may be interchangeable.

**Adult Basic Education** (ABE)-a program for students who do not have a high school diploma, have withdrawn from a traditional K-12 school, and have earned a score at the ABE level on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). The program offers coursework designed to teach basic skills, prepare students for entry into a GED program, or vocational/technical training opportunities (HCPS, 2010).

**At risk students**-also referred to as high need students, those at risk of failing in school and/or requiring special assistance and supports due to the following risk factors:
living in poverty, homeless, or in foster care, have been incarcerated, have disabilities, are English language learners, are attending high-minority schools, achieving far below grade level, at risk of not graduating with a high school diploma with their cohort group or leaving school prior to earning a high school diploma (FLDOE, 2010).

**Consensual reasonableness**—I synthesized this term based upon the concept described as consensual validation (Eisner, 1991). Deeply experienced and/or informed individuals via discussion form a consensus with regard to the reasonableness and viability of interpretations, findings and conclusions drawn from analysis.

**Dropout**—a student who quits school prior to earning a high-school credential (NCES, 2009).

**English Language Learner (ELL)**—students learning English as second language; sometimes referred as Limited English Proficiency (LEP) (FLDOE, 1995).

**Exited school-sites**—the school-sites the study’s participants exited from prior to enrolling into their ABE/Under-aged GED program.

**Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)**—a test that measures students’ achievement of the state’s educational standards (FLDOE, 2007).

**Gaming**—emphasizing management or personal costs and benefits with limited or no concern for the good of the student (Strike, 2007).

**GED** (General Educational Development)—a test designed to measure, outcomes generally associated with four years of regular high school instruction (Snider, 2010).

**GED Credential**—hard-copy documentation of having passed the GED test (Snider, 2010).
**GED Exit Option Model**-a strategy developed for enrolled high-school students who may be at risk of not graduating with their cohort group to take the GED test and gain a standard high school diploma through an alternate graduation route (FLDOE, 2004).

**Goal displacement**-educational practices which uncritically narrow aspirations for students (Strike, 2007).

**Hispanic-Latin-American** of Spanish-speaking origins or ancestry (Pew Research Center, 2005).

**Latino**-persons residing in the United States of Latin American origin or descent (Hayes-Bautista & Chapa, 1987).

**Limited English Proficiency (LEP)**-people who are described as unable to effectively communicate in English (FLDOE, 1995).

**Motivational displacement**-actions motivated by accountability indicators rather than the notion of doing good, ethically centered work (Strike, 2007).

**Over-aged**-older than one’s grade-level peers and in jeopardy of not graduating with his/her cohort group (FLDOE, 2004).

**Performativity**-response/s to evaluative pressure/s which influence individual/s to place accountability ahead of beliefs and/or commitments of conscience (Ball, 2003).

**Push-out**-student deemed un-teachable due to a seeming lack of academic engagement or success, and/or misbehavior that is encouraged to leave school (ACLU-NC, 2008).

**Second-generation Latino**-a Hispanic/Latino having been born in the United States to at least one foreign born parent (Suro & Passel, 2003).
**Test of Adult Basic Education** (TABE)-an assessment utilized by ABE used to evaluate reading, mathematics, and language skills for program placement (HCPS, 2010).

**Traditional high school**-as it pertains to this study, a school context designed to provide coursework geared toward earning a standard diploma to adolescent students grades nine through twelve during daytime hours.

**Under-aged GED**-program designed to prepare students, ages 16 to 17, to take the GED test (FCPS, 2010).

**Limitations**

Within my study, the scope of inquiry was limited by design and by the limited selection of high school sites and participants. Thus, my study of a single element of the Latino high school dropout prevention phenomenon will not be applicable or generalizable to the larger Latino high school-aged population. While the Under-aged GED program is but one factor related to the high school completion and the dropout prevention phenomenon, the potential significance of my study is to highlight the supposition that those who fail to progress through the educational pipeline ultimately are denied the opportunity to enter and reap the benefits associated with post-secondary education (Saenz and Ponjuan, 2009). In light of the possible implications associated with such a supposition in this era of high-stakes school accountability, this study may contribute to the current discourse related to social justice issues which have arisen in the context of leadership in contexts (Kozol, 2005; Michael & Dorn, 2007; Valenzuela, 2004) and may serve as a narrative for prompting further discussion regarding the tracking and sorting practices of Latino students which are potentially embedded in discourses of accountability produced by school leaders which presently remain relatively

Consequently, this study is intended to raise questions associated with the
aforementioned for future research study.

The chapter which follows is an examination of the literature associated with the
growth of Latino student populations and the responses to the high school dropout
phenomenon in the United States and Florida with particular emphasis upon an element of
the Latino high school dropout prevention phenomenon known as the ABE (Adult Basic
Education)/Under-aged GED (General Education Diploma) Program. In addition, the
subsequent chapter will provide further rationale for the selection of the inquiry
framework and the methodology I utilized to conduct this research project.
Chapter Two

Review of Literature

The educational experience of Latinos in the United States (US) is of personal interest. It is the impetus for this dissertation specifically exploring the high school experience of Latinos (males) within an educational alternative touted as a means to engage at-risk students, the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program. This program is utilized within Florida and the specific school-district that is setting of this study which will be referred to herein by the pseudonym, Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS).

Within this chapter, I have composed a literature review pertinent to the factors common to Latino students which lead them to dropout of high school or select an educational alternative. Within this literature review, I have utilized the term Latinos and its seemingly synonymous appellation, Hispanics, interchangeably. This review of literature has been constructed for the purpose of identifying, describing, and critiquing the expanse and academic achievement of the Latino high school educational experience in the contexts of the United States, the State of Florida, and the local communities which are situated within the pseudonymous, Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS).

In reviewing the literature regarding responses to the Latino dropout phenomenon, I specifically focused upon exploring an educational alternative, the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program. I sought to answer the following questions regarding this program: What constitutes an Adult Basic
Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development Program? What does the existing literature reveal regarding an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program? What are some of the documented effects of an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program? In addition, the chapter provides further rationale for the selection of the inquiry framework and the methodology I utilized to conduct this research project.

**Growth of Latino Student Populations**

According to the United States Census Bureau by the year 2005, minorities totaled 33 percent of the U.S. population with Hispanics comprising the largest minority group, at 14 percent of the population (US Census Bureau, 2007). By 2008, the Hispanic population had increased to 15 percent (Aud et al., 2010). According to statistical data gleaned from the Census Bureau's 2008 American Community Survey (ACS) three of the largest Latino origin groups residing in the United States, in respective order, are Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban with individuals self-identifying as Mexican accounting for nearly 66 percent of the total Latino US population followed by Puerto Ricans and Cubans at approximately 9 percent and 3.5 percent respectively (US Census Bureau, 2008).

**Growth of second and third generation Latinos.** It has been generally assumed that the increase of the Latino population is a result of immigration. This may be an antiquated notion, as approximately only 44 percent of the US Hispanic population was foreign born according to 2007 estimates. For example, based upon the data amassed from the American Community Survey (2008) approximately 37 percent of Mexicans, 33 percent of Puerto Ricans, and 60 percent of Cubans were foreign born (US Census Bureau, 2008). The Pew Hispanic Center reports the growth in the Latino population is
undergoing a “fundamental change.” Past growth has been attributed primarily to immigration, yet currently the Latino birth rate in the US is “outpacing immigration as the key source of growth” (Suro & Passel, 2003). By the year 2005, approximately 40 percent of the 41.9 million Hispanics were foreign born. Within their study, Suro and Passel defined generations of Latinos in an effort to aid in disaggregating demographic information with the purpose of comparing and clarifying current as well as past Latino population growth rates and trends. They define Hispanics born outside of the United States (US), its territories, or possessions as first-generation. These Latinos can be further identified by their status as naturalized US citizens, legal immigrants or undocumented immigrants. Second-generation Hispanics are those defined as having been born in the United States to at least one foreign born parent. These Latinos, by virtue of the Fourteenth Amendment of the US Constitution, are citizens by birth. The third-plus generation of Hispanics is defined as those born in the US to parents who were also born in the United States.

Demarcating a period between 1970 and 2000, the Hispanic population in the US grew from 9.6 million to 35.3 million which represents an increase of 25.7 million. Immigrants comprised 45 percent of the increase, with second generation and third-plus generation Hispanics accounting for 28 percent and 27 percent respectively (p. 3, Table 1). By the year 2000, the trend had been altered. Generational population totals indicated a 14.2 million first generation, a decrease of 5 percent to 40 percent, a slight increase of the second generation, 9.9 million to 28 percent, and a third-plus generation total of 11.3 million, a 4 percent increase to 32 percent of the Hispanic population.
Passel et al. (2003) project that the growth rate attributable to the second-generation will gain sufficient momentum to surpass the first-generation rates even if immigration rates were to accelerate as “…second-generation births are a demographic echo of immigration and the high fertility among immigrants” (p. 3). Second-generation population projections beginning in 2000 indicate a 4 percent increase in each subsequent decade culminating in a 36 percent total of Hispanic population growth by 2020. During the identical period, the third-plus generation is predicated to decline by 2 percent in 2010 to 30 percent and remain so in 2020. First-generation percentage declines are projected at 2 percent from 2000 through 2010 to 38 percent and further dropping by 4 percent to 34 percent by 2020. Projecting the growth of the Hispanic population utilizing a “mid-range estimate of immigration flows” from 2000 to 2020 at 25 million, it is estimated that 47 percent of the increase will be attributable to the second-generation. It is assumed that the second-generation will more than double in size, from 9.8 million in 2000 to 21.7 million in 2020 thereby outnumbering the first-generation by 2020 (Passel et al., 2003).

**Latino student school enrollment growth.** It is assumed that across the world educational policy and its incarnation, schooling, is propelled by demographic and economics forces. Furthermore, any policy which is a product of a society is profoundly influenced by not only the size of its general population but also the factors of geography, ethnicity, race and age of a particular population (Guthrie et al., 2007). The US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that in the period from 1993 to 2003, minorities increased as a proportion of public school enrollment. The schools in central city areas experienced the greatest growth in the
percentage of minority students. Hispanic students accounted for much of the increase in minorities in all types of locales, and Hispanic 3 to 5-year-olds were the least likely ethnic group to be enrolled in center-based preprimary educational programs (NCES, 2009).

Much has been recently written regarding the growth of the Latino student population in the United States. Kochhar (2009) states, “Hispanics are not only the largest minority population in the United States (US), they are also the youngest” (p.13). Over the past twenty years there has been continuous growth of the Latino student population in US public elementary schools (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009a). Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (2004) reported approximately 5 million Latino students enrolled in US public schools during the 1993-94 school year. The NCES reported that in the 2005-2006 school year the number of Latino students had nearly doubled since the 1994 estimate and the latest available statistics indicate the Latino student public-school population at 21.2 percent (over 10.4 million) of the total public school enrollment in the 2007-2008 school year (NCES, 2010). While the latest demographic projections have begun to reflect a more conservative estimate of the Latino population, the increasing numbers of Latino students present unique challenges to the educational system. In particular, second-generation Latinos’ population estimates intimate various consequences impacting education in US public schools.

*impact of second-generation Latino students.* Suro and Passel (2003) believe the growth and predominance of second-generation Latinos will have immediate consequences for the nation’s schools. Second-generation students, by the accord of researchers in the field, are defined as children born in the United States of at least one
foreign-born parent or foreign-born pre-adolescent children brought to the US who have continued to reside in the US (Portes & Hao, 2004).

According to Suro and Passel (2003):

- The number of second-generation Latinos aged 5 to 19 years old is projected to more than double from 2000 to 2020, growing from 4.4 million to 9.0 million people. About one-in-seven of the new students enrolling in U.S. schools over these 20 years will be a second-generation Latino (p.7).

“Second-generation” Latinos will seemingly possess positive attributes such as bilinguality, a U.S. public education, and an increased presence in the main-stream labor market (Suro & Passel, 2003). Rong and Grant (1992) concluded high school completion rates for Hispanics increased with subsequent generations. Therefore, it may be assumed that the US public educational system will have a profound positive effect on at least a portion of the Latino student population. Suro and Passel (2003) posited, “Native-born Latinos have distinctly higher levels of education than their immigrant counterparts. Thus change in the generational composition alone—without any change in attainment—will significantly lift the educational profile of the Latino population” (p. 8). Kao and Thompson (2003) state, “Generation also differentially affects high school completion” (p. 428). When considering absolute achievement, immigrants’ educational success generally lags behind their native-born counterparts (Kao & Thompson, 2003). This is seemingly especially pertinent in regards to Latino students.

Latino students identified as second-generation are of greatest interest to me. Seemingly nationwide, a significant number of second-generation plus Latinos are
considered at risk for completing a high school credentialing program while factors such as nativity, English fluency, and/or bilinguality point to potential for scholastic success (Farley & Alba, 2002). Factors affecting this population’s educational success, such as poverty, low parental educational attainment, and family stressors pose challenges to accessing quality educational opportunity and to potentially succeeding in school increasing the likelihood of dropping out which ultimately impacts economic upward mobility. Hispanic students in public and private high schools were more likely to drop out than their White counterparts and Latinos are dropping out at a greater rate than Latinas. In 2004, 28.4% of Latino males 16 to 24 years old were high school dropouts, compared with 18.5% of Latino females, 7.1% of White males, and 13.5% of African American males (NCES, 2006). Simply stated, the academic rationale for the targeting of this marginalized group in the milieu of education is the fact that Latinos are more likely to drop out of high school (Solorzano, Villaelpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006).

**Challenges to and Educational Achievement of Latino Students**

In the milieu of education, a description of a majority of minority students as at risk has seemingly become accepted as the norm. This assumption is perpetuated by the challenges many children of color must meet and defeat. Three such challenges are poverty, parental educational attainment, and the new Latino Diaspora.

**Poverty and Latino students.** According to the Census Bureau's 2008 American Community Survey (ACS) the percentage of Hispanics living in poverty in the US is estimated at 20.7 percent. Of the three largest Latino origin groups residing in the United States, 22.6 percent of Puerto Ricans were living in poverty followed by Mexicans (22.3)
and Cubans (13.2) percent. In 2005 Hispanics, among other minorities, were more likely to be eligible for the free and reduced-price lunch program, the most likely to attend high-poverty schools, and more than 75 percent of Hispanics and blacks were attending schools with high minority enrollment. Aud et al. (2010) state, “Poverty and family structure influence a child’s learning environment… and poverty poses a serious challenge to children’s access to quality learning opportunities and their potential to succeed in school” (p. 16). Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) asserted that children were less likely to complete their secondary education if they lived in a poverty-stricken home during early childhood. There is suggestive evidence that poverty and family structure are correlated.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported that in the United States in 2007, 18 percent of children under age 18 were living in poverty. The percentage of these children living in poverty ranged from 5 to 52 percent depending on race/ethnicity and living arrangement/family structure. The percentages of children living in poverty were higher for Blacks (34 percent), American Indians/Alaska Natives (33 percent), Hispanics (27 percent), and Native Hawaiians or Other Pacific Islanders (26 percent), than for children of two or more races (18 percent), Asians (11 percent), and Whites (10 percent). The poverty rate for children living with a female parent with no spouse present was higher for American Indian/Alaska Native children (52 percent), Hispanic and Black children (49 percent each) and children of two or more races (39 percent) than for White children (31 percent) and Asian children (31 percent). For children living with a male parent with no spouse present, the percentages in poverty for American Indian/Alaska Native children (30 percent) and Black children (28 percent) were higher than the percentages
for Hispanic children in poverty (24 percent), and each were higher than the percentages for children of two or more races (20 percent), Asian children (16 percent), and White children (15 percent) (American Community Survey, 2007).

Aud et al. (2010) concluded “In general, across racial/ethnic groups, a higher percentage of children living with a female parent with no spouse present were living in poverty than children living with a male parent with no spouse present” (p. 17). Furthermore, they concluded that “Overall, a higher percentage of Hispanic families with children were living in poverty than the national percentage of families with children living in poverty” (p. 18). This claim was substantiated by the 2007 U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS). Of the 15.3 million Hispanic children under age 18 living with their parents or a relative, 27 percent were living in poverty compared to the national percentage of children living in poverty reported at 18 percent.

Based upon results from the 2007 U.S. Census Bureau ACS, approximately 73.9 million children under 18 years old resided in the United States. Of these children, 66 percent lived with married parents, 25 percent lived with a female parent with no spouse present, 7 percent lived with a male parent with no spouse present, and 2 percent lived in other arrangements. With the exception of Blacks and American Indians/Alaska Natives, the majority of children under 18 years old lived with married parents. The greatest percentage of children living with married parents were Asian children at 83 percent, followed by White children (75 percent), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander children (61 percent), Hispanic children (61 percent). While there are a majority of school-aged children living within a family structure composed of married parents, a significant number reside within a single-parent household. A higher percentage of
Black children lived with a female parent with no spouse present (56 percent) than did American Indian/Alaska Native children (38 percent), children of two or more races (34 percent), Hispanic children (28 percent), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander children (27 percent), White children (17 percent), and Asian children (11 percent). A higher percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native children (11 percent) lived with a male parent with no spouse present than did Hispanic children (9 percent), Black children (8 percent), children of two or more races (7 percent), White children (6 percent), and Asian children (5 percent) (American Community Survey, 2007). Some researchers have surmised that there may be another vital indicator/predictor of children’s education success, the level of educational attainment of their parents.

**Parental educational attainment.** Aud et al. (2010) assert, “Research has shown a link between parental education levels and child outcomes such as educational experience and academic achievement” (p. 20). For example in 2005, Asian/Pacific Islander and White children ages 6 to 18 were more likely to have parents with higher levels of educational attainment than were Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native children. Differences were also apparent across racial/ethnic groups in the lower levels of parental educational attainment. Hispanic children had the highest percentage of mothers who were not high school completers (41 percent), compared to Black (18 percent), Asian/Pacific Islander, (16 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native (12 percent), and White children (6 percent). Similarly, Hispanic children had a higher percentage of fathers who were not high school completers (41 percent) than did American Indian/Alaska Native (15 percent), Black (11 percent), Asian/Pacific Islander (8 percent), and White children (7 percent) (American Community Survey, 2007).
Within Hispanic immigrant sub-groups, there are vast discrepancies in terms of educational attainment. Hispanics born in Puerto Rico or Mexico completed fewer years of schooling. This may reflect a lack of educational opportunity in the country of origin (Farley & Alba, 2002). This rationale seems highly plausible in the case of Mexican immigrants. Kao and Thompson (2003) reported that for individuals in the 26-35 age range, approximately 28 percent of foreign-born Mexican Americans and 66 percent of native-born Mexican Americans had completed a high school education. The rates of Puerto Ricans in this age group were lower approximated at 53.5 percent. Miller (1995) noted that Cuban-Americans were the most successful of the three largest Latino groups in regards to attaining high school graduation. Based upon these afore-mentioned demographic indicators it is seemingly apparent that the educational fate of Latinos in the United States is one of challenge, risk and resilience. An additional aspect of the Latino impact upon education and vice versa in the United States is what has been termed the Latino Diaspora.

**Latino diaspora.** Historically, there has been a concentration of Latinos in particular cities and states in the United States. California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, Arizona, New Jersey, New Mexico and Colorado account for 80 percent of where Latinos reside (PEW Hispanic Center, 2005). While still primarily concentrated, between the census periods (1980-2010) the Hispanic population grew and began to disperse to a certain degree. Fry and Gonzales (2008) state that even more recently, “The Hispanic population is geographically concentrated in certain states and Hispanic public school enrollments mirror these residence patterns” (p.15). They refer to *established* Hispanic states such as California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado,
Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey; new Hispanic states such as Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, Nevada, North Carolina, Oregon, Virginia, Washington and emerging Hispanic states such as Arkansas, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah and Wisconsin. Regarding the three predominant Latino groups, Mexicans are generally concentrated in two states: California (36.7 percent) and Texas (25.2 percent). Puerto Ricans are concentrated predominantly in the northeastern US (55.4 percent) more specifically in New York (26 percent) and they also reside in the South (17.9 percent) primarily in Florida. Cubans are considered to be the most geographically concentrated of all Latino groups with approximately 68 percent residing in Florida (U.S. Census, 2008). Yet, Latinos even in geographic areas in which they are concentrated are dispersed within cities and neighborhoods and in many urban areas are but a small segment of the population.

Levinson (2002) considered the decade of the 1990’s to include a “fundamental demographic shift” within the contiguous United States with regard to Latino immigrants. He noted a trend in which substantial numbers of Latinos began to take up residence in areas beyond the large urban centers and agricultural areas which they traditionally occupied. Levinson cited as contributing factors to this cultural dispersal within and into the United States from Latin-American nations: new employment and economic opportunities, urban flight precipitated by the drug trade, gang violence, and racism. This dispersal phenomenon has been recently coined the New Latino Diaspora.

Approximately 10 percent of Hispanics in the US can be considered living in diaspora which can be defined as a relocation resulting from economic necessity or cultural estrangement (Nevaer, 2010). Through this lens, certain Latinos are consider
displaced people who self-identify culturally, ethnically, linguistically, racially, and/or socially as minorities within the United States (Nevaer, 2010). Wortham, Murillo, and Hamann (2002) posit the New Latino Diaspora is resulting in an increasing number of Latinos, immigrants and others from within the United States, self-dispersing to areas of the United States which have not traditionally been home to Latinos (p.1). In this estranged circumstance, Latinos are far more likely to encounter challenges to their senses of identity, status, and community by themselves and main-streamed Americans. As questions arise from these encounters, many are often addressed through formal and informal policies of mediating institutions such as schools (Goode et al., 1992; Lamphere, 1992; Levinson and Sutton, 2001). Furthermore within schools, social-cultural notions of hierarchal status and patterns of inter-ethnic interaction are reaffirmed (Goode et al., 1992).

**Resilience of Latino youth.** Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, and Cortes (2009) indicated that resilience is a process. Various other researchers describe this process as surmounting the challenges associated with risk exposure, developing successful coping strategies when confronting traumatic experiences, and navigating around pathways created by risks (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten & Powell, 2003; Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003; Rutter, 1985; Werner, 1992). Perez, et al (2009) stated, “A key requirement of resilience is the presence of both risk and protective factors that either help bring about a positive outcome or reduce and avoid a negative outcome (pp. 5-6).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2007) have complied data with regard to health risks behaviors in which Latino youth are engaged. Rates of
behaviors such as attempted suicide (10%) and unprotected sex (42%) are higher with respect to Black or White youth. In addition, the National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention (2004) youth violence estimates indicate that Latino males between the ages of 12 and 17 have been victims of violence and that 46% of gangs in the US are comprised of Latinos (National Youth Gang Center, 2006). Yet despite exposure to such risks in their social context, many Latino youth exhibit resilience and are developing positively (Ceballo, 2004; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Shetgiri, Kataoka, Ryan, Askew, Chung, and Schuster state, “Youth resilience is developed through a combination of many factors” (p. 223). Several researchers perceive resilience as a multilevel systems concept intertwining biological, social, and cognitive processes transacting with factors within the family, community, school, society and cultural levels of analysis (Kuperminc & Brookmeyer, 2006; Kuperminc, Wilkins, Roche, and Alvarez-Jimenez 2009; Masten, 2007). Kuperminc, Wilkins, Roche, and Alvarez-Jimenez (2009) posited

… issues of race and ethnicity, minority status, economic stratification, immigration history, and current immigration status are determinants of the neighborhoods Latino youth live in, the adult role models they are exposed to, the schools they attend, the classrooms they are placed in, and the expectations their teachers have for their educational attainment (p. 215).

Therefore, resilience research has also entered the realm of academic success and persistence. Researchers have come to term this as academic or educational resilience. Educational resilience can be defined as "… the heightened likelihood of educational
success despite personal vulnerabilities and adversities brought about by environmental conditions and experiences" (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994, p. 46).

Risk factors commonly associated with academic resilience such as minority student status, attendance in an inner-city school, residing in a low socio economic area, or living in a home where English is not the primary language have been extensively documented. (Perez, et al, 2009). Jimerson, Egeland, and Teo, (1999) concluded that there are a many students who despite the risks continue to do quite well academically. Researchers have identified protective factors which these students possess (Garmezy, 1981, 1983; Garmezy & Rutter, 1983; Werner, Bierman, & French, 1971; Werner & Smith, 1982). Perez, et al (2009) highlight two types of protective factors: personal and environmental resources.

Personal positive perception of academic status as well as direct influence over academic success and/or failure resulted in academic success ((Dweck & Licht, 1980; Dweck & Wortman, 1982; Stipek & Weisz, 1981; Willig, Harnisch, Hill, & Maehr, 1983; Wylie, 1979). Specifically with regard to Latinos, Alva and Padilla (1995) concluded that resilient Latino students maintained positive attitudes while attending majority-culture dominated schools, and this greatly contributed to their successful school adjustment. In addition, Gordon (1996) stated that within an urban school context belief in one’s cognitive skills was a significant difference between resilient and non-resilient Latino students.

With regard to environmental resources, Wayman (2002) stated, “Positive adult contact has been shown to be an important protective factor correlated with educational resilience” (p. 168). Perez, et al (2009) noted, “Academically successful students appear
to have a supportive network of family members, friends, neighbors, and teachers whom they rely on for counsel and advice in difficult or stressful situations” (p. 7). In their study of Mexican youth, Guzman, Santiago-Rivera, and Haase (2005) identified a powerful predictor of academic achievement and positive perception of school as the extent that these youth were willing to interact with students of other ethnicities. Furthermore, Shetgiri, Kataoka, Ryan, Askew, Chung, and Schuster (2009) noted, “School-related protective factors include school connectedness, opportunities for children to participate in school programs, high-quality education, positive school experiences, and socially supportive, pro-social peer groups” (p. 218).

Secondary Educational Options

The secondary educational options which may be pursued by students as they transition from middle school to high school are varied. Most high schools in the United States have and continue to offer a choice of vocational and/or college prep curriculums.

Enrollment. The factors which influence enrollment and the enrollment process associated with pursuing a particular option are contingent upon student ability, parental involvement and the dictates of the school system (Cooney, & Bottoms, 2002; Falbo, Lein, & Amador, 2001; Oakes, & Guiton, 1995). The decision/s with regard to enrollment in one the various options set into motion students’ educational trajectories which impact their transition from middle school to high school and their post-secondary futures (Baker and Stevenson 1986; Schiller, 1999; Useem 1991).

Factors. Practical factors and considerations: academic quality, class size, discipline, school atmosphere, school location, student safety and transportation issues; have been identified by researchers as generally influencing school enrollment choices
With the advent of legislation to increase the freedom and flexibility of choices in school enrollment that has expanded nationwide (Holme, 2002; Rees, 2000), it is certainly within reason to assume that political support from families of various socioeconomic situations has expanded (Holme, 2002; Molnar, Farrel, Johnson, & Sapp, 1996). Some studies have cited race and ethnicity as aspects of import to parents in their school enrollment choices suggesting White parents within upper income brackets prefer Whiter, wealthier schools while parents of color tend to prefer schools where their children are better represented (Glazerman, 1998; Henig, 1996; Holme, 2002; Lankford & Wyckoff, 1997; Saporito & Lareau, 1999).

School districts have taken steps to provide secondary enrollment options based upon curricular considerations to attract students. In recent years, the development of specialized curriculum suited to varying interests has brought other options to bear and has taken root in the forms of magnet schools and other specialized schools (Ilg & Massucci, 2003). For example, some specialized public high schools are designed with curriculums to address Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education issues and attract students with matching educational and career interests (Subotnik, Tai, Rickoff, & Almarode, 2010). Other high school options which attempt to attract students with specialized curriculums and areas of focus that match educational and career interests are career academies. Regardless of the impetus for choosing a particular school for enrollment, a process for enrolling exist and can vary depending on school districts’ application procedures, guidelines and deadlines.
process. Generally speaking, the most common and significant feature in the process of enrolling in high school begins with the transition from middle school. Notwithstanding school choice to enroll and attend a school which is assigned by a student’s residence, the transition from middle school to high school is dictated by feeder patterns and is shaped by districts' school assignment policies (Schiller, 1999). While the process may vary across localities and schools, placement practices associated with the transition are predominantly established by school-based administration and carried out at their behest by high school counselors. This process generally begins with an articulation meeting between feeder middle schools’ and high schools’ administrative and school counselor personnel in which procedures are set in place for obtaining achievement test scores and recommendations from middle school teachers to confer with regard to appropriate placements for the transitioning students. This information in turn is communicated by the middle school personnel to students and parents (Cooney, & Bottoms, 2002; Oakes, & Guiton, 1995; Smith, 1997). With this information at hand parents and students can formulate opinions with regard to academic placement issues and provide selections for elective course and extra-curricular activities of preference. This is an important aspect within the process of transitioning from middle school to high school for student success. Falbo, Lein, and Amador (2001) asserted, “Parents whose children made the transition to high school successfully were more likely to participate in the teen’s course selection and extracurricular activities (p. 518).

impact. Once parents have selected an enrollment option and a student has passed through the enrollment process a profound element with regard to the decision’s impact lies within the school’s course offerings and placement procedures (Oakes, & Guiton,
1995). Unless parents remain vigilant and are knowledgeable about how to keep their children on track or change their educational trajectories, students can be at the mercy of what has been described as "institutional inertia," a consistency of students' prior placement patterns which can lead to tracking (Baker and Stevenson 1986; Kerckhoff, 1993; Schiller, 1999; Useem 1991).

With regard to the practice of tracking students, Oakes and Guiton (1995) stated, “The most common explanations that tracking decisions represent schools' efforts to use educational structures and technologies to match students and courses in ways that both further societal goals and accommodate individual differences” (p. 5). There has been much debate with regard to the tracking of students and the impact such a practice has upon students and society. Some hold the belief that tracked schools increase student’s human capital by preparing them for the workforce with the acquisition of knowledge and skills for which enhances their capacity to attain income and status in the future (Oakes, & Guiton, 1995; Rehburg, & Rosenthal, 1978). Other critical theorists contend that tracking creates matches between students and curriculum which perpetuates schools’ role in maintaining a stratified society based upon race and class (Apple, 1982; Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Giroux, 1981; Oakes, & Guiton, 1995). In summation it is important that the options selected by parents and students are carefully considered and constantly monitored as whether the ultimate goal is to take advantage of post-secondary educational opportunities or direct entry into the workforce. The impact of school enrollment choice can be profound.

**Career and technical education (CTE).** From its initiation in the early 1900’s as a preparatory program for students to enter the workforce sans postsecondary education,
vocational education has evolved. This evolution has transpired as demands for greater academic and technical skills have increased in the work place (Cox, 2013; Hernández-Gantes, Phelps, Jones, and Holub, 1995; Kemple & Snipes, 2000; Levesque, Lauen, Teitelbaum, Alt, & Librera, 2000; Silverberg, Warner, Fong, & Goodwin, 2004). The current state of vocational education has proclaimed its new identity as the field of Career and Technical Education (CTE) (Cox, 2013; Plank, DeLuca, & Estacion, 2005). According to Symonds, Schwartz, and Ferguson (2011) “… over the past third of a century, all of the net job growth in America has been generated by positions that require at least some post-secondary education” (p. 2). In response to such a trend under the umbrella of CTE, comprehensive high schools have developed small learning communities referred to as career academies. The express goal of career academies is the delivery of curriculum which addresses preparation for college as well as a career theme. A rigor of academic study has been combined with a high degree of relevance evident in the establishment of partnerships with employers, universities and communities. It is the hope of researchers in the field of CTE that providing an option in high schools which is more relevant with regard to the real world and forges a connection between school and work will encourage a greater number of students to remain in school (Symonds et al., 2011). The end result of such a marriage of workforce skills and preparation for postsecondary education has produced positive outcomes such as increased attendance, academic success and a reduction in dropout rates when these programs have been properly implemented (Cox, 2013; Kemple & Snipes, 2000).

**Career and technical education (CTE) in Florida.** In an effort to implement viable alternative options across the entire state in the area of Career and Technical
Education, the Florida legislature enacted the Career and Professional Education (CAPE) legislation in 2007 which required all school districts to implement a minimum of one career academy (Cox, 2013; Estacion, D'Souza, & Bozick, 2011). The Florida Legislature’s Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability (OPPAGA) (2011) states, “As of January 2011, all of Florida’s school districts had at least one career and professional academy. Many districts offered multiple career and professional academies; statewide, there were 1,298 career and professional academies” (p. 7). In a report issued by the Pathways to Prosperity Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Symonds, Schwartz, and Ferguson (2011) emphasize the import of this legislation as it provides provisions for earning high-quality industry-recognized certifications and considerations for CTE courses to be “… equivalent to AP and other advanced academic courses in the state’s grading system for high schools” “A core aim of Florida’s new approach is to raise the graduation rate by offering students more high-quality, relevant programs of study” (p. 27). OPPAGA (2011) expounds, “When students receive an industry certification based on the program at a career and professional academy and graduate with a standard high school diploma, the school district receives incentive funding designed to encourage districts to provide more programs that result in industry-certified credentials” (p. 7). With specific regard to specialized academies, OPPAGA (2007) states, “Career academies seek to simultaneously prepare students for college and the workforce by linking academic skills to career training” (p. 1). Further clarification is provided by OPPAGA (2011)

Career and professional academies differ from traditional academic and vocational programs in that they simultaneously
prepare students for college and the workforce. These programs provide students with qualifications that can be used to either pursue a college education or enter directly into the workforce upon graduation, whichever is most appropriate for the individual student (p. 7).

Regarding the impact such programs have upon diploma options, OPPAGA (2011) explains,

Florida does not offer different diploma options for its standard diploma, students have several opportunities to prepare for the workforce (p. 5).

Florida students who wish to move more quickly toward workforce readiness may graduate under the state’s three-year accelerated diploma program. The state’s three-year, 18-credit career preparatory diploma is designed to prepare students for entry into a technical center, Florida college for career preparation, or the workforce (p. 7).

While nationwide non-traditional high school completion options such as magnet schools, STEM schools, career academies, the ABE/GED programs, or the performance based exit option offered at career centers in Florida provide alternative pathways to post-secondary educational opportunities: technical, vocational and/or gainful employment, the dropout or non-completion option is seemingly preferential to a significant number of Latinos. In public and private high schools, Latinos were more likely to drop out than their White counterparts and are dropping out at a greater rate than Latinas (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). Therfore,
regarding the Latino high school experience, I chose to focus my research on the high school completion option known as the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program.

**Latino Population Trends in Florida**

Florida has been identified as one of the *Border States* in much of the literature regarding immigrant and migrant Latinos. As to be expected within a nation of great diversity, the racial/ethnic composition varies regionally and from state to state (Aud et al, 2010). According to the US Census Bureau (2008) the percentage distribution of the resident population by race/ethnicity of the three largest groups in the state of Florida, was 60.3 (White) 15.0 (Black) and 21.0 (Hispanic). A comparison to the percentage distribution of the resident population by race/ethnicity of the identical groups within the same time-frame of the United States 65.6 (White) 12.2 (Black) and 15.4 (Hispanic) reveals a relatively substantial percentage of Latinos reside in the state of Florida. According to the Florida Demographic Summary (FDS) commencing in the 1990's the number of people in the state of Florida rose by 3 million, a 23.5 percent increase, surpassed only by California and Texas in growth during that decade. This positions Florida as the fourth largest state behind California, Texas, and New York. Demographers assert population growth is dependant upon two components, a natural increase, defined as the difference between births and deaths, and domestic/international migration. In the decade (2000-2009) natural increase accounted for 16.9 percent of Florida’s growth and net migration accounted for 83.1 percent (FDS, 2010).

A report released in August of 2005 by the Florida Legislature’s Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR) states that based upon the US Census of
2000, sixty-seven percent of the persons living in Florida in 2000 were born outside of Florida: 16.7 percent were foreign-born and 50.6 percent were born in another US state, Puerto Rico or US island area (EDR, 2005). The US Census (2000) also reported that nearly 65 percent of the growth in the foreign-born population nationally, in the time period from 1960-2000, occurred in California, Florida and Texas with Florida’s foreign-born population growing from 0.3 million to 2.8 million (US Census Bureau, 2001). Specifically, from 1990 to 2000 the foreign-born population in the Miami-Ft. Lauderdale grew from 1.1 million to 1.6 million persons. The US Census Bureau estimated that about 41.8 percent of Florida’s net migration is due to international migration (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

Florida’s population has become increasingly Hispanic over the last 20 years. In 1980, the US Census Bureau declared 8.8 percent (858,158 persons) of Florida’s total population was of Hispanic origin. By 1990 the percentage had increased to 12.2 (1,574,143) and subsequently the in year 2000, 16.8 percent (2,685,715). This represents an increase in the Hispanic population of 70.4 percent between 1990 and 2000. Currently, Florida’s Latino population is projected to increase to 21.4 percent (4,128,562) of the total population in 2010 (FDS, 2010).

The state of Florida may be considered somewhat unique regarding the make-up of its Latino population. There is seemingly a greater variety of Latino groups including Central Americans, Cubans, Mexicans, and South Americans residing in the Florida than in other areas of the US. Recently, the traditional predominant Cuban influx has been conjoined with an increase in the Puerto Rican population. According to Guzman (2000) in the period from 1990 to 2000, the US Cuban population increased 18.9 percent and in
2000 fifty-two percent of the US Cubans lived in the Florida county of Miami-Dade with another fifteen percent living in various other Florida counties. In toto, by the year 2000, approximately two-thirds of all Cubans living in the US were in Florida (US Census Bureau, 2001). Duany and Matos-Rodriguez (2005) reported that a portion of Florida’s recent growth in Hispanic population is attributable to the increase of its Puerto Rican population. In the decade of the 90’s, the Puerto Rican population in the US increased 24.9 percent, while in the state of Florida the number of Puerto Ricans has been increasing since 1960 commencing at two percent of the Puerto Ricans living in the US and culminating in 2000 in which Florida had 14 percent of the Puerto Ricans living in the nation. This indicated somewhat of the Latino Diaspora effect as Florida began to displace the Northeast US as the recent Puerto Rican migrants’ destination of choice (Duany & Matos-Rodriguez, 2005).

The Florida Demographic Summary (FDS) reports that the youth population (ages 0-19) within the state of Florida has shown an increasing growth rate over the last 30 year period from 15.5 percent between 1970 to 1980 to 25.2 percent between 1990 and 2000 a percentage which represented the number of youths in the year 2000 at 4,048,632. Currently, it is estimated that 24.4 percent of the state’s total population in 2010 are persons age 19 and younger (FDS, 2010). Naturally, the majority of this age-group can be considered school-aged. Florida’s educational planners conclude that the “increase in the foreign-born population should have had a larger effect on Florida school enrollment growth than on the total U.S. school enrollment growth (FDS, 2010 p. 2). The rapid population growth and its seeming mobility has given pause to Florida’s education
planners as public school district enrollments have become more difficult to forecast (EDR, 2005).

**Latino student enrollment in Florida.** Aud et al. (2010) declared that the percentage of Hispanic students increased in all regions of the United States. They cited as examples percentages of the two major Hispanic student growth regions. The West showed an increase from 32 to 38 percent and the South an increase from 15 to 20 percent between 2000–01 and 2007–08 respectively (p. 26). According to the US Census Bureau (2008) the percentage distribution of public elementary and secondary students by race/ethnicity of the largest groups in the state of Florida, was 47.6 (White) 23.9 (Black) and 25.0 (Hispanic). A comparison to the public elementary and secondary students by race/ethnicity of the identical groups within the same time-frame of the United States (US) was 55.8 (White) 17.0 (Black) and 21.0 (Hispanic) which reveals a relatively substantial percentage of public elementary and secondary students of color reside in the state of Florida. In 2008, five of the 20 largest school districts in the US were located in the state of Florida: Dade County School District, Broward County School District, Hillsborough County School District, Orange County School District, and Palm Beach County School District. The total enrollment and the percentage distribution of public elementary and secondary students in these five Florida school-districts by race/ethnicity in the 2007-2008 school year is indicated in Table 1.

According to the Office of Economic and Demographic Research (2005) there is a distinct variation among Florida school districts in regards to public school demographics especially when considering the effects of foreign migration and migration from Puerto Rico. In some school districts, the effects have been profound while others have been
virtually unaffected. These variations create a variety of challenges for school districts within the state.

**Florida’s English language learners.** One of the most prominently perceived challenges facing Latino students and the school districts with a relatively high concentration of Latino students revolves around the issue of home language. In the United States, the population of persons speaking a language other than English at home increased between 1990 and 2000 with the growth rate for persons aged 5 and over who spoke a language other than English at home reportedly 47 percent between 1990 and 2000 (US Census Bureau, 2000). In addition, while the nation’s population of persons aged 5 and over speaking English less than *very well* rose throughout the decade of the 90’s from 6.1 to 8.1 percent, the percent of the population in Florida age 5 and over who spoke English less than *very well* rose to 10 percent in the same period of time (Shin & Bruno, 2000).

The Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR) (2005) reports 277 languages, including English, were spoken in the home and that Spanish was the most prevalent home language other than English for 57 of the 73 school districts\(^1\). In addition, within 54 of the school districts, students with Spanish as their home language comprised more than half of the students with home language other than English (p. 14). Adopting a seemingly euphemistic posture in describing these students, the state of Florida utilizes the term, “Language Enriched Pupils (LEP)” instead of “Limited English Proficient (LEP).” In addition, there has been a movement in recent years to replace the term ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) with the term ELL (English

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\(^1\) Florida’s school-district designations are based on the 67 counties; yet special programs i. e. deaf, blind, special needs, university lab schools and the Florida Virtual School are considered separate school districts irrespective of physical locale.
Language Learners). These terms are frequently utilized to refer to the same student population (EDR, 2005, p. 1). In Florida, it is interesting to note that while students born abroad were more likely to be classified LEP, sixty percent of the former and current LEP classified students were born in the US and forty percent were born abroad. Furthermore, the number of students currently receiving ESOL services was fairly evenly split between the US-born (51 percent) and the born-abroad (49 percent) populations (EDR, 2005, p. 17).

The EDR (2005) asserts that LEP students often do not perform as well as non-LEP students in school (p. 6). In addition, the 2005 report states that Florida LEP students in 2004: had the lowest pass rate (13 percent) of any group for first-time test takers on the grade ten Reading/Language Arts FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test), a first-time pass rate of 48 percent for the grade ten Math FCAT, and a 47 percent graduation rate (Sullivan et al., 2005). Moreover, 30 percent of LEP students were reading at or above grade level and 38 percent of LEP student were scoring at or above grade level in math (FLDOE, 2004).

The EDR (2005) further posits, “Ability to speak English well is important for students to progress through the grades” (p. 22). Furthermore, the report states that students who were born abroad and had a home language other than English are more likely to be two or more grades below modal grade level. The modal grade indicator is derived from grade and birth date database elements. The EDR cites for example:

‘Modal grade’ refers to a student’s expected grade if the student enrolled in kindergarten at age 5 and progressed one grade level each year. Thus, a student age 5 in kindergarten would be at modal
grade; a student age 6 in kindergarten would be one grade below modal grade; and a student age 7 in kindergarten would be two grades below modal grade (p. 8).

They believe that status, evident of two or more grades below modal grade, can serve as an indicator of lack of educational success and conclude that when a student falls two or more grade levels behind, this is a clear indication of a lack of academic progress.

It is prudent in assessing this conclusion to note that Florida has apparently adopted an assimilationist stance on language policy and instruction (Schmidt, 2000). This seems evident as to an underlying philosophy at all levels of instruction in the creation of an instructional format utilized by Florida, the inclusion model. The inclusion model described in the technical assistance paper posted by the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) contains provisions regarding the use of primary/heritage language “for instructional support,” assessment procedures to determine student progress, placement, and assessment in a mainstream/heterogeneous educational setting (FLDOE, 1995). The inclusion philosophy encourages the implementation of an ESOL program model in which, as the term explicitly implies, English is to be the language of instruction.

Therefore, Florida delivers curriculum and instruction as well as conducts assessments, including standardized assessment, towards pupil progression in an English-only format. It is also prudent to note that there is evidence of the unreliability of standardized testing as a means to assess ELL (English Language Learners) also termed CLD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) students. Two relevant factors in this regard are aspects of cultural bias inherent in these standardized assessment instruments and the lack of a specifically constructed or norm-referenced assessment that can be utilized when
assessing CLD students (Baca & Cervantes, 2004; Figueroa, 2002). Assessments designed for native English speakers have lower levels of reliability and validity when utilized in the assessment of ELL (Abedi, Leon, & Mirocha, 2003). Therefore, results from such assessments should not be deemed indicative of the academic achievement of ELL (Abedi, 2004).

The EDR report also indicates another characteristic associated with Language Enriched Pupils, poverty. Students with a home language other than English were the most likely to be eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and among them were sixty-four percent of the U.S.-born students with a home language other than English (p. 18). While there is limited research substantiating this correlation, nationally there is evidence that LEP children and LEP immigrant families are more likely to live in poverty than either bilingual or English monolingual children and immigrant families which speak English well or very well (Batalova, 2006, Capps et al., 2002).

**Population trends within Flamingo County.** Based upon the November 2008 US Office of Management and Budget MSA definitions (OMB Bulletin No. 09-01) and the Economic and Business Research Florida Estimates of Population 2009, the area situated in West-Central Florida identified herein with the pseudonym Chela Bay, has nearly doubled its population over the last three decades from 1,613,600 to over 2,732,839. This figure stands at approximately 15.5 % of the total population of the state of Florida. Within the Chela Bay area is Flamingo County. According to the US Census Bureau (2000) Flamingo County’s population stood at 998,948 and is currently estimated in excess of 1.2 million (Florida Economic and Business Research, 2009). The Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR) identifies Flamingo County as the 4th most
populous county in the state at 6.4% of the total population of Florida (EDR, 2010). Flamingo County is comprised of the three incorporated cities and a large unincorporated area. According to the 2008 Flamingo County Planning Commission Estimates, the population of these municipalities and unincorporated area stands as follows: Central City (34,250), Tempo Trace (24,080), the unincorporated area (804,340), and the seat of the Flamingo County government, Chela (342,100).

In regards to other statistical information of interest to this study, the EDR (2010) reports 2008 poverty figures indicate that Flamingo County’s total percentage of residents below the poverty level is slightly higher (13.9 percent) that the state of Florida (13.3). However, the below poverty level percentage for Flamingo County residents ages 0-17 stands at 19.3 percent nearly a full percentage point higher than the state’s 18.4 percent. An additional statistic pertinent to this study is considered a quality of life indicator, educational attainment (EDR, 2010). Based upon 2008 data, the Florida Legislature’s Office of Economic and Demographic (EDR) reports the percentage regarding educational attainment of residents in Flamingo County, age 25 and older having earned a high school credential or higher, stands slightly above (80.8 percent) the state of Florida (79.9 percent) and the percentage of the identical group having a bachelor’s degree or higher in Flamingo County (25.1) is significantly higher than the state’s 22.3 percent. The Latino population embedded within Flamingo County stood at 179,692 (18 percent of the county’s overall population) in the year 2000 (US Census, 2000); and one can be relatively certain that the Latino growth rate has paralleled the overall Hispanic growth rate of the state of Florida into this decade.
**Latino student enrollment trends in Flamingo County.** According to the 2000 Census, 60,029 Latinos between the ages of 5 and 19 (21.5 percent of the total population of the identical age group) resided in Flamingo County. It is reasonable to identify this group as school-aged. These children are enrolled or have/had the opportunity to enroll in Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS). FCPS is the 8th largest school-district in the nation and the 3rd largest school-district in the state of Florida (Digest of Education Statistics, 2008). FCPS self-reports its 2009-2010 total school enrollment at 207,549 (FCPS, 2010). Based upon the FCPS ethnic enrollment data report (2009) within a period of seven years beginning in the 2003-2004 school year (180,842) and culminating in the 2009-2010 school year (192,581) the district experienced a 6.1 percent increase in total school enrollment; although, during that period total school enrollment fluctuated. Total school enrollment increased 5.1 percent over the three year period from 2003-2004 through 2005-2006, but in the subsequent three year period 2006-2007 through 2008-2009, total school enrollment decreased by 0.7 percent eventually rebounding in 2009-2010 by 1.6 percent. During this identical seven year period, Hispanic student enrollment in the 2003-2004 school year (44,268) increased steadily each subsequent school year culminating in the 2009-2010 school year (54,556) an increase of 18.9 percent. In comparative terms, the Hispanic student enrollment percentage of the FCPS total student enrollment (24.48 percent) in the 2003-2004 school year grew 3.85 percent by the 2009-2010 school year (28.33 percent). The two other major racial groups, Whites and Blacks, showed slower growth and/or a decline in student enrollment during this period. The Black student enrollment total in the 2009-2010 school year (42,035) indicated an overall 0.9 percentage decrease in Black student enrollment of FCPS total student
enrollment during the seven-year period. The White student enrollment totals and percentages of FCPS total student enrollment steadily decreased overall during the seven-year period, slightly rebounding in the 2009-2010 school year (79,590) 41.33 percent, culminating in a 4.4 percent decrease overall. It is apparent based upon this statistical data that the Latino student population is increasing, the Black student population is maintaining, while the White student population is waning in Flamingo County Public Schools. Therefore, the academic achievement and success of Latino students, particularly in the area of high schools graduation, completion, or non-completion are areas relevant to the overall success of Flamingo County Public Schools in this era of school accountability.

**High School Dropouts in the United States**

It is estimated that the residual effects of the overall high school dropout phenomenon are socially and economically staggering. Balfanz and Legters (2004) state, “It is hard to find a critical social or economic issue that does not ultimately intersect with the American High School” (p. 9). Within the walls of those American high schools, the ultimate issues of graduation, completion or non-completion (colloquially coined, dropout) are decided. It is estimated that approximately 1.3 million high school students did not graduate from US public schools in 2009 (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009b). A published report by the NGA (National Governors Association) estimates that minimally one student in five drops out of school, and nearly 5 million 18- to 24-year-olds lack a high school diploma in the US (Princiott & Reyna, 2009). Yet, attempting to find accurate data regarding national completion and dropout rates is a daunting task.
Defining a high school dropout. The primary source of difficulty in attempting to ascertain a definitive description of what constitutes a high school dropout is a lack of consistent parameters utilized to calculate graduation, completion, and dropout rates. Sum and Harrington (2003) aver, “The evidence on dropout rates is quite mixed and controversial” (p. 2). For example, the 2009 NCES (National Center for Education Statistics) Compendium Report on High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States stated:

Four rates are presented to provide a broad picture of high school dropouts and completers in the United States, with the event dropout rate, the status dropout rate, the status completion rate, and the averaged freshman graduation rate each contributing unique information (p. 1).

Seemingly, among researchers, educators, and politicians, what clearly constitutes and delineates a dropout is debatable. The debate has become especially pertinent in regards to current calculations which impact school accountability formulas. Researchers speculate that federal dropout statistics may be underestimating the number of students who dropout of high school (Greene, 2002; Swanson, 2004), and that states and/or schools reporting graduation rates under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) may be subject to significant error (Education Trust, 2004; Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004). This may be attributable to the fact that the method utilized generally to calculate graduation rates for NCLB, developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), is highly dependent upon schools accurately self reporting how many students dropout (Swanson, 2003).
averaged freshman graduation rate. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report regarding high school dropout and completion rates in the US, the AFGR (Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate) provides a rate which is based on an estimate of the percentage of public high school students who graduate with their cohort group four years after starting 9th grade with a regular diploma (NCES, 2009). “The AFGR among public school students in the United States for the class of 2005–06 for the 48 reporting states was 73.2 percent,” with individual state AFGR for public school students ranging from 55.8 percent in Nevada to 87.5 percent in Wisconsin (p.10). Therefore, it would seemingly be an accurate assumption that an estimated 26.8 percent do not complete this educational credentialing process with their cohort group. However, US dropout rates estimated and documented by various organizations are calculated utilizing data which is defined by a variety of parameters. This has prompted researchers to utilize a variety of rate formulas. Within the NCES study, the event dropout rate is defined as an estimate of the percentage of high school students who leave high school between school years without earning either a high school diploma or other equivalent credential. Thus the event dropout rate which within its calculations includes high school completers who have prepared or earned an equivalent high-school credential such as a General Equivalency Diploma (GED). Therefore, it is the primary rate relevant for the purposes of my research study.

Latino High School Dropouts in the United States

Male dropouts. Undoubtedly, the American educational system is a product of the patriarchal society designed by the founding fathers. This is a reality few could debate. What is debatable are the underlying issues of causality for the chronically high dropout
rates of males. In regards to educating males, there has been and currently remains a crisis. Perkins-Gough (2006) states that elementary school boys are more likely than girls to be held back a grade, more likely than girls to drop out of high school, fewer boys will take college entrance exams, are less likely to enroll in college, and obviously less likely to graduate than girls. Sacks (2005) cited findings which detail the percentage of high school male graduates has fallen to a level twenty years in the past. A majority of learning-disabled students are male. Boys are more likely to receive a diagnosis of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder than females, and are more frequently disciplined, suspended, and/or expelled from school than their gender counterparts.

There are other detriments to the academic achievement and success of males in schools. For example, educational best practices have shown that reliance upon the three primary learning channels: auditory, visual and the kinesthetic-tactile is an optimum information delivery system (Hasenstab & Flaherty, 1982). Yet, to the disadvantage of a majority of males, the latter channel, kinesthetic-tactile, is rarely employed as it is difficult to incorporate into classroom delivery. The visual and especially the auditory formats are most reliant on the verbal skills of students and area of apparent delayed maturation in the brain-mapping findings of males.

There is speculation that the Progressive Era, which coined the term boy crisis, can be considered a likely origin of the phenomena. Tyack and Hansot (1990) asserted educators in this era constructed the “crisis” as generally the product of a “… campaign to better fit schooling to boys…” as a result of the number of males with non-academic aspirations continued to rise. The boy crisis of the Progressive Era has given way to the terminology of the: boy problem of the 1960’s, and currently has been tabbed the boy
turn (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). Some researchers consider the male crisis in education to be a valid concern composed of various factors which contribute to the male crisis in education: physiological, psychological, and social-cultural. This assertion does not denote that such identical factors are not contributing to a female crisis in education.

Gurian (2001) contended gender differences in brain construction constitute differing educational needs and currently schools are not meeting the needs of males. Various authors work have identified social issues relevant to males worthy of attention and intervention. Weaver-Hightower (2003) theorizes that ironically the work of feminist theorists in conjunction with the subsequent work of males involved in utilizing feminist theory intensified the focus upon male issues:

These include the familial, social, economic, and physical aspects of men’s lives in connection with labor, emotional disconnection, health concerns, divorce and custody disputes, body image, and violence, among other things (p. 475).

William Pollack (1998) asserted that boys are in need contending society perpetuates injustices such as the consequential danger of separation from parents, role expectations of toughness as well as the suppression of emotions. There is also the social-construct of masculinity and one’s personal identification with the somewhat ambiguous definition of the term itself which is constructed and institutionalized. Martino and Meyenn (2001) related, “…the issue that needs to be addressed is the investment that many boys, men and schools have in promoting a particular version of masculinity which is to their detriment in the sense that it limits them from developing a
wider repertoire of behaviours and ways of relating” (p. xii). These issues may also be pertinent to the success of Latinos in US public schools.

**Latino dropouts.** Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) commented, “Latino male students are “vanishing” from the American education pipeline, a trend that is especially evident at the secondary and postsecondary levels” (p.54). Therefore the graduation, completion or non-completion of a high school equivalency credentialing program by Latinos is a phenomenon worthy of investigation. The national event dropout rates estimate that 3.5 of every 100 students enrolled in public or private high schools in October 2006 left school before October 2007 without completing a high school program. In the identical time frame the estimated dropout rate by race/ethnicity finds that Hispanic students in public and private high schools were more likely to drop out than were White students with the event dropout rate estimated at 6.0 percent for Hispanics compared with 4.5 for Blacks and 2.2 percent for Whites. In regards to gender, the event dropout rate has remained in a generalized pattern for a 30 year period with males dropping out at an estimated rate of 3.7 compared to females at 3.3 (NCES, 2009). The event dropout rate index which may serve as a more accurate indicator of public school students in the US is the state-level event dropout rates. These rates are useful for discerning the performance of public school systems. The rates reported reflected the percentage of public school students who enrolled in grades 9–12 during the 2005–06 school year but left school prior to October 2006 without earning a high school diploma or completing a state or district-approved educational credentialing program. This indicator, as with most dropout data, must be viewed critically as some states withhold data while others include or exclude data related to state and/or district educational programs such as special education.
programs and GED (General Educational Development) programs (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009b; Greene, 2002; NCES, 2009; Swanson, 2003). Regional data generated by this index indicated that of the four regions of US the West and South ranked highest with a respective event dropout rate of 4.2 and 3.6 in comparison to the respective rates of the Northeast (2.9) and Midwest (3.1). It is of personal interest to note that the South had the largest number of event dropouts at 135 per thousand (NCES, 2009).

**Status Dropout Rate.** As defined in the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2009) report, the status dropout rate measures the percentage of individuals who are neither enrolled in high school nor possess an equivalent educational credential. In the US, the national status dropout rate is higher than the event rate. The report states the increase can be attributed to the inclusion of all dropouts in a particular age range (people ages 16 through 24) regardless of having or not having attended school at any time. The reported national status dropout rate within this age grouping in October 2007 approximated 3.3 million were not enrolled in high school and had not earned a high school diploma or an alternative credential. This estimate of status dropouts represented “8.7 percent of the 37 million non-institutionalized, civilian 16 through 24-year-olds living in the United States” (NCES, 2009, p. 6). In regards to gender and ethnicity: males were more likely than females to be high school dropouts respectively 9.8 percent, 7.7 percent; 6.0 percent of White males were status dropouts compared with 4.5 percent of females and while Hispanic males were also more likely to be high school dropouts than their female counterparts, the comparative rate was much greater (24.7 percent vs. 18.0 percent) respectively” (NCES, 2009, Figure 3, p. 18). There were no detectable differences between the rates of Black or Asian/Pacific Islander males and females.
Irrespective of gender the Hispanic status dropout rate of 21.4 percent was considerably higher in comparison to Whites (5.3 percent) Asians/Pacific Islanders (6.1 percent) and Blacks (8.4 percent). The report further indicates that “the percentage of Hispanics ages 16–24 who were dropouts was consistently higher than that of Blacks and Whites throughout the 36-year period of 1972–2007.” As to be expected, status dropouts were “disproportionately concentrated in the South and the West” (NCES, 2009, p.7).

**status completion rate.** The status completion rate indicates the percentage of 18 through 24 year-olds who have left high school and who hold a high school credential (p. 8). In 2007, the report estimates approximately 89 percent of this age-group had received a high school diploma or equivalent educational credential. Within this index: females had a higher status completion rate (90.6 percent) than males (87.4 percent). Specific to gender, race, and ethnicity, White and Hispanic females status completion rates were higher than their male counterparts (94.6 percent and 77.6 percent respectively) compared with 92.4 percent of White males and 68.1 percent of Hispanic males. Whites and Asians/Pacific Islanders had higher status completion rates (93.5 percent and 93.1 percent, respectively) than Blacks (88.8 percent) or Hispanics (72.7 percent). It is noteworthy that the status completion rates of foreign-born Hispanics (56.1 percent) was lower than the rates for Hispanics born in the United States (85.9 percent for “first generation” and 85.1 percent for “second generation or higher”) and in each immigrant category Hispanics were less likely than non-Hispanics to have earned a high school credential (NCES, 2009, p 8). Once again as expected, status completion rates in the regions of the South and West were lower than the Northeast and Midwest (NCES, 2009).
Florida’s High School Graduates and Dropouts

Graduation rates. According to a data report released by Florida’s State Board of Education (SBE) Education Information and Accountability Services (EIAS) in 2009, the state currently calculates three graduation rates: the National Governors Association (NGA) Compact rate, a rate for No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reporting purposes, and “Florida’s regular rate” (p. 2). When examining the descriptors regarding these three rates, one notes shared similarities and contrasting characteristics. For example, all of the rates utilize a cohort method of rate calculation and tracking individual students. The SBE/EIAS (2009) offers the following definition, “A cohort is defined as a group of students on the same schedule to graduate. The graduation rate measures the percentage of students who graduate within four years of their first enrollment in ninth grade” (p. 1). Subsequently, the cohort method is utilized to track individual students within graduation calculations by accounting for exiting transfer students and deceased students who are removed from the calculation as well as entering transfer students who are included in the calculation of the class with which they are scheduled to graduate, based upon their date of enrollment (SBE/EIAS, 2009, p.1). Contrastingly, the rates differ as to defining a graduate. The state’s National Governors Association (NGA) Compact rate “… includes standard and special diplomas but excludes GEDs (General Educational Development), both regular and adult” (SBE/EIAS, 2009, p.1). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) rate “… counts as graduates recipients of standard diplomas and GEDs awarded to high school students but not special diplomas and GEDs awarded to adult students” while “Florida’s regular rate counts all diploma recipients as graduates including standard and special diplomas and all GEDs” (SBE/EIAS, 2009, p. 2). Recently, Florida’s State Board
of Education (SBE) has approved a new high school grading formula, which incorporates graduation rates into the grading of high schools (SBE, 2009). In anticipation of the pending official release of the U.S. Department of Education (ED) mandate for all states to adopt a uniform calculation method, the Uniform Federal Graduation Rate (UFGR) by 2011-2012 school year, the SBE has selected the NGA Compact rate to utilize in its grading formula. Curiously, the NGA Compact rate is not completely in sync with the ED uniform calculation which includes standard diplomas but excludes GEDs (General Educational Development) and special diplomas (SBE/EAIS, 2009, p. 1). In essence by utilizing this rate, the state of Florida has eliminated GEDs as a graduation option in its legislatively mandated calculation. In their published data report, Florida’s EIAS (2009) list the following statistical information regarding the three aforementioned cohort graduation rates spanning a five year period from 2004-2005 school year through the 2008-2009 school year (fig. 2 p. 2). In addition to rate totals the three identical rates are presented demographically disaggregated over the identical time-frame (Tables: 1, 2, 3 p. 3). The statistical information for the three predominant racial groups is listed in Table 2.

**Latino graduation rates.** Irrespective of the rate of choice, Hispanics over the five-year span have for the most part increased in number of graduates/completers. Although comparatively speaking, Hispanic graduation/completion rates lag behind White and overall rates within all three rate calculations and among each cohort; albeit, the gap has narrowed somewhat over the five-year period. Only black students fare worst than Hispanic students in all rate calculations. Interestingly the Florida calculation, which includes all credentials as graduates, exhibits the greatest discrepancy between Hispanic and White as well as rate total per cohort.
Seemingly, this suggests an anomalous outcome as Latinos are considered to be over-represented in special diploma and alternative credentialing programs. This is a point of interest in regards to the exploration of Latino academic success. Furthermore, the five-year average gap between Hispanic and White as well as rate totals is greater than the average of all three rates per these parameters as illustrated in Table 3. I consider the resulting comparison of the five-year average gap and the average of all three rates to be indicative of the continuing Hispanic-White gap despite efforts to narrow the gap and the inclusion of statistical information regarding high school completion alternatives i.e. high school and adult GED, constituting the Florida calculation.

**Dropout rates.** Researchers posit that the existence and utilization of a vast variety of modes of calculations and data source origins yield estimates of high school dropouts which are widely varying (Duncan, 2002; Greene, 2001; Kaufman, 2001; 2001; Sum et al., 2003). In seeming concordance with this assertion, the Florida’s State Board of Education (SBE) Education Information and Accountability Services (EIAS) 2009 data report highlights its conclusion that graduation and dropout rates are misunderstood and misinterpreted. Florida’s EIAS (2009) data report claims, “These rates are not inverses of one another” (p. 5). The report states that differences between graduation rates and dropout rates are based upon varying periods measured and varying student populations. According to the report graduation rates are indicative of a cohort over a specific four-year period. In contrast, the dropout rate indicates a single-year snapshot of a large student grouping. In addition, the report posits that the graduation rate tracks only original and identical cohort members in contrast to the dropout rate which tracks all students within the high school context in a single year. The report refers to the
following with regard to the state’s 2008-2009 NGA graduation rate of 76.3 percent which “… doesn’t mean that 23.7 percent of the cohort are dropouts” (p. 5). The report maintains that within a cohort students are assigned varying classifications. These classifications are identified as graduates, dropouts, and non-graduates. The SBE defines non-graduates thusly, “… students who have been retained and are still in school or students who receive certificates of completion” (p. 5). The SBE report defines Florida’s dropout rate and dropouts:

…the percentage of ninth- through twelfth-grade dropouts compared to the ninth- through twelfth-grade total, year-long student membership.

A dropout is defined as a student who withdraws from school for any of several reasons without transferring to another school, home education program, or adult education program (p. 5).

**Latino dropout rates.** Per these parameters as with regards to dropouts, the report provides cohort demographically disaggregated dropout data over the five-year span; included in Table 4 are only the three primary race designations and cohort totals. Comparisons of dropout rates within cohorts reveal Hispanic students exceed Whites and cohort totals in their percentage of students defined as dropouts. Reviewing the latest data made available by Florida’s Department of Education (FLDOE) complied by the Bureau of Education Information & Accountability Services (EIAS) and subsequently published in the Florida School Indicators Report (FSIR) for the 2007-2008 school year, the cohort membership for that particular school year was tabulated at 798,399 students. Within that cohort, Florida reported a 2.6 percent total dropout rate which equates to approximately 20,524 students who were considered dropouts. Reviewing the National
Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) Common Core of Data (CCD) event dropout rate findings for the 2007-2008 school year, which can be rationalized as closely aligned with Florida’s calculation methodology, indicates that approximately 6,816 Hispanics were among those students who were considered dropouts. Even unquestionably accepting the dropout rates reported by Florida at face value, the reported estimate of thousands of Latinos considered to be high school dropouts is a significant number. In addition, critics contend that the very existence and utilization of a vast variety of modes of calculations and data source origins, coupled with a view that state-reported rates based on such calculations may be substantial underestimates of students exiting high schools prior to earning a regular diploma or equivalent credential warrant investigation as the underestimates obscure the actual magnitude of the drop-out phenomenon and its economic impact (Sum et al., 2003). This investigation is germane to my previously stated purpose of identifying, describing, and critiquing the expanse and academic achievement of the Latino high school educational experience within the State of Florida, and the local communities which are situated within the Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS) district.

**Flamingo County’s High School Graduates and Dropouts**

As previously stated, Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS) is the third largest school district in the state of Florida with a self-reported PreK-12 total student-enrollment of 207,549 for the 2009-2010 school year. According to the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) Education Information and Accountability Services (EIAS) Data Report (2010) the Fall, 2008 PreK-12 total student-enrollment figure for HCPS was listed at 191,975.
Graduation rates. In its published data report, Florida’s EIAS (2009) listed the following statistical information regarding the three aforementioned cohort graduation rates spanning a five year period from 2004-2005 school year through the 2008-2009 school year with respect to FCPS partially illustrated in Table 5. In addition to rate totals, the three identical rates are presented demographically disaggregated over the 2008-2009 school year. The statistical information for the three predominant racial groups with respect to FCPS is listed within Table 6.

Dropout rates. The EIAS (2009) listed the following statistical information regarding dropout rates spanning a five year period from 2004-2005 school year through the 2008-2009 school year with respect to Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS) reflecting comparatively superior dropout rates to those of the State of Florida. For example, in the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years FCPS maintained a 2.1 dropout rate while Florida reported dropout rates of 3.0 and 3.5 respectively. The comparative trend continued between FCPS and the state in the subsequent school years of 2006-2007 (1.6) (3.3), 2007-2008 (1.8) (2.6), and 2008-2009 (1.0) (2.3) respectively.

Latino dropout rate. The high school dropout rates in FCPS are comparatively more favorable to those of the State of Florida which has been identified as possessing one of the highest high school dropout rates in the nation and are also reflective of the high dropout rates of Latino students. In addition to rate totals, listed below is the statistical information demographically disaggregated over the 2008-2009 school year for the three predominant racial groups with respect to FCPS: White Non-Hispanic rates in HCPS (0.7) in Florida (1.6) Black Non-Hispanic rates in FCPS (1.3) in Florida (1.6) Hispanic rates in FCPS (1.2) in Florida (2.5). This statistical information indicates that in
the State of Florida and Flamingo County Public Schools, Hispanic high school students are more likely to dropout before earning a regular high school diploma or an equivalent credential than their White counterparts and Hispanic dropout rates exceed the overall state and school-district average rates.

Responses to the Latino Dropout Phenomenon

Assuming the accuracy of current demographics and statistical information regarding academic achievement and dropout rates, Latinos are becoming a significant segment of the student population with the potential to impact the overall economic well-being of Flamingo County, the State of Florida, and the United States. High rates of student high school non-completion, is relevant to the rates of unemployment, loss of productivity, and expenditures for social programs such as welfare (Clarke et al., 2003). Carnevale (2001) stated,

if we could equalize the opportunity to learn among blacks, Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites, the resultant productivity improvements would add more than $230 billion in national wealth and $80 billion in new tax revenues every year. No one is going anywhere in the new economy without some postsecondary education and training (p. 32).

Specifically in terms of education, the No Child Left Behind Act has expressly cited the reduction of the national dropout rate has a primary goal (NCLB, 2001). In this light, responses to the dropout phenomenon and especially the Latino dropout phenomenon have begun to capture the attention of educators and educational researchers.
National responses. Various strategies and programs have been either implemented or proposed to curtail the overall dropout rate in the nation for decades. Recent research recommendations have begun to shift the focus from the deficiency of the individual and family to the structures, organizational and systemic elements found in educational institutions. This has led to programs such as AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), Upward Bound, STAND UP, and Boost Up. Yet, programs have been developed to address issues that may be considered beyond the scope of the school alone.

Some researchers have speculated that an essential component in determining student academic success is the involvement of parents and the need to bridge gaps between school, home and community (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Epstein, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1996; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993; Valdes, 1996). This may be most pertinent to the needs of children of color such as Latinos. Cultural and socio-economic status have been considered factors in ways parents perceive and define their place in their children's education (Coleman et al., 1966; Lareau, 1989; Lightfoot, 1978; Van Galen, 1987). To that end, projects and programs such as California’s Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) are committed to creating a partnership between parents, students and educators to further students’ academic success (PIQE, 2010). San Diego’s The Puente Project and its Puente High School Program is designed to help Mexican/Latino students with graduating from high school, and becoming college-ready by providing support via instruction in culturally sensitive rigorous curriculum, academic counseling, mentoring and community related activities.
**Florida’s response.** Florida has also undertaken efforts to aid Latinos in their educational pursuits. One such initiative was undertaken in a combined effort by the University of Florida, Flamingo County Public Schools, and the United States Department of Education. This educational triad recognized a need for bilingual school-counselors to provide aid to Hispanic children and their families as well as mediate difficulties in navigating the monolingual English school system. The Consejeros: Levantando El Pueblo (C-LEP) program was developed for providing school counselors to work with Hispanic/Latino students and their families for the express purpose of *Uniendo a la Comunidad, la Familia y la Escuela* (Uniting the Community, Family, and School). These and various other local programs across the nation are attempting to aid students identified as at risk of not graduating or completing requirements for a high school educational credential. Yet, the foremost widely recognized alternative high school educational credential continues to be the General Education Development (GED) (Fry, 2010; Smith, 2003).

**General Education Development (GED) response.** The General Education Development (GED), conceived by Everett Lindquist and Ralph Tyler, was originally implemented to offer soldiers returning from World War II the opportunity to complete a high school education since returning to a traditional school setting at their advanced age would be impractical for a variety of reasons (Rachal & Bingham, 2004). Tyler (2003) stated, “The General Educational Development or GED credential has become an exceedingly important credential for school dropouts in the United States. Currently about one in every seven high school "diplomas" issued each year is a GED credential” (p. 369). Smith (2003) reiterates the prevalence of the GED calling it, “… the most
widely recognized form of alternative secondary certification in the United States today” (p. 375). Heckman et al. (2010) aver, “The General Educational Development (GED) program has become a major factor in American education (p. 4). Furthermore, Fry (2010) states “The GED, or General Educational Development Tests, is the nation’s largest dropout recovery or second chance program” (p. 2).

Currently, states and school-districts in the US continue to consider this educational credential as a factor in determining graduation rates. As with their white and black counterparts, Latinos have been introduced to this dropout prevention intervention. Yet, according to survey results complied by the U.S. Census Bureau (2008), only one-in-ten Latino high school dropouts has earned a GED, and this ethnic group is the least likely to do so which calls into question the effectiveness of this as a viable option for this population. Fry (2010) attributed this partially to the “large presence” of relatively recent Latino immigrants who require time to gain knowledge of educational opportunities available to them such as the GED. Despite his attribution, Fry highlights the following with regards to a seemingly conflicting observation, “Yet, among native-born Hispanic high school dropouts, only 21% have a GED” (p. 1). This is an apparent indication that an awareness of the GED is not sufficient enough to significantly attract Latinos to the credentialing option. In addition, second-plus generation adult Latino groups vary in respect to the likelihood of having earned the GED credential. Those who speak only English in their homes or speak it proficiently are more likely to have a GED than those who are strictly Spanish-speakers, and Latino adults of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Dominican origin are more likely to have a GED as well. One might be inclined to assume that this may be related to the issue of language, economic circumstances, and/or
social and cultural capital. This may or may not be the case. The Pew Hispanic Center (2010) reports “The GED tests are also given in Spanish (p. 8).

Admittedly, while the GED seemingly benefits Latinos in the labor market, Fry (2010) concludes that Latino students “… who end their education with a GED would have been better off staying in high school and graduating” (p. 2). Latino high school graduates in comparison to their GED holding counterparts were more likely to be unemployed, less likely to be employed full-time, and more likely to be incarcerated (Fry, 2010). While Hispanic dropouts with a GED generally fare better than un-credentialed Hispanic dropouts, their prospects, as with all GED credential individuals, are limited in regards to economic benefits, post-secondary education, and on-the-job training (Boesel, Alsalam & Smith, 1998; Cameron & Heckman, 1993; Clark & Jaeger, 2006; Fry, 2010; Smith, 2003; Tyler, 2003).

Although economic outcomes are important regarding the benefits a GED affords its recipients, there are indications that issues for further exploration regarding the GED are related to social capital as there are indications that this is an area for further exploration. Tyler (2002) stated:

… there continues to be a dearth of research examining the impact of the GED on outcomes that are not directly related to the labor market. Whether or not the GED affects outcomes such as parenting skills, health, citizenship, and involvement in crime are critical questions that have, unfortunately, not been addressed by the research community (p. 3).
Under-aged GED programs. Of late, the General Education Development (GED) has been an intervention utilized to encourage high school aged students who may dropout to obtain an educational credential. The period from 1989 to 2001 evidenced an increase in the number and percentage of 16 and 17 year-olds receiving GED credentials. Rachal and Bingham (2004) argued that the GED “appears to be evolving into an alternative form of adolescent education” (p. 32). Based upon the GED Testing Service Statistical Report, by 2001 forty-four states issued a total of 655,514 GED credentials, which included a 42% and 32% increase from 1996 to 16 year-olds and 17 year-olds respectively, evidencing a trend of progressively younger recipients (Rachal & Bingham, p. 36). The 2009 GED Testing Program Statistical Report, states “Approximately 26.3 percent of all candidates in 2009 were 16 to 18 years old, ages at which many jurisdictions require additional documentation and permissions in order to take the GED Test” (American Council on Education, 2009, p. 11). In addition, the report states in 2009 regarding the three major ethnic groups, that 50.2 percent of all candidates who indicated their ethnicity were white, 24.7 percent African American, 20.1 percent Hispanic. The ethnic distribution across U.S. jurisdictions did vary. While White candidates represented approximately half of candidates in the United States at the national level, a non-white ethnic group had the highest percentage of candidates in the District of Columbia (DC) and seven states. In seven U.S. jurisdictions, African Americans (in DC, Maryland, New Jersey, and New York) or Hispanics (in California, New Mexico, and Texas) represented the highest percentage of candidates (American Council on Education, 2009, p. 16).
Federal statue has defined an adult in regards to Adult Basic Education (ABE) and secondary education as “any individual who has attained 16 years of age or is beyond the age of compulsory school attendance under state law” (Rachal & Bingham, 2004, p.34). Some states in the US have created programs for high school aged students traditionally considered under-aged in regards to GED candidacy. These programs have varying designs, restrictions and permissions. States such as California, Florida, New York, and Texas, have similarities; offering the GED in Spanish, honoring letters of request from the military, prospective employers, or post-secondary educational institutions. Yet, these states do differ. For example, California, Texas, and New York require residency, but Florida does not; California’s age minimum age requirement is 17 years of age while Florida’s, New York’s, and Texas’s minimum age requirement is 16 years of age.

Most pertinent to my research study is the academic status of the under-aged students in regards to obtaining the opportunity to be a candidate for the GED. California requires that 17 year-old students must have been out of school for at least 60 consecutive school days or incarcerated to be a GED candidate. In contrast, New York requires under-aged students to be enrolled in an Alternative High School Equivalency Preparation (AHSEP) program (New York State Education Department, 2000) and Texas requires under-aged students to be enrolled in The High School Equivalency Program (HSEP) or In-School GED Option Program (Texas Education Agency, 2001). The state of Florida operates in a similar fashion in this regard with the institution of a program which is the subject of this study, the Alternative Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development GED.
**Florida’s GED response.** According to the 2009 GED Testing Program Statistical Report, Florida’s largest percentage of GED test candidates were within the 16-18 year-old age group listed at 36.5 percent of the state’s 49,542 test candidates. In addition the report states that of the total number of test candidates, 54.5 percent were white, 17 percent were Hispanic and Florida administered a total of 49,546 GED tests: 48,946 in English, 2 in French, and 598 in Spanish.

In Florida, the General Education Development (GED) and the standard high school diploma are under certain circumstances considered equivalent. The Florida Community College System (FCCS) recognizes the standard high school diploma and the General Education Development or GED as the minimum requirement for admission to an associate degree program. “Florida has one of the highest rates of GED attainment in the nation … and relies heavily on the GED to provide an alternative route to a diploma for students who dropped out of high school” (FCCS, 2002, pp. 1-3). For example, the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) endorses a GED Exit Option Model as an alternative for high school completion. According to a FLDOE (2004), the GED Exit Option Model is an effective strategy for students who do not have the required credit hours, do not have the required GPA, or have not earned passing scores on the FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test). This option is a design utilized with students traditionally considered under-aged GED test candidates. The GED Exit Option Model requires a student to be at least 16 years of age, overage for current grade level, and unlikely to graduate with his/her cohort. Furthermore, the student must be enrolled within a PK-12 program in courses leading to a standard diploma. At the time of induction into the option model, the student’s demonstrated reading level must be at 7th
grade and must be minimally at grade level 9 as measured by the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) at the time of GED testing. The student may earn a standard high school diploma and will be allowed to participate in all graduation activities provided the student passes the GED Test and FCAT before the end of the school year even if he/she is “credit-deficient” or does meet “the minimum 2.0 GPA requirement” (FLDOE, 2004, p. 2). Recently, this option has been renamed the Performance Based Exit Option Model (FLDOE, 2010).

**Flamingo County’s GED response.** The Flamingo County Public School (FCPS) district is located in an area of Florida with a military base significant both in its strategic purpose to the national military complex as well as its historic impact on the local economy.

**history of the GED in Flamingo County.** To accommodate the military and civilian population the GED program of classes was implemented within the school district’s adult and community instructional program. Traditionally, the adult and community schools were primarily evening programs housed in the district’s traditional high school facilities. There were two schools which were designed to serve the same purpose of accommodating adults in earning a GED which were independent adult schools. One of these schools was modified from its original purpose of serving as a vocational daytime school setting into also functioning as an evening adult educational program. The other was converted into a daytime adult high school in 1988 and continues to function strictly as a daytime adult school setting. In the face of an alarming increase in the high school dropout rate in 1986, the school-district’s primary adult and community administrator implemented a concerted dropout prevention effort by facilitating and expanding the
GED program option to high school students identified as dropouts (Froelich, 2003). This program continued as a part of the adult and community school program and required students to withdraw from a traditional high school setting to enroll in an adult evening program at the high school of their choice. Currently, FCPS’s Department of Adult and Community Education offers two academic programs, Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Education Development (GED).

*Flamingo County’s Adult Basic Education Program.* The Adult Basic Education (ABE) program is designed for students who do not have a high school diploma, have legally withdrawn for a traditional K-12 school, and score at the ABE level on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) placement assessment. This program provides instruction to aid adult students by improving their basic skills in math, reading, language arts, and prepare students into the GED program, or vocational/technical training opportunities.

*Adult Basic Education GED.* The traditional GED program is offered to adult students 18 or older to master skills that will prepare to take the GED test in order to earn a Florida High School Diploma. The GED program is for students who do not have a high school diploma, have legally withdrawn for a traditional K-12 school, and score at the high school level on the TABE placement assessment. In addition, under the auspices of the adult education program and funded through dropout prevention funds, Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS) has implemented the GED Exit Option Model in the school-district’s career centers and via a computer lab credit recovery system housed on traditional high school campuses.
GED Exit Option Model a.k.a. the Performance Based Exit Option Model. The four career centers located in the school-district offer a variety of vocational programs. A student must apply to attend and/or be referred by the traditional high school that is in his/her attendance area. Students who wish to avail themselves of this option must be at least 16 years of age, at least one year behind in school, have no record of severe discipline problems, have earned less than nine credits, and have earned a GPA below 1.0. Furthermore, this student must be willing to focus on an available career cluster offered at one of the career centers, and willing to commit to workplace training. Students in career centers may also choose to pursue a standard diploma option in lieu of the GED Exit Option or the traditional GED program option. In addition, another GED option has begun to gain momentum. This option is identified as the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program more commonly known as the Under-aged GED Program.

ABE/Under-aged GED Program. Students, ages 16 to 17, who want to take the GED test may attend an approved Under-age GED program. The (ABE)/Under-aged GED Program has been relatively recently conceived to provide the at risk high school students with a choice. The Under-aged GED program provides a diploma option offered by the district’s adult education program to at risk students currently enrolled at the high school level on various high school campuses during regular day-school hours. Currently, there are 27 traditional high schools in the school district and 12 of these high schools house, in portable classrooms, an under-aged GED program on campus during daytime school hours (Department of Adult and Community Education, 2007-2008). The ABE/Under-aged GED program is delivered in self-contained classrooms of 20 to 25
students and is housed on various high school campuses around the district. Subsequently, the GED test is administered to student and assesses students in four core academic areas: language arts reading/writing, mathematics, social studies, and science. After attaining the prescribed levels in the four core academic areas, students are granted a GED which is equivalent to a Florida High School Diploma. I intend to explore this completion option currently offered by Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS) system’s adult education division on various high school campuses during regular day-school hours, known as ABE (Adult Basic Education)/Under-aged GED (General Education Development) Program. FCPS and participating high schools have endorsed this diploma option program which is physically housed on high school campuses. The participating students are no longer enrolled in traditional high schools within the FCPS, and therefore; do not count with respect to high-stakes accountability performance measures.

I believe the exploration of this ABE (Adult Basic Education)/Under-aged GED (General Education Development) Program and the research resulting from the exploration into the procedures and practices of educational leaders implementing the Under-aged GED program may have the potential to provide insight relative to the original concern in the development of the GED regarding its potential for encouraging students to drop-out of the traditional high school setting (Rachal & Bingham, 2004).

**Inquiry Framework: Investigating Individual Latino Dropouts**

As result of my personal interest in Latinos, my role as a high school guidance counselor, and my studies as a graduate student, I began to critically examine educational leadership practices regarding the comparatively low graduation rates of Latino students
and embarked on an investigation into individual cases of Latino dropouts. The phenomenon I explored and described were the recollected high school experiences of Latinos (males) in particular those identified as second-generation, and the factors which contributed to these over-aged, at risk Latino traditional high school students’ choice to enter a completion option offered by Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS) district’s adult education division, the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged GED (General Education Development) Program. In addition, I focused and described the participants’ recollected experiences of the enrollment process associated with the (ABE)/ Under-aged GED Program and their perceptions with regard to the impact of having enrolled in the (ABE)/ Under-aged GED Program.

As an overarching inquiry framework, I drew upon Latina/Latino-Critical Race Theory (Lat-Crit) as well as the associated lenses which have resulted from such a critical perspective, Leadership for Social Justice (LSJ), and Ethics of Accountability Pressure (EAP). The common threads within these lenses can be brought into focus by emphasizing the concepts of racialization, paramount amid the precepts of Lat-Crit; advocacy, for every student asserted by LSJ; and conflict of conscience, potentially created by meeting high stake accountability standards, expounded in the literature of EAP. Syllogistically speaking, the commonality should be deemed plausible. If racialization equates to marginalization, and marginalizing conditions undermine social justice, which in turn creates an ethical conflict while attempting to develop and meet systemic /organizational goals, (Blackmore, 2006) then Lat-Crit, LSJ, and EAP are inexorably intertwined.
In my study utilizing a critical perspective, I sought to question educational leadership practices regarding the comparatively low graduation rates of Latino students by exploring and describing the high school experiences of second-generation, over-aged Latinos (males); in particular, those who chose to enter a completion option some have regarded as low profile and which potentially limits educational attainment. The research I conducted sought to unearth and reveal educational leadership practices that might have served to push over-aged students out of diverse high schools. Such practices may be establishing a new form of tracking and segregation by covertly coercing those labeled over-aged and under-achieving high school students, who are primarily students of color and specifically the focus of this study, Latinos, out of high schools and into an ABE/Under-aged GED Program. Asking and attempting to answer questions surrounding the dynamics of placement practices into programs of this nature may provide opportunity for educational leadership to engage in self-reflection and in debate regarding professional practice and program options beneficial for students and public-school leaders. Therefore, the intertwined relative strands of literature emblematic of such a critical perspective Latina/Latino-Critical Race Theory, Leadership for Social Justice, and Ethics of Accountability Pressure (EAP) were woven into an inquiry framework utilized to frame the study and the analysis of these phenomena.

**Latina/Latino-Critical Race Theory (Lat-Crit).** Entering into this phase of my professional and personal development, I felt the compulsion to shift to a critical perspective and adopt the precepts of critical theory. The primary tenet of Critical Theory fashioned by the Frankfurth School can be described as an effort to challenge the status quo in every aspect of a capitalistic society. Subsequently, it has given rise to the
perceptions, speculations and assertions posited by critical theorists in examining the contexts, policies and practices of organizations as they pertain to the domination and/or subjugation of marginalized segments of society through the use of economic and political power (Bernal, 2002; Cole & Maisuria, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 1994; Kincheloe, & McLaren, 2000; Nelson, Palonsky & McCarthy, 2007). Regarding this as a research paradigm, and its basic tenet of “empowering the oppressed” Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated, “Research is about documenting how that oppression has been experienced … Research should lead to action to reduce the problems caused by oppression” (p. 25).

Evolving as a paradigm from the late 60’s/early 70’s Critical Legal Studies movement, which asserts that the law is neither neutral nor free of values and political influences (Boyle, 1992; Unger, 1986), Critical Race Theory (CRT) seeks to further comprehend the social origins of race and racism as well as highlighting that racism is woven into every aspect of American society structuring it in a manner which maintains the status quo (Bell, 1992; Cole & Maisuria, 2007; Delagdo & Stefancic, 1994; Lopez, 1995). CRT has also begun to surface as a theoretical framework for the examination of contexts, policies and practices in education. Pursuant to such a theoretical framework, critical pedagogues and specifically critical race theorists posit that race may be a significant contributing factor to the higher dropout (or the more sinister practice) push-out rates of Latino students. This is a phenomenon worthy of critique based upon a concern with the democratic, liberal concepts of meritocracy, colorblindness, and individuality which CRT views as means to undermine the visibility of racialization an endemic process in American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 1994). If one speculates that racialization is endemic to American society, then one must assume the probable
existence of comparable attitudes and practices within the milieu of public education manifesting a causal relationship regarding disproportionate Latino lack of educational success and subsequent loss of human capital.

As result of my personal interest in Latinos, I began to focus upon Critical Race Theory (CRT) and more specifically, Latina/Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Solórzano, Villapando & Oseguera, 2005). Evolving as a paradigm from the CRT movement, Latina/Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) assumes many of the tenets of CRT and augments it with the analysis, and according to Delgado-Bernal (2002), the theorizing of “issues such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality” (p.108). In addition, because Latinas/Latinos possess “multidimensional identities” LatCrit serves as theory which addresses what has been termed an “intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression” (Delgado-Bernal, 2002, p.108). The volume of research based upon the framework has occurred as practices in higher education have come under investigation and close scrutiny by individuals of marginalized groups. The framework is comprised of the following five primary tenets when utilized as a lens in which to study the effects of race in education as outlined by Solórzano (1998):

1. The importance of transdisciplinary approaches.

2. An emphasis on experiential knowledge.

3. A challenge to dominant ideologies.

4. The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination.

5. A commitment to social justice.
Scholars and researchers utilizing LatCrit within the context of education are primarily examining and attempting to document how racialized structures, policies, and practices influence and impact the educational attainment and academic progress of Latinas/os (Solórzano, Villapando & Oseguera, 2005). LatCrit theorists posit that educational structures, processes, and discourses operate in contradictory ways with the potential to oppress and marginalize students of color who at times believe they have to choose either family or culture or school success (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Nieto, 1996). This conflict of interest may have a profound impact on the educational attainment and academic progress of Latinas/os. Flores (2000) asserts, “The task for critical race scholars is to uncover and explore the various ways in which racial thinking operates” (p. 437). Once these modes of racialized reasoning are exposed LatCrit, as a theoretical framework in educational research, challenges the dominant discourse on race, gender, and class by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000).

Perhaps the most predominant aspect of subordination radiates from the concept of epistemology defined in this context as a “system of knowing” that is linked to worldviews based on the conditions under which people live and learn (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Delgado Bernal (2002) states, “Although students of color are holders and creators of knowledge, they often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational settings” (p. 106). Certain scholars within education have begun to view these ways and systems of knowing as emerging from a social, cultural, and political history different from the
dominant race (e.g., Delgado Bernal, 1998; Dillard, 1997, 2000; Gordon, 1990; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Scheurich & Young, 1997). In this manner, LatCrit is attempting to provide “…credence to culturally and linguistically relevant ways of knowing and understanding and to the importance of rethinking the traditional notion of what counts as knowledge” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 117). An important method for aiding educators in ameliorating such issues is counter-storytelling. Counter-storytelling is a method of voicing the stories of people marginalized by the dominant society whose experiences are not often told; counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). It is a technique utilized originally by critical race theorists, has been incorporated by LatCrit practitioners to provide testimonios of the life histories of people of color related from a view differing in perspective from the dominant culture. Counter-stories, which incorporate the five elements of critical race theory, provide opportunity for White educators to develop ways of listening and hearing the messages within counter-stories and by doing so, come to an understanding and appreciation for the unique experiences, responses, and ways of knowing of students of color (Delgado, 1989, 1993; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). As Delgado Bernal (2002) notes, “…learning to listen to counter-stories within the educational system can be an important pedagogical practice for teachers and students as well as an important methodological practice for educational researchers” (p. 116).

**Leadership for Social Justice (LSJ).** If as a nation we accepted that the primary function of public education is fundamentally and inexorably tied to the proposition of our democratic tenets such as the “pursuit of happiness,” the promotion of the “general welfare,” and “to insure domestic tranquility,” then the rates of high school graduation
and completion of every student are subjects worthy of examination. Operating from a
democratic posture, the Leadership for Social Justice (LSJ) literature asserts that
educational leadership should engage in self-scrutiny and debate to ensure it is
advocating for, believing in, and upholding the valued ends of equal political and social
opportunity for every student (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Marshall & Parker, 2006;
Theoharis, 2007). Senge (1990) speaks of the process of self-reflection as a means to
uncover and assess one’s worldview. In this manner, educational leadership may assess
personal connections to the diverse student-populations which compose their contexts
and the associated social justice issues inherent therein. As a result of self-reflexive
practice that may broaden social and political perception, definitions of social justice
often emerge. Theoharis (2007) offers as a definition of social justice and a subsequent
call to action “… leaders make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation,
and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the U.S. central to their
in the broadest sense includes political, educational, legal, economic, social and other
human rights of people” (p. 483) and “social justice is about taking intentional action to
create nondiscriminatory relationships that transform unequal power structures” (p. 490).
She further asserts that advocating for social justice is a difficult action.

Blackmore (2006) alludes to potential conflict of educational leaders adopting a LSJ
(Leadership for Social Justice) posture while attempting to develop and meet systemic
/organizational goals. Authors in the field researching leadership practices for social
justice such as Bogotch (2000) cite the duality of traveling such a path. While seemingly
viewed as heroic by some, the questioning of the status quo carries the risk of a tarnished
personal reputation as uncooperative, an inhibiting of career advancement and/or the maintenance of one position at even the highest level of the educational hierarchy. Garza (2008) concluded in his autoenthography regarding his brief tenure as a school district superintendent:

Superintendents hold the position of greatest administrative authority in a school-district. It is a position of power and immense influence. Reciprocal to this power is the responsibility and moral obligation to provide equitable opportunities for all students and their parents. Leading for social justice incites political unrest because the hegemonic culture will resist change that provides equity to all members of society (p. 163).

Standing up to the incessant political and social pressures required a strong sense of ethics, and courage (p. 164).

I learned that it is not easy to be a leader for social justice.

Leaders for social justice consistently challenge the hegemonic culture, and this often results in an adversarial relationship between the superintendent and those who use their power to demand and create privilege (p. 176).

Yet, it is noted by those in positions of educational leadership that there are students at all levels of public educational institutions which are contending against “negative and inequitable treatment (Scheurich & Laible 1999; Valenzuela 1999). In the face of a significant indication that student achievement varies greatly between those student populations receiving such inequitable treatment and their counterparts, Cambron-
McCabe and McCarthy (2005) urge educational leaders to question assumptions and seek to rectify the educational contexts, policies, and practices which perpetuate inequities in the schooling of marginalized students eventually resulting in limitations to the completion of secondary and post-secondary opportunities and their potential access to economic power. The call to action by universities’ educational leadership preparation programs has become increasingly apparent.

“The field of educational administration was strongly influenced by a series of works on school leadership grounded in critical theory (e.g., Anderson, 1990; Bates, 1983; Foster, 1986; Smyth, 1989)” (McKenzie, Christman, Hernandez, Fierro, Capper, Dantley, González, Cambron-McCabe, & Scheurich, 2008, p. 115). Observing current educational administrative context, “… the day-to-day practice of educational leadership, leadership for social justice is messy, complex, and at times, full of contradictions (Chien & Capper, 1999; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Scanlan, 2005)” (McKenzie, et al., 2008, p. 114). McKenzie et al. (2008) argue “… for a definition of social justice that is non-essentialized (that there is not one meaning that can be universally applied in every situation, with every marginalized individual, in the same way)” (p.115). Based upon the work of (Grant & Sleeter, 2007) McKenzie et al. (2008) specifically state, “…leaders for social justice are defined by three goals that they must have at the forefront of their efforts”:

- To raise the academic achievement of all the students in their school (Riester et al., 2002; Rusch, 2004; Skrla et al., 2004).
- Prepare their students to live as critical citizens in society (Shields, 2004).
• To structure their schools to ensure that students learn in heterogeneous, inclusive classrooms (McKenzie et al., 2008, pp. 114-116).

**Ethics of Accountability Practice (EAP).** This era of high-stakes accountability has potentially created a conflict of conscience among educators (Ball, 2003; Rustique-Forrester, 2005; Strike, 2007). Through a critical lens, the conflict’s impetus may be the movement for education to ascribe to the principles and precepts of the business-model in that the primary focus is shifted to performance rather than authentic learning (Ball, 2003). The incredible power wielded by the business community in all arenas, locally and nationally, has through attrition seemingly convinced the *body politic* that public schools should function under a business model. “Business cares about education because the well-being of their companies and every American is at stake” (Goldberg, Traiman, Molnar, & Stevens, 2001, p. 75).

Special interest groups have and will continue to exert political power in educational policy-making. Cibulka (2001) stated, “Business conservatism has a very different reform agenda for the public schools. It was precisely the growing international influences in the American business establishment that led to a concern for the quality of public schools (p. 31). Debray-Pelot and McGuinn (2009) refer to “the new politics of education” which has witnessed the formulation of a coalition with the express goal of quickening the pace of education reform (p. 22). Groups such as the National Governors Association (NGA) have united with various business organizations and civil rights groups to increase federal involvement in education to advance reform agendas (National Governors Association, 2010). Business interests since the 1990s have become increasingly concerned with the training and productivity of workers exiting American
schools and civil rights advocates have called for educational reforms to ameliorate achievement gaps among racial groups. This coalition has become a formidable political force in erasing the boundary between federal and state control over education (Cibulka, 2001; Debray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Manna, 2006).

Since the scathing accusations of the ineptitude of the American public educational system in the 1980s, high-stakes accountability public policy infused with the precepts of business practices has profoundly impacted the work of educational leaders particularly in urban contexts (Diaz & Black, 2008). This was manifested in the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and the subsequent expanding role of the state in local educational practices (Fuhrman & Elmore, 2004; Sadovnik, O'Day, Bohnstedt, & Borman, 2008). Nelson, Palonsky, and McCarthy (2007) and Firestone, Shorr, and Monfils (2004) suggested that the professed equity values embedded in NCLB and state-level accountability policies were represented in the establishment of rigorous academic standards for all, the assessment of students and schools performance against standards, the use of assessment data to improve schools, and the ability to hold schools accountable by rewarding success and punishing failure. However, others have chronicled school-based responses to high-stakes performance policies and argued that these have done little to close the achievement gap (Rothstein, 2004, Sadovnik, et. al, 2008; Sherman, 2008) or worse, have actually catalyzed a myriad of undemocratic and unjust educational responses that serve to limit opportunities for students, particularly low-income students of color (Ball, 2006; Dorn, 2007; Lipman, 2004; Rustique- Forrester, 2005; Valenzuela, 2004).
In relation to my research interests, I tendered the following supposition. Perhaps instead of centering the best interest of the child and school community, certain high school administrators may be engaging in what Strike (2007) terms “vices” of accountability: goal displacement, motivational displacement, and gaming. Goal displacement speaks to educational practices which uncritically narrow aspirations for students. In this context, motivational displacement speaks to actions motivated by accountability indicators rather than the notion of doing good, ethically centered work. Finally, gaming is primarily concerned with the management or personal costs and benefits without concern for the greater public good and good of the student (Strike, 2007, pp. 136-137). These perceived phenomena have prompted a call to consider issues in preparing educational leaders.

**Implications for Research Design**

Education is an institution which affects the lives of all citizens. As a practicing high school guidance counselor, I have observed and been privy to relatively covert decisions to remove students from the traditional high school setting partially to avoid the negative impact their presence in the schools may have on publicly reported accountability performance indicators such as drop-out rates, attendance, and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) results. Researchers have speculated that as the pressure mounts to improve low or failing school grades, educational leaders may be engaging in practices of performativity as a means to avert public shaming and the accompanying financial incentives in place in states such as Florida (Alexander, Anderson, & Gallegos, 2004; Dorn, 2007; Smith, 2004). I believe this to be a matter of social justice. To such a conceptual framework as Critical Race Theory and Latina/Latino
Critical Race Theory, social justice is a compelling, paramount and explicit goal. Therefore if educational leaders are to operate from a democratic posture, then social justice issues which have arisen in the context of leadership in high-stakes school accountability contexts and in school practices must be scrutinized and when necessary confronted.

I believe the research I conducted may contribute to the current and future discourse related to social justice issues which have arisen in the context of leadership in high-stakes school accountability contexts (Kozol, 2005; Michael & Dorn, 2007; Valenzuela, 2004). In addition, my research may serve as a narrative for prompting further discussion regarding the tracking and sorting practices of Latino students which are potentially embedded in discourses of accountability produced by school leaders are relatively covert (Alexander, Anderson, & Gallegos, 2005; Kozol, 2005; Lipman, 2004). From this critical perspective relevant questions commenced to crystallize regarding research implications.

**Research issues.** To critically craft and comprehend responses to such questions, I considered Critical Race Theory (CRT) and specifically, Latina/Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit). Therefore, I continued to review the literature and appropriate documents to explore the following related questions: What are the relevant and indicative Latino graduation, four year completion, and dropout rates within the United States, the State of Florida, and the school-district of Flamingo County? What factors are contributing to the higher dropout/push-out rates among Latinos compared to other student populations? What are the perceptions of educators regarding issues around the Latino dropout/push-out phenomenon?
More specifically from a critical perspective, it was my intention to critically examine educational leadership practices within the Flamingo County Public Schools which may have encouraged Latino high school students to enter an alternative educational program, the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development program located on a number of high school campuses. To that end, I considered these questions: What are the explicit and implicit purposes of Flamingo County Public Schools’ Under-aged Adult Basic Education (ABE)/General Education Development (GED) Program? What are the institutional structures and practices that support Flamingo County Public Schools’ Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program? What are the recollected experiences of past participants in Flamingo County Public Schools’ Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program? What are the perceived effects of Flamingo County Public Schools’ Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program?

**Method and analysis.** Within a panel discussion summary, researchers commented upon the complexity in attempting to understand and determine the mechanisms, the *how* and *why* of the student dropout phenomenon. Due to this complexity, research models utilizing surveys and statistical data may be insufficient to uncover the process by which students opt to not complete a high school credentialing program. Responses recorded by the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) survey were terse statements thereby revealing little regarding the underlying causes or long-term processes which influenced students to choose to dropout (Rumberger, 2001). Ergo, panel members concluded that:
To explore mechanisms—that is, to answer the “how” or “why” questions—qualitative, descriptive, in-depth studies are often most useful” and that, “…the advantages of open-ended methods such as interviews, focus groups and case studies is that they can uncover processes that are unanticipated by the researcher. While the researcher may go into the study expecting students to have certain reasons for dropping out of school, qualitative methods make it possible for phenomena to emerge that are completely unexpected (Clarke, Dorn, Kaufman, Letgers, Lillard, & Warren, 2003, p. 9).

qualitative, multiple case study. Stake (2006) reasoned that since educational and other social service programs were not uniform across situations, “To understand complex programs, it is often useful to look carefully at persons and operations in several locations” (p. v). Therefore, as a result of my desire to answer how and why questions, comprehend the actions of individuals whose past behavior is unalterable, and attempt to comprehend the opaque connection/s of the contextual conditions to the phenomenon under study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003), I chose to employ a qualitative, multiple case study method.

documents and policies. Patton (1990) asserted that documents can serve as stimulus for crafting interview questions of importance in understanding programs. Therefore, I perused and analyzed relevant state-level education and school-district documents as well as pertinent state-level and school-district policies for the purposes of composing interview protocols as well as gathering and analyzing data pertaining to the recollected experiences of the participants in an ABE/Under-aged GED program.
Closing

I have conducted a critical phenomenologically informed multiple case study to gain insight into the process by which second-generation plus Latino students opted to enroll in an Under-aged Adult Basic Education (ABE)/General Education Development (GED) Program and the roles/practices of Flamingo County Public Schools (HCPS) district-level administrators, high school-based administrators and Adult and Community School Administrators (ACSA), within that context and across three varying school sites. In the chapter that follows, the methods for collecting and analyzing data are described in greater detail.

Table 1

Total Enrollment and Percentage Distribution of Florida’s Five Largest School District’ by Race/Ethnicity: 2007–08

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District</th>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dade County</td>
<td>348,128</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>62.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broward County</td>
<td>258,893</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillsborough County</td>
<td>193,180</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange County</td>
<td>174,142</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm Beach County</td>
<td>170,883</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

2004-2008 Cohort Graduation Rates for Florida’s Black, Hispanic, and White Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NGA</td>
<td>W 78.3</td>
<td>B 55.6</td>
<td>H 62.8</td>
<td>T 69.7</td>
<td>W 78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NCLB</td>
<td>W 78.3</td>
<td>B 52.9</td>
<td>H 62.1</td>
<td>T 69.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>W 80.8</td>
<td>B 57.1</td>
<td>H 64.5</td>
<td>T 71.9</td>
<td>W 79.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2009 Florida’s State Board of Education’s Education Information and Accountability Services (Figure 1, p. 1).
Table 3

*Florida’s Hispanic and White Five-year Cohort Graduation Rates Total Averages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5-year Cohort Avgs.</th>
<th>Hispanic vs Total</th>
<th>Hispanic vs White</th>
<th>Grad Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NGA</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>13.88</td>
<td>Standard &amp; Special Diplomas, No GED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>14.88</td>
<td>Standard Diplomas &amp; HS GED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>Standard &amp; Special Diplomas, HS &amp; Adult GED</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average of Rates | 6.16 | 14.55 | N/A |

Source: 2009 Florida’s State Board of Education’s Education Information and Accountability Services (Figure 2, p. 2).

Table 4

*Florida’s Black, Hispanic and White Five-year Cohort Dropout Rate Totals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White, Non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Black, Non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2009 Florida’s State Board of Education’s Education Information and Accountability Services (Table 6, p. 5).
Table 5

*Florida and Flamingo County Five-year Cohort Graduation Rates Total Averages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dist./St.</td>
<td>Flam.</td>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Flam.</td>
<td>FL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGA</td>
<td></td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB</td>
<td></td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>68.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td></td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>71.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2009 Florida’s State Board of Education’s Education Information and Accountability Services (Tables 9-11, pp. 7-9).

Table 6

*Florida’s and Flamingo County 2008-2009 Black, Hispanic, and White Cohort Graduation Rates Total Averages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2008-2009</th>
<th>Race &amp; Totals</th>
<th>White Non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Black Non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dist./St.</td>
<td>Flam</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Flam</td>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Flam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGA</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>78.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>80.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2009 Florida’s State Board of Education’s Education Information and Accountability Services (Tables 12-16, pp. 10-14).
Chapter Three

Methods

My review of literature was constructed for the purpose of identifying, describing, and critiquing the expanse and academic achievement of the second-generation Latino high school educational experience. Specifically in this study, I explored the recollected experiences of Latino high school students who chose to enroll in an educational alternative/dropout prevention completion option, the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program in three high-schools based in a selected public school-district within the State of Florida.

This critical and phenomenologically informed multiple case study was undertaken to identify the factors and the process by which second-generation Latino high school students opted to enroll in an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program. I sought to gain insight into the aspects participants took into effect in choosing this alternative educational completion program, as well as, their perspectives on the consequences of choosing the program. To that end and based upon specific criteria, I interviewed participants who exited or completed the program from selected high schools within a public school-district in regards to their recollected experiences and the circumstances which surrounded their decision to enroll in the Under-aged GED program. The data collected via these interviews was analyzed for the identification of pertinent themes related to the recollected experiences of the Latino youth in the research study. Additionally, I consulted with a selected team of
specifically knowledgeable and experienced critical informants with regard to the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program in order to seek confirmation regarding the consensual reasonableness and plausibility of conclusions drawn from the initial and final thematic analysis as well as a search for alternative explanations.

This chapter details the questions which prompted the research and the inquiry framework utilized to frame the study. In addition, the chapter describes the procedures of the research design, the mode of data collection, data analysis and the contexts of the study. Finally my role as a qualitative researcher and issues of credibility and limitations of the study are discussed.

**Research Questions**

1. What participant identified factors contributed to second-generation Latino high school students opting to enroll in an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program?
2. What were the recollected experiences of second-generation Latino students during the enrollment process in an Adult Education (ABE)/Under-Aged General Education Development (GED) program?
3. What do the participants conceive has been the impact upon their lives as a result of having enrolled in an Adult Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program?

**Inquiry Framework**

Constructionism posits that individuals, through enculturation, are awash in a whole world of meaning blended by cultures and sub-cultures which shape our thinking and
behavior (Crotty, 2003). As a constructionist’s epistemological positioning in qualitative research, the utilization of critical theory as a theoretical lens has, as a portion of its aims, an engagement into reconsideration and self-reflection of that which is taken for granted in the social world in which we live. The intent of such an immanent mode of critique is the surfacing of inner contradictions, innate flaws, and the undiscovered potential for the revision of social practices. In this manner, critical inquiry promotes a stance which is practical, moral, ethical, and politically informed. The overall aim of such critical social science is to ultimately alter beliefs and practices which are inconsistent and hypocritical with those which have been established (Schwandt, 2001).

Critical qualitative inquiry itself calls upon a phenomenological approach to view our social world anew. Wolff (1984) stated that phenomenology tasks us “… to call into question our whole culture, our manner of seeing and being in the world as we have learned it …” (p. 192). In this vein, phenomenology is a viable frame for critical inquiry, and the social institution that is education is a milieu within and reflective of the larger social world in which it exists. Phenomenology, “… is critique and grounds a critical methodology” (Crotty, 2003, p. 82). “Phenomenology is a reflective enterprise, and its reflection is critical” (Larrabee, 1990, p. 201). Phenomenologist tradition recommends questioning culture and the concepts derived from acculturation by casting a suspicious gaze upon our experiences (Armstrong, 1976; Sadler, 1969; Wolff, 1984). Crotty (2003) cites the criticality of phenomenology at its inception as a form of inquiry which tasks researchers to suspend their understanding of experience in order to perceive it anew. By renewing perception of experiences in the social-world, the tenet, that culture offers both liberation and confinement, in the sense that the meanings derived by culture are capable
of imposing and excluding with the power to further particular interests while oppressing others, is plausible. Thereby derived meanings are capable of promoting the manipulation of individuals and situations which can create a climate of injustice.

Merriam (1998) refers to critical research in education as a philosophical orientation which seeks to frame education as “…a social institution designed for social and cultural reproduction and transformation “(p. 4). Situated within this paradigm is the critique of positions of power which afford privilege and opportunity to oppress and maintain the status quo via educational practice. Regarding this as a research paradigm, and its basic tenet of “empowering the oppressed” Rubin and Rubin (2005) stated, “research is about documenting how that oppression has been experienced …” “research should lead to action to reduce the problems caused by oppression” (p. 25). Highlighting inequity is a component of combating oppression. In taking this action, the researcher illuminates the trials and tribulations faced by groups or individuals to issues regarding power (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). Ultimately, this illumination is an initial step to empowering the oppressed.

Critical theorists suggest that within the field of public education inequities in structure and practice are oppressing or limiting opportunities for marginalized students including Latino youth. For example in this era of high-stakes accountability, there have been instances when educational leaders have engaged in educational practices that potentially have deleterious effects on the least powerful individuals in the schools, especially those who tend to be more likely to fail to meet standards. Simultaneously, leaders are often concerned with fortifying an organizational system that maintains the legitimacy of the educational institution above the interest of traditionally marginalized
students (Ball, 2006; Cruz, 2006; Dorn, 2007; Lipman, 2004; Meyer & Rowan, 2006; Rustique-Forestor, 2005; Strike, 2007; Valenzuela, 2004).

Therefore, I conducted a critical phenomenologically informed multicase study to gain insight into the process by which second-generation Latino students opted to enroll in an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program. In addition, I sought to capture their personal perspectives regarding the roles/practices of high school-based administrators, counselors, and community school administrators (CSA) within that process. As a portion of my research, I investigated how the students, who exited or completed the alternative education program, perceived the ways particular schools may have utilized the program to influence Latino high school students, labeled over-aged and under-achieving, out of traditional high schools and into an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-Aged General Education Development (GED) program.

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the literature I believed pertinent to this plausibility, and I chose to frame my study utilizing a framework comprised of Latina/Latino-Critical Race Theory as well as two related frameworks which have resulted from such a critical perspective: Leadership for Social Justice and Ethics of Accountability Practice. This theory and the two related lenses are aligned and intertwined within a critical phenomenologically informed approach. As evidence to the role that these lens have played in influencing and formulating my perspective, the interview protocol, and my overall research design and analysis; I revisit how and why those lenses informed my research choices.
Latina/Latino-Critical Race Theory (Lat-Crit). Latina/Latino-Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) has begun to surface as a theoretical framework for the examination of contexts, policies and practices in education. Pursuant to such a theoretical framework, if one speculates that racialization is endemic to American society, then one must assume the probable existence of comparable attitudes and practices within the milieu of public education. Therefore, race may be a significant contributing factor to the higher dropout (or the more sinister appellation) push-out rates of Latino students.

As a theoretical framework in educational research, LatCrit challenges the dominant discourse on race, gender, and class by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). Following this line of reasoning, LatCrit is a viable lens for utilization in a critical phenomenological inquiry as it also questions culture and the concepts derived from acculturation. Flores (2000) asserts, “The task for critical race scholars is to uncover and explore the various ways in which racial thinking operates” (p. 437). Scholars and researchers utilizing LatCrit, within the context of education, are primarily examining and attempting to document how racialized structures, policies, and practices influence and impact the educational attainment and academic progress of Latinas/os (Solorzano, Villapando & Oseguera, 2005).

Are there practices and policies in place which are manifesting a relationship regarding disproportionate Latino lack of educational success? Delgado Bernal (2002) states, “Although students of color are holders and creators of knowledge, they often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational settings” (p. 106). An important method for aiding
educational researchers in ameliorating such issues is counter-storytelling. Counter-storytelling, a technique utilized originally by critical race theorists and has been incorporated by LatCrit practitioners to provide the perspectives of people of color which relate a view differing from the dominant culture (Delgado, 1989, 1993; Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000). As Delgado- Bernal (2002) notes, “…learning to listen to counter-stories within the educational system can be an important pedagogical practice for teachers and students as well as an important methodological practice for educational researchers” (p. 116).

In my study and the research I conducted, I sought to capture the participants’ recollected experiences as it related to their choice to enroll and their subsequent experiences within the study’s selected educational alternative program. I believe, based upon my practical experience as a public-school educator and my lived experience as a Latino, that the Adult Basic Education (ABE) /Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program I examined in my study should be subjected to a critical inquiry; and most assuredly, a critical perspective informed my interview protocols and research. Based upon the allusions of participants’ responses to the interview protocols, I sought to document the ways in which race and gender may have contributed to the selected student participants’ choice to enroll in an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program which some consider low profile. Since some implications surfaced from the participants’ responses I, through a critical lens, posed this syllogistic supposition: If we accept that the primary function of public education is fundamentally and inexorably tied to the proposition of our democratic tenets such as the “pursuit of happiness” and the promotion of the “general welfare,” then
any indication that the roles and practices of educational leaders may have influenced over-aged Latino high school students into a less than optimum educational program which potentially limits educational attainment should be examined as a matter of social justice.

**Leadership for Social Justice (LSJ).** The Leadership for Social Justice (LSJ) literature asserts that educational leadership should engage in self-scrutiny and debate to ensure it is advocating for, believing in, and upholding the valued ends of equal political and social opportunity for every student (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Marshall & Parker, 2006; Theoharis, 2007). Theoharis (2007) offers this definition of social justice accompanied by a subsequent call to action, “… leaders make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the U.S. central to their advocacy, leadership practices and vision” (p. 223). Additionally, Bruner (2008) states, “Social justice is about taking intentional action to create nondiscriminatory relationships that transform unequal power structures” (p. 490).

Yet, it has been noted by those in positions of educational leadership that there are students at all levels of public educational institutions which are contending against negativity and inequity (Scheurich & Laible 1999; Valenzuela 1999). In the face of a significant indication that student achievement varies greatly between those student populations receiving such inequitable treatment and their counterparts, Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) urge educational leaders to question assumptions and seek to rectify the educational contexts, policies, and practices which perpetuate inequities in the schooling of marginalized students eventually resulting in limitations to the completion of secondary and post-secondary opportunities and their potential access to
economic power. In lieu of such suppositions and based upon the recollected experiences and personal perspectives of the participants in my study, I attempted to answer questions which surfaced surrounding the dynamics of placement practices of Latino high school students, labeled over-aged and under-achieving out of traditional high schools and into an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program.

As a public-school educator and a practitioner utilizing a lens of a critical phenomenologically informed inquiry within LSJ, I sought to answer questions surrounding the dynamics of placement practices into programs of this nature as it may provide opportunity for educational leadership to engage in self-reflection and debate regarding professional practice and program options beneficial for both students and public-school leaders. Senge (1990) speaks of the process of self-reflection as a means to uncover and assess one’s worldview. In this manner from the findings in this research study, educational leadership may assess personal connections to the diverse student-populations which compose their contexts and the associated social justice issues inherent therein.

As it pertains to a critical phenomenologically informed inquiry, “Reflection is the process of critically assessing the content, process or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 104). This implies the necessity of educational leaders to reflect critically. Brookfield (1995) envisioned an interrelation of thought processes with regard to critical reflection in which one questions previously un-critiqued assumptions, finds alternative views, and perceives the hegemonic dominance inherent in cultural values. Brown (2004) stated, “The purposes of critical
reflection are to externalize and investigate power relationships and to uncover hegemonic assumptions (p. 84). Mezirow (1998) contended that critical reflection entails educational tasks which develop an awareness of oppressive practices and a means to alter such practices. The findings of this research study revealed practices, which in retrospect are in need of such critical reflection.

If educational leaders are to develop as critically reflective practitioners, they must build capacity for critical inquiry and self-reflection (Larrivee, 2000; Schon, 1983). The emergence of such capacity amalgamates critical inquiry, “…the moral and ethical implications and consequences of schooling practices on students” and the practice of self-reflection which is a “… deep examination of personal assumptions, values, and beliefs” (Brown, 2004, p. 89). Thus the amalgamation allows for the educational leader to reexamine personal and professional beliefs while deliberately considering ethical implications and effects within their practices (Brown, 2004). Foster (1989) with regard to the concept of critique’s role within leadership commented, “… leadership always has one face turned towards change, and change involves the critical assessment of current situations and an awareness of future possibilities (p. 29). Furthermore he asserted that critical leadership’s orientation moves towards, “…a reconceptualization of life practices where common ideals of freedom and democracy stand important” (Foster, 1989, p. 35).

Ethics of Accountability Practice (EAP). Authors and researchers have posited the distinct possibility that this era of high-stakes accountability has prompted actions motivated by accountability indicators rather than the notion of doing ethically centered work and thus potentially creating a conflict of conscience among educators (Ball, 2006; Dorn, 2007; Leistyna, 2007; Lipman, 2004; McNeil, 2000; Rustique-Forrester, 2005;
Strike, 2007; Valenzuela, 2004). For example, Strike (2007) refers to the “vices” of accountability: goal displacement, educational practices which uncritically narrow aspirations for students; motivational displacement, motivated by accountability indicators rather than the notion of doing good, ethically centered work; and gaming which is primarily concerned with the management or personal costs and benefits without concern for the greater public good and good of the student (Strike, 2007, pp. 136-137).

While reviewing the relevant literature in relation to my research, I found most pertinent the suppositions of those authors who have chronicled school-based responses to high-stakes performance policies and argued that these have done little to close the achievement gap (Rothstein, 2004, Sadovnik, et. Al, 2008; Sherman, 2008) or worse, have actually catalyzed a myriad of undemocratic and unjust educational responses that serve to limit opportunities for students, particularly low-income students of color (Ball, 2006; Dorn, 2007; Lipman, 2004; Rustique-Forestor, 2005; Valenzuela, 2004).

As a practicing public-school educator, it is plausible to me that the possibility of a conflicted conscience among educational leaders is more of a probability. From a critical perspective and proceeding in the tradition of critical inquiry, a question crystallized regarding implications inherent in practices arising from an educational system attempting to function in this period of high-stakes accountability. To what extent, if any, has pressure to achieve high-stakes standards by public schools driven educational leadership to engage in practices bordering on self-interest in opposition to the educational needs of Latino high school students; some of whom require additional educational support services, an extended interval of time for cultural acclimation, and a larger pool of teachers trained in cultural competence to meet high-stakes standards?
This line of inquiry reasonably emerged as a result of utilizing the ethics of accountability practice as a critical lens and based upon the data collected from the interview protocol responses and personal perspectives of the selected participants within my study. Hence, I attempted to ascertain if there were educational leadership practices, which are attributable to perceived pressure to achieve high-stakes accountability performance thresholds, that were implemented to push over-aged, under-achieving Latino high school students out of three diverse high schools in a large metropolitan school district and into an ABE (Adult Basic Education)/Under-aged GED (General Education Development) Program. In addition, I attempted to capture what the study’s participants perceived has been the impact upon their lives as a result of selecting to enroll in this educational alternative. The participants’ responses in this area were limited; subsequently, contributing minimally to the findings and implications of the study.

**Method and Analysis**

Within a panel discussion summary, researchers commented upon the complexity in attempting to understand and determine the mechanisms, the *how* and *why* of the student dropout phenomenon. Due to this complexity, research models utilizing surveys and statistical data may be insufficient to uncover the process by which students opt to not complete a high school credentialing program (Clarke, Dorn, Kaufman, Letgers, Lillard, & Warren, 2003). Embarking upon such an investigation of lived or relived phenomena is a journey into complexity in which neither human experience nor the world in which we live can be described separately from one another. Endeavoring to capture the lived or relived experiences of individuals in the social world is an attempt to portray an
intricately woven pattern and then unravel its mystery. Public schools are such a social world where cultures collide, ethical dilemmas are negotiated, and justice may be done or undone. As a result of my desire to answer *how and why questions*, comprehend the actions of individuals whose past behavior is unalterable, and attempt to comprehend the opaque connection/s of the contextual conditions to the phenomenon under study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003); I chose to employ a qualitative, multicase study method.

**Qualitative case study.** The qualitative case study method has been described as a viable vehicle for the exploration of individuals, organizations, interventions, relationships, communities, or programs (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). Since research scholars contend case study is approached with a constructivist paradigm claiming truth as relative and dependent on individual perception; in essence, a social construction of reality (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Searle, 1995; Stake, 1995; Yin 2003), I believed that the participants in my study would reveal, via their stories, their views of reality with regard to their experiences in the ABE (Adult Basic Education)/Under-aged GED (General Education Development) Program. This allowed me the distinct possibility of comprehending a portion of their actions and the actions of school officials who offered this option for earning an alternative high school credential (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Lather, 1992; Robottom & Hart, 1993).

**Multiple case study.** Stake (2006) states, “The multicase project is a research design for closely examining several cases linked together” (p. v). In addition, “An important reason for doing the multicase study is to examine how the program or phenomenon performs in different environments” and “... a multicase study starts with recognizing what concept or idea binds the cases together” (p. 23).
The five selected cases in my study were linked as a result of the participants’ participation in the ABE (Adult Basic Education)/Under-aged GED (General Education Development) Program and their recollected experiences within the program’s implementation in varying settings and situations. Because I believed that there were factors which motivated educational leaders to utilize the program beyond simply benefiting the program’s participants, I engaged in a critical phenomenologically informed multicase natural inquiry; and I was the research instrument.

**Yo, Io, (I): the role of this researcher.** I am a Latino, a Latin male. From a personal perspective, I define Latino as an individual of Latin descent; Latin in the sense of those peoples whose languages have derived from Latin. I am half Sicilian, partially Spanish, and partially Hispanic, a term that was used interchangeably with Latino within this dissertation. I, my parents, and my paternal grandparents were born in Florida and in the city which is the setting of this research. I am an educator, a school counselor employed by the school district in which I was a student from grade school through high school graduation; the same school district which has been purposely selected as the research setting.

I once was trilingual, and now I am barely bilingual. During the era in which I was a public school student, I and my multi-lingual peers, were strongly discouraged by the schools we attended to speak any language other than English at school. Since I am a skeptic; one who doubts the veracity of most institutions that tout equality while undermining equity, I believe this practice was an example emblematic of a state and nation which ideally preaches diversity but continues to strive for assimilation.
A writer, a former fellow educator and entertainer, as well as a native of the same city where my study was conducted, autographed and wrote in my copy of his book, “…life-long friend and fellow ‘roach’ adopted.” I was curious about the reference to “roach” until I reached the portion of the book where he described his experience in the “free school’ which is how his and my parents’ generation had referred to the public school. In his memoir about attending the public school in the same school district, Jack wrote of overt comments by a few White teachers who inferred “…that we (Latins) were inferior and suggesting we should go back where we belong,” and specifically, one teacher he overheard “…referring to us (the Latin students) as ‘Those little roaches’” (Espinosa, 2007, p. 70). Because of lived and relived experiences such as those related to me by my family and friends, as well as my own, the educational experience of Latinos in the United States and especially in the State of Florida and the selected school district is of passionate, personal interest.

Does it matter who I am and what I have experienced? I was the primary research instrument, and via interviews of the participants, utilizing a protocol I crafted and documents which I selected; I collected, examined, and analyzed the data. Therefore as a human being serving in such a capacity, I must freely express the potential for personal perception to have informed the research process as all analyses passed thorough the lens of my worldview and values (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). It was my intentional practice to incorporate within the research design techniques to promote critical reflection of my personal perception by utilizing a reflective journal and bracketing to disclose my assumptions as I encountered them. Furthermore, I utilized a team of critical informants to review, interrogate, and check the findings from my analysis of the data I collected.
**Data collection.** Due to the complexity in attempting to understand and determine the *how* and *why* of phenomenon, researchers have commented qualitative, descriptive, in-depth studies are often most useful (Creswell, 2007; Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Warren & Karner, 2010; Yin, 2003). Hence, this is a relevant approach in relation to my study which chronicled, analyzed, and interpreted the recollected experiences, the stories; in essence, the *how* and *why* selected second-generation Latino students were advised and/or guided and ultimately chose to enroll in an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program.

In case study research, collecting data relies on three primary data collection techniques: interviewing, observing and analyzing documents (Merriam, 1998). My study relied primarily on the techniques of gathering data via conducting semi-structured interviews yielding audiotape transcripts, recording personal notes in a reflective journal, reviewing the input of the study’s critical informants, and selecting/amassing pertinent documents for analysis (Schwandt, 2001). Over the course of several months attempts to contact in excess of 500 potential participants who fit the selection criteria, were made. Only five participants agreed to participate in the study, and they were interviewed and recorded data was captured. All of the five participants had participated in an ABE/Under-aged GED Program and, their recollected experiences provided insight into the variations of the program’s implementation at the exited school sites. Since the aim of my multicase study was to gain insight into a social process, the collected data was subjected to single case and cross-case analysis to highlight similarities and/or
contradictions within the single cases that yielded enlightenment into the social issue/s I encountered (Stake, 1995; Schwandt, 2001; Yin, 2003).

**planned participant selection and recruitment.** The potential pool of participants was composed of approximately 1,500 Latino students who were considered at risk for completing a traditional high school credentialing program and opted for enrollment in an ABE/Under-aged GED program within a specified six-year period (2006-2012) in the Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS). Availing myself of professional and personal contacts with a number of the school-district’s adult and community school administrators, high school guidance counselors, and administrators, I narrowed the potential participant pool utilizing purposively selected criteria with the expanse of the recruitment process resulting from the utilization of *snowball sampling* (Goodman, 1961) as well as compensation in the form of a retail gift certificate in the amount of twenty-five dollars.

The primary criteria for the selection of the participants was second-generation Latinos (males) who enrolled in and exited (either having completed or dropped out) from an ABE/Under-aged GED program at four specific school sites in the Flamingo County Public Schools within a six-year period commencing in 2006 and ending in 2012. In my initial proposal discussions, I envisioned a total of eight participants, two per purposively selected schools, were to be recruited and selected utilizing the aforementioned criteria. Upon review and recommendation by the committee prior to the proposal defense, this was amended to a total of twelve participants, three per purposively selected schools, to be recruited and selected.
second-generation Latinos. As previously broached in Chapter Two, seemingly nationwide, as well as in Florida, a significant number of second-generation Latinos are considered at risk for completing a high school credentialing program while factors such as nativity, English fluency, and/or bilinguality point to potential for scholastic success (Farley & Alba, 2002). I believed the completion or non-completion of a high school equivalency credentialing program such as the ABE/Under-aged GED, as well as the factors which contributed to the participants’ choice to enroll, their recollected experiences during the enrollment process, and the impact they perceived upon their lives as a result of participating in this educational alternative was a phenomenon worthy of investigation. I felt this was best approached from the perspectives and through the recollected experiences of the selected second-generation Latino former high school student participants in my study.

ABE/Under-aged GED enrollment. The express purpose of selecting participants in this particular program was to compare the participants’ recollected experiences as it was related to their opting to enroll in an ABE/Under-aged GED program. In addition, I sought to compare the participants’ recollected experiences as it was related to the process, procedures, and roles/practices of high school-based administrators, counselors, and community school administrators (CSA) within that process from the perspective that their enrollment and respective participation in an ABE/Under-aged GED program had occurred in association within the specifically designated high school context. This association could have been direct; as enrolling into the program on the identical campus of their former traditional high school assignment, or indirect; as enrolling into a program housed at another traditional high school campus.
enrollment time-frame. In regards to the specified six-year period enrollment window of the study, the recruited and selected participants’ enrollment and respective participation in an ABE/Under-aged GED program must have occurred in association with the specifically designated high school context during the following school years: 2006-2007, 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012. The purpose for selecting this specific time-frame was primarily based upon the time-frame’s relevance within the discourse associated with high-stakes school accountability. Specifically, as high stakes accountability measures were continually evolving, certain educational practices were either instituted or affected. In turn, the participants were affected. Finally, since the participants were exited from the program at the time of their participation, the study was reliant upon their recollected experiences.

completers of the ABE/Under-aged GED. Economic outcomes are important regarding the advantages or disadvantages associated with the completion of a GED program. That is an area which has been the subject of relatively extensive research. One of the aims of my research study was an attempt to address the potential benefits the GED affords its recipients regarding issues related to social capital as there are indications that this is an area for further exploration. Are the experiences associated with earning or attempting to earn this educational credential maximizing the establishment of social networking bonds, bridges, and linkages that are necessary to advance as well as combat powerlessness and exclusion (Parts, 2003; Woolcock, 2000)? Can involvement and participation in such a group have positive consequences for the individual and the community (Portes, 1998)? Therefore, the afforded benefits which
were perceived and related by the selected participants resulting from the completion of the ABE/Under-aged GED program were explored.

*males.* I believe in regards to educating males there has been and currently remains a crisis. Specific to this study, males are more likely than females to drop out of high school (NCES, 2009, Figure 3, p. 18). With respect to ethnicity, Hispanic students in public and private high schools were more likely to drop out than their White counterparts and Latinos are dropping out at a greater rate than Latinas (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). The fact that Latinos are more likely to drop out of high school was my rationale for targeting, recruiting, and selecting this marginalized group as participants in this research study. The Latino students were recruited from three of the four school sites which are detailed subsequently in this chapter.

*participant exited school sites.* Currently there are 27 traditional high schools in the Flamingo County Public School district. Twelve of these high schools house an ABE/Under-aged GED program, mostly in portable classrooms, on campus during daytime school hours (FCPS Department of Adult and Community Education, 2007-2008). From within that potential pool of 12 school-sites, four school-sites were selected after reviewing the following areas: physical location and general information, student enrollment and demographics, overall academic achievement documented in the individual school’s School Improvement Plan (SIP), School Public Accountability Report (SPAR), and information, as well as, data pertaining to an on-site Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program. Consequently, the
exited school-sites are the selected school-sites in which the study’s participants exited from in their respective ABE/Under-aged GED program.

*Criteria for site selection.* The school sites were purposively selected, and can be considered an example of purposive sampling as three of the four school sites adhere to all of the following criteria: traditional high schools which contain a sizeable Latino student-population and house an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program with a comparatively substantial Latino enrollment on its campus that is reflective of the demographics of the community in which the selected school sites are situated. While the remaining school site (Mallard High School) adheres to only one of the selection criteria: houses an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program with a comparatively substantial Latino enrollment on its campus. Stake (2006) commented, “An important reason for doing the multicase study is to examine how the program or phenomenon performs in different environments. This often means that cases in both typical and atypical settings should be selected” (p. 23). Therefore, the one site was chosen for a point of contrast as its student-enrollment and community demographics are in contrast to the other selected school sites.

With regard to the sizeable Latino student-population of the school sites and its significance to the selection criterion; during the 2010-2011 school year, in its 27 traditional high schools, the school district’s Hispanic high school enrollment overall average was 26.7 percent (13,280 students) with 49.52 percent (6,557 students) comprised of Hispanic males. Among the school-district’s total Hispanic high school enrollment, 23.13 percent (3,072 students) were enrolled in the four selected school sites
and 49 percent (1,502 students) of those students were Hispanic males. Regarding the other selection criteria, the four selected school sites are examples of traditional high schools within the school-district which house an on-site Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program with a significant Latino student population pertinent to my study. For example during the 2006-2007 school year, the district-wide total enrollment in the ABE/Under-aged GED was reported at 1,651. Among those enrollees, 27.8 percent were Hispanics; and 15.9 percent of the total district enrollment in the program were Hispanic males which accounted for 27.72 percent of the males in the program; and among the total Hispanic enrollment, 57.08 percent were males. A comparison of the total enrollment figure for the four selected school-sites and the total district enrollment in the program during the 2006-2007 school year yields the following: 51.6 percent (852 students) of the total district enrollment, 18.23 percent (301 students) of the total district enrollment were Hispanic, 10.1 percent (166 students) were Hispanic males, and 65.6 percent of the total Hispanic district enrollment were housed in the four selected school sites. This statistical information and the statistical information which follows with regard to the exited school sites was gleaned from the 2007, 2009, and 2010 Florida Department of Education School Public Accountability Reports (SPAR).

*description of the communities and exited school sites.* The four selected school sites are located in the western portion of the Flamingo County School-district. Osprey High School and Pelican High School are commonly referred to as *inner-city* schools by district personnel. The remaining two selected school sites, Anhinga High School and Mallard High School are not considered *inner-city* schools in the sense that the respective
immediate surrounding community lacks a predominance of the racial and ethnic population commonly associated with the term, *inner-city*. Anhinga High School and Osprey High School draw from communities that house a historically significant population of Latinos, which is reflected in the student-population. One of the four school sites, Pelican High School, serves a diverse Latino population within walking distance of the site. The significance of relating this distinction is its relative uniqueness within the context of the selected public-school district. This particular school site can arguably be considered a segregated Latino community school. During the 2009-2010 school year, the Latino student-population at this school-site stood at 70.49 percent (1,119) which is 8.4 percent of the school-districts’ entire Hispanic high school enrollment while Pelican High’s total enrollment stood at 3.2 percent (1,592 students) of the school districts’ total high school enrollment for that school year. These figures ranked Pelican High School first in total number and percentage of Hispanic high school students in the school district. In contrast, one of the four school sites, Mallard High School, has recently begun to experience a relatively significant increase in its Latino student-population and may serve as a contrasting element in regards to the personal perspective of the participant/s selected within a context that is situated in a community in which a significant resident Latino population is not present.

In terms of overall success with regard to the ABE/Under-aged GED, of the 1,651 students enrolled at some point in time during the 2006-2007 school year, 16.95 percent (280 students) successfully completed the program throughout the school district. Among those students who successfully completed the program, 9.44 percent (156 students) were males. A comparison of the total enrollment figures and overall program
completions rates are contained within Table 7. What follows are profiles of the four school sites, and pseudonyms have been utilized to identify the school sites.

**Anhinga High School.** One participant previously enrolled and exited from Anhinga High School was recruited for the research study. Anhinga High School was established in the late 1950’s in what was considered a suburban area in Flamingo County. As the county’s population has expanded into outlying areas beyond the city proper, Anhinga High School can currently be considered as situated within the central portion of the school district. Many of the students of color attending Anhinga High School are transported by the school district from neighborhoods predominantly populated by people of color. Consequently, the racial and ethnic diversity of the school’s student population has increased and the White student enrollment has decreased steadily within the last decade. Anhinga High School offers standard curriculum, vocational, and AP (Advance Placement) courses.

**Student enrollment.** Over an eight-year period (2003/2004-2010/2011) Anhinga High School’s total student enrollment has averaged 1,982 and has ranged from a high point of 2,084 (2004-2005) to its lowest point 1,840 (2010-2011). During the identical period, the Hispanic student-population has increased by 8.64 percent to a high of 32.5 percent (598) of the total school enrollment in the 2010-2011 school year. Comparatively, this percentage is higher than the school district’s 2010-2011 school year Hispanic high school enrollment overall average of 26.68 percent and Anhinga High School’s total Hispanic student enrollment ranked fifth in both number and percentage among the school district’s high schools. In the 2010-2011 school year approximately 32.8 percent (300) of the males enrolled at Anhinga High School were identified as
Hispanic. According to figures recorded in the School Public Accountability Report (SPAR) Anhinga High School reported that in the 2009-2010 school year, 59 percent of the student body was considered economically disadvantaged (FLDOE, 2010). Of the four selected schools, this percentage was nearest to the school district (53.7) and state (53.5) averages in the 2009-2010 school year.

*academic achievement.* Anhinga High School’s 2008-2009 graduation and dropout rates as recorded and compared within the SPAR were as posted within Table 8. It is interesting to note in the 2008-2009 school year Anhinga High School reported that the only other sub-group dropping out of Anhinga High was Blacks at the rate of 0.6 (district-1.3, Florida-3.4) (FLDOE, 2010). In addition, Anhinga High School’s SIP (School Improvement Plan) for the 2010-2011 school year reported a 2010 overall dropout rate of 4 percent and Anhinga High has a dropout prevention specialist among its on-site staff. Anhinga High School’s overall school grades for the last four school years are as follows: 2006-07/Grade D, 2007-08/Grade C, 2008-09/Grade D, 2009-10/Grade D. Anhinga High School was among the twenty-six school-district high schools that did not make AYP in the 2009-2010 school year and over a nine-year period (2002/2003-2010/2011) has not made AYP.

*on-site under-aged GED program.* With regard to the ABE/Under-aged GED, Anhinga Adult and Community School administration states that there is a minimum requirement of 225 hours of coursework, that prospective students are 16-17 years in age, and they, accompanied by a parent or guardian, must attend an orientation prior to acceptance into the program. For example during the 2010 spring semester, nine orientation sessions were held. Anhinga Adult and Community School’s ABE/Under-
aged GED classes are held in two classrooms on the grounds of Anhinga High School five days a week (Monday-Friday) between the hours of 7:15 am and 12:30 pm.

Anhinga Adult and Community School has had a relatively large annual enrollment in the ABE/Under-aged GED. During the 2006-2007 school year, 26.11 percent (431 students) of the district’s total enrollment in the ABE/Under-aged GED was enrolled at Anhinga Adult and Community School. Among those enrollees, 28.07 percent (121 students) were Hispanics, 14.15 percent (61 students) were Hispanic males, which accounted for 28.63 of the males in the program; and among the total Hispanic enrollment, 50.41 percent were males. Anhinga Adult and Community School’s overall student success rate for completion of the program during the 2006-2007 school year was 16.7 percent (72 students) based upon the annual total student enrollment of 431. Of the 121 Hispanic students enrolled at some point in time during the school year, 12.4 percent successfully completed the program with Hispanic males favoring better than the overall Hispanic rate of success at 18 percent. Overall, Hispanic’s accounted for 33.3 percent with Hispanic males composing 24.4 percent of the program’s successful students.

**Mallard High School.** Two participants previously enrolled and exited from Mallard High School were recruited for the research study. Mallard High School was established in the mid-1980’s in what was a rural portion of the city in Flamingo County. As the county’s population has expanded into outlying areas beyond the city proper, Mallard High School can currently be considered as situated outside of the city limits within the northwestern portion of the school district and should perhaps be considered a rural rather than an urban school. Mallard High School’s immediate surrounding community lacks the racial and ethnic diversity indicative of its student-population. The
school has only recently begun to experience a relatively significant increase in its Latino student-population despite being situated in a community in which a significant resident Latino population is not present. Many of the students of color attending Mallard High School are transported by the school-district from neighborhoods predominantly populated by people of color. Consequently, the racial and ethnic diversity of the school’s student population has increased and the White student-enrollment has decreased steadily within the last decade. Mallard High School offers standard curriculum, vocational, and AP (Advance Placement) courses.

*student enrollment.* Over an eight-year period (2003/2004-2010/2011) Mallard High School’s total student enrollment has averaged 2,216 and has ranged from a high point of 2,321 (2004-2005) to its lowest point 1,938 (2010-2011). During the identical period, the Hispanic student-population has increased by 5 percent to a high of 30.24 percent (586) of the total school-enrollment in the 2010-2011 school year. Comparatively, this percentage is higher than the school-district’s 2010-2011 school year Hispanic high school enrollment overall average of 26.68 percent and Mallard High School’s total Hispanic student enrollment ranked sixth in number and eighth in percentage among the school-district’s high schools. In the 2010-2011 school year, approximately 30.43 percent (297) of the males enrolled at Mallard High School were identified as Hispanic. According to figures recorded in the School Public Accountability Report (SPAR) Mallard High School reported that in the 2009-2010 school year 34.5 percent of the student body was considered economically disadvantaged (FLDOE, 2010). This percentage was well below the school-district (53.7) and state (53.5) averages in the 2009-2010 school year.
academic achievement. Mallard High School’s 2008-2009 graduation and dropout rates as recorded and compared within the SPAR were as posted within Table 9. It is interesting to note in the 2008-2009 school year Mallard High School reported that the only sub-groups dropping out of Mallard High were Whites (0.5) and Blacks (0.9) and that no Hispanic students were to be counted among the dropouts, (district-Blacks (1.3) Hispanics (1.2) Whites (0.7), ( Florida-Blacks (3.4 ) Hispanics (2.5) Whites (1.6) (FLDOE, 2010). Mallard High School’s overall school grades for the last four school years are as follows: 2006-07/Grade B, 2007-08/Grade A, 2008-09/Grade B, 2009-10/Grade A. Mallard High School was among the twenty-six school-district high schools that did not make AYP in the 2009-2010 school year and over a nine-year period (2002/2003-2010/2011) has not made AYP.

on-site under-aged GED program. With regard to the ABE/Under-aged GED, Mallard Adult and Community School administration states that there is a minimum requirement of 225 hours of coursework, that prospective students are 16-17 years in age, and they, accompanied by a parent or guardian, must attend an orientation prior to acceptance into the program. Orientation sessions are held the last Thursday of each month at 1:30 pm. Grand Adult and Community School’s ABE/Under-aged GED classes are held in two portable classrooms on the grounds of Mallard High School five days a week (Monday-Friday) between the hours of 7:25 am and 12:35 pm.

Mallard Adult and Community School has had a relatively average annual enrollment in the ABE/Under-aged GED. For example during the 2006-2007 school year, 11.38 percent (188 students) of the district’s total enrollment in the ABE/Under-aged GED was enrolled at Mallard Adult and Community School. Among those
enrollees, 28.72 percent (54 students) were Hispanics, 19.7 percent (37 students) were Hispanic males, which accounted for 33.03 of the males in the program; and among the total Hispanic enrollment, 68.51 percent were males. Of the 54 Hispanic students enrolled at some point in time during the school year, 18.51 percent successfully completed the program with Hispanic males favoring better than the overall Hispanic rate of success at 21.62 percent. Overall, Hispanic’s accounted for 25 percent, with Hispanic males composing 20 percent, of the program’s successful students.

**Osprey High School.** Two participants, one previously enrolled and exited from Osprey High School and one previously enrolled in an area middle school, were recruited for the research study. Osprey High School was established in the late 1930’s and is the oldest of the four selected school sites. Osprey High has been traditionally considered a Latino school since its inception. Within the city proper, the Latino community currently and traditionally has congregated within two areas: one area west and the other area east of the river which runs through the center of the city. Osprey High School was originally situated within the eastern Latino community. In the mid-1960’s, Osprey High School was closed by the school-district and remained so until the early 1970’s when it was reopened by the school-district at its present location situated nearby the western Latino community. At its current location, Osprey High School’s immediate surroundings are a combination of a commercial district and a community composed predominantly of the racial and ethnic identity parallel to its student-population. In general, the students within walking distance of the school are Blacks, and the majority of the Latino student-population attending Osprey High School is transported by the school-district from the surrounding neighborhood. Osprey High School is a magnet school emphasizing
International Studies and a Title I school, which offers standard curriculum, vocational, and AP (Advance Placement) courses.

*Student enrollment.* Over an eight-year period (2003/2004-2010/2011) Osprey High School’s total student enrollment has averaged 1,684 and has ranged from a high point of 1,762 (2005-2006) to its lowest point 1,622 (2008-2009). During the identical period, the Hispanic student-population has averaged 45.87 percent of the total school enrollment fluctuating between a low of 44.10 percent (777) in 2005-2006 to a high of 47.72 percent (774) in 2008-2009. In the 2010-2011 school year, Osprey High School’s Hispanic student-population stood at 46.78 percent (769) of the total school enrollment. Comparatively, this percentage is nearly double that of the school-district’s 2010-2011 school year Hispanic high school enrollment overall average of 26.68 percent, and Osprey High School’s total Hispanic student enrollment ranked fourth in number and third in percentage among the school-district’s high schools. In the 2010-2011 school year approximately 47.94 percent (350) of the males enrolled at Juniper High School were identified as Hispanic. According to figures recorded in the School Public Accountability Report (SPAR) Osprey High School reported that in the 2009-2010 school year 64.1 percent of the student body was considered economically disadvantaged (FLDOE, 2010). This percentage was above the school-district (53.7) and state (53.5) averages in the 2009-2010 school year.

*Academic achievement.* Osprey High School’s 2008-2009 graduation and dropout rates as recorded and compared within the SPAR were as posted within Table 10. Osprey High School’s overall school grades for the last four school years are as follows: 2006-07/Grade C, 2007-08/Grade B, 2008-09/Grade C, 2009-10/Grade B. Osprey High School
was among the twenty-six school-district high schools that did not make AYP in the 2009-2010 school year and over a nine-year period (2002/2003-2010/2011) has not made AYP.

**on-site under-aged GED program.** With regard to the Under-aged ABE/GED, Osprey Adult and Community School administration states that there is a minimum requirement of 225 hours of coursework, that prospective students are 16-17 years in age, and they, accompanied by a parent or guardian, must attend an orientation prior to acceptance into the program. Orientation sessions are held on Monday evenings at 5:00 pm by appointment. Osprey Adult and Community School’s ABE/Under-aged GED classes are held in one portable classroom on the grounds of Osprey High School five days a week (Monday-Friday) between the hours of 7:30 am and 12:30 pm.

Osprey Adult and Community School has had a relatively scant annual enrollment in the ABE/Under-aged GED. For example during the 2006-2007 school year, 4.8 percent (80 students) of the district’s total enrollment in the ABE/Under-aged GED was enrolled at Osprey Adult and Community School. Among those enrollees, 32.5 percent (26 students) were Hispanics, 23.75 percent (19 students) were Hispanic males, which accounted for 40.42 percent of the males in the program; and among the total Hispanic enrollment, 73.07 percent were males. Of the 26 Hispanic students enrolled at some point in time during the school year, 15.38 percent successfully completed the program with Hispanic males not favoring as well as the overall Hispanic rate of success at 5.2 percent. Overall, Hispanic’s accounted for 14.28 percent with Hispanic males composing 3.5 percent of the program’s successful students.
**Pelican High School.** The initial plan to recruit and select two participants previously enrolled and exited from Pelican High School for the research study did not reach fruition despite multiple visits and attempts. Yet, I assert that the inclusion of the school-site’s description and the community in which it is situated was relevant to the study’s analysis and discussion of implications for future educational leadership practices and future research.

Pelican High School was established in the mid-1960’s in what was considered a suburban area in Flamingo County. As the county’s population has expanded into outlying areas beyond the city proper, Pelican High School can currently be considered as situated within the central portion of the school district and can arguably be identified as an *inner-city* school in the sense that the school’s immediate surrounding community is comprised of the racial and ethnic diversity commonly associated with the definition of *inner-city*. The surrounding community has been described as predominantly economically disadvantaged. Pelican High School, predominantly serves a diverse Latino population within walking distance of the site. This particular school site can arguably be considered a segregated Latino community school located in the current central concentration of Latinos in a single community. During the 2009-2010 school year, the Latino student-population at this school site stood at 70.49 percent (1,119) which is 8.4 percent of the school-districts’ entire Hispanic high school enrollment. Pelican High School is a MAPS (Magnet Advanced Placement Scholars) and a Title I school, which offers standard curriculum, vocational, and AP (Advance Placement) courses.
student enrollment. Over an eight-year period (2003/2004-2010/2011) Pelican High School’s total student enrollment has averaged 1,677 and has ranged from a high point of 1,779 (2009-2010) to its lowest point 1,592 (2010-2011). During the identical period, the Hispanic student-population has averaged 64.71 percent of the total school enrollment increasing annually to 12.57 percent between the 2003-2004 school year (57.94 percent, 984 students) and its highest point in the 2009-2010 school year (70.49 percent, 1,254 students). In the 2010-2011 school year, Pelican High School’s Hispanic student-population stood at 70.29 percent (1,119) of the total school enrollment. Comparatively, this percentage is nearly triple that of the school-district’s 2010-2011 school year Hispanic high school enrollment overall average of 26.68 percent, and Pelican High School’s total Hispanic student enrollment ranked first both in number and in percentage among the school-district’s high schools. In the 2010-2011 school year approximately 70.07 percent (555) of the males enrolled at Pelican High School were identified as Hispanic. According to figures recorded in the School Public Accountability Report (SPAR) Pelican High School reported that in the 2009-2010 school year 73.2 percent of the student body was considered economically disadvantaged (FLDOE, 2010). This percentage was well above the school-district (53.7) and state (53.5) averages in the 2009-2010 school year.

academic achievement. Pelican High School’s 2008-2009 graduation and dropout rates as recorded and compared within the SPAR were as posted within Table 11. In the 2008-2009 school year, Pelican High School reported that no White students were to be counted among the dropouts, (district-Blacks (1.3) Hispanics (1.2) Whites (0.7), (Florida-Blacks (3.4) Hispanics (2.5) Whites (1.6) (FLDOE, 2010). Pelican High School’s overall
school grades for the last four school years are as follows: 2006-07/Grade D, 2007-08/Grade C, 2008-09/Grade D, 2009-10/Grade C. Pelican High School was among the twenty-six school-district high schools that did not make AYP in the 2009-2010 school year and over a nine-year period (2002/2003-2010/2011) has not made AYP.

*on-site under-aged GED program.* With regard to the ABE/Under-aged GED, Pelican Adult and Community School administration states that there is a minimum requirement of 225 hours of coursework. Pelican Adult and Community School’s ABE/Under-aged GED classes are held in one classroom on the grounds of Pelican High School five days a week (Monday-Friday) between the hours of 7:30 am and 3:00 pm.

Although Pelican Adult and Community School has recently had a relatively scant annual enrollment, past annual enrollment in the ABE/Under-aged GED can be characterized as moderate. For example during the 2006-2007 school year, 9.26 percent (153 students) of the district’s total enrollment in the ABE/Under-aged GED was enrolled at Pelican Adult and Community School. Among those enrollees, 65.35 percent (100 students) were Hispanics, 32.02 percent (49 students) were Hispanic males, which accounted for 66.21 percent of the males in the program; and among the total Hispanic enrollment, 49 percent were males. Of the 100 Hispanic students enrolled at some point in time during the school year, 13 percent successfully completed the program with Hispanic males not favoring as well as the overall Hispanic rate of success at 10.2 percent. Overall, Hispanic’s accounted for 59.09 percent with Hispanic males composing 22.72 percent of the program’s successful students.

*site selection summary.* To reiterate, I selected these four school sites which have distinctive and relevant characteristics to my study. The choices were made due to the
comparatively large overall enrollment of Latinos, the sizeable Latino and total Under-aged GED enrollment within the school site, and the demographics of the community in which the selected school sites are situated. With these descriptions in mind, these schools were fitting sites in which to recruit former Latino Under-aged GED participants for the purpose of conducting semi-structured interviews to document their recollected experiences in the Under-aged GED program.

As a veteran educator in the selected school-district, I was permitted entrée into sites and sources pertinent to my study. Ultimately, I interviewed five participants from three of the selected schools. Two participants per two schools, Mallard and Osprey were interviewed and the remaining interviewed participant attended Anhinga. With regard to Pelican High School, I did visit the school-site and met with school personnel relative to my inquiry. Therefore, I maintained and included the collected data in my field-notes and this study due to its relevance to my analysis and discussion of implications for future educational leadership practices and future research.

Finally, I maintain that despite the modification of the initial research design, a primary aspect of the site selection rationale remained in tact; the one site was chosen for a point of contrast as its student-enrollment and community demographics are in contrast to the other selected school sites. Furthermore, I maintain that despite the lack of an interview participant from Pelican High School the inclusion of the school-site remains germane to the contextual description of the Flamingo County Public Schools and the Latino high school population within the school-district. In addition, the contact with Pelican High School personnel and the conversations with potential participants and their respective parents contributed useful data.
activities in the field. As my research study progressed, I encountered unforeseen circumstances in the field which required an unanticipated response and a revised approach to the original design. This is not an unusual occurrence in qualitative, case-study research often described and deemed emergent in nature. Researchers who have engaged in qualitative studies have highlighted the emergent nature of such a methodological approach (Biklen & Casella, 2007; Clarke, Dorn, Kaufman, Letgers, Lillard, & Warren, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2006; Swandt, 2001; Warner & Karner, 2010). As Creswell (2007) stated:

The research process for qualitative researchers is emergent.

This means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and that all phases of the process may change or shift after the researchers enter the field and begin to collect data. For example, the questions may change, the forms of data collection may shift, and the individuals studied and the sites visited may be modified. The key idea behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from participants and to address the research to obtain that information (p. 39).

Specifically with regard to emergent design, Swandt (2001) cites, arising unexpectedly the researcher encounters emergent circumstances which require an unanticipated response and “… the plan for fieldwork should be flexible and adaptive” (p. 63). As an example of emergent design, the case study approach to research requires similar considerations. Stake (2006) states, “Case study work is often said to be progressively focused; that is, the organizing concepts may change a little or a lot as the study moves
Biklen and Casella (2007) posited, “You do not design your study in the qualitative approach and then carry out the work. Design is more mobile than this and requires some flexibility “(p. 5). These authors further elucidated,

Two aspects of qualitative research-the uncertain outcome of the qualitative project, and process of first casting the net widely and then narrowing down the focus of your project—mean that the proposal is only a guide to what you will do, not a detailed account of what will actually happen. It is an important guide, but it is not like a contract (Biklen & Casella, 2007, p. 56).

Most assuredly, this is an ideal which, at times, conflicts with research on the ground. For instance, Merriam (1998) states, “Ideally, for example, the design of a qualitative study is emergent and flexible, responsive to changing conditions of the study in progress. This is not the case, however, with thesis and dissertation committees …” they among others, “often require the design of the study to be specified ahead of time (p. 8). Therefore, qualitative researchers have encountered obstacles to acceptance due to design flexibility (Warner & Karner, 2010). This was not an issue with regard to amending my initial dissertation proposal which was accepted with modifications.

Yet as my research study progressed, I did encounter an obstacle to fulfilling a portion of the dictates prescribed within the initial design of the study. The obstacle to which I refer was within the area of data collection with regard to obtaining the originally specified number of participants for the study. After employing a number of strategies, for example increasing the amount of the compensation for participation from twenty-five to thirty-five dollars, I was unsuccessful in recruiting the originally specified number
of participants. As a result, the number of participants was reduced to a total of five participants from three of the four purposively selected schools, and pseudonyms were used to identify those participants.

I assert that the crux of the research design with regard to data collection and analysis remained in tact due to my ability to establish trustworthiness with my participants and critical informants as result of my counseling/interviewing experience. Furthermore, this ability increased the amount of collected data gleaned from informal discussions with participants’ parents in their homes for an extended period of time prior to and after the participant interviews which was rich and relevant.

**issues regarding recruiting participants.** The recruiting of the study’s participants was a process which I initially viewed as a rather simple task. This was a foolhardy assumption on my part! The concept left unaccounted for (with regard to its extensiveness) in the recruitment plan was the residual consequences of residential mobility especially associated with Latino and other minority populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Despite numerous attempts via letters (over 300 sent), emails (over 100 sent), and telephone calls (over 500 made) many of the hundreds of Latinos who fit the selection criteria were no longer at their previous residences and a number of former students of Puerto Rican descent had return to the commonwealth. Two of the potential participants were reported by their respective families to be currently incarcerated and one had sadly been the victim of a local homicide. While several potential participants did express an interest in participating initially, they were ultimately not willing to commit to an interview appointment. Others were unwilling to participate in the study due to time-constraints associated with work schedules, and some simply rejected the
notion of participation. It is interesting to note that those potential participants who were associated with Pelican High School, which has been described in this study as a segregated Latino community school, were the most difficult to locate and the most unresponsive of the four school-sites. Consequently, no participants were forthcoming nor interviewed from this school-site. Nonetheless with regard to Pelican High School, I maintained and included the collected data in this study due to its relevance as a school-site of interest and its relationship to the purpose of identifying, describing, and critiquing the expanse and academic achievement of the Latino high school educational experience within the State of Florida, and the local communities which are situated within the Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS) system.

_reduction of participants examined in depth._ With regard to the justification of a reduction in both a school site and participants, Stake (2006) stated in his book, _Multiple Case Study Analysis_ “The benefits of multicase study will be limited if fewer than, say, 4 cases are chosen, or more than 10” (p. 22). The reduction of participants in this case study obviously fell within this range. In addition, Merriam (1998) stated, “Sample selection in qualitative research is usually (but not always) nonrandom, purposeful, and small …” (p. 8). I assert that my ability as an experienced school-counselor with regard to counseling individuals elicited in-depth responses in the interviews conducted. This was evident in the amount of data collected from those interview sessions albeit reduced in number. Finally, another circumstance arose in the field as the study progressed which contributed to the accumulation of rich, abundant, and pertinent collected data. This was the serendipitous, unexpected, and unsolicited input of the participants’ parent/s
occurring prior to and after most of the interview sessions as well as in telephone conversations attempting to recruit willing, unwilling, or unable participants.

*responses of participants’ and non-participants’ parents.* To reiterate, researchers have stated that qualitative methods make it possible for phenomena to emerge that are completely unexpected” (Clarke, Dorn, Kaufman, Letgers, Lillard, & Warren, 2003, p. 9). This was the case with the responses of participants’ parent/s. With respect to responding to such a spontaneous occurrence, Rudestam and Newton (2001) aver that research studies can, “...capitalize on the occurrence of unanticipated events that are ripe for data collection …” (p. 191). With that in mind, I submit that those informal conversations, which I documented in my field-notes’ journal, were relevant to the study, and my reflections on them can be considered important supplemental data that informed my subsequent discussion of implications despite the fact that it was not a portion of the original research design.

**Interviews.** I utilized in-depth interviewing techniques to gather data regarding the recollected experiences of the selected participants. In-depth interviewing provides a viable method for understanding the complexities of sociological experiences and political processes which are often undiscovered by survey questioning techniques (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Rubin and Rubin (2005) have identified their approach to in-depth interviewing as responsive interviewing which is comprised of characteristics described as interpretive, critical, and practical; a design with a goal of developing depth of understanding and allowing for flexibility throughout the entire research project (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 30). This type of intensive research interviewing is often structured in a face-to-face manner which allows for focusing upon the meanings derived
by interviewees as a result of their life experiences (Warren & Karner, 2010). In light of these attributes, I utilized this method to glean insight into the selected participants’ recollected experiences during and after the transition from high school and into the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program.

The following research questions were of consideration during the designing of the interview guides utilized for the interviews.

1. What participant identified factors contributed to second-generation Latino high school students opting to enroll in an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program?

2. What were the recollected experiences of second-generation Latino students during the enrollment process in an Adult Education (ABE)/Under-Aged General Education Development (GED) program?

3. What do the participants conceive has been the impact upon their lives as a result of having enrolled in an Adult Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program?

The nature of the inquiry for each of the research questions was to ascertain the recollections and perceptions of each participant. Specifically, question one was designed to gather data with regard to what each participant identified as the factors (reasons) that contributed to the decision to enroll in the dropout prevention high school credentialing alternative. The data gleaned could subsequently be subject to comparison and the identification of patterns. The impetus for question two was much the same, yet the emphasis of the inquiry was more of identifying patterns of a systemic nature.
Finally, question three was an inquiry into the perceptions of the participants as to the impact opting for this alternative credential has produced in their subsequent endeavors.

The primary method for gathering data was digitally audio-taped individual interviews and concise notations were written simultaneously to document my impressions. These interviews were conducted with participants who had been directly associated with the three of the purposively selected traditional high school settings that house an on-campus ABE/ Under-aged GED program within the Flamingo County Public School-district (FCPS). As a result of the problematic issue regarding the recruitment of participants and based upon the rationale to modify the original study design, I reduced the number to five participants from three of the four selected schools: Anhinga, Mallard, and Osprey. The five participants were interviewed at a location of their selection.

The initial interviews were approximately 30-60 minutes in length utilizing a pre-determined, semi-structured protocol. In addition, participants were interviewed a second time for approximately 30-60 minutes in length. The second interviews were for the purposes of further clarification and/or relevant follow-up of participant responses to develop a deeper understanding of their recollections on their experiences. The guides for the second interviews were informed by the individual participant’s initial responses, my field-notes and reflective journal entries, as well as the feedback from the critical informants with regard to my initial analysis of the initial interview data. A matrix of the selected school-sites and participant interviewee identification codes is displayed in Table 12.

As a school-counselor trained in the developmental guidance tradition, I possess skills in the areas of open-ended questioning, active listening, high facilitative responses,
and recognition/interpretation of non-verbal behavior/communication (Myrick, 2003). I drew upon those skills to facilitate and document responses from the participants, and it is my belief that as a highly trained, practicing school-counselor I possess skills which enhanced the establishment of a highly facilitative responsive relationship with the participants that resulted in the generation of rich and abundant data (Myrick, 2003). As a result of my school-counseling training, a rapport was readily established with the participants and on several occasions with the parent/s with which they were residing. This resulted in serendipitous pre and post interview discussions with participants and their respective parents which contributed to the expansion and clarification of the participants’ initial and subsequent responses.

While unexpected and unaccounted for in the originally proposed methodological design, this data did contribute to the resultant analysis and partially informed the subsequent second interview process. This is not an unusual occurrence in qualitative studies which are considered to be of an emergent design.

Finally, field-notes of greater expanse and description were written in my reflective journal within sixty minutes of each interview’s conclusion while memory served to preserve the details of participant responses and my impressions.

**Interview Procedures.** The interviews which took place were approximately 30 to 60 minutes in length and were conducted in one of two settings which included local public libraries and participant homes. I began each initial interview by introducing and providing a thumbnail sketch of myself which included my place of birth and ethnic heritage. I then explained the rationale for the research. Subsequently, the participant
and I reviewed the information contained within the informed consent document for clarity of understanding before I requested their signature.

Practicing simultaneous data collection and analysis, I introduced the initial analysis of responses for the purpose of member checking and amassed data from the responses to craft queries which were tailored more in an individualized format for the purposes of follow-up and further clarification. The protocols or guiding questions, so to speak, are documented in appendices A through G. In addition, the data provided from the critical informants with regard to areas requiring further probing were utilized to craft questions for the follow-up/clarification inquiry. To that end, the data gleaned from the critical informants in this regard included recommendations for clarification in the following areas:

- Parental influence with respect to social-economic status, educational background and involvement, family dynamics
- Parental perspectives of the process and procedures associated with the transition from the traditional high school program to the Under-aged GED Program
- The impact of the freshman year experience in high school
- Pre-conceived ideas about the GED credential
- Extent of preparation for future educational or career considerations and options

**documents and policies.** The primary criterion for selecting documents for review in this study lied within its relevance to the establishment of state and district policies which document performance standards and expectations, initiate and dictate parameters
of drop-out prevention program options, as well as create and regulate program procedures and outcomes affecting identified over-age students.

documents. Document selection was determined and generated by its relevance: to the formulation of pertinent interview protocols, to the personal perspectives related by the participants, and for the subsequent analysis of data collected as well as the triangulation of findings. The document of primary relevance in regards to collecting demographic and academic data connected to this study was the annual School Public Accountability Report (SPAR) specifically associated with the selected school-sites. Additional SPAR data pertinent to my study were the NCLB (No Child Left Behind) and NGA (National Governors Association) graduation rates as well as the state and school-district dropout rates.

calucations. Patton and Sawicki (1986) recommend that data collection with regard to policy and subsequent policy analysis should begin with careful consideration of the problem undergoing scrutiny, the individuals who are likely involved, and the existence of situation of similarity evidenced in the past (Patton & Sawicki, 1986). Bearing such advice in mind, the policies and procedures outlined within as a result of policy implementation most pertinent to my research are the Florida statute governing the Exit Interview Survey and Data Collection as well as the selected school-districts K-Adult Student Progression Plan, Underage Adult Education Program Guidelines and Underage Adult Education Placement Referral Guidelines as these policies related to the responses generated by the participant interviews.

Data analysis. Regarding phenomenological data analysis, Creswell (2007) recommends following a guideline which provides for the analysis of data to identify
phrases of significance in order to develop meanings which may be subsequently clustered thematically and ultimately presented as “… an exhaustive description of the phenomenon” under study (Creswell, 2007, p. 160). Warren and Karner (2010) stated that as the researcher adds bracketed notations to field-notes, transcribes interviews, peruses and organizes documents, data analysis commences (Warren & Karner, 2010, pp 215-216). I engaged in this practice as I reviewed my collected field-notes, the transcribed interviews, the input of the critical informants, and perused photocopied documents.

It was my intention to practice simultaneous data collection and analysis utilizing rudimentary analysis techniques (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992; Merriam, 1998). Therefore, I proceeded by reading and re-reading each interview transcript and the feedback of the critical informants, writing notes detailing relevant perceptions, observations, and suppositions prior to engaging in the subsequent participant interview session. In this manner, I followed procedures which facilitated a give and take flow between data and conceptualizations allowing for interpreting and theorizing regarding collected data (Schwandt, 2001). My intent in proceeding thusly was to facilitate the focus of the study and to refine interview protocols as the collected data indicated. To further facilitate this practice, I utilized a team of critical informants to view my initial analysis from the obtained data for purposes of reviewing accounts, verifying process and procedures and identifying initial participant responses in need of further clarification.

The analysis phase of the data began based upon the response data recorded from each participant interview which was coded by categories. The response data from each interview was subsequently cross-referenced and patterns emerged. These patterns
provided the basis for the initial analysis which upon completion was transmitted to the critical informants for critical feedback. Subsequently, I conducted further analysis of the previously collected data. As Yin (1981) suggested with regard to cross-case analysis, I initially engaged within-case analysis and noted the issues from each case which when compared to the other cases a common explanation began to emerge, and it was utilized to characterize the overall issue/s within the program/phenomenon under study. In this manner if the relevant parameters were similar from case to case, then the explanation, sometimes with modifications, should apply to the subsequent cases and certain credible conclusions could emerge. Upon completion of the second phase of data analysis, I met once again with the team of critical informants to view my subsequent analysis which is further elucidated in this chapter. This action was taken to establish the consensual reasonableness of the organizational aspects of my analysis, its relationship to the research questions, and my conclusions drawn from the participant responses. Finally, from the subsequent analysis of data obtained from these sources, I reported findings and derived interpretations relevant to the phenomenon under investigation.

**analysis of participant interviews.** Warren and Karner (2010) aver that interview transcripts provide accounts of individuals’ interpretations of their social worlds in a particular context (Warren & Karner, 2010, p. 232). As is the case in case study research, I served as the *primary instrument* for gathering and interpreting data and engaged in the analysis of the participant interview responses. Upon completion of the interviews, I employed and remunerated a reputable, certified transcription service to transcribe the interviews.
To begin the analytic process, I practiced on-going analysis as each interview was completed for the purposes of identifying cataloguing, and summarizing responses relevant to the study’s research questions as well as making modifications to interview protocols I deemed appropriate to further the investigative process. My observations were shared with the individual participants in the vein of member checks (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). I then analyzed the collected data from the interviews to identify recurrent themes referred to as the preponderance inherent within the data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), and I literally labeled the concepts, quotes and themes within the interview transcripts (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As they suggested, the generation of concepts and themes can occur from pondering interviewee responses individually or collectively to identify concurrent issues which suggests appropriate coding strategies (Rubin & Rubin 2005).

Although the central topic of my study is one in which I have experience from the perspective of an educator and the protocols are driven by my theoretical interests, an a priori noncontent-specific scheme seemed the logical mode of operation for developing an initial coding scheme since my primary activity as a multicase analyst was to detect and record the commonalties and differences across the interview responses of the participants’ relived experiences within my study (Locke, Spirduso, Silverman, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Schwandt, 2001). I chose a path that requires the analyst to create or adapt codes relevant to the data rather than a hard fast schema. Therefore, a simple pattern coding scheme can be employed such as identifying themes that can be illustrated with quotes, and the initial within-case analysis was based upon line-by-line coding of the data (Dey, 1993; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).
To identify themes, I analyzed the collected data based upon individualized participant responses and then, across participant interview responses in search of concurrences and deviations from the discussions and interviews to construct conclusions; (Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 2007; Minor, 1997; Schwandt, 2001; Yin, 2003) which defined the personal perceptions of the student participants and/or (in the case of the critical informants) professional perception, attitudes, and behavior of my participants to reduce the data into storable categories for analysis. These categories were labeled and subsequently clustered into a thematic outline. Sub-thematic material was subsequently generated within the general thematic outline and labeled for the purpose of identifying and clustering quotes generated by the participant responses which supported the thematic identification as pertinent.

In the initial analysis of the participant responses, my organizational technique was predicated upon the inquiry framework and the research questions which focused this study and the interview protocols. As this study progressed into the subsequent phases, the overarching themes that related to all three of the research questions which emerged were three-fold: a sense of isolation, the positive effects of structure, and the power of personal resilience. Within and underlying these themes was an emergence of similar patterns in the responses to personal perception and the perception of others recollected by the participants with regard to being Latino, their educational experiences in both the traditional high school setting as well as the Under-aged program, and their perceptions of the roles and practices of the school-based professionals with which they were in contact. These patterns were woven into thematic and sub-thematic material for analysis:

- Relating what Latino means to me
• Recalling high school
• Selecting the ABE/Under-aged GED
• Recalling the ABE/Under-aged GED Program experience
• Contemplating the impact of having enrolled the ABE/Under-aged GED

Finally, included within the study with regard to analysis was the team of critical informants. Each critical informant reviewed my interpretations and analysis of the interview transcripts. Subsequently, the team of critical informants and I engaged in an interactive discussion with regard to the data obtained from the participant interviews for accuracy and alternative interpretations in the vein of peer debriefing (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

critical informants. The input and observations of critical informants can function as a quasi-validation of portions of data collected thereby adding credibility to the researcher’s interpretations (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, I utilized a team of critical informants primarily for the purpose of what I termed consensual reasonableness in which critically informed individuals via discussion form a consensus with regard to the reasonableness and viability of interpretations, findings and conclusions drawn from analysis (Creswell, 2007; Eisner, 1991; Mason, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Schwandt, 2001). The four critical informants were purposefully selected with the selection process having been facilitated by virtue of my status as an insider. The selection criteria for the study’s critical informants were primarily based upon their professional knowledge and practical experience within the field of adult and community education and specifically the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program within the selected school-district. The critical informants had no further connection to
the study. Pseudonyms were used to identify the critical informants, and they were compensated with a retail gift card in the amount of twenty-five dollars.

The critical informants functioned primarily to review, question, and clarify my initial and final interpretations of the detailed accounts of the student participants and provide information in regards to the enrollment process and procedures associated with the ABE/Under-aged GED program. All of the critical informants were involved in reviewing my interpretation of the individual participant responses and initial data analysis. Subsequently, the critical informants provided their individual interpretations and commentary in a written format. The initial round of input regarding critical informants’ queries and clarifications was utilized to facilitate my subsequent probing in participant interviews and further analysis. Finally, the critical informants reviewed the results of my final data analysis, and we engaged in an interactive discussion for utilization in the final analysis of the research project. The rationale for such a design with regard to the utilization of the critical informant team was steeped in the belief that the one to one interaction between the researcher and each critical informant provided an opportunity for critical feedback facilitating the research process. Furthermore, the interactive discussion yielded valuable information and varying perspectives considered in the final analysis (Creswell, 2007; Kruger, 1994; Morgan, 1988).

The team of critical informants was composed of a former school-district director of adult education, one former and one current community school administrator, and a former community school administrator currently serving as a traditional high school assistant principal for curriculum. The critical informants were identified in the study as:
CI 1, CI 2, CI 3, and CI 4. What follows are professional background sketches of the critical informants.

*critical informant 1 (CI 1).* This critical informant is a former Flamingo County Public School (FCPS) district director of adult education. CI 1 began a career in education as a mathematics instructor and continued on the career ladder within FCPS as an assistant principal for student affairs (AP I), an assistant principal for curriculum (APC), a district-level supervisor of attendance, and district-level director of adult education. With regard to the ABE/Under-aged GED program, CI 1 maintains that it is only one of various options available to students pursuing an alternative route in earning a high school credential. CI 1 possesses knowledge and administrative work experience in both the traditional high school and adult educational settings which made this CI a valuable resource with regard to this research project.

*critical informant 2 (CI 2).* This critical informant is a former adult and community school administrator (ACSA) who was stationed at a traditional high school which housed an ABE/Under-aged GED program. CI 2 began a career in education as an Exceptional Student Education (ESE) instructor and continued on the career ladder within FCPS as a school-based ESE specialist, an adult education instructor, and an ACSA. CI 2 is currently serving as an instructor at an adult and community program in FCPS and can be considered an avid proponent of the ABE/Under-aged GED program. CI 2 maintains that the program provides a viable pathway for all students regardless of their educational circumstances and challenges, i.e. ESE or ELL (English Language Learners) to successfully complete a high school credentialing journey.
critical informant 3 (CI 3). This critical informant is a former adult and community school administrator (ACSA) who was stationed at a traditional high school which housed an ABE/Under-aged GED program. CI 3 began a career in education within FCPS as an ACSA and is currently serving as a traditional high school assistant principal for curriculum (APC). CI 3 has recently earned an Ed.D in educational leadership and possesses knowledge and administrative work experience in both the traditional high school and adult educational settings which made this CI a valuable resource with regard to this research project.

critical informant 4 (CI 4). This critical informant is a current community school administrator currently (ACSA) stationed at a traditional high school which houses an ABE/Under-aged GED program and has in the past served as a subject for a pilot study conducted during my previous coursework with regard to ABE/Under-aged GED programs housed on traditional high school campuses. CI 4 began a career in education at a middle school as an attendance counselor, an assistant teacher, an Exceptional Student Education (ESE) instructor, and a social studies instructor. CI 4 moved on to the traditional high school setting as an alternative education instructor and continued on the career ladder within FCPS as an assistant principal for student affairs (AP I), an adult education instructor, and an ACSA. CI 4 possesses knowledge and administrative work experience in both the traditional high school and adult educational settings which made this CI a valuable resource with regard to this research project.

summary of critical informants’ responses. The critical informants provided their individual interpretations and commentary in a written format. Their initial round of input regarding critical informants’ queries and clarifications was utilized to facilitate my
subsequent probing in participant interviews. The topics which were gleaned from those responses for this purpose were couched in the form of questions:

Should the number of participants be increased to add validity to the study?

Should factors such as parental support of education, generational successes/failures in school, socio-economic status, and single-parent or two-parent family contexts be considered in the analysis?

Should common participant experiences with regard to their 9th grade (freshman) year be explored?

Did the participants possess pre-conceived ideas about the GED diploma?

What will the future be like for participants?

Will the participants be prepared for entering post-secondary education?

What is the extent of the disadvantage/s associated with parental high-school and/or post-secondary lack of experience to the participants?

Would the perspectives of teachers, parents and/or underage GED program personnel of the high school be relevant to the analysis?

My reflective process. It was my routine practice to review my field-notes after and prior to each subsequent participant interview session. I considered the field-notes functioning both as documentation of what I observed during the sessions and as a reflective journal of my thoughts after the sessions. Included within the field-notes/journal were the serendipitous comments of parents which brought to mind either
confirmations of assumptions I brought with me to the project or disclosures I had not anticipated. These comments influenced the subsequent interview queries and eventually my musing during the cross-case analysis process. In addition, my interaction with the critical informants and their respective responses was critical in the search for further clarification of participant responses, the search for explanations which contradicted some of my assumptions, and the triangulation of findings. It is my assertion that these elements increased the credibility of the analysis process.

**Credibility**

The traits of qualitative research which enhance the credibility of a study hinge upon the valid and reliable construction of the interviews, the quality of analysis attributable to the documents utilized, and the premise that the conclusions drawn by the research are anchored in the data collected (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Rubin and Rubin (2005) speak of “demonstrating credibility through transparency” (p. 76). They describe this process as one which demonstrates that the reader of a qualitative research project should able to lucidly perceive how the data was collected and analyzed. In essence, that the “path of analysis” is transparent. To that end, I retained notes and recordings to ensure the transparency of the data collected as well as retaining records detailing the mode utilized in coding the data for analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 76-77).

In general, the choice to utilize the term credibility has been determined by the impetus of many qualitative researchers to reject the continuance of couching the value of findings in the quantitative lexicon (Creswell, 2007; Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Nonetheless no matter how contentious the debate, the literature regarding the value of qualitative
findings continues to often employ the concept of validation. Eisner (1991) chose to replace the utilization of the term *validation* with the credibility qualitative research can establish; and furthermore, he reasoned that to demonstrate such credibility the evidence presented should be persuasive. Eisner termed one standard for establishing such credibility as “consensual validation” obtained via the solicitation of the opinions of “competent others” that are capable of corroborating “… that the description, interpretation, and evaluation and thematics of an educational situation are right” (p. 112). In that spirit, I utilized the team of critical informants in my study to meet such a standard. I contend the utilization of critical informants added to the credibility which some qualitative researchers have come to view as tantamount to the concept of validation most often associated with quantitative research studies (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Creswell (2007) approaches credibility as an elemental criterion of validation (p. 206). Based upon his and other researchers’ perspective, credibility in qualitative inquiry should be an answer to a question; “Are the results an accurate interpretation of the participants’ meaning?” (Creswell, 2007; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Strategies for answering such a query and ensuring validation of conclusions, findings, and interpretations, which I employed, were member-checking and external audits conducted by the critical informants (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell, 2007; Ely et al., 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2007) recommended that the qualitative researcher should formulate a plan to deal with “threats to validity.” They formulate three such threats as questions: How will you ensure the accuracy of your descriptions of the context
and participants? Is your personal bias a threat? Will participant reactions to you or the utilized procedures in the study influence the quality and quantity of the data collected? (p. 104). In an attempt to fortify trustworthiness, one of the perceived threats has been addressed in my study by the cautious consideration in the selection process of both participants and school-sites in an attempt to limit the effects of personal biases as an educator. Foremost, I had no previous contact or involvement with the selected participants. Secondly, the utilization of a team of critical informants facilitated the accuracy of my descriptions of the content participants’ responses recorded within the interview transcripts which were transcribed by an outside party. Furthermore to this end, I have freely disclosed the inevitable influence of my life-experiences as a student in and employee of the school-district and state under study my entire public school career, as well as my life-experiences as a Latino within the introduction to this chapter and previously in Chapter One. In addition, to address the question of the accuracy of descriptions, I utilized member checks during the process and ultimately utilized the team of critical informants in the vein of peer debriefing (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Finally, Firestone’s perspective regarding the question of validity suggests that the author of a study should provide the peruser with a detailed depiction which evidences the credibility of the resulting conclusions drawn (Firestone, 1987; Merriam, 1998). With regard to a phenomenological study, if the notion/s and conclusions presented are well-grounded and well-supported utilizing accurate transcriptions and descriptions of the experience/s then the study may be adjudged valid (Creswell, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1989). It was my intention to do so by utilizing the compositional technique previous researchers
have termed *thick description*; a narrative that literally and fully describes in depth the
details of the context as well as the emotional and social relationships revealed by the
participants with respect to their experience within the phenomenon under investigation
(Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Rudestam & Newton, 2001; Warren & Karner, 2010). In this manner, I provided the reader with an in-depth description of the phenomenon experienced by the study’s participants in whom the reader may vicariously experience the occurrences described in an attempt to establish a certain degree of transferability to other settings (Creswell, 2007; Denizen, 1989; Merriam, 1998).

**Limitations**

Limitations to the study included the thoroughness and accuracy of the participants’ recollections. In addition, as broached by those associated with the study on the periphery, the scope of inquiry by design was limited by the selection of only three high school sites and five participants. Therefore, the study can critically be considered limited regarding applicability to the larger Latino high school-aged population of the nation, the state of Florida, and the school-district which is the specific context of the study. Furthermore, this study of a single element of the Latino high school dropout phenomenon can not be considered applicable or generalizable to the larger Latino high school-aged population. Subsequently, the participants’ recollected positive experiences and successful navigation of the program can be viewed as an influence in choosing to participate in the study; and therefore, a limitation with regard to participant selection. In addition, most of the participants did not exhibit a critical perspective as anticipated with regard to the school-based educational leadership. Finally, the personal bias of the researcher and the participants may have impacted this study.
Summary

In this chapter, the guiding inquiry framework was revisited to elucidate its relevance to the methods of data collection and analysis utilized in attending to the research questions of the study. The data collected via interviews of the recollected experiences of five second-generation Latino high school students to identify the factors and the process by which they chose to enroll in an educational alternative/dropout prevention completion option was analyzed for the identification of pertinent themes. In addition, issues which arose in the field regarding participant selection and recruitment were documented including the descriptions of four high-schools, the local communities in which the schools are based, and the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) programs housed within for the purpose of contextual situation.

Finally, for the purposes of increasing credibility and the triangulation of findings, I consulted with a selected team of specifically knowledgeable and experienced critical informants with regard to the ABE/Under-aged GED Program. These consultations were specifically seeking confirmation regarding the consensual reasonableness and plausibility of conclusions drawn from the initial and final thematic analysis as well as a searching for alternative explanations. Moreover, an exposition of the study’s limitations was included for the purpose of delineating the range and scope of the study.

What follows in the next chapter are the individual participant profiles and the themes generated by the analysis of the participant interview responses. Furthermore, in keeping with the acknowledged parameters of qualitative research projects, I have
included within the next chapter my experiential perspective which is naturally the driving force of my interpretations.

Table 7

*Total District Enrollment, Percentage Distribution and Total of Selected Schools’ Enrollment in Under-aged GED and Completion Percentages/Totals by Male/Hispanic: (2006–07)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Selected Schools Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>AHS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Male</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Hispanic</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Hispanic Male</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Completion %</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>AHS</th>
<th>MHS</th>
<th>OHS</th>
<th>PHS</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>14.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Male</td>
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<td>25.0</td>
<td>21.3</td>
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<td>Total Hispanic</td>
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<td>15.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Hispanic Male</td>
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<td>18.0</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>15.1</td>
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</table>

Anhinga High School, Flamingo County, and Florida’s 2008-2009 Hispanic, Gender, and Overall Graduation and Dropout Rate Totals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anhinga High</th>
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<th>Flamingo</th>
<th></th>
<th>Florida</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>71.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGA</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>72.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.2</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
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Table 9

Mallard High School, Flamingo County, and Florida’s 2008-2009 Hispanic, Gender, and Overall Graduation and Dropout Rate Totals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mallard High</th>
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<th>Florida</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Overall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGA</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>82.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10

Osprey High School, Flamingo County and Florida’s 2008-2009 Hispanic, Gender, and Overall Graduation and Dropout Rate Totals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Osprey High</th>
<th>Flamingo</th>
<th>Florida</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Overall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGA</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>82.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11

*Pelican High School’s, Flamingo County, and Florida’s 2008-2009 Hispanic, Gender, and Overall Graduation and Dropout Rate Totals*

|        | Pelican High |            |            |            |            |            |
|--------|--------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
|        | Overall      | Hispanic   | Overall    | Hispanic   | Overall    | Hispanic   |
| NCLB   | 72.0         | 69.8       | 82.4       | 78.5       | 76.2       | 71.6       |
| NGA    | 73.7         | 71.2       | 82.2       | 77.8       | 76.3       | 72.1       |
| Dropout|              |            |            |            |            |            |
|        | All          | Hispanic   | Gender     | All        | Hispanic   | Gender     | All        | Hispanic   | Gender     |
|        | F            | M          |            | F          | M          |            | F          | M          |            |
|        | 0.6          | 0.6        | 0.4        | 0.8        | 1.0        | 1.2        | 0.1        | 0.2        | 2.3        | 2.5        | 2.0        | 2.5        |

Table 12

*Participant Exit Site* and *Interviewee Pseudonyms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anhinga High</td>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mallard High</td>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>Oscar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osprey High</td>
<td>Rick</td>
<td>Vincent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Four

Findings

In an attempt to illuminate the experiences of Latino high school students enrolled in an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program and to critically examine certain educational leadership practices, processes, and procedures associated with the program, I interviewed five Latinos who attended the program within three high schools in the Flamingo County Public Schools. The research questions that guided the study are:

1. What participant identified factors contributed to second-generation Latino high school students opting to enroll in an Adult Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program?

2. What were the recollected experiences of second-generation Latino students during the enrollment process in an Adult Education (ABE)/Under-Aged General Education Development (GED) program?

3. What do the participants conceive has been the impact upon their lives as a result of having enrolled in an Adult Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program?

In this chapter I present an analysis of the participants’ decision to enroll, experiences in the traditional high school setting, as well as, in the Under-aged GED program, and the impact they perceived resulted from participating in the program. The participant interviews provided a basis for gathering data related to the central research
questions and for the initial organizational thematic analysis based upon individualized participant responses. Subsequently, the initial analysis continued across participant interview responses in search of concurrences and deviations from the discussions and interviews to construct conclusions and identify themes (Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 2007; Schwandt, 2001; Yin, 2003) which defined the personal perceptions of the student participants.

My analysis of patterns within the participants’ responses led to overarching themes which emerged and were three-fold: a sense of isolation, the positive effects of structure, and the power of personal resilience. In the next sections, I introduce the study’s participants: Angel, Luis, Oscar, Rick, and Vincent, and I present the participants’ interview responses as related to the research questions as well as the major themes and sub-themes.

**Participants**

The participants who took part in the study’s interviews were five Latinos (males) between 18 and 25 years of age. At some point in their high school careers, these individuals were considered to be at risk of not graduating with a high school diploma. All five self-identified as bilingual (English and Spanish) Latinos. All opted to enroll within the study’s specified six-year (2006-2012) enrollment time-frame in an ABE/Under-aged GED program housed at one of the study’s specified participant exited school-sites during daytime hours, and all subsequently completed the program, passed the GED examination, and earned the GED credential. As previously identified (Table-12), participants were selected and interviewed from three traditional high schools: Anhinga High School (Angel), Mallard High School, (Luis and Oscar) Osprey High
School, (Rick and Vincent). Pseudonyms were utilized for the purposes of readability and to maintain the privacy of the participants. What follows is a summative description of the participants.

**Angel.** Angel entered the Under-aged GED (U-GED) program at Anhinga High School during the 2010-2011 school year. He was interviewed at his home and his mother was present during most of the audio-taped interview. The young man and his single-parent still reside in the modest home as when he attended high school. At the time of the initial interview Angel’s mother was preparing her dinner to be eaten later in the evening at her place of employment. This participant was quite articulate and the most informative.

Angel described his Puerto Rican origin and the family’s original US destination as New Jersey. The family eventually relocated to Chela, Florida and Angel reported that Chela was his place of birth. He described a blended family situation in which his mother was previously married and had been divorced twice. Angel described the family make-up as a half-brother from his mother’s first marriage. His mother’s second marriage produced two children, an older sister and Angel. Angel did not discuss his father further.

Angel reflectively described his educational experience and felt he shared the responsibility for his lack of success with the educators in the traditional setting he had attended. He felt that somewhere along the timeline in the transition between middle school, where he was an honor student, and high school he became disinterested with his schooling. He spoke of being bored, sleeping in class, and ultimately skipping classes
altogether. Angel did not recall being given any academic counseling by a guidance counselor in school.

The advice he did receive came from two of the assistant principals (AP’s) for student affairs who dealt primarily with disciplinary issues. Angel stated that the AP’s spoke more of his lack of motivation and in ultimatums with regard to disciplinary actions. Angel recollected that the decision was made to dropout of school to avoid the disciplinary consequences such as detention, in-school or out-of-school suspension that he was unwilling to accept. He stated he was not advised at the time of departure by either administration or guidance as to his options.

Angel related that he sought out the U-GED program on his own, researching the GED option on-line and despite the advice of peers not to dropout of school to earn a GED, he felt it was his best option. Angel stated that his peers provided no rationale for their conclusions, and he felt that dropping out and getting a GED was viewed by his traditional high school peers as a “negative thing.” At times, Angel stated that this was also the opinion of some of his extended family. Nonetheless, he returned to Anhinga High after withdrawing from the school and entered the Anhinga High Adult ABE/Under-aged GED program of his own accord after meeting with the U-GED teacher.

Angel stated that the GED curriculum seemed the same as what he had encountered during the day at Anhinga High but that the coursework, which was delivered partially on-line at home and partially in the on-site classroom, was simpler than he expected. However, he also related that the actual GED examination was rather difficult, and that he felt the program did not adequately prepare him. Angel attributed his successful
passage of the GED examination to his ability as a “really good test-taker.” Ultimately, Angel believes his decision to pursue this option for earning a high school credential to be valid and positive results have been actualized such as providing him with the opportunity to enroll in the local community college. Angel spoke of furthering his education but cited lacking both the resources and the know-how to pursue this avenue. He also stated that by choosing the U-GED option he was unable to take advantage of the “college-readiness programs” that were afforded traditional high school students.

Angel recalled that absences and the lack of academic success which accompanies non-attendance were the major factors in his opting for the U-GED, other factors such as his age and FCAT test scores, which were favorable with regard to him, were not of issue. Finally, Angel recollected that the high school administrators informed him that with his GED he could further his education at the local community college and that the negativity associated with earning a GED might be with regard to his obtaining gainful employment as potential employers view applicants with traditional high school diplomas more favorably. At the time of this writing, Angel remains unemployed.

Angel’s perception of Latinos was as a growing minority population. He spoke of areas within the US in which he perceived that Latinos were the majority. In addition, he stated that despite the “bad reputation” Latinos have in some of the areas of the country, it was up to Latinos like himself to show otherwise. He viewed this as “an opportunity.” Angel stated that while attending Anhinga High, being a Latino did not seem to be much of an issue with peers of any race. Angel did recollect that this was a different situation with regard to some teachers he believed were “prone to stereotyping.” He also stated that he,” went out of his way to make sure I didn’t look like a hoodlum.”
**Luis.** Luis entered the Under-aged GED program (U-GED) at Mallard High School during the 2011-2012 school year. He was interviewed in a conference room at a public library near his home, and he seemed at ease during the interview. Luis was born and raised in a multi-generational family home in Bridgeport, Connecticut before moving to Flamingo County with his mother and other than stating these facts, he did not speak about his family.

Luis provided a more detailed description of both his traditional high school and U-GED settings than the other participants in the study. He accepted onus for his lack of academic success in the traditional high school. Luis stated that he loved school, but lacked the focus “to finish” and further stated that as his decline in success began, due to “slacking on your school work,” it became difficult “to get yourself back up.” Luis primarily attributed his decline to spending time with his friends “and that he didn’t really take school seriously.”

Luis related that reflecting upon his initial interview responses brought to mind his initial realization with regard to his experience of interacting with school officials. He stated that he, among others, were targeted by school officials because of their lack of academic success specifically with regard to a low GPA (Grade Point Average) and lack of sufficient credits per their cohort requirements. Luis understood the impact of these factors on graduation. He recalled that some of the targeted students were successful in the traditional setting as a result of meeting with school officials. Although he did not feel he had benefited greatly from the traditional setting strategies.

Luis stated that the initial school response with regard to his lack of academic success was to place him a credit recovery program at the school during regular school
hours. Meeting with limited success in the initial credit recovery endeavor, the next strategy employed by school officials was to engage him in credit recovery at the “night school” housed on campus in conjunction with his daily classes. This became a difficult proposition as he had to provide his own transportation to participate in the program. Ultimately due to this obstacle, he was unable to recover credit and consequently unable to raise his GPA. Luis stated that at one point in an attempt to raise his low GPA his guidance counselor suggested an OJT (On the Job Training) course in addition to his regular daily class schedule. This was not a feasible option for him as it required enrollment in a vocational program for which he felt he was not qualified.

Ultimately, due to a variety of factors and obstacles, Luis was unable to complete the traditional high school course of study. Luis noted that he never considered not completing high school and that he relied on his intuition to decide the U-GED was his best option for completion after speaking with all of the school officials involved in the program: his guidance counselor, his AP (assistant principal), and the U-GED instructor. Luis stated that he has passed the GED credential examination, and he credited a large portion of his success in the program to his U-GED instructor. Luis is currently employed at a bowling alley while attending Flamingo Community College. Luis is enrolled in remedial courses. He has not decided upon a major course of study and his future plans beyond completing an AA are uncertain.

Regarding his perspective on being a Latino, Luis related the most limited response of all of the participants in the study. He stated, “I just see it as me being a regular person that just knows another language.” He further spoke of being a part of groups of students of various races and felt race and/or ethnicity was a non-issue at Mallard High.
Oscar. Oscar entered the Under-aged GED (U-GED) program at Mallard High School during the 2011-2012 school year. He was interviewed in a conference room at a public library near his home. Oscar was somewhat apprehensive in regards to the expectations within the interview process. The informal discussion which occurred prior detailing the general purpose of the interview seemed to make him feel more at ease. Seemingly, this ease was a product of conversing informally with me as like me; Oscar is a native of Chela, Florida. Ethnically speaking, Oscar self-identified as being of Arabic and Hispanic extraction.

Oscar recalled his initial academic success in high school and attributed much of that to his parents home environment, in which he continues to reside, as well as the academic success of his older sibling; “I’m the 5 of 6 siblings and the older brother, that’s a little bit older than me was the first one to graduate; so, I wanted to kind of keep that trend going”. Oscar described his high school experience as “…fun”. He recollected that his freshmen year began positively “…for like the first two weeks I did my work and stuff”.

Oscar described a similar scenario to some of the other participants;” I started hanging out with friends and skipping class.” He related that the downward trend continued and escalated during his sophomore year; “… like the snowball effect; it got worse and worse.” Oscar stated the paramount issue that contributed to his academic failure was an illness that occurred during his sophomore year causing him to miss a significant amount of school-days. He perceived that he was unable to make-up and keep up with his school-work in the traditional setting. As he described his high school experience, Oscar seemed quite comfortable with admitting regrettable actions on his part.
during high school and accepted personal onus for the lack of success in the traditional high school context.

With regard to the response of school personnel and the subsequent interactions, Oscar recollected that his mother was contacted by his assistant principal (AP) late in the summer preceding his senior year. He and his mother were invited to attend a meeting at the school regarding his academic status. At this meeting, Oscar recalled that the school personnel in attendance were the assistant principal and one of the U-GED instructors. When he was made aware by the school personnel at the meeting of the potential to complete the U-GED coursework in preparation for the GED examination within a 45 day period, Oscar felt that he should choose this path to earning a high school credential. Oscar described the U-GED classroom experience as “different” from the traditional setting,” It was like going to detention and doing work …”. “… same time as regular school, but … dismissed at “12:30.”

Oscar’s self-perception of being Latino and his perception of how others thought of Latinos at his high school included notable responses. “I think it’s just a label. Really, I’m just like every other American.” “Loud! Most of the Hispanics were in ESOL classes, and they all stick together.” Oscar stated that he, “… never hung around a whole bunch of Hispanics.” He attributed this to the elective extra-curricular program he was a part of, “I was in the band program, so the Hispanic to White ratio was like 3 to 25.” Oscar felt that the perception of his peers was mostly based upon the comical aspects of various ethnic groups, “…we joke about it. I’m the Hispanic of the group and there’s the Indian guy of the group”. I was usually the only Hispanic…”.
In retrospect, if Oscar had any true regrets it seemingly had its source in the social aspects associated with attending and completing the traditional high school experience such as the extra-curricular functions and activities. Yet, Oscar appeared to be happy and satisfied with his decision, and he is pursuing a musical career. He is currently recording an album in a local studio. He allowed me to listen to a portion of his recent recording and from my perspective; Oscar is a talented musician.

Rick. Rick entered the Under-aged GED (U-GED) program at Osprey High School during the 2011-2012 school year. He was interviewed in his home and his mother was present and sat silently throughout the entire audio-taped interview. The young man and both of his “birth parents” still resided in the modest home as when he attended high school. Rick and his mother were born in New York City of Dominican extraction. His father is a native of Santo Domingo and was a major league baseball pitcher until his career was cut short by injury.

Rick was the most informative participant with regard to his traditional high school setting. He described classroom settings in which his classmates were all children of color, and stated that the majority of his teachers utilized “dittos” rather than textbooks. Rick attributed that factor in combination with an absence of direct instruction as the primary reasons for his lack of academic success. He related that his low GPA was the major issue of concern; as he neither was absent from school nor recitation on a regular basis, nor had any disciplinary issues.

As Rick spoke further regarding his experience with teachers’ methods of instruction and classroom procedures, he voiced his opinions adamantly: “Some of the teachers were good; some of them weren’t really helpful at all. Some were aggressive for
some reasons; I don’t know.” When recalling his peers, Rick stated, “They always had a lot of drama for some reason. It was just very dramatic”.

As the interview progressed towards the segment related to Rick’s decision to pursue the alternative route to earning a high school credential, he described this perception of his academic circumstances, “I was behind in credits and my GPA (Grade Point Average) was pretty low.” He then described the traditional school personnel’s response quite negatively. “What I remember is that me and my mom had gone to Osprey and went to the main office, which the office people weren’t helpful at all and were very rude.”

In response to issues regarding race and ethnicity, Rick related his attitude, “I don’t find a difference in it. Somebody Hispanic, Black or White is the same thing;” In his perception, these issues were expressed in episodes of conflict, “I was never one of those; but, I would always see Hispanics and like the Blacks fighting each other. After the interview was concluded, there was a lengthy impromptu discussion between Rick, his mother, and me. This discussion provided me with insight into the perception of the school’s climate and culture held by Rick and his parent. Another topic which arose during the discussion was with regard to how they perceived and were perceived by various other Hispanic groups.

Rick is currently enrolled at Flamingo Community College and is undecided with regard to a major area of focus. He is employed part-time by his father who owns and operates a tire repair and sales business near the family’s home.

Vincent. Vincent entered the Under-aged GED (U-GED) program at Osprey High School during the 2011-2012 school year. He was interviewed at his home, and his
mother was present during the initial interview. Vincent related that he was of South American extraction, with family origins including Colombia and Venezuela. After contemplating settling in New York City with his maternal extended family, the decision was made to move to Chela where his paternal extended family had established residency.

When recollecting his educational experience, Vincent related that he was advised to enter the U-GED prior to enrolling in high school; “Well, I didn’t go to high school; because, I went to the U-GED program.” He reported that he had not completed all of the requirements to be promoted from grade 8 to grade 9. As the interview proceeded Vincent related that his peers were having a profound influence; “… more of influence, on me”.

When speaking of the response of school personnel to his academic status, Vincent stated he was initially advised by the guidance counselor to apply for enrollment at a career center. He reported that he was denied entrance. As a result of that rejection, the school’s principal recommended the U-GED Program. Vincent described one of the procedures employed by the middle school’s personnel with regard to the U-GED recommendation, “They called my mother and my father and talked to them”. Of the advice he was given Vincent stated, “They guided me the right way.” When he spoke of the decision to enter the U-GED Program: It was really good!”

Vincent’s recollections were the most poignant of all the study’s participants regarding self-perception and the perceptions of others with regard to Latinos. He described a negative perception of Latinos by teachers and administrators at the middle school, “They just, we were viewed as trouble makers basically all Hispanics”.
When speaking further of his peers, he offered an explanation, “They had different troubles in their family, and their homes; so, they just acted out in the school”.

After the interview was concluded, there was a lengthy impromptu discussion between Vincent, his mother, and me. This discussion provided me with some insight into the perception of the school’s climate and culture held by Vincent and his parent. What they related paralleled the perceptions of Rick and his parent. As an aside, neither Rick, nor Vincent, nor their respective families were acquainted with one another. Other topics which arose during the discussion were with regard to their perceptions of the educational process in the United States, as well as, the lack of bilingual personnel employed by the schools and its impact on parental involvement.

In my reflective journal, I noted that I was impressed by the resiliency and the accomplishments of Vincent, who had managed to complete the U-GED and pass the GED examination earning his alternative high school credential without ever entering a traditional high school classroom. He currently attends Flamingo Community College and has not decided upon a major course of study. His future plans beyond completing an AA are uncertain.

**Participant interview data overview.** The following major areas of inquiry and initial themes emerged from the initial interview response data based upon the three research questions:

- Recalling high school and selecting the ABE/Under-aged GED, in general all five participants identified similar factors for opting into the program.
- Recalling the ABE/Under-aged GED Program enrollment
experience, in which the greatest variance in participant responses occurred.

- Contemplating the impact of having enrolled in the ABE/Under-aged GED Program, in which consensus emerged in that the participants viewed the impact upon their lives as positive.

- Relating what Latino means to me, in which the participants provided from their perspectives definitions of how they viewed and identified themselves as Latinos, and how they perceived others viewed Latinos in general.

These initial themes can be identified as aligned with one of the three research questions. Due to the nature of the inquiry associated with each of the primary research questions, the construction of the semi-structured protocols, and the nature of qualitative interviewing as an extended conversation, (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) there were occasions of overlapping. In addition, the theme related to the participants’ perspectives regarding the discussion of Latinos was an embedded sub-theme which emerged.

**participant identified enrollment factors.** It was apparent from the responses of the participants that their ethnicity, a lack of academic success, and chronic absenteeism were factors contributing to their sense of isolation and influencing their decision to enroll in the alternative high school completion program.

**recalling high school.** The participants reflected upon their high school experience and the process and procedures associated with enrolling in the Under-aged GED program. Most of the participants shared similar experiences and related a pattern
consistent with a lack of academic success in high school which began during the transition from middle school to high school. Variations did exist in how the faculty and staff of the middle school, the high school, and the adult program’s personnel approached the Under-aged GED program recommendation and subsequent implementation.

*high school experiences and performance.* The recollections of their high school experience and their academic progress were echoed by the participants who attended Anhinga High School and Mallard High School. Their recollections are consistent with the conjecture that the freshman year is critical to a successful navigation of the high school experience culminating in graduation (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenburg, 2008).

Angel:

I started in high school in 9th grade just fine, carrying on at school, learning, studying, and making good grades.

Oscar:

Freshmen year for like the first two weeks I did my work and stuff, and then high school started to hit, and then I got sick in sophomore year.

*experiences.* Some of the participants expressed onus with regard to their *at risk* status. While others related that their status was a result of the school culture and environment.

Angel:

I felt like being an irresponsible kid who didn’t have much guidance. I felt like the system failed me.

Luis:

I actually loved my high school experience. I enjoyed everything about high
school. I guess I just wasn’t focused enough to finish.

Oscar:

It’s fun; obviously it was fun.

In particular, the participants who attended the Under-aged GED program at Osprey High School related educational experiences that were more of an emotional nature and at times, quite negative.

Rick:

I know there was a lot of drama. High school really doesn’t help at all; you feel like you’re still in middle school. Like in middle school when the teachers are just bossing you around and telling all these things. It feels just like that, I thought it was gonna be a lot different.

Vincent:

Well I didn’t go to high school; because, I went to the GED program.

So I never really got to experience the whole high school society.

*academic performance*. The participants identified factors that are common to sub-par academic performance associated with students labeled at-risk for completing standard high school diploma requirements. Dominate among the participant indentified factors were a lack of self-discipline and effort which consequently led to failure in courses and a diminished GPA.

Luis:

I guess once you start going down, once you start slacking on your school-work— it’s kind of hard to get yourself back up.

Rick:
I was behind in credits and my GPA (Grade Point Average) was pretty low

Vincent:
Well, middle school it was really chaotic. I didn’t really technically finish the eighth grade.

*influence of peers.* Each participant shared recollections of the impact of peers on their high school experience. This influence was couched in negativity ranging from a sense of fatalism to a lack of self-discipline. As before, the participants who attended Anhinga and Mallard High were prone to accepting onus for their situations.

Angel:
As the social structure of high school, once that started to set in, I started to get pretty distracted.

Luis:
When I was there, I kind of just like hung out with my friends and didn’t really take school seriously.

Oscar:
I started hanging out with friends and skipping class and doing stupid stuff that high school scholars do. And sophomore year was just more of like the snowball effect; it got worse and worse.

In contrast, those who attended Osprey cited various issues within the school culture and environment which they perceived played a part in their lack of success.

Rick:
They always had a lot of drama for some reason. It was just very dramatic. For some reason you couldn’t just walk through the hallways without somebody like
judging someone. I guess that’s a normal thing though for our age. People in the classroom weren’t helping either. Because, all right the teacher’s not helping you, so the kids are just not gonna care.

Vincent:
Like everyone was getting into trouble; everyone was getting expelled. So that really affected me, and like there was point where I really didn’t even want to go to school; because, like what was the point of going there if all you were doing was getting suspended and getting referrals every day. My classmates were influencing, more on me.

*perceptions of teachers and instruction.* The recollected experiences with regard to instructional personnel were shared by two of the participants. These responses certainly evidenced their frustration and calls into question the methods in which curriculum was delivered, the methods of instruction, and evaluation in the classroom setting.

Angel:
I was never by any means a bad student; I can have my teachers vouch for that and my mother vouch for that. I was very bored. I would be so disinterested in the curriculum, because I would know it. Sometimes the pace was too slow; so I would sleep in class.

Rick:
I mean, I’ve had classes where I would go into the class; the teacher would give you a worksheet, that’s it. She won’t discuss any lessons; she won’t go in the book, won’t do nothing. And, I’m talking one of those classes when they’ll say, “Can you bring in your textbook everyday”? You bring in your textbook, but for
what? Like, you’re not opening it. You’re not learning anything; and they expect you to come back the next day and try and ace the test.

perceptions of the school personnel response. The participants recollected experiences regarding school personnel’s responses to their at risk status and the options available to them.

Angel:

First they were disciplining me. After skipping for so long, I was disciplined. They gave me a pat on the head; you messed up. You could have done it; trying to keep me here, you can do it. I wasn’t convinced. If there’s one thing, it’s very hard for me to be convinced. They were like, we can lay this out for you; if you stay, we can do this. I was being stubborn and said no. They told me if I were to drop out one of my options would be GED. They didn’t tell me much about GED; they said one of my options would be GED (Under-aged GED).

Luis:

(To remain in regular high school) I would need to do on-the-job training, which is OJT (On the Job Training), which is – it’s a program where you work they’ll give you like seven or eight credits just for working while you’re in school. So that would’ve boosted my thing (number of credits) up to like 20 pretty much. (In what vocational area?) No, there wasn’t anything. Maybe – no I don’t think there was. I was just – she was going to give me that, but I wasn’t taking it yet. Like that would be the next thing, OJT I was going to do. And she told me I would do that and take credit recovery. And if I was to do all of that, I would be able to pass on time. But, I never really got to do that. So like, I’d say a week later, she called me back down,
and she gave me the option of doing the GED (Under-aged) program. It was – let me see. It was my guidance counselor and my assistant principal. They told me a little bit about it, and they called me down to let me know where I was in school. And pretty much like what I have to do to pass, and if I don’t do it, this is another option. They called my mother in to let her know this is what’s gonna happen. When they called her in and they called me down, they told her what programs I needed to take – like they gave me an option.

Oscar:
Towards the end of summer, so the Friday before school started that year, I got a phone call from Mr. Seagull. Well, I got a phone call from my mom; he called my mom. And she said, you need to go to Mallard. So, she came and picked me up, and we went to Mallard; and we had the meeting about me entering the program (Under-aged GED). Mr. Eider (Under-aged GED teacher) and my mother as well. Just them telling me like hey, this is a better way out then you like finishing in two years. You might as well do it now and start college.

Rick:
What I remember is that me and my mom had went to Osprey and went to the main office, which the office isn’t helpful at all and very rude. But, we asked to speak to Ms. A, yeah Ms. A. Ms. A, (the night-school guidance counselor) talked to us I think. Oh, yeah and then she took me to Ms. Ten, (the night school principal); and she’s the one that basically helped everything. If it wasn’t for her, I probably wouldn’t have been able to do it (Under-aged GED).

Vincent:
Well it was first, it was the guidance counselor, she told me to try out B.J. Honeydew (career center) but they didn’t accept me for some reason; I can’t recall the reason specifically. I had a little bit of help from my guidance counselor and my principal. That was a good helpful thing that they did. They gave me the chance to go to the GED (Under-aged GED) program.

_perceptions of the school personnel roles._ Within the participants’ recollections was an apparent lack of consistency in how their respective high schools followed the protocol set forth in the exit-interview procedures. In some instances, there was an absence of the exit-interview procedure.

Angel:

Assistant principals actually doubled as guidance counselors sometimes. For the most part the assistant principal; it was an assistant principal, There was another (assistant principal), a tall woman, I forgot her name. Those two basically are the ones I spoke to about my decision. I don’t remember that much intervention with the guidance counselor. I remember more strongly the assistant principal. They wanted punishment. Yeah, that’s normally how it ran. I came back with my mother and I was like you know, let’s just make sure we get this over with, I don’t want to be here anymore. I was at least 16, the process of un-enrolling me was not that difficult, I came up and said I want to leave. Are you sure you want to do this? Stuff like that. I had to do it.

Luis:

The school recommended it (Under-aged GED). First, they gave me – instead of the GED (Under-aged GED), they gave me credit recovery. It was – let me see,
it was my guidance counselor and my assistant principal. Miss Ibis was my guidance counselor, and Miss – what was her name? I forgot her name; they were the two people that told me about the (Under-aged GED) program. When they called me down, they told me. Yeah, they were together. We were all in the same room, my mother and the two people, the two women. They told me if I don’t – she said about a half a semester to get a 2.0. She said pretty much I’d have to get all A’s in everything, like even little assignments and that I would need a 2.0 (minimum GPA) more credits. They gave me a little slip to go down to the office. She brought me to the Under-aged GED teacher during like my second period.

Vincent:

Yeah they called both of them, my mother and my father and they talked to them. They pulled me down aside because they still think I was a trouble maker. So he (the middle school principal) talked about the GED with them and that’s what was necessary. Then the teacher, the principal and all of them made a reunion and that the only way that I could pass was if I went to the GED (Under-aged GED) program so they guided me the right way.

participants’ decision to enroll in the ABE/Under-aged GED. The participants’ responses alluded to skepticism and responsibility for one’s actions as they described the process by which they were advised and decided to enroll in the U-GED program. In addition, they spoke of the classroom structure, procedures, and practices of their respective U-GED program’s instructor/s and how they perceived its effectiveness in comparison to their respective traditional high school experience.
selecting the ABE/Under-aged GED. The responses of the participants, alluded to skepticism and responsibility for one’s actions in selecting to enter the program

Angel:

I remember going home and doing my own assessment. I find something and I research and GED was one of them. Before I dropped out I found out if GED would be a viable option, if it would be considered equivalent to a high school diploma. I didn’t want it to be more difficult. I wanted GED to keep me on the track to actually staying in school and getting my diploma and using it to get the job. I did the research to make sure it was true because a lot of people said it was true so I did.

Luis:

I didn’t ask any of peers about it; like I didn’t ask anybody. I knew some of the kids that were in the program already. And I just kinda like went off on my own like all my friends that I had in school I just kind of like went away and did my own thing. So it was just my own choice to do it. I was actually not going to do it because I kinda wanted to stay in school and try, but I felt like it was if I would’ve stayed, I probably would’ve had to have done another year. I wouldn’t be passing with my class, which is what I wanted; just something was telling to go. Like just do it and you’ll be done before your friends even get out and you’ll still be able to see them.

Oscar:

Well, I went home and thought about it and I left Mr. Seagull a voicemail on his mailbox maybe a day before school or maybe a couple of days and I said I’m gonna
do the (Under-aged GED) program. And I called Mr. Eider (Under-aged GED teacher).

Rick:
I was way too behind. I didn’t want to stress myself out, so I said I’ll just do this. It’ll help me, and maybe the teacher will actually help me out. I didn’t want to stop school and then wait a month before I mean you have to wait, but I didn’t want to wait too long to sign up for something. So I mean I wanted to do it ASAP because I didn’t want to be behind. So I did that (Under-aged GED).

Vincent:
They really gave them (parents) the path; which was I had to go to the (Under-aged) GED at Osprey or the GED (Under-aged GED) program at any other high school. I chose Osprey.

*process of enrolling in the ABE/Under-aged GED.* When considering the recollected responses of the participants, the process by which students enrolled in the program was rather consistent within a given school site. Yet, there was a lack of consistency with the enrollment process from school-site to school-site.

Angel:
There was a building on the side of Anhinga; it was part of Anhinga, and it was on the side. There was a woman there I had to speak to. I forget her name. She had a little classroom there. I talked to her and told her my situation and she told me what my options are. Part of it is going to be online and every so often I am going to ask you in on Tuesday and Wednesday and going to assess you from what you learn online. There is an assessment online as well but also a curriculum. (Mother went
with you?) I think for the most part it was just me.

Luis:

I went to go meet Mr. Eider (Under-aged GED teacher) and saw what the room was like; and he gave me a slip for orientation – to come another day with my mom and to check out the room and see how the program is. And I ended up doing that, on a Thursday afternoon. And we met in the cafeteria of Mallard. And he pretty much explained how the program was run, what his rules were and where he wants us to be.

Oscar:

I never heard back from Mr. Seagull (assistant principal), but Mr. Eider called me back; and he said that I’m signed up and stuff, so come in for orientation.

Rick:

Ms. A (the night-school guidance counselor) walked me over there, and she said I need you to help him. Hmm-hmm, that’s what happened. Ms. Ten (the night-school principal); made it pretty basic. Then they make you wait a month or two for you to actually start the program, and that was about it.

*recalling the ABE/Under-aged GED experience.* The participant responses with regard to their experience within the program setting can be classified within four areas: issues related to the classroom structure and procedures, the GED examination, the practices and effectiveness of the programs’ instructors, descriptions of peers in the program. The participant responses also contained comparisons to their respective traditional high school experience.
classroom structure.

Angel:
It was pretty simple. It was a lot simpler than I expected. I expected it to be just as difficult as high school but the GED’S would low ball me. It either appears that way or I can’t really tell if the curriculum they gave in GED is the same as in high school. The curriculum they taught was easy; it seemed a lot easier. While I was learning the GED curriculum I was learning my own. I always kind of learn my own. It didn’t turn out to be too difficult.

Luis:
When I got in there, I was kinda skeptical. I loved the program. I actually enjoyed waking up in the morning and coming to the class. That’s how much better it was than like actual regular school. I just sat in one desk all day, and I listened to one teacher. It was different to me.

Oscar:
It was a different experience. It was like going to detention and doing work; so, I kept to myself most of the time, stuff like that.

Rick:
The environment was pretty cool. Everybody was relaxed with each other; there were no arguments, nothing. There were White kids in there, there were Hispanics, and there were Blacks, so I don’t think race is a matter with anything. It was good.

Vincent:
It was really good! Like everyone was nice in there.
procedures and schedules.

Luis:
First they make you take a test. And if you’re at a certain level – if you’re above, you’re with Mr. Eider; if you’re not above the levels they want you to be, you’re with the other teacher. I had Mr. Eider for two of the three classes. And he does reading, writing and, I think, math. For math, I was with the other teacher, and for reading and writing, I was in his class, I didn’t understand that because I didn’t pass the FCAT. And those scores were based on like – not FCAT, but they were like pretty around there. And that was kinda weird for me that I passed the reading part and not the math. So it was kinda backwards. I loved the way that the class was run. We got out early. We would go in at 8:00a and get out like around 1:00p. We would do math, reading and writing for like two hours each. And he would give us a break for every other period, so when we’d get out of reading, we would do reading for about an hour and a half, get like a 30-minute break, and then go on to writing. And then we – after writing, we would do math. And after math, he’d let us go.

Oscar:
I remember going in same time as regular school, its 7:25a, 7:30a, something like that. We left at 12:30p.

Rick:
She (the teacher) will tell you to read in the book, she won’t tell you what page, she won’t tell you anything like that. You have to do it yourself, but at least she’s telling you what book, what you have to learn. She’s telling
you what you’re bad at, unlike the high school teachers who would just tell you oh, you’ll learn if you keep studying. That’s not helping me; because, I don’t know what it is that I need to learn. She wouldn’t just teach you what you have to learn, the basic stuff. She’ll get you ready; she’ll teach you some other stuff ahead.

GED examination. Only one participant shared his experience with regard to actual GED examination. Angel reflected upon the preparation he received in the program and his perception of the exam.

Angel:
The GED themselves, the curriculum they taught was easy, but having passed all the assessments, the assessment I took Yeah, that was actually pretty difficult. I remember taking the test and not knowing basically. It felt like what they taught me was just the basic. It could be me not learning the entire curriculum. I am a really good test-taker; it ended up working out for me anyway. I had done my own personal research. The people (teachers) missed some and just given me what I needed for the (in classroom) assessments.

instructor/s. Some of the participants expressed their appreciation for the personality, instructional technique, and personal dedication of their instructor/s

Luis:
I met both the teachers; there were two teachers. I had Mr. Eider for two of the three classes. He didn’t take like disrespect from anybody. Everybody in there, they listened. If you act up, he just kicks you out of the program.

Rick:
The teacher will actually help me out, and she did, she was very helpful. Unlike the high school teachers, that was not very helpful. But in high school, I don’t know why they wouldn’t make it just specific for me. She would, I’m not saying she made it easy for me, she didn’t. It took me time.

Vincent:
The teacher she was especially the most helpful to me, because she really sat down and explained stuff to me. She really took her time. I also did the best that I could to help myself out. That’s what really helped me out.

Peers. Some of the participants had little or nothing to relate with regard to peers within the classroom setting. This was suggestive of a relative sense of isolation associated with working within a classroom format designed for individual students’ self-paced progress. In addition, this may be related to the mode of curriculum delivery commonly associated with computer-based instructional programs. Yet, three of the participants were cognizant of peers.

Luis:
Usually the kids in there, they’re not like the greatest kids. They’re kind of not disciplined. There were some kids that got fired. All the kids that I knew that I hung out with inside of that class, we all made it. We all did the test and we all made it out.

Rick:
In the GED program everybody got along with everybody. I mean there were certain kids in there that I would see why they were in there because they looked very lazy, I mean everybody’s different. There are those lazy kids, and there are
those kids that actually want to get somewhere. I would think that if you’re lazy and not going to do anything you shouldn’t join the program, at least not yet until you’re ready.

Vincent:

Like there was still like one person that still had the little trouble maker influence, and then I really decided not to like. I just decided to ignore that, and they (the other students) were really good.

participants’ conceptions of the program’s impact. The participants’ conceptions and reflections regarding the impact of having enrolled and completed the U-GED program highlighted expressions of self-evaluation, self-satisfaction, personal accomplishment, and future pursuits. Furthermore, the participants shared the reaction of peers, family, and friends with regard to their decision to enroll in the alternative credentialing program. Finally, the participants’ responses reflected personal aspirations, perceptions of obstacles overcame, obstacles that remain and are to come which evidenced their resolve and resilience.

contemplating the impact of having enrolled. As the participants reflected regarding the impact of completing the program, various aspects were highlighted. Dominate among them were expressions of self-evaluation, self-satisfaction, personal accomplishment, and their future pursuits.

Angel:

I think the next step comes from me using the opportunity that was given. Using that and proving to me that I didn’t just drop out, or it was a getaway. This is not so much how I can perform intellectually; actually, it does have to do with how I can
perform intellectually, but now it takes me turning into an adult. Making sure I have the money to pay for the college, stuff like that. I think it’s more than possible, but that’s where the work comes from. At this point work comes from being responsible.

Luis:

So I ended up doing the GED (Under-aged GED), which was actually good choice for me. When I graduated, I had, I have a girlfriend that was still in high school. She was still going for her diploma. And I went to their graduation, because their graduation was the same place mine took place. And it was the same exact experience; like I got to see how Mallard did theirs. And I got to see how my class did theirs, and it was pretty much the exact same thing. So, I mean it was really like, there was like nothing to miss out on.

Oscar:

I pretty much have always wanted to graduate. I’m the 5 of 6 siblings and the older brother that’s a little bit older than me is the first one to graduate, so I wanted to kind of keep that trend going.

Rick:

I actually got to move on. I felt like I was actually learning a little something. I felt good, I was actually learning stuff, taught myself how to do things. I was able to teach myself that I have to go in the book and study and all this. It was pretty cool.

Vincent:

I felt that this was a good decision for me, the right decision for me, and that this
program did you a lot of good.

*perceptions of others*. The reaction of peers, family, and friends with regard to the participants’ decision to enroll in the alternative credentialing program were mixed.

Angel:

Dropping out and getting a GED at Anhinga is a pretty big statement; it’s viewed as a negative thing. It feels like a common stereotype. No one in the actual GED group thought it was a bad decision, but family sometimes, friends, some students. I told them I was going to drop out and get my GED and they told me don’t do that. They really wouldn’t tell me why not, and I kept asking why not? They would say things like, what are you doing dropping out? There was a pretty big social stigma. I think most of the influence is with fellow students and what they think of you. Since I mentioned earlier, I was one of the only one of my friends to drop out; it felt like that, but I am doing fine. They have no idea.

Luis:

For anybody that has done the program, I’m pretty sure everybody feels the same way about the program. I’ve talked to kids about this program that they have for like at Sandpiper High and like all the other high schools that do it. I have friends that transferred from that school to go to the one I have, the one I’ve been to. And pretty much, they you know, I’ve talked to them, and they told me it’s the same thing just the way they run it is a little bit different. But it’s the same kind of program; it’s the same exact way they run it, the same subjects and everything. And everybody has told me they agree with what I say. It’s a great program and was the best choice for them.
reflecting on the decision. The participants’ responses reflected personal aspirations, perceptions of obstacles overcome, obstacles which remain and are to come, personal regret and personal satisfaction, as well as satisfaction with the program experience.

Angel:
I have a lot of wants, I have a lot of goals, but most of the time I don’t have a clear way to go about them. It’s finding out the way to go about them that I find difficult; partly because, my goals and wants require a lot of money. I am trying to gauge exactly how much work. In general, people tell you that you should get a job, but when it comes to what I want a career in, I want a career in astronomy and I want masters in astronomy. Whether or not that’s shooting too high, being that I can’t afford it, is something I am debating internally. It’s something I really want. It is working; there is progress, but it’s very slow.

regret.
Angel:
I didn’t and I don’t have much guidance in order to fulfill my goals; it is difficult. My fellow students, they figured out where they want to go to college. Because I dropped out, I didn’t participate in any of that; so, they were a little more prepared. If I would have known that what I cared for in the end is to go to college and get a career, I would have participated in all the programs that help you practice the SAT. I would have participated in the programs that help you decide for college and how to pay tuition; all that stuff.

One participant response was somewhat ambivalent.
Luis:
I feel like I didn’t have any regrets. Yeah, I could’ve just like gone to school, you know, instead of like skipping. Because that’s what I did, I skipped. I could’ve just gone to class. Just nonetheless, it would’ve been, it would’ve made a lot of difference. I would’ve had just, if I would’ve went to class, I would’ve done a little bit of work. And it would’ve pushed me up, you know, a little bit maybe. But, I would’ve still had a chance if I would’ve never just missed out on those days.

Oscar:
Bitter, sweet! I should have gone to class and done my work like most kids should do; because, I’m missed out on everything like band and my senior year. I regret not having a senior year, a little more bitter than sweet, but kids tend to grow up some time and now is the time.

satisfaction.

Luis:
I feel like I made a good choice. There’s nothing really negative I can say about the program. Like, I’d recommend it to, I still do recommend it to people that are going through the same thing I went through. I tell them, listen, before you turn 18, you might want to do that program that I did. I let everybody know that comes in like all my friends that are still in high school.

Rick:
I feel good. I think GED got me more ready for college than Osprey High School would of or any high school. In the end, I think the GED was a better decision
because now I think I can handle college. Like when I’m in college, I feel like when the teacher tells me to just go in the book and do this, I can do it! Because, I discipline myself to actually go in the book and do all that; because the GED, that’s how you have to pass it.

Vincent:
I think that I would have failed if I went to B. J. Honeydew (career center); because, I, really, that was a career center, and I would have just got lost in there. It was better with the one teacher focusing on me; that was really good.

Responses to patterns to themes. There was an inductive emergence of similar patterns in the responses to personal perception and the perception of others recollected by the participants with regard to being Latino.

relating what Latino means to me. With regard to being Latino, There were expressions of pride:

Angel:
I am a Latino male, a pretty proud thing.

A sense of equality:

Oscar:
I think it’s just a label. Really, I’m just like every other American.

And tolerance of other races and ethnicities:

Rick:
I don’t find a difference in it. Somebody Hispanic, Black or White is the same thing.
When viewed from a critical perspective, what underlies these expressions is the concept of colorblindness which may have been adopted as a mindset. Perhaps, that mindset is a manifestation of the White dominant culture’s rhetoric which professes that racial privilege has been eradicated. This has been countered by Critical Race theorists who maintain that those who are privileged are blind to the reality that their power is maintained in the practices and structures still entrenched in the society (Bell, 1992; Cole & Maisuria, 2007; Delagdo & Stefancic, 1994; Lopez, 1995). As a result of continuous exposure to such rhetoric, can it be proposed that these young adults have abandoned their cultural uniqueness?

Luis:

I just see it as me being a regular person that just knows another language.

Or, can it perhaps be a product of the inherent naiveté of youth?

Vincent:

Hispanic is just like a label; it doesn’t really show like the qualities of that person.

Critical Race theorists and LatCrit theorists such as Delgado Bernal (2002) maintain that practices and structures remain in place which discount the histories, experiences, cultures, and languages of children and people of color causing them to experience difficulty in maintaining a sense of the value inherent in their unique social/racial identity and their “system of knowing” (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Dillard, 1997, 2000; Gordon, 1990; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Scheurich & Young, 1997).

others’ perceptions of Latinos. The recollected perceptions of the participants with regard to how Latinos were perceived in general and particularly in their respective school settings revealed similarities and differences. In some ways, these expressions
belie their beliefs of assimilation and acceptance. For example, Angel expressed his experience with the general perception of Latinos and its personal impact:

I know that we have a bad reputation a lot of times in some states. I think it’s up to some of us to show differently, but not many prove to be different. So, to me it’s an opportunity to show we are proud and smart.

*Self-perception and the perceptions of peers.* Participant responses regarding their perception of their race and ethnicity and their peers’ perceptions were generally consistent.

Angel:

Being Hispanic was not that much of an issue because a large majority of the students were Hispanic. So, it didn’t feel like we were judged.

The recollections of both participants who attended Mallard High School described a slightly similar scenario with regard to peers. Luis spoke of being a part of groups of students of various races. He felt race and/or ethnicity was a non-issue at Mallard High:

I wasn’t really treated differently. I hung out with all kinds of races. There was never really a problem with, you know, any Hispanics or blacks or anything.

On the other hand, Oscar related a perception suggestive of racial overtones.

Loud! Most of the Hispanics were in ESOL classes, and they all stick together. I never hung around a whole bunch of Hispanics. I was in the band program, so the Hispanic to White ratio was like 3 to 25. I mean most of my friends are pretty respectful about it. Of course, we joke about it. I’m the Hispanic of the group and there’s the Indian guy of the group. I was usually the only Hispanic, so I usually got all the Hispanic jokes. For the most part, no one really crossed
that line. It was always just friendly joking; it wasn’t anything.

Contrastingly within the other two high school settings, the recollections of Rick who attended Osprey High School and Vincent who attended an area middle school, detailed self, peer, faculty, and staff perceptions containing clear references to racial issues.

Rick:
I was never one of those, but I would always see Hispanics and like the Blacks fighting each other. I’m thinking at that age everybody wants to be macho; so, for some reason they’re going to school not to learn but fight each other. But that’s not only the Blacks they assume. I think it’s everyone as well. I mean the first day of school I saw a White kid fighting. First day of freshman year, I saw a White kid fighting; so, I’m not going to a school and judge only Hispanics! I see a whole bunch of different races fighting each other. So, I think it’s just natural.

Vincent’s recollections were even more poignant and his perception of how Latinos were viewed and includes himself among the “trouble makers”.

We were viewed as trouble makers because part of us, part of that, it was because we were trouble makers. I hung out with really they were all Hispanic, but they came from families who like their parents were in jail. They had different troubles in their family and their home; so, they just acted out in the school.

**perceptions of faculty and staff.** Among the most interesting of responses with regard to this aspect was related by Angel. His response was reminiscent of his general perception and draws into question his acquiescence to the agency of the adults in his school-setting:

I know that given that some of the teachers were, I believe, prone to stereotyping;
I’m pretty sure whether they liked it or not, they stereotyped. I remember just being a Latino and looking like, if you looked the wrong way, they had no choice but to stereotype you. I wasn’t one of those. I went out of my way to make sure I didn’t look like a hoodlum.

Vincent:
They just, we were viewed as trouble makers basically all Hispanics. The last principal I had, basically the years before that, they just looked at us as trouble-makers. The people that were before them, they looked at us like trouble-makers.

In addition, there was an inductive emergence of similar patterns in the responses of the participants with regard to their educational experiences in both the traditional high school setting as well as the Under-aged GED program, and their perceptions of the roles and practices of the school-based professionals with which they were in contact. These patterns were woven into thematic and sub-thematic material for analysis and subsequently led to the emergence of three overarching themes.

**Themes**

When examining the recollected responses of the participants with regard to traversing each personal journey from the traditional school setting to the culminating attainment of the GED high school credential, the overarching themes which emerged were three-fold: a sense of isolation, the positive effects of structure, and the power of personal resilience. These interwoven themes emerged as the subsequent levels of analysis unfolded and were based upon the initial organizational areas of inquiry from the interview response data, the input of the critical informants, my field-notes and experiential reflections.
Isolation. The conceptualization of isolation as a factor in the high school dropout phenomena is recognized by researchers (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Lee & Burkam, 2003). This isolation can be perceived as a process of disengagement that begins well before students arrive at the moment when they leave school (Lee & Burkam, 2003). A sense of isolation was evident across the participant responses which indicated behaviors and factors commonly associated with isolation occurring in school contexts. Initially emerging in the traditional high school context, the isolation was mostly self-imposed. It continued within the context of the Under-aged GED program albeit couched as more of an imposition by the structure of the program.

traditional high school context. Within this context the participant responses indicated the following isolative factors: absence from recitation, more commonly referred to as skipping, a lack of relationships with teacher/s or other school personnel, a lack of positive relations with peers, and a lack of involvement in school activities.

skipping. All but one of the study’s participants indicated their decision not to regularly attend either one or more of their classes. This behavior began early and obviously served as a major factor in their lack of academic success.

Angel:

After skipping for so long, I was disciplined.

Luis:

I could’ve just like gone to school, you know, instead of like skipping. Because that’s what I did, I skipped.

I could’ve just gone to class.
Oscar:

I started hanging out with friends and skipping class.

lack of positive relationships with teachers and peers. It was apparent from the participant responses that positive relations with teachers or other school personnel were rarely established. This has been widely recognized as a factor contributing to the disengagement of students and their subsequent withdrawal from school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999). Unengaged students have stated that teachers are apathetic with regards to them, their education, and their problems (Fine, 1987; Lee & Burkam, 2003; MacLeod, 1987; Valenzuela, 1999; Wayman, 2002). Most of the participants expressed that they felt some form of either apathy and/or negativity from school personnel and some could not recall names of teachers and/or staff in which they were in direct contact about their schooling.

Angel:

I know that given that some of the teachers were, I believe, prone to stereotyping; I remember just being a Latino and looking like, if you looked the wrong way, I went out of my way to make sure I didn’t look like a hoodlum.

I don’t remember that much intervention with the guidance counselor. … a tall woman (assistant principal) I forgot her name.

Luis:

It was, let me see, it was my guidance counselor and my assistant principal. Miss Ibis was my guidance counselor, and
Miss – what was her name? I forgot her name.

Rick:

Some of the teachers are good; some of them weren’t really helpful at all. Some were aggressive for some reasons; I don’t know. Support from teachers?! Not at all!

In addition, some interview responses indicated that the lack of positive relations and interactions with their peers contributed to the disengagement. This aspect has also been documented by researchers who have stated that students via interviews have voiced social reasons such as not getting along with teachers or other students were instrumental in their decision to quit school (Caterall, 1998; Lee & Burkam, 2003).

Rick:

They always had a lot of drama for some reason. It was just very dramatic. For some reason you couldn’t just walk through the hallways without somebody like judging someone. I guess that’s a normal thing though for our age. People in the classroom weren’t helping either. What I remember is that me and my mom had went to Osprey and went to the main office, which office isn’t helpful at all and very rude.

Vincent:

Like everyone was getting into trouble; everyone was getting expelled. So that really affected me, and like there was point where I really didn’t even want to go to school; because, like what was the point of going there if all you were doing was
getting suspended and getting referrals every day. My classmates were more influencing on me.

**lack of involvement in school activities.** Over the past twenty-eight years as an educator, it has been my experience as a teacher and school counselor that students who are not involved in school activities either academic or extra-curricular are not generally successful and are not likely to complete a traditional high school credentialing program of studies. This has been echoed by researchers who have posited that while at risk students have taken onus for their actions, they are not solely responsible for disengagement; and that school restructuring both academically and socially would enhance the development of social relationships which are powerful incentives for students to come to school and be successful (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006 Fine, 1991; LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991; Lee, Smerdon, Alfeld-Liro, & Brown, 2000; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandes 1989). Some of the participant responses were indications of such circumstances.

Angel:

I was very bored. I would be so disinterested in the curriculum, because I would know it. Sometimes the pace was too slow; so I would sleep in class. I was one of the only one of my friends to drop out.

Luis:

I didn’t ask any of peers about it; like I didn’t ask anybody. I just kinda like went off on my own.

Oscar:

I should have gone to class and done my work like most kids should do;
because, I’m missed out on everything.

**Under-aged GED context.** In the Under-aged GED (U-GED) context there are several factors which may be perceived as contributing to a sense of isolation: Most of these factors are related to the structure of the program: the mode of curriculum delivery, the lack of interaction with peers, the physical location of the U-GED classroom, and the separation from traditional high school’s activities and student population.

*curriculum delivery and lack of peer interaction.* The vast majority of curriculum is delivered via the computer. In general, this constitutes a one-on-one delivery system which virtually neither allows nor encourages any interaction with peers during class time.

Angel:

Part of it is going to be online and every so often I am going to ask you in on Tuesday and Wednesday. While I was learning the GED curriculum, I was learning my own.

Luis:

I just sat in one desk all day I knew all the kids in the class, but I didn’t hang out with certain ones

Oscar:

It was like going to detention and doing work; so, I kept to myself most of the time,

*separation from traditional high school’s activities and student population.* The majority of U-GED programs are housed in portable classrooms. The portable classrooms are physically located at an appreciable distance from the traditional high
school buildings. The physical situation of the U-GED context contributes to the sense of isolation. In addition, U-GED students are not entitled to participate in the extra-curricular activities associated with the traditional high school experience and are prohibited from mingling or interacting with the traditional students on campus. Violation of such stipulations by U-GED students can result in punitive measures such as short term or long term suspension from the program or permanent dismissal from the program. Because participants are usually attending U-GED programs housed on the identical campus of the traditional school they once attended, a unique dynamic is set in place. The participants voiced various thoughts and feelings as to the effects and impact of these isolative attributes of the program.

Angel:

I didn’t participate in the programs that help you decide for college and how to pay tuition; all that stuff.

Luis:

Unlike all my friends that I had in school, I just kind of like went away and did my own thing.

As with most high school students, extra-curricular activities associated with the social aspects of schooling were of import to some of the participants. Some of the participant reflective responses were couched in regret. These expressions included regret for opportunities lost which impacted their past and future experiences.

Angel:

I didn’t and I don’t have much guidance in order to fulfill my goals; it is difficult. My fellow students, they figured out where they wanted
to go to college. Because I dropped out, I didn’t participate in any of that.

Oscar:
I’m missed out on everything like band and my senior year. I regret not having a senior year.

Vincent:
Well I didn’t go to high school; because, I went to the GED program.
So, I never really got to experience the whole high school society.

**Structure.** The school setting with regard to size and organization has been recognized as a factor affecting students who elect to drop out of school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Lee & Burkam, 2003, Valenzuela, 1999). In larger school contexts, the obvious resulting consequences are that the larger student population increases student to school counselor and assistant principal ratios and classroom memberships increases student-teacher ratios. These increases may diminish the likelihood of relationships developing between students, teachers, and other school personnel. Students who have been subjects of both qualitative and quantitative research projects addressing their decision to leave school prematurely have expressed that satisfaction with schooling occurred most often when teachers were able to pay attention to them. Conversely, students stated that in large classrooms in which they were one of many, they were unknown by name. As aforementioned, this contributed to their sense of isolation and was a major source of dissatisfaction with schooling (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Lee & Burkam, 2003). How schools and classrooms are organized as well as managed play an integral role in student academic success and satisfaction with schooling and the decision to stay in school. Just
as compelling is the assertion that the lack of relationships with school personnel and positive organizational characteristics exacerbate student dissatisfaction and clearly contribute to the decision to drop out of school. The participants recollected such instances when describing their traditional high school experience.

**traditional high school context.** With respect to the traditional school settings that served as contexts in this study, participants described school and classroom organizational and management issues which were factors in their decision to terminate their enrollment in the traditional high school setting.

Angel:

They (assistant principals) wanted punishment. Yeah, that’s normally how it ran. I came back with my mother and I was like you know, let’s just make sure we get this over with, I don’t want to be here anymore. I was at least 16; the process of un-enrolling me was not that difficult. I came up and said I want to leave. I had to do it.

Rick:

High school really doesn’t help at all; you feel like you’re still in middle school. Like in middle school when the teachers are just bossing you around, it feels just like that, I thought it was gonna be a lot different.

Vincent:

Well, middle school it was really chaotic. They (administration) pulled me down aside because they still think I was a trouble maker.

*teachers.* The influence of teachers in the traditional high school contexts in this study was mixed. How teachers conducted classrooms and how teachers were perceived
outside of the classroom were factors influential to several of the participants. For example, the participant from Anhinga High, Angel stated that in his opinion “some teachers were prone to stereotyping.” This made him very conscious of his appearance and concerned about how he was perceived. He also described how he perceived the classroom environment contributed to his lack of success.

Angel:

I felt like the system failed me. I was very bored.

Both participants from Mallard High took onus for their lack of success at Mallard and were tacit regarding their traditional teachers. The most vocal of the participants was Rick who attended Osprey High School. His description of classroom experiences in the traditional context regarding teachers was marked with frustration.

Rick:

Yeah, I had some teachers that when you turn in some work, they’ll lose it; and then they’ll tell you that you never turned it in. And then, you’re sitting here going I turned it in. They’ll tell you, you never turned it in. So there’s nothing you could really do about it, because I didn’t make a copy of it. Now, I know to make copies of things, but at that age who am I to make a copy of my homework? Teacher’s just sitting there telling the kids oh, stop talking, stop doing this. But, the teacher on the other hand isn’t doing anything. It doesn’t make sense to me; because, they’re really not assisting you much at all.

Ultimately, the isolative nature of the larger traditional context with its inherent organizational structure inside and outside the classroom provided a powerful reason for the participants to contemplate and subsequently decide to enter the Under-aged GED
program. The participants and some of their parents referred to other factors such as the changing of classes and problems in establishing genial and working relationships with multiple teachers. Those were non-factors within the U-GED context; yet, the isolation from the majority of their peers and school extra-curricular activities were consequences.

**Under-aged GED context.** As related previously the program’s implementation by school-based educational leaders varied from school-site to school-site and an intricately parallel pattern emerged comprised of both consistency and contradiction. This aspect was of no import to the participants since they remained isolated in their individual U-GED context. The issues of import which did emerge in the participants’ recollections were primarily concerned with the positive factors inherent in the structure of the program.

*abbreviated school day.* Participants were grateful that the school-day was abbreviated which allowed for more hours to study, to work, or for recreation.

Luis:

We got out early. We would go in at 8:00a and get out like around 1:00p.

Oscar:

I remember going in same time as regular school, its 7:25a, 7:30a, something like that. We left at 12:30p.

*curriculum.* Participants spoke of the focused curriculum and the consistent structured delivery. They related that in their perception it was very different than their traditional high school experience.

Angel:
I can’t really tell if the curriculum they gave in GED is the same as in high school. The curriculum they taught was easy; it seemed a lot easier.

Luis:

We would do math, reading and writing for like two hours each. And he (the teacher) would give us a break for every other period; so, when we’d get out of reading, we would do reading for about an hour and a half, get like a 30-minute break, and then go on to writing. And then we – after writing, we would do math.

Oscar:

It was a different experience.

*one classroom setting*. Positive factors which were recollected by the participants included the low teacher to student ratio, the absence or significant reduction of class or teacher changes, the strictly defined classroom and program rules and its effect on the behavior of themselves and peers.

Luis:

For me, there’s no switching periods like besides the fact that when I started there was a switching but when I joined, like when I actually finished with the first teacher, I stayed in Mr. Eider’s class for the remainder of the day. I just sat in one desk all day, and I listened to one teacher. I had one-on-one time with that teacher. Everybody in there, they listened. So it was kinda different from regular school. If you act up, if you mess up, you’re not coming back for maybe another year. And the way the program is run, you have to be a certain age to be in that program. So if you were to mess up and you’re 17, like
that the minimum age for that program. And if you turn 18 when he (Mr. Eider, the GED instructor) kicks you out, you can’t come back. You have to get your GED (in the regular adult program).

Participants recollected having little or nothing to relate with regard to interacting with peers within the classroom setting and their peers impact on the classroom environment.

Luis:
I knew all the kids in the class, but I didn’t hang out with certain ones.

Rick:
The environment was pretty cool. Everybody was relaxed with each other; there were no arguments, nothing.

Vincent:
It was really good! Like everyone was nice in there.

While one can perceive and frame most of these aspects positively, some are suggestive of the relative sense of isolation associated with working within a classroom format designed for individual students’ self-paced progress utilizing a mode of curriculum delivery commonly associated with computer-based instructional programs. For example, the U-GED teacher related to one participant that his presence in the classroom was not always required. This may be a result of the aforementioned manner in which the U-GED programs were implemented in a variety of modes depending on school-site.

Angel:
Part of it is going to be online and every so often I am going to ask you in on Tuesday and Wednesday and going to assess you from what
you learn online. There is an assessment online as well but also a curriculum.

Oscar:

It was a different experience. It was like going to detention and doing work; so, I kept to myself most of the time, stuff like that.

*the caring teacher.* It was abundantly clear from the participants’ recollections that the relationship with the teacher and their influence mattered. Participants referred to the positive effects of how the teacher structured the delivery of the curriculum, provided one-on-one instruction and encouragement, maintained classroom discipline with simple rules and consistent consequences for violations, and aided them in enhancing their study skills to encourage self-reliance.

Luis:

I had Mr. Eider for two of the three classes. He didn’t take like disrespect from anybody. Everybody in there, they listened.

Rick:

The teacher would actually help me out, and she did, she was very helpful. I’m not saying she made it easy for me, she didn’t. It took me time.

Vincent:

The teacher she was especially the most helpful to me, because she really sat down and explained stuff to me. She really took her time. She really did what all of my other teachers that I had all of my life didn’t do, which was sit down and like really got to know like the student; really got to like help them out and do the best that she could to help me out.
Contrastingly, one participant’s recollection about his instructor was with regard to the actual GED examination experience.

Angel:

I remember taking the test and not knowing basically. It felt like what they taught me was just the basic. It could be me not learning the entire curriculum. I am a really good test-taker; it ended up working out for me anyway. I had done my own personal research. The people (teachers) missed some and just given me what I needed for the (in classroom) assessments.

**Academic resilience.** Resilience research has entered into the realm of academic success and persistence. Some researchers have chosen to term academic resilience as educational resilience (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994; Wayman, 2002). Wang et al., (1994) provided this definition, "… the heightened likelihood of educational success despite personal vulnerabilities and adversities brought about by environmental conditions and experiences" (p. 46). Jimerson, Egeland, and Teo, (1999) concluded that there are many students who despite the risks continue to do quite well academically.

It was evident to me that despite the challenges they encountered, the Latinos who participated in my study persevered and reached their goal of earning a high school credential. Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, and Cortes, (2009) stated, “A key requirement of resilience is the presence of both risk and protective factors that either help bring about a positive outcome or reduce and avoid a negative outcome (pp. 5-6). I found this was the case with my study’s participants.

**Risk factors.** Risk factors commonly associated with academic resilience such as minority student status, attendance in an inner-city school, residing in a low socio
economic area, or living in a home where English is not the primary language have been extensively documented. (Perez, et al., 2009). Researchers have also identified other social risk factors such as student mobility and single-parent status, which in conjunction with academic risk factors i.e. low expectations, grade retention, high absenteeism, and sub-par school performance; increase the likelihood of students discontinuing their schooling (Lee & Burkam, 2003; Rumberger & Larson, 1998). The life-situations described by the participants and what I observed as I visited their homes were emblematic in many instances of some of these risk factors.

One participant described moving from either one country to another and/or from one state to another within the United States.

Luis:

I grew up north in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Then I moved up here.

But they – my family, they’re from New York and like all of my other elders, they’re all from Puerto Rico.

Two of the five participants, Angel and Luis, described single-parent situations, blended families, and residing in multi-generational homes.

Angel:

My brother is my half-brother and my sister is my full sister. My sister is the daughter of my dad and my brother has a different father.

Luis:

I was raised with my mother, my aunts, my one cousin, my grandmother and my grandfather. I grew up in a 2-story house, and we were – I lived there (Connecticut) for about – I’d say since ’94 all the way to 2008.
My dad, I never lived with him. I grew up just with my mom. I see my dad once in a while, I know who he is – but he’s just – he’s never really been there like that.

All but one of the participants described high rates of absenteeism either self-perpetuated by skipping classes and/or school entirely or due to a period of prolonged illness.

Angel:

After skipping for so long, I was disciplined.

Luis:

When I was there, I kind of just like hung out with my friends and didn’t really take school seriously. Yeah. I could’ve just like gone to school, you know, instead of like skipping. Because that’s what I did, I skipped.

Oscar:

I started hanging out with friends and skipping class. I should have gone to class and done my work like most kids should do.

Then, every year during pollen season I get really bad allergies, but sophomore year it was really bad. So, I stayed home for most of the month of March, and on top of me not doing my work already that really set me back.

Vincent:

I really didn’t even want to go to school; because like what was the point of going there if all you were doing was getting suspended and getting referrals every day.
Accounts of sub-par academic performance were described by the participants. The academic deficiencies recollected included lack of academic credits with respect to one’s cohort, low GPA (Grade Point Average) which when projected would fall below the 2.00 graduation minimum, and/or failing scores on graduation benchmark examinations (FCAT).

**Luis:**

She (school-counselor) said pretty much I’d have to get all A’s in everything, like even little assignments and that I would need a 2.0, more credits. I didn’t pass the FCAT.

**Rick:**

I was behind in credits and my GPA was pretty low. I was way too behind.

**Resilience factors.** As with resilience research in general, resilience associated with education success is a result of the existence of factors that protect against adverse effects and enhance the chances of success (Wayman, 2002). Researchers have categorized these factors into personal factors and environmental factors (Alva, 1991; Arellano & Padilla, 1996; McMillan & Reed, 1994). Personal factors are those inherent within the individual such as a strong work ethic, self-confidence, and educational aspirations (Geary, 1988; McMillan & Reed, 1994; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994; Wayman, 2002). Environmental factors are external forces which offer protection and aid in overcoming obstacles. These forces include positive influences from adults such as relationships with teachers, familial support, peer-networking, and a positive learning environment (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; McMillan & Reed, 1994; Wang et al., 1994; Wayman, 2002). Many of these factors were present in the recollections of my study’s
participants as they ventured in the Under-aged GED program and successfully earned their high school equivalency credential. For example, the young man who attended Anhinga High voiced his self-reliance and concern for others. As I sat in his home while his mother prepared her meal to leave for work I could sense the support and respect he and his mother shared for one another as the exchanged glances.

Angel:

It’s an opportunity to show we (Latinos) are proud and smart.

I wanted the GED to keep me on the track to actually staying in school and getting my diploma and using it to get a job. While I was learning the GED curriculum I was learning my own. I always kind of learn my own. It didn’t turn out to be too difficult. I think the next step comes from me using the opportunity that was given. Now it takes me turning into an adult. Making sure I have the money to pay for the college, stuff like that. I think it’s more than possible, but that’s where the work comes from.

At this point work comes from being responsible. I hope that this research project benefits people who are on the stepping stone of getting their life together or want to get their life together. I hope this helps and I feel it is pretty important for growing. I really want others to succeed.

It was Luis that most emphasized how important a positive learning environment can be and how important it was to him to help support his mother and himself. This was initially evident when he requested that his gift card for participating be from somewhere that he could buy groceries. He also expressed a genuine concern for others.

Luis:
I loved the way that the class was run. He (Under-aged GED teacher) didn’t take
disrespect from anybody. Everybody in there, they listened. All the kids
that I knew that I hung out with inside of that class – we all made it.
We all did the test and we all made it out. I knew all the kids in the class,
but I didn’t hang out with certain ones. I loved the program. I actually
enjoyed waking up in the morning and coming to the class. So I ended
up doing the GED, which was actually good choice for me. Everybody has
told me they agree with what I say. It’s a great program and was the best
choice for them. I feel like I didn’t have any regrets. I feel like I made a
good choice. There’s nothing really negative I can say about the program.
Like, I’d recommend it to – I still do recommend it to people that are going
through the same thing I went through.
The other young man from Mallard High was in some ways anomalous of the study’s
participants. His parents were married prior to his birth and have remained so, and he
continues to reside with them in a relatively affluent area of the city. His interests were
seemingly more self-centered.
Oscar:
I pretty much have always wanted to graduate. I’m the 5 of 6 siblings and
the brother that’s a little bit older than me is the first one to graduate; so, I
wanted to kind of keep that trend going.
The participants from Osprey High echoed similar sentiments in their recollections. Rick
re-emphasized the importance of positive learning environs and the acquisition of skills
such as self-discipline and self-sufficiency. He also had a strong parental support system.
His mother attended the initial interview session and his father came home having left work early to meet with me after the session was concluded.

Rick:

I didn’t want to stop school. The environment was pretty cool. Everybody was relaxed with each other; there were no arguments, nothing. The (Under-aged GED) teacher actually helped me out, and she was very helpful. In the GED program everybody got along with everybody. It was good. I felt good, I was actually learning stuff, taught myself how to do things. I was able to teach myself that I have to go in the book and study. It was pretty cool. I think the GED was a better decision because now I think I can handle college. Like when I’m in college, I feel like when the teacher tells me to just go in the book and do this, I can do it because I discipline myself to actually go in the book.

Yet, I was most taken with Vincent who managed to successfully earn his high school credential going directly from the middle school into the Under-aged GED program and the positive attitude displayed as he recollected the experience.

Vincent:

Well I didn’t go to high school; because, I went to the GED program. That was a good helpful thing that they (school counselor and principal) did. They gave me the chance to go to the GED Program; so, they guided me the right way. It was really good like there they (peers) were really good. I felt that this was a good decision for me, the right decision for me, and that this program did you a lot of good. It was better with the one teacher
focusing on me; that was really good.

**Summary of Themes**

The three themes which unfolded as I contemplated the recollections of the participants were the sense of isolation, the positive effects of structure, and the power of personal resilience. As these themes emerged it became apparent that the themes evidenced a common thread, the caring Under-aged GED (U-GED) teacher. It was the U-GED teacher who mitigated much of the negative effects of isolation experienced by the participants by establishing a caring working relationship. It was the U-GED teacher who established the positive structure of the classroom by implementing rules to enhance success and apply those rules consistently. Finally by establishing such a classroom climate, the U-GED teacher facilitated the participants’ resilience.

While it is absolutely justifiable to place onus upon the individual for the self-imposition of isolation, for developing awareness of the import of structure, and for the personal protective factors that are an integral part of resilience; for students, it is the influences of school personnel especially teachers which seemingly play a key role. In many ways, it is the teacher who either heightens isolation inherent in the structural factors via the mode of curriculum delivery and the level of interaction between students and their peers, or lessens isolation by establishing a positive classroom climate and a caring relationship with students. Consequently, these influences impact personal and academic resiliency.

It was clear from the participants’ recollections that the relationship with the teacher and their influence mattered. Participants referred to the positive effects of how the teacher structured the delivery of the curriculum, provided one-on-one instruction and
encouragement, maintained classroom discipline with simple rules and consistent consequences for violations, and aided them in enhancing their study skills to encourage self-reliance. This self-reliance can be counted among the personal protective factors that promote resiliency. This factor in conjunction with the environmental factors included within the positive influences from adults such as relationships with teachers provides evidence of the centrality with which teachers are positioned in potentially enhancing or lessening isolative effects via structural modifications and aiding students in building resilient capacities.

In the chapter which follows I highlight the pertinent points for discussion as well as proposing implications for future practice, future research, and the study’s situation in the discourse regarding the impact of Latino students on schools and the schools’ educational impact on Latinos.
Chapter Five

Discussion and Implications

Discussion

**Rationale.** The impetus for this research study originated with my critical inspection of school-district and high school-based educational leadership practices that I had witnessed, as a result of my direct and practical experience as a public high school counselor in a diverse urban high school. I believed that some of these practices were covertly designed to encourage, coerce, or push over-aged students out of diverse high schools in a large metropolitan school district in Florida in an attempt to avoid the negative impact their presence in the schools may have had on publicly reported accountability performance indicators such as dropout and attendance rates and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) results. Specifically, I became curious regarding the utilization of the ABE (Adult Basic Education)/Under-aged GED (General Education Development) Program by the Flamingo County Public Schools and traditional high schools to move “over-aged” at risk students, who are primarily students of color, out of traditional high schools and into this alternative high school credentialing option offered by the school-district’s adult education program.

The direct focus of this study with regard to participants was pursuant to a personal interest as a Latino. Primarily, in my critical perusal of the literature, I discovered the depth and significance of the Latino dropout phenomenon. Particularly, Latino students identified as second-generation became of greatest interest to me. Seemingly nationwide,
a significant number of second-generation plus Latinos are considered *at risk* for completing a high school credentialing program while factors such as nativity, English fluency, and/or bilinguality point to potential for scholastic success (Farley & Alba, 2002; Hernandez & Nesman, 2004; Kohler & Lazarin, 2007). In many cases, the choice to leave the traditional high school setting in favor of a non-traditional completion option has curtailed the advancement of Latinos into post-secondary settings. Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) commented, “Latino male students are “vanishing” from the American education pipeline, a trend that is especially evident at the secondary and postsecondary levels” (p.54). I felt this was quite alarming and therefore, a phenomenon worthy of investigation.

In the light of this epiphany, I decided to conduct a phenomenologically informed multiple case study, about former Latino high school students and their recollected experiences with respect to their enrollment in the Adult Education (ABE)/Under-Aged General Education Development (GED) Program. I was specifically seeking to answer this overarching question: What may the recollected experiences of second-generation Latino students during the enrollment process in an Adult Education (ABE)/Under-Aged General Education Development (GED) program reveal regarding the factors which contributed to their enrollment, the resulting impact of having opted to enroll, and the roles/practices of the educational leaders who presented the program option to them during the enrollment process?

The research I conducted also sought to unearth and reveal educational leadership practices that may have served to push over-aged students out of diverse high schools. I speculated that such practices may be establishing a new form of tracking and
segregation by covertly coercing those labeled over-aged and under-achieving high school students, who are primarily students of color and specifically the focus of this study, Latinos out of high schools and into an ABE/Under-aged GED Program.

I composed this chapter expressly with the intent of highlighting and offering the pertinent points of the study for discussion. The chapter begins with a re-visitation of the questions and findings of the study, the participants’ perspectives and recollected experiences with regard to their decision to enroll in the U-GED, their recollections of the enrollment process, and the subsequent impact they perceived resulted from having enrolled in the program. In addition, the chapter cites implications for practice in educational leadership and implications for further research.

**Questions and findings.** My research study attempted to chronicle, analyze, and interpret the recollected experiences of selected second-generation Latino students who chose to enroll in the Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) Program as well as the how and why those selected second-generation Latinos students were advised and/or guided to enroll in the program by school-based educators. Since asking and attempting to answer questions surrounding the dynamics of placement practices into programs of this nature may provide opportunity for educational leadership to engage in self-reflection and in debate regarding professional practice and program options beneficial for Latino students and public-school leaders, the intertwined relative strands of literature emblematic of Latina/Latino-Critical Race Theory, Leadership for Social Justice, and Ethics of Accountability Pressure were woven into an inquiry framework utilized to frame the study’s research.
questions. This mindset was a significant contributing factor in tendering the following research questions:

1. What participant identified factors contributed to second-generation Latino high school students opting to enroll in an Adult Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program?

2. What were the recollected experiences of second-generation Latino students during the enrollment process in an Adult Education (ABE)/Under-Aged General Education Development (GED) program?

3. What do the participants conceive has been the impact upon their lives as a result of having enrolled in an Adult Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program?

**participant identified factors.** In reviewing the participant’s responses in this area of inquiry, I found that isolation and disengagement and the resultant associated effects were the most significant contributing factors in their decision to withdraw from the traditional high school and enroll in the ABE/Under-aged GED Program.

**absenteeism.** The consistent characteristic contributing to the participants’ decision to abandon the traditional high school context and their initial contemplation of dropping out of school entirely was absenteeism. This observation is consistent with the research literature on the dropout phenomenon in general. Researchers refer to non-attendance as one of the key academic risk factors (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Other academic risk factors which include low expectations, grade retention, high absenteeism, and sub-par school performance; increase the likelihood of students discontinuing their schooling (Lee & Burkam, 2003; Rumberger & Larson, 1998). It stands to reason that if
students do not attend school, the chances for academic success are severely diminished, and to me this implied that the most significant factor identified by the study’s participants was the absence of an established relationship with an adult on the traditional school campus.

_disengagement versus relationships_. The establishment of a positive relationship with any adult on campus can increase the odds of establishing a positive relationship with an educator. This in turn increases the odds of achieving academic success and decreases the likelihood of leaving the traditional setting and/or dropping out. Students who are disengaged within the school context have stated a lack of connectedness with teachers; even after having made efforts to gain assistance from school personnel (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Lee & Burkam, 2003). I utilize the term adult in the aforementioned statement simply because it has been my experience that those students who can identify and establish a positive relationship with any adult on campus: a secretary, school nurse, school resource police officer, or a custodian curtail the effects of isolation which leads to disengagement from schooling. The conceptualization of isolation as a factor in the high school dropout phenomena is recognized by researchers (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Lee & Burkam, 2003). This isolation can be perceived as a process of disengagement that begins well before students arrive at the moment when they leave school (Lee & Burkam, 2003).

elements of academic success. Reflecting upon academic success, such as earning a high school credential, the determinant elements are certainly intertwined. In Florida, the key elements which are necessary to attain a traditional high school diploma are a minimum grade point average (GPA), a set total of required and elective credits, and
passing scores on state assessment benchmarks. In reviewing the responses of the participants in the study, the only one of these three elements that was not consistently cited as a reason for withdrawing from the traditional high school was passing scores on state assessment benchmarks. In my perception, this was a significant contributing factor in the success of the participants in earning passing scores on the GED examination and earning the GED credential. I perceived this as an example of their academic resilience.

perception of personal ethnicity. The recollected perceptions of the participants with regard to how Latinos were perceived in general, and particularly in their respective school settings, were not considered by them to be a factor in their decision to opt for enrollment in the Under-aged GED Program. Yet in some ways, their responses belied their beliefs of assimilation and acceptance. Participant responses regarding their perception of their race and ethnicity and their peers’ perceptions were generally consistent; but, the individual recollections did reveal both similarities and differences.

While a particular participant response indicated a perception symbolic of the transformation of racial overtones to benightedness, contrasting responses from participants associated with the other two tradition high school settings revealed quite negative peer, faculty, and staff perceptions. These participant responses contained clear references to racial issues. One participant’s recollection was even more poignant and akin to the overt attitudes of the past including a statement self-identifying as among the “trouble makers” simply for being Hispanic. Another participant response was reminiscent of this general perception and draws into question the agency of the adults in his high school-setting who he felt “stereotyped” Latinos as “hoodlums”. Based upon all of the participant responses, I believe their recollections with regard to their ethnicity
were a significant factor in contributing to their isolation and disengagement from the traditional school context. These participant responses and the serendipitous dialogues with the participants’ parents that revealed their perceptions were indicative of what Valenzuela described as a lack of caring and cultural insensitivity (Valenzuela, 1999).

In summation, the significant factors contributing to the participants’ respective decisions to leave the traditional setting and enroll in the Under-aged GED Program were isolation and disengagement which contributed to their engaging in deviant behaviors such as skipping class and examples of psychic and emotional withdrawal symptoms of what Valenzuela referred to as “subtractive schooling” (Valenzuela, 1999, p.62). For example, Angel’s comments, “… get this over with, I don’t want to be here anymore”. I was very bored I would sleep in class. “After skipping for so long …”, or Vincent’s comments, “We were viewed as trouble makers”, “Like everyone was getting into trouble; everyone was getting expelled …” “…there was point where I really didn’t even want to go to school…” A combination of the traditional high school’s culture and climate, the participants’ recollected negative perceptions of the school’s faculty, staff, and peers regarding their ethnicity, and their self-imposed hindrances contributed to the state of isolation and the consequential disengagement. This became manifest in high absenteeism which profoundly impacts the intertwined determinant elements necessary to earn a traditional high school diploma: the attainment of the required number of credits at an achievement level to attain and maintain the minimum GPA; thus, cementing their status as academically at risk students which prompted a response from school-based educational leaders.
**participants’ recollections of the enrollment process.** The encouragement and advisement by assistant principals and/or school-counselors to enroll in the program was viewed by all of the study’s participants as a positive influence. Yet, in reviewing the responses of the participants, it is difficult to assess the validity of the advice and/or direction the individual students were afforded by school-based personnel as some of their respective responses ranged from skepticism and personal responsibility for one’s actions, to ambivalence, and to coercion in selecting to enter the program. The most notable aspect identified in the participants’ recollections was the apparent lack of consistency in how the traditional high schools followed the protocol set forth in the state-mandated exit-interview procedures, and some instances, the total absence of the exit-interview procedure. Regarding the participants recollected experience with the actual enrollment process into the ABE/Under-aged GED program, the process described by which students enrolled in the program was rather consistent within a given school site. Yet, there was a lack of consistency from school-site to school-site when considering the recollected perspectives of the participants.

**participants’ conceptions of the program’s impact.** Several aspects may be perceived as contributing to a sense of isolation inherent in the ABE Under-aged GED context related to the structure of the program: the mode of curriculum delivery, the lack of interaction with peers, the physical location of the U-GED classroom, and the separation from traditional high school’s activities and student population. Despite this isolative environ, the participants positively reflected upon their experience in the program and the ensuing impact of completing the program. Various aspects were highlighted such as a personal satisfaction of accomplishment, as well as satisfaction with
the program experience. Other issues of import which did emerge in the participants’ recollections were primarily concerned with the positive factors inherent in the structure of the program such as the abbreviated school day, tightly focused curriculum, and the single classroom setting.

Dominant participant recollections included expressions of emerging skills in self-evaluation, earning a sense of self-satisfaction from personal accomplishment, and feeling positively regarding their future pursuits. The significance of these revelations is in its relevance to personal and academic resilience. With regard to personal resilience factors, Wayman (2002) commented, “Self-concept and optimism have been shown to be especially critical for minority students, whose social and ethnic identities may be different from the school culture” (p. 168). While these attributes may or may not have been initially perceived by the participants, these became evident as they progressed in the ABE Under-aged GED Program. This was revealed as the participants’ related responses which reflected personal aspirations, perceptions of obstacles overcome, those which remain and those which are to come.

Contrastingly, some participant responses expressed were of an ambivalent nature and other participant reflective responses were couched in regret. These expressions included personal regret for opportunities lost which impacted their past and future experiences. As with most high school students, extra-curricular activities associated with the social aspects of schooling were of import to most of the participants and in part the missed opportunities were couched in regret.

Finally, it was abundantly clear from the participants’ recollections that the relationship with the teacher and the teacher’s influence mattered. This was singly the
most significant of findings related to the question of the program’s impact. Participants referred to the positive effects of how the teacher structured the delivery of the curriculum, provided one-on-one instruction and encouragement, maintained classroom discipline with simple rules and consistent consequences for violations, and aided them in enhancing their study skills to encourage self-reliance.

summation of findings to questions. There was an emergence of similar patterns in the participants’ recollections and responses to personal perception and the perception of others with regard to being Latino, their educational experiences in both the traditional high school setting as well as the ABE/Under-aged program, and their perceptions of the roles and practices of the school-based professionals with which they were in contact. In examining these interwoven patterns with regard to each personal journey traversing from a traditional school setting to the culminating attainment of the GED high school credential, I discovered: the debilitating effects of isolation, the positive effects of structure, and the power of personal resilience. It was amazingly evident to me that despite the challenges they encountered, the Latinos who participated in my study persevered and reached their goal of earning a high school credential.

Implications for Practice in Educational Leadership

Based upon the responses of the study’s participants, informal conversations with their respective parents, the study’s critical informants, and informal conversations with school-based faculty, staff, and administration; the following are recommended areas of address for practices: the import of the school’s culture/climate in establishing positive relationships, effective interviewing/hiring practices, and the contemplation of ethical considerations. As with much of the content of this research study, these facets are
interwoven. Educational leadership should consider its ethical accountability in creating a school culture and climate which addresses instances of negative and inequitable treatment of students (Scheurich & Laible, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999). Relatedly, a substantial factor in the creation of a student friendly school climate is contingent upon the attitudes and practices of those most directly involved with students, faculty. This highlights the import of developing effective interviewing and hiring practices.

**Relationships/relevance/rigor.** The high stakes accountability movement seems to have triggered a reaction among educational leadership that emphasizes rigor. This seems especially true at the school-district administrative level where the rhetoric begins and is perpetuated as it trickles down to school-based administrative personnel and faculty. It has been my experience and perception that in many ways this mindset has increased the level of anxiety for all stakeholders in the school including parents and students. As a result, this has deemphasized the importance of establishing positive relationships and was implied by the study’s findings.

One of the overarching themes which emerged from the study was the sense of isolation. Based upon the study’s findings with regard to the traditional high school context, this was manifested in the identification of the following isolative factors: absence from recitation, a lack of relationships with teacher/s or other school personnel, a lack of positive relations with peers, and a lack of involvement in school activities (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Caterall, 1998; Lee & Burkam, 2003). The recognition of these elements prompted a re-visitation of the Rigor/Relevance/Relationships (Littky & Grabelle, 2004) movement for reforming high schools to achieve high academic standards brought forth by Willard Daggett (2004) and
the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE). Based upon my study’s findings, a reordering which emphasizes the development of relationships as the primary tenet is warranted: Relationships/Relevance/Rigor. This is not an unprecedented observation as Littky and Grabelle (2004) as well as Daggett (2004) commented in their respective bodies of work: “You have to start with relationships” (Littky & Grabelle, 2004, p. 116). “Rigor and relevance are linked with relationships” and “Strong relationships are critical to academic success for students” (Daggett, 2004, p. 5).

Most relevant to my research study, the development of relationships has been documented by researchers as a means to mitigate the dropout phenomenon and may take on even greater importance to Latinos and their academic success (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Fine, 1987; Gordon, 1996; Lee & Burkam, 2003; MacLeod, 1987; Valenzuela, 1999; Wayman, 2002). I assert that the development of positive relationships between school-district administration, school-based administration, faculty, staff, students, parents, and the community at-large is paramount to the academic success of students deemed at risk as well as students in general (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Nicoll, 1992; Noddings, 1992; Peeks, 1993; Valdes, 1996; Valenzuelza, 1999).

The study’s participants related recollections of their respective traditional high school experience which painted a picture lacking in positive relations with school based personnel. The interactions that did occur were couched in negativity: “They wanted punishment. Yeah, that’s normally how it ran”. “They just looked at us as trouble-makers”. “Support from teachers?! Not at all”! There is a need for consideration by all
of these stakeholders to revisit and reemphasize the establishment of positive relationships.

Within the school building there should be more emphasis placed on cultural sensitivity and relationship building training for school based personnel. This could be accomplished via in-service training opportunities made available during pre-planning days prior to students returning to school for the fall term and could be incorporated for consideration and discussion in school’s professional learning community (DuFour, & Eaker, 1998) sessions.

*school district and community.* While not explored in the study through direct inquiry, but based upon the serendipitous dialogues with the participants’ parents, it was apparent that relations between these members of the Latino community and the respective high schools the participants withdrew from to enroll in the U-GED program were less than accommodating. Therefore, this aspect of practice should be reflected upon by educational leadership. Students will learn at their optimum potential when the two most important influences in their lives, home and school, cooperate in such a way to create a positive relationship (Peeks, 1993).

Several other researchers have speculated that an essential component in determining student academic success is the involvement of parents and the need to bridge gaps between school, home and community (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Epstein, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1996; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993; Valdes, 1996). This is vital with regard to increasing academic success and post-secondary opportunity for Latinos and other students of color and was supported by the findings in my research study as most of the study’s participants were
residing in single-parent family structures and economically disadvantage situations. Family dynamics have been consistently identified in the research as important factors in the academic and behavioral adjustment of children and adolescents (Nicoll, 1992). According to the Census Bureau's 2008 American Community Survey (ACS), Hispanics, among other minorities, were more likely to be eligible for the free and reduced/price lunch program, the most likely to attend high-poverty schools, and more than 75 percent of Hispanics and blacks were attending schools with high minority enrollment. Aud et al. (2010) stated, “Poverty and family structure influence a child’s learning environment… and poverty poses a serious challenge to children’s access to quality learning opportunities and their potential to succeed in school” (p. 16). For example, this is especially pertinent with regard to accessing technology.

The Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) has recently revised high school graduation requirements to include completion of an on-line course. Resources in these high-poverty communities are few and far between including public libraries where students must compete for limited computer access. Perhaps, school-district educational leadership could initiate/facilitate the establishment of a partnership between neighborhood schools and the local universities to provide access to technology for low-income students. This type of initiative would be welcomed by the community and forge another positive relationship which should translate into increased academic success and potential post-secondary opportunity.

While certain initiatives have been implemented by the Flamingo County Public Schools (FCPS) such as coordinating mentoring programs for students, an expansion of the programs designed to enhance community outreach should be seriously considered.
One such initiative designed specifically to aid Latinos in their educational pursuits was undertaken in the past by school-district educational leadership. This initiative was a combined effort by the University of Florida, Flamingo County Public School-district, and the US Department of Education. This educational triad recognized a need for bilingual school-counselors to provide aid to Hispanic children and their families as well as mediate difficulties in navigating the monolingual English school system. The Consejeros: Levantando El Pueblo (C-LEP) program was developed for providing school counselors to work with Hispanic/Latino students and their families for the express purpose of Uniendo a la Comunidad, la Familia y la Escuela (Uniting the Community, Family, and School).

The findings of my study indicated that this program is in need of expansion as currently there still remains a limited number of culturally competent, bilingual school counselors as well as bilingual school-based administration, faculty and staff. The participants’ parents spoke of feeling unwelcome and some of them, who possess little or no command of English, expressed feeling intimidated and as a consequence remained unconnected to the school. Latino students are coping with a number of stressors some of which are unique to minority children such as the language barrier, poverty, and others common to adolescences such as self-esteem. Individual counseling assists students to resolve issues that cause emotional distress and, as such, interfere with personal goals and academic success (Diaz, 2004; Sue & Sue, 2003; University of New Hampshire Counseling Center, 2004). This highlights the importance of school-district educational leadership attending to matters psychological and sociological by the expansion of related programs. Shetgiri, Kataoka, Ryan, Askew, Chung, and Schuster (2009) noted, “School-
related protective factors include school connectedness, opportunities for children to participate in school programs, high-quality education, positive school experiences, and socially supportive, pro-social peer groups” (p. 218).

Finally while the community in which the school resides must be a primary consideration, a number of students are attending schools which are not immediately adjacent to the community in which they reside. Therefore, consideration must be given to expanding the school’s outreach to those communities. School officials at the district and school level would do well to expand efforts to enter the communities and provide evening forums for parents to voice concerns and establish a line of face to face communication to increase a sense of trust and support. Nothing can be accomplished without the support of the community, as its standards and values irrevocably govern the school environment. The challenge for the schools is the establishment of a communicative bond between these essential components that serves the interwoven, cyclical needs of these parties. Specifically with regard to Latino families it is vitally important to provide written and verbal communication in Spanish as well as in English if a viable communicative bond is to be established (Diaz, 2004).

**school district, high schools, adult/community schools, career and technical education centers.** Relationships between the school-district, its high schools and adult and community schools were also an area in need of speculation based upon the study’s findings. Lines of communication, which foster relationships, appear to be in need of improvement per the responses of participants, school-based personnel, the study’s critical informants, and parents. The articulation and implementation of the ABE/Under-
aged GED program across the three entities lacked consistency and consequently yielded varying results of effectiveness.

The enrollment and in-take process initiated at the most successful program (with regard to successful completion rate) of the three exited school sites followed the state mandated exit-interview procedures, articulated efficiently with the adult and community administrator and U-GED instructor, and followed the district guidelines for communicating with students and parents regarding enrollment procedures and process. In addition, the two participants who attended this particular program indicated that the U-GED teacher’s clear and concise exposition of the classroom rules and program expectations during the in-take process set the tone for success. Furthermore, the participants commented that the instructor consistently enforced the rules in a caring manner which they felt contributed to their successful completion of the program and the ultimate acquisition of the GED credential. The consideration for school district administration to replicate this successful formula at other sites is worthy of contemplation.

The study’s findings also indicated the importance of relevancy. Participants expressed the relevant and focused nature of the ABE/Under-aged GED curriculum which prepared them for the examination’s academic areas and indicated a desire that this would have been the case in the traditional high school context. With further regard to relevancy, this draws attention to the alternative secondary educational options that are currently offered and should be considered for expansion or implementation by school-district educational leadership. For example, some specialized public high schools are designed with curriculums to address Science, Technology, Engineering, and
Mathematics (STEM) education issues and attract students with matching educational and career interests (Subotnik, Tai, Rickoff, & Almarode, 2010). Other high school options which attempt to attract students with specialized curriculums and areas of focus that match educational and career interests are career academies. The current state of vocational education has proclaimed its new identity as the field of Career and Technical Education (CTE) (Cox, 2013; Plank, DeLuca, & Estacion, 2005). In an effort to implement viable alternative options across the entire state in the area of Career and Technical Education, the Florida legislature enacted the Career and Professional Education (CAPE) legislation in 2007 which required all school districts to implement a minimum of one career academy (Cox, 2013; Estacion, D'Souza, & Bozick, 2011).

Most relevant to my study is the relationship between these alternatives educational options and dropout prevention. It is the hope of researchers in the field of CTE that providing an option in high schools, which is more relevant with regard to the real world and forges a connection between school and work, will encourage a greater number of students to remain in school (Symonds et al., 2011). The end result of such a marriage of workforce skills and preparation for postsecondary education has produced positive outcomes such as increased attendance, academic success, and a reduction in dropout rates when these programs have been properly implemented (Cox, 2013; Kemple & Snipes, 2000).

**schools and families.** Seemingly nationwide, a significant number of second-generation plus Latinos are considered at risk for completing a high school credentialing program while factors such as nativity, English fluency, and/or bilinguality point to potential for scholastic success (Farley & Alba, 2002). LatCrit theorists posit that
educational structures, processes, and discourses operate in contradictory ways with the potential to oppress and marginalize students of color who at times believe they have to choose either family or culture or school success (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Nieto, 1996).

In addition, as previously broached, schools are faced with accommodating an increase of Latino students and their families who require services that schools are lacking the resources to provide. These factors have strained relationships between schools and families.

The findings of my study implied that much of the issue with developing a positive working relationship between schools and the family was tied to a lack of substantive positive communication. When communication did occur between the schools and the families, the tone and substance of the communication was mostly couched in negativity. This seems especially true with Latinos and other male students of color. Sacks (2005) cited findings which detailed males are more frequently disciplined, suspended, and/or expelled from school than their gender counterparts. It is clear that these students are confronted with many risk factors including diminished self-esteem. Specifically with regard to Latinos, Gordon (1996) concluded that within an urban school context belief in one’s cognitive skills was a significant difference between resilient and non-resilient Latino students. These assertions were reinforced by the findings of my study.

It is important for schools to find ways to mitigate the effects of negative communication with families by establishing positive lines of communication to establish positive school-family relationships. As Perez, et al (2009) noted “Academically successful students appear to have a supportive network of family members, friends, neighbors, and teachers whom they rely on for counsel and advice in difficult or stressful
situations” (p. 7). Finally, the development of positive relationships between school-based administration, faculty, staff, and students can be most facilitated by attending to the school’s culture and climate.

**Attention to relationships to develop positive culture and climate.** A significant portion of the findings in my study are related to school culture and climate. MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009) have stated, “Organizational theorists have long reported that paying attention to culture is the most important action that a leader can perform” (p. 73). This assertion is in reference to all types of organizations including educational organizations such as schools. In his study, Maslowski (2001) defined school culture as, “… the basic assumptions, norms and values, and cultural artifacts that are shared by school members, which influence their functioning at school” (p. 8).

Obviously, the educational leader at the school level is embodied in the school’s principal. Researchers have captured the testimonials of school principals who have effectively managed successful schools. Evidently, focusing and attending to the school’s culture has been fundamental to the improvement of teacher morale and student achievement (Hallinger and Heck 1998; Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; Maslowski 2001; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). “Ultimately, the relationships that shape the culture and climate of the school are strongly influenced by the school principal” (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009, p. 76). Once again, this highlights the importance of positive relationships between school-based administrators, their teachers, students, and parents as the primary factor for enabling success.
Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral, (2009) comment that there is no universally concurrent definition of school climate, and they offer this suggestion:

… school climate refers to the quality and character of school life.

This climate includes norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe. People are engaged and respected. Students, families, and educators work together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision.

It is a group phenomenon … (p. 182).

There is a degree of accord among researchers that four major areas clearly contour school climate: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, and the (external) environment (Cohen, 2006; Freiberg, 1999). Once again, this highlights the importance of relationships in creating a positive school climate which in turn is conducive to student success. This is extremely pertinent to my study and the dropout phenomenon in general.

As Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral, (2009, p. 185) reiterated research has indicated that positive school climate is associated with significantly lower levels of absenteeism (deJung & Duckworth, 1986; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Reid, 1982; Rumberger, 1987; Sommer, 1985) and is predictive of rate of student suspension (Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982). Both absenteeism and out-of-school-suspensions are key elements with regard to males dropping out of school and this assertion was supported by the responses of participants in my study.

The implications to educational leadership practice which seem most relevant in this area are first and foremost the continued emphasis on the importance of culture and climate and its inclusion in preparation programs for educational leaders (Chauncey,
2005; Fulton, Yoon, & Lee, 2005). Secondly on a larger scale, Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral, (2009) highlight an interesting point in their observation with regard to the scant emphasis on school climate by states despite “… a compelling, and growing, body of research that underscores the importance of school climate” as it “…promotes student learning, academic achievement, school success, and healthy development, as well as effective risk prevention, positive youth development efforts, and increased teacher retention” (p. 187). They further recommend revisiting and revising educational policy at the state level to emphasize school climate in their accountability measures.

When I reflect upon the responses of the participants in my study, it is clear that in their perception the culture and climate of the traditional high schools they ultimately withdrew from before completing their schooling was not positive. Their stories of being stereotyped by teachers and administrators as trouble-makers, the references by their parents of feeling unwelcome, and the recollected number of physical altercations in the hallways and classrooms that they reported made it apparent that their safety and well-being were issues of concern. Finally as previously broached, the participants’ recollected responses made it quite clear that relationships with most teachers were not of a positive nature. Apparently, much of this was tied to the climate at the study’s respective schools and brings to mind Conners’s (2000) admonition, “If you don’t feed the teachers, they eat the students!” In contrast the positive, working, relationships they established with their ABE/Under-aged GED teachers was instrumental their ultimate success in the program. This emphasizes a tried and true axiom; teachers play vital roles in student success. To that end, another important implication for educational leadership
is the development of effective interviewing skills and the careful consideration to hiring highly qualified, caring teachers.

**Effective interviewing and hiring.** Rebore (1998) asserted that the selection of individuals who will successfully fulfill their respective task and remain in an educational institution is vital to not only the education of students, but also the financial condition of a school district. Therefore the process and procedures associated with interviewing and hiring teachers is extremely important. Aspects of such a process are the formulation of selection criteria to be utilized by those conducting interviews, and the recommended procedure for the purposes of hiring instructors at school-sites to be conducted by an interviewing committee. This committee should be comprised of both individuals who will serve in a supervisory capacity and those individuals with the practical expertise required for the position to be filled. In addition, “the use of an open-ended interview format should be most effective in eliciting the interviewee’s opinions, beliefs, and attitudes” (Rebore, 1998, pp.108-109). With regard to the findings of my study this would be a viable technique in attempting to hire those individuals who embody what has been termed the caring teacher (Noddings, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999).

The caring teacher is very relevant to my study based upon the participant’s recollections. As Latinos in predominantly White schools, much of what they recollected experiencing was similar to what Valenzuela (1999) described in *Subtractive Schooling*. My study’s participants expressed boredom due to the curriculum, which was neither interesting nor relevant, and its mode of delivery. It was also apparent from the responses that as with Valenzuela’s subjects, “…students’ self-representations make them vulnerable to school authorities whose caring for students is oftentimes more centered on
what they wear than on who they are” (p.75). As she surmised and as was the case with my participants, Latinos “…are committed to an authentic form of caring that emphasizes relations of reciprocity …”(p.61). This concept of relationships once again comes to the forefront of attempting to mitigate the dropout phenomenon for students of all races. Relationships with teachers or other adults who authentically care about their culture, their lives, and their problems outside of the classroom are vital (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). These aspects highlight the importance of hiring and retaining caring, culturally competent teachers.

Marshall (2008) commented, “Thoughtful hiring is crucial, since each vacancy is an opportunity to get another top-notch teacher on the team” (p. 2). Therefore, it is incumbent upon school-based leadership to formulate effective interviewing and hiring practices and procedures to fill vacancies with highly qualified, caring teachers and retain them by creating a school culture/climate that values and rewards their efforts and empowers them through shared leadership and a role in decision-making (Bolger, & Somech, 2004; Bolman, & Deal, 2003). In turn, teachers should be receptive to accepting training opportunities which enhance their cultural competency and their capacity for self-reflection of their cultural assumptions. This could ultimately lead to classrooms and schools which value and nurture students. Finally as Valenzuela (1999) stated, “The current emphases on achievement and on standard academic subjects may lead youth to conclude that adults do not care for them” (p. 110). I believe in many ways high-stakes testing and accountability and the current state of teacher evaluations has created a conflict of conscience resulting in ethical dilemmas which are issues to be reconciled if students, especially those of color, are to be properly served.
Ethics. While there is no direct evidence in the findings of my research study with regard to the ethical behavior of educational leadership, there are from a critical perspective, inferences which can be drawn from the participant responses and their parents to justify the consideration of implications with regards to ethical practice. This is in keeping with the perspective of researchers who have addressed and continue to address the ethical component of educational leadership training and practice.

Foster (1986) contended that “… educational administration is concerned with empowerment” and in a critical role “… looks for examples of powerlessness and tries to empower students, parents, and individual teachers who are without it” (p. 32). On the surface, this appears contradictory to the established and predominantly accepted precept that “Administration, though, or so we are led to believe, is associated with running an organization efficiently and effectively without regard to ultimate ends or consequences” (Foster, 1986, p. 72). Recognizing this dilemma from a critical perspective, Foster further contended that administration is “a moral science” and as such involves contending with moral dilemmas. Therefore, actions taken based upon decisions made carry “…moral, rather than just technical implications” ergo; “Each administrative decision carries with it a restructuring of a human life; this is why administration at its heart is the resolution of moral dilemmas” (Foster, 1986, p. 33). Based upon his conception of educational leadership practice Foster (1989) contended among other criteria that leadership must be critical and ethical.

From the findings of my study, there was little indication, based upon their actions and decisions that educational leadership engaged in critical reflection or consideration of empowering the various stakeholders. Examples of such actions and decisions were
evidenced by Angel’s statement that he “sought out the U-GED program on his own” and Rick’s poignant statement “What I remember is that me and my mom had gone to Osprey and went to the main office, which the office people weren’t helpful at all and were very rude.”

This highlights the need for an expansion or inclusion of an ethical training component in programs designed to educate and certify educational leaders. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) commented:

> When discussing ethics in relation to the professionalization of educational leaders, the tendency is to look toward professions such as law, medicine, dentistry, and business, which require their graduate students to take at least one ethics course before graduation as a way of socializing persons into the profession.

> The field of educational administration has no such ethics course requirement (p. 19).

The message to incorporate training in ethics has begun to impact educational leadership graduate programs based upon the work of researchers such as Greenfield (1993) who eloquently stated, “A failure to provide the opportunity for school administrators to develop such competence constitutes a failure to serve the children we are obligated to serve as public educators” (p. 285). With regard to my research study and its findings, I am not surprised by the observation and assertion brought forth by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) highlighting the lack of literature which defines the concept of best interests of the student (Stefkovich, O’Brien, & Moore, 2002) and consequently utilized the concept to justify the best interests of adults (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005; Walker,
Educational leadership graduate preparation programs need look no further than *in-house* to the psychological and social graduate programs within their respective colleges of education.

Ethical training for school counselors is rather extensive due to the nature of their work. Writing on behalf of the ACA (American Counseling Association), Forester-Miller and Davis (1996) credit the work of K. S. Kitchener (1984) as “identifying five moral principles…viewed as the cornerstone” of the profession’s ethical guidelines in working with clients/students.

- *Autonomy*-encourage independent thinking and actions.
- *Nonmaleficence*-cause no harm.
- *Beneficence*-contribute to the welfare.
- *Fidelity*-exhibit loyalty, faithfulness, commitment.

Forester-Miller and Davis (p. 2) cautioned while the five moral principles are capable of providing clarity on resolving ethical dilemmas, utilizing them solely can not suffice in addressing dilemmas of a complicated design. To aid in these instances they espouse “a practical, sequential, seven-step, ethical decision model” based upon the work of Van Hoose and Paradise (1979), Kitchener (1984), Stadler (1986), Haas and Malouf (1998), Forester-Miller and Rubenstein (1992), and Sileo and Kopala (1993). The Ethical Decision Model is comprised of these elements:

- Identify the problem by gathering information to analyze the situation
- Apply the code of ethics
- Determine the nature and extent of the dilemma
• Generate potential courses of action
• Consider the consequences of options and determine a course of action
• Evaluate the selected course of action
• Implement the course of action

Forester-Miller and Davis (p. 4) concluded that a “right answer to complex dilemma” would be rare. They maintain that the utilization of a decision model provides a rationale, a “professional explanation” for one’s chosen “course of action.”

As evidenced by the parameters described above, a counselor is bound by an ethical code which is dedicated to the well-being of the client. This translates specifically for school counselors into what has literally become the school counselor’s mantra, “Always advocate for the child!” The time for educational leadership to adopt such a mindset and practice such an approach is long overdue. In this spirit and from a practical perspective, an emphasis and increase in the amount of hours dedicated to ethical training in educational leadership graduate study programs would be prudent.

Implications for Further Research

Recent research recommendations have begun to shift the focus from the deficiency of the individual and family to the structures, organizational, and systemic elements found in educational institutions. Reflecting on my research study and the consequential findings, the implications for further research lie within the following three areas: the Latino dropout phenomenon, the GED and Latino recipients, and the effects of high-stakes testing and school accountability on educational policy/leadership.

**Latino dropout phenomenon.** My study was focused upon a limited number of participants who were involved in a specific high school credentialing alternative;
therefore, this study only considered a single element of the expansive Latino dropout phenomenon. The need for further research into the educational fate of Latinos is warranted. High rates of student high school non-completion, is relevant to the rates of unemployment, loss of productivity, and expenditures for social programs such as welfare (Clarke et al., 2003).

As Carnevale (2001) stated:

> If we could equalize the opportunity to learn among blacks, Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites, the resultant productivity improvements would add more than $230 billion in national wealth and $80 billion in new tax revenues every year. No one is going anywhere in the new economy without some postsecondary education and training (p. 32).

The increasing numbers of Latino students present unique challenges and various consequences that will impact education in US public schools. Vice versa, the US public schools will present unique challenges and various consequences that will continue to impact Latinos’ educational opportunity. Most pertinent to my research study were Latino students identified as second-generation. This focus was selected primarily based upon the conundrum that seemingly nationwide, a significant number of second-generation plus Latinos are considered at risk for completing a high school credentialing program while factors such as nativity, English fluency, and/or bilinguality point to potential for scholastic success (Farley & Alba, 2002). These factors were characteristic of the participants in my study and other factors affecting their educational success, such as poverty, low parental educational attainment, and family stressors were also present.
and posed challenges to succeeding in school which increased the likelihood of their dropping out.

The study’s findings indicated that their personal and academic resilience were the ultimate keys to their completion of the ABE/Under-aged GED high school credentialing program and to gaining access to a post-secondary educational opportunity which may ultimately impact their economic upward mobility. Potentially, this may be the case with many Latino students. Therefore, areas of continued research which are vital to Latinos enrolled in US public schools are with regard to other aspects of the Latino dropout phenomenon (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999) and the import of personal and academic resilience of Latinos (Perez, et al, 2009; Shetgiri, Kataoka, Ryan, Askew, Chung, & Schuster, 2009) in successfully navigating the high school credentialing process.

Supplementally, an implied topic of interest that came forth in contemplating areas for research is the study of the various Latino student groups who currently reside in Florida. The state may be considered somewhat unique regarding the make-up of its Latino population. There is seemingly a greater variety of Latino groups including Central Americans, Cubans, Mexicans, and South Americans residing in the Florida than in other areas of the US (Duany, & Matos-Rodriguez, 2005; Guzman, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). My study included participants from three different Latino groups, and further study focused upon the social capital aspects which may or not be unique to each group and its effects on schooling success would be an interesting avenue for pursuing strategies to enhance educational success for all Latinos. For example, Miller (1995) noted that Cuban-Americans were the most successful of the three largest Latino groups
in regards to attaining high school graduation. Yet as Valenzuela (1999) suggested in her study of Mexican immigrant and Mexican American youth, perhaps the initial step to enhance Latino educational success is for researchers to provide evidence of the importance of schools in reflecting, recognizing, and mitigating the effects of practices and policies that create school climates of “subtractive schooling” which rob resources that students of color possess such as their valuable funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 132) and “… divest Mexican students of their culture and language” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 20).

**GED and its Latino recipients.** According to survey results complied by the US Census Bureau (2008), only one-in-ten Latino high school dropouts has earned a GED, and this ethnic group is the least likely to do so. Admittedly, the GED seemingly benefits Latinos in the labor market, but Fry (2010) concluded that Latino students “… who end their education with a GED would have been better off staying in high school and graduating” (p. 2). While Hispanic dropouts with a GED generally fare better than un-credentialed Hispanic dropouts, their prospects, as with all GED credential individuals, are more limited as a group in regards to economic benefits, post-secondary education, and on-the-job training than Hispanic students who earn a traditional standard high-school diploma (Boesel, Alsalam & Smith, 1998; Cameron & Heckman, 1993; Clark & Jaeger, 2006; Fry, 2010; Smith, 2003; Tyler, 2003).

Although economic outcomes are important regarding the benefits a GED affords its recipients, there are indications that issues for further exploration regarding the GED are more so related to improved self-esteem, an enhanced enjoyment of life, improved child-rearing, and social skills which in turn may have positive consequences for both the
individual, the family, and the community (Bourdieu, 1985; Kawachi, Kennedy, Lochner, & Prothrow-Smith, 1997; Neuman & Caparelli, 1998; Snider, 2010). Regarding the GED and its relation to social capital as an area of further exploration, Tyler (2002) stated:

… there continues to be a dearth of research examining the impact of the GED on outcomes that are not directly related to the labor market. Whether or not the GED affects outcomes such as parenting skills, health, citizenship, and involvement in crime are critical questions that have, unfortunately, not been addressed by the research community (p. 3).

Participant interview responses and subsequent findings in my research study suggest such an area of future exploration and longitudinal study is pertinent and prudent. Additionally, an area of future study with regard to the GED will lie in its restructuring and the consequential effects upon students attempting to earn this alternative high school credential. Fry (2010) stated “The GED, or General Educational Development Tests, is the nation’s largest dropout recovery or second chance program” (p. 2). Therefore, the alterations to the GED examination and its process may have a wide range impact upon individuals attempting to earn the alternative credential. According to the 2014 GED Testing Service (GEDTS) Assessment Guide, the new GED will increase its rigor based upon the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) which were developed as a result of an initiative by “The nation's governors and education commissioners, through their representative organizations, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) …” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014, p. 1), and these
standards are to show evidence of career and college-readiness (GEDTS, 2014). An additional alteration to the GED examination will be its administration as an exclusively computer based assessment. In their white paper for the ProLiteracy Organization, Lipke and Farrell (2013) cautioned that GED preparation programs in various localities across the nation may lack the experience and/or resources to prepare students in the assessment specific computer skills and stricter standards for obtaining test site certifications may reduce the number of test sites available for students to test. Obviously, the fees for taking the test will increase perhaps making the cost “prohibitive for vulnerable populations” (p. 1). Given the import of the GED as an alternative high school credential, the benefits it awards its recipients, and the subsequent impact on educational institutions and the economy, findings in my research study suggest such an area of future exploration and longitudinal study is pertinent and prudent.

Finally, all of the participants in my study successfully completed the Under-aged GED program and earned their GED credential. The focal point of this success per their recollected responses was the U-GED instructor. This implies that research studies designed to interview, observe, and document successful GED teachers are in order to facilitate students who chose this alternative credentialing pathway.

Educational policy and leadership, high-stakes testing, school accountability, and Latinos. To what extent, if any, has pressure to achieve high-stakes standards by public schools driven educational leadership to engage in practices bordering on self-interest in opposition to the educational needs of Latino high school students; some of whom require additional educational support services, an extended interval of time for cultural acclimation, and a larger pool of teachers trained in cultural competence to meet
high-stakes standards? I assert that this question remains germane, and it remains as the basis for what prompted this study. There is no direct evidence in the findings of my research study with regard to the effects of high-stakes testing and school accountability on the behavior of educational leadership and the formulation of educational policy, both aspects of which affect Latino students per se. Yet, from a critical perspective, personal and professional experience, and based upon the participant responses and the serendipitous conversations with their parents; the consideration of implications with regards to continued research on this topic is worthy of consideration.

**Educational policy and leadership.** If as a nation we accepted that the primary function of public education is fundamentally and inexorably tied to the proposition of our democratic tenets such as the “pursuit of happiness,” the promotion of the “general welfare,” and “to insure domestic tranquility,” then the rates of high school graduation and completion of every student are subjects worthy of examination (Diaz & Black, 2008). Therefore, an aspect that the research I conducted focused upon was an element of the dropout phenomenon. I believe this is an area of research with regard to educational policy that should continue as there are aspects which appear opaque at best. The primary source of difficulty in attempting to ascertain a definitive description of what constitutes a high school dropout is a lack of consistent parameters utilized to calculate graduation, completion, and dropout rates (Sum & Harrington, 2003). Seemingly, among researchers, educators, and politicians, what clearly constitutes and delineates a dropout is debatable. The debate has become especially pertinent in regards to current calculations which impact school accountability formulas. This has prompted questions which are in need of clarification and could serve as fodder for further research.
Does the absence of a lucid and candid representation of graduation and dropout rates essential to maintaining integrity make those rates suspect? Have the current circumstances, which entail the politically essential yet arguably unrealistic components of school accountability and high-stakes testing, challenged the maintenance of this integrity?

Special interest groups have and will continue to exert political power in educational policy-making. (Cibulka, 2001; Goldberg, Traiman, Molnar, & Stevens, 2001). Since the scathing accusations of the ineptitude of the American public educational system in the 1980’s, high-stakes accountability public policy infused with the precepts of business practices has profoundly impacted the work of educational leaders particularly in urban contexts (Diaz & Black, 2008). This was manifested in the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and the subsequent expanding role of the state in local educational practices (Fuhrman & Elmore, 2004; Sadovnik, O'Day, Bohrnstedt, & Borman, 2008).

From a critical perspective other relevant questions commence to crystallize regarding research implications: Are educational leaders intending to unequivocally commit to a student-centered stance or are particular interpretations of the pressure to achieve high-stakes standards by public schools driving educational leadership to engage in practices bordering on self-interest in opposition to the educational needs of students? Are the motives of school-based administration to protect themselves and school-based personnel from the ills and stigma associated with a low or failing school grade? Do school-based administrators functioning in a traditional hierarchical system become so desensitized and/or conditioned to follow the directives of superiors unquestionably?
Should they risk reprimand and/or promotion, even demotion for non-compliance? I believe based upon the findings of my research study and the findings of past studies that there are implications for further research to address these questions and contribute to the current and future discourse related to social justice issues which have arisen in the context of leadership in high-stakes school accountability contexts (Kozol, 2005; Michael & Dorn, 2007; Valenzuela, 2004).

**High-stakes testing.** Researchers have chronicled school-based responses to high-stakes performance policies and argued that these have done little to close the achievement gap (Rothstein, 2004, Sadovnik, et. al, 2008; Sherman, 2008) or worse, have actually catalyzed a myriad of undemocratic and unjust educational responses that serve to limit opportunities for students, particularly low-income students of color (Ball, 2006; Dorn, 2007; Lipman, 2004; Rustique-Forrester, 2005; Valenzuela, 2004). Specifically with regard to Latinos, Cruz (2006) stated, “For Latinos, the high-stakes testing movement has been devastating” (p. 16). This has been echoed by a variety of researchers who view the emphasis on high-stakes testing is reducing the quality and quantity of curriculum in all subject areas by spending an inordinate amount of time on high-stakes test preparation and driving out greater numbers of Latino and African American students based on a single measure depriving them of a quality education (McNeil, & Valenzuela, 2001; McNeil, 2005; Sloan, 2005; Valencia, & Villarreal, 2005; Valenzuela, 2005).

I believe, based upon my personal and professional experience as an educator, that there is a distinct probability of the accuracy of those assertions and scrutiny, via further research into the impact of high-stakes testing with respect to its effects on students,
schools, educational leadership, and educational policy is warranted. For example, a recent development with regard to high-stakes testing and educational policy in Florida was highlighted in a recent editorial printed by the local newspaper: “The company that won the $220 million, six-year contract — the Washington-based nonprofit American Institutes for Research — is field-testing the new Florida assessment in Utah, raising questions about whether that state’s overwhelmingly white population can provide a good representation of Florida’s diverse student population” (Tampa Tribune, 2014, p. 12). Perhaps a longitudinal study on the effects of this high-stakes assessment instrument, which is earmarked to replace the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) as the high school graduation assessment requirement, would certainly be of interest to researchers, critical pedagogues, and specifically critical race theorists who posit that race may be a significant contributing factor to the higher dropout rates of Latino students and other students of color.

**School accountability.** In relation to my research interests, I tendered the following supposition. Perhaps instead of centering the best interest of the child and school community, certain high school administrators may be engaging in what Strike (2007) terms “vices” of accountability: goal displacement, motivational displacement, and gaming. Other researchers have speculated that as the pressure mounts to improve low or failing school grades, educational leaders may be engaging in practices of performativity as a means to avert public shaming and the accompanying financial incentives in place in states such as Florida (Alexander, Anderson, & Gallegos, 2004; Dorn, 2007; Smith, 2004). Nelson, Palonsky, and McCarthy (2007) and Firestone, Shorr, and Monfils (2004) suggested that the professed equity values embedded in NCLB and state-level
accountability policies were represented in the establishment of rigorous academic standards for all, the assessment of students and schools performance against standards, the use of assessment data to improve schools, and the ability to hold schools accountable by rewarding success and punishing failure.

If educational leaders are to operate from a democratic posture, then social justice issues which have arisen in the context of leadership in high-stakes school accountability contexts and in school practices must be scrutinized and when necessary confronted (Diaz & Black, 2008). There were implications in the findings of my study that suggest such assertions are plausible. A primary factor in the decision to withdraw from the traditional high school setting and enroll in the alternative credentialing program identified by four of the five participants in my study was chronic absenteeism. High rates of absenteeism are an element of the school accountability formula targeted by schools for its negative effect on school grades. Was this a factor in the advice afforded the participants by school-based educational leaders with regard to their enrollment options? I believe that further research into the impact of school-accountability with respect to its effects on students, schools, educational leadership, and educational policy is warranted.

**Latinos.** If one speculates that racialization is endemic to American society, then one must assume the probable existence of comparable attitudes and practices within the milieu of public education, which may have become manifest in a causal relationship regarding disproportionate Latino lack of educational success and subsequent loss of human capital. Flores (2000) asserted, “The task for critical race scholars is to uncover and explore the various ways in which racial thinking operates” (p. 437). To expose these
modes of racialized reasoning, Latino/Latina Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) has been adopted as a theoretical framework in educational research. Scholars and researchers utilizing LatCrit within the context of education are primarily examining and attempting to document how racialized structures, policies, and practices influence and impact the educational attainment and academic progress of Latinas/os (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 1994; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano, Villapando & Oseguera, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). LatCrit theorists posit that educational structures, processes, and discourses operate in contradictory ways with the potential to oppress and marginalize students of color who at times believe they have to choose either family or culture or school success (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Nieto, 1996).

The findings of my research study indicate that this assertion may be a possibility. Because, this conflict of interest may have a profound impact on the educational attainment and academic progress of Latinas/os, continued research in this area is vital to both the success of Latino students and the schools which serve them.

In addition, my research findings imply that there should be further research studies regarding the tracking and sorting practices of Latino students which are potentially embedded in discourses of accountability produced by school leaders and remain relatively covert (Alexander, Anderson, & Gallegos, 2005; Kozol, 2005; Lipman, 2004). Specific questions that have arisen from my research project that may be potentially of interest to subsequent researchers include: What factors are contributing to the higher dropout/push-out rates among Latinos compared to other student populations? What are the perceptions of educators regarding issues around the Latino dropout/push-out phenomenon?
Finally, as a result of the serendipitous, informal conversations which took place with the participants’ parents and other parents and relatives during the recruitment process, I became aware of the anger and frustration with the negative perceptions of their children and themselves that they encountered during interactions with the school personnel in the school sites within my study. Much of what they related and described has been termed the deficit view of Spanish-speaking children and rejected by researchers (Flores, Cousin, & Diaz, 1991; Flores, 2005; Valencia, 1997). Therefore, a research study designed to interview, collect, and analyze the responses of Latino parents with regard to their perceptions, recollections, and lived experiences in dealing with their respective school districts and schools, should be of interest and beneficial to researchers attempting to mitigate the lack of academic success and propose solutions to increase Latino academic success.

In conducting future research of this kind, researchers may wish to consult the work of Hidalgo (2005) who examined “… the development of a Latino/a epistemology in the study of Latino/a families in the United States” (p. 378). Hidalgo highlights that the research which comes forth from such an epistemological approach can aid educators in developing “… an understanding of core values such as familism, reciprocity, and dignity” “… to inform educational practices” (p. 396). Such research could document and provide an exposition for the continued discourse regarding the improvement of quality education for Latinos. Yet, if true reform is to be forthcoming, as Rocco (2005) states, such “… studies are part of a broader context of Latino/a struggles for democracy, social justice, and to achieve full membership in the society” (p.426). Ultimately, furthering the discourse and research efforts into such a context will provide students,
families, and educators an opportunity to “… develop critical the consciousness of our social existence (Tejeda, & Gutierrez, 2005, p. 283). This may lead to “praxis: the action and reflection of men in the world in order to transform it” (Friere, 1990, p. 66).

Summary

This chapter was intended to highlight and offer pertinent points of the study for discussion and concludes with a greater number of questions rather than answers regarding what can be done to aid a rapidly expanding student population and even more specifically, the issues associated with Latino males who struggle to succeed in attaining a high school credential at an alarming rate. The implications of such an institutional failure and instances of success which enhance student resiliency will impact not only the future economic potential of these individuals, but as this specific population grows the potential economic well-being of the nation.
My research journey began after school-district administration provided a listing of over-aged, at-risk students to school-based administration who responded by scheduling a staff meeting in which assistant principals and guidance counselors were given a directive to find these students “a new home”! Upon perusing the list of students more extensively two distinguishing demographics were apparent. These students were overwhelmingly students of color and predominantly males. I believed then and still do believe, the directive was designed to coerce over-aged, under-achieving high school students into entering alternative high school credentialing programs to avoid the negative impact their presence in the school would have on high-stakes accountability measures and consequently school grades. At the time, removing these students from the traditional context would have been advantageous for the school, the school district, and the state; as students who managed to complete an alternative high school credentialing program such as the ABE/Under-aged GED program and earn a State of Florida High School Diploma would have effected a positive increase in Florida’s overall graduation rate. Since I was employed as a school counselor at a high school that was housing an ABE/Under-aged GED program in two portable classrooms on campus, I visited one of the classrooms which was overwhelmingly composed of Latino and African American males (68 percent).
I began to question whether the dynamics around this placement practice were beneficial for students or public-school educational leadership.

The topic for my study was cemented in my mind while I was attending a lecture in which Dr. Luis Ponjuan of the University of Florida stated in his presentation that “Latino male students were vanishing from the American educational pipeline; a trend that is especially evident at the secondary and postsecondary levels, and less than 1% of Latinos earn a doctorate degree”. I found these statements to be personally disturbing. This feeling was intensified exponentially when I attended a book-signing where Jack Espinosa, also a native of the city, autographed his book, “… life-long friend and fellow ‘roach’ adopted.” One of the passages in the book contained Jack’s recollection about the “free school” (public school) and a few White teachers who inferred “…that we (Latins) were inferior and suggesting we should go back where we belong,” and specifically, referring to us (the Latin students) as ‘Those little roaches’”. This triggered my recollection of experiences such as those related to me by my family and friends, as well as my own. From the comments of the Latinos who participated in my study, I am convinced that racism, albeit covertly, remains in schools.

In the final analysis, so to speak, I take the following constructs from this research study. First and foremost, make the development of positive relationships with and among all stakeholders a priority for everyone in the school building. The isolative factors that become manifest in the form of high-absenteeism, negative thoughts and behaviors were clearly a result of the lack of an established relationship with an adult on campus. Secondly, schools with structured environments tend to be positive influences on all school stakeholders. This usually creates a school culture and climate that is
caring, consistent, and comprehensible. When you know where you stand, because the expectations and the procedures for navigating the system are clearly communicated, fear is generally reduced and constructive work within a nurturing environment can flourish benefiting all the school’s stakeholders. Finally, never underestimate the power of personal resilience. In a structured school environment, positive student-teacher, student-administrator, and teacher-administrator relationships can provide another environmental protective factor that increases the likelihood of academic and personal resilience for students. This is extremely vital for students of color who face many challenges.

Reflecting upon this experience and the lived experience of my professional career in education as a teacher and counselor, I have formulated the following observations. The three “R’s” have been prioritized erroneously. Based upon my own schooling experience, including this culminating episode, it is relationships and then relevance that begets motivation towards the acquisition of knowledge which in turn allows for increased rigor. Rigor in and of itself is unlikely to result in success; it is just the easiest element to measure and therein lies the pre-occupation of politicians and statisticians.

This leads me to the topic of high-stakes testing and school-accountability. Is perceived pressure to achieve high-stakes accountability performance thresholds resulting in a culturally hierarchical organizational structure (Bolman & Deal, 2003) that implicitly drives educational leaders such as principals, assistant principals, and counselors to engage in practices that border on personal and institutional self-interest in opposition to the educational needs of students? I believe the answer is yes. The isolative factors borne in a culture of fear evident in our school district’s hierarchal organizational system continues to place accountability indicators as the paramount priority and consequently
undermines the possibility of first doing good, ethically centered work (Strike, 2007). One need only peruse the local newspapers to confirm that relationships between the school board, school district administration, teachers and the community are currently strained and deteriorating.

Several years ago, I was interviewed by a writer who was doing an article on education for one of the local newspapers. The question arose regarding my choice to become a teacher. I responded that I owed a debt to the teachers who took the time to develop a caring, positive relationship with me. This helped me to mitigate the risk factors that were present during my schooling and set me on a path to succeed. Education is a powerful institution, and for me, given its mission, it requires heart. The author, Carlos Castañeda (1968) quoted his character, Don Juan as follows:

Para mi solo recorrer los caminos que tienen corazón,

cualquier camino que tenga corazón. Por ahí yo corro,

y la única prueba que vale es atravesar todo su largo.

Y por ahí yo corro mirando, mirando, sin aliento (p. xxv).

(For me there is only the traveling on paths that have heart,

on any path that may have heart. There I travel, and the only

worthwhile challenge is to traverse its full length. And there

I travel looking, looking, breathlessly.)

For me, education is such a path; a path with heart; the path I have chosen, and I am prepared to traverse its full length hopefully pointing a way.
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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your family background.

2. What does being identified as a Hispanic/Latino mean to you?

3. Please describe what you recall about how Latinos were perceived in your school/s.

4. Tell me about your high school experience.

5. How did you come to decide to enter the Under-aged GED program?

6. What was happening at school that made you decide to enter the Under-aged GED program?

7. Please describe what you recall about the process and procedures for your placement in the Under-aged GED program.

8. Please describe your Under-aged GED experience.

9. How do you feel now about your decision to enter the Under-aged GED program?

10. Knowing what you know now, would you have done anything differently?

11. Is there anything else you wish to tell me at this time?
Appendix B

Potential Interview Protocol

1. What do you feel you gained by entering the Under-aged GED program?

2. What do you feel you might have gained by remaining in the traditional high school setting?

3. Were absences, lack of academic success, your age, and/or FCAT test scores a factor in your choice?

4. If you had to choose one reason, what would it be?

5. What do you recall being told about options to continuing your education?

6. What can you recall about what you and/or your parent/s were told was the difference between a standard high school diploma and the GED?

7. Is there anything else you wish to tell me at this time?
Appendix C

Interview Protocol A1

1. What do you feel you gained by entering the Under-aged GED program?
2. What do you feel you might have gained by remaining in the traditional high school setting?
3. Were absences, lack of academic success, your age, and/or FCAT test scores a factor in your choice?
4. If you had to choose one reason, what would it be?
5. What do you recall being told about options to continuing your education?
6. What can you recall about what you and/or your parent/s were told was the difference between a standard high school diploma and the GED?
7. What else can you recollect about your traditional high school experience?
8. What level of courses were you taking while you were enrolled in the traditional high school setting?
9. What are your plans for the future?
10. Is there anything else you wish to tell me at this time?
Appendix D

Interview Protocol M1

1. What do you feel you gained by entering the Under-aged GED program?

2. What do you feel you might have gained by remaining in the traditional high school setting?

3. Were absences, lack of academic success, your age, and/or FCAT test scores a factor in your choice?

4. If you had to choose one reason, what would it be?

5. What do you recall being told about options to continuing your education?

6. What can you recall about what you and/or your parent/s were told was the difference between a standard high school diploma and the GED?

7. What do you recall you and your mother were told about your options before enrolling in the Under-aged GED program?

8. Who presented the options you were given?

9. What are your plans for the future?

10. Is there anything else you wish to tell me at this time?
Appendix E

Interview Protocol M2

1. What do you feel you gained by entering the Under-aged GED program?
2. What do you feel you might have gained by remaining in the traditional high school setting?
3. Were absences, lack of academic success, your age, and/or FCAT test scores a factor in your choice?
4. If you had to choose one reason, what would it be?
5. What do you recall being told about options to continuing your education?
6. What can you recall about what you and/or your parent/s were told was the difference between a standard high school diploma and the GED?
7. Was there a time when you felt you did not want to finish school at all?
8. During your traditional high school career, which year had the most impact on your choice?
9. What are your plans for the future?
10. Is there anything else you wish to tell me at this time?
Appendix F

Interview Protocol O1

1. What do you feel you gained by entering the Under-aged GED program?

2. What do you feel you might have gained by remaining in the traditional high school setting?

3. Were absences, lack of academic success, your age, and/or FCAT test scores a factor in your choice?

4. Tell me about your experience with the teachers in the traditional high school program?

5. Please tell me about the other students in your classes.

6. If you had to choose one reason, what would it be?

7. What do you recall being told about options to continuing your education?

8. Did you seek out the Under-aged GED program?

9. What can you recall about what you and/or your parent/s were told was the difference between a standard high school diploma and the GED?

10. What are your plans for the future?

11. Is there anything else you wish to tell me at this time?
Appendix G

Interview Protocol O2

1. What do you feel you gained by entering the Under-aged GED program?
2. What do you feel you might have gained by entering in a traditional high school setting?
3. Were absences, lack of academic success, your age, and/or FCAT test scores a factor in your choice?
4. If you had to choose one reason, what would it be?
5. Please tell me about the other students in your middle school.
6. What do you recall being told about options to continuing your education?
7. What can you recall about what you and/or your parent/s were told was the difference between a standard high school diploma and the GED?
8. What was the transition from middle school to high school like?
9. What are your plans for the future?
10. Is there anything else you wish to tell me at this time?
Appendix H

Participant Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before participating
As an educational research institution the University of South Florida (USF) encourages students to conduct research studies. More often than not, a research study requires people to serve as participants within the study. Such is the case in this research study. This form is intended to provide information to you, the potential participant, about this research study. The research study in which you are being invited to participate in is: The Adult Basic Education/Under-aged General Education Development Program: An Element of the Latino High School Dropout Phenomenon.

The principal investigator or researcher, person responsible for conducting this research study, is Carlos Diaz. Another person involved in this research study process is the dissertation committee chair, Dr. William Black of USF’s Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

The research you will be participating will take place at a site agreeable to you and the principal investigator, Carlos Diaz.

Purpose of the study
The purpose of the study is to identify the factors and the process by which second-generation Latino high school students chose to enroll in an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program and to gain insight into what the participants believed resulted from choosing to enroll in the program.

Study procedures
If you choose to participate in this research study, you will be asked to:

- Take part in at least two one-to-one audio-taped interviews. The first approximately 60 minutes in length and the second approximately 30-60 minutes in length.
Appendix H (continued)

- The researcher will meet and interview you at a place agreeable to you and the researcher.
- The interviews will be audio-taped for the purpose of transcribing.
- The research study will take place over a 12-week period.

Risks
The risk to you as a participant is considered to be minimal in the sense that it is at the same level of risks people face every day in ordinary living.

Compensation
You will be given a gift card in the amount of $25.00 for participating in this research study at the conclusion of the interview process.

Confidentiality
We are required to keep your records resulting from this research study as confidential as humanly possible. Specifically:

- Audio-taped recordings and transcripts will be accessed for the purpose of analysis by the researcher and a team of critical informants who will help the researcher.
- Audio-taped recordings and transcripts will be kept under lock and key for a period of five years and then destroyed.
- All participants of the research study will remain anonymous. To ensure this, false names will be created for each participant.

It is possible that other people may need to see your research study records. By law, anyone who sees your research study records must also keep them as confidential as humanly possible. The people who may need to see your research study records include:

- The research team made up of the researcher, the critical informants, and the dissertation committee chair.
Appendix H (continued)

- Government agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services and/or people from USF’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the purposes of making sure this research study is done correctly and that the research team is protecting you and your rights.

Since it is likely that all or part of this research will be published, we will take extreme care to protect your identity and publish nothing which would let others know who you are.

Voluntary participation/Withdrawal
Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. You should absolutely not feel any pressure to participate. You are free to participate in this research study, and you have the right to withdraw for this research study at any time without penalty.

Questions, concerns, complaints
Should you at any point in time have questions, concerns, or complaints about this research study you may call Carlos Diaz at (813)-541-0116 or email at cjdiaz2@mail.usf.edu. In addition, you may call Dr. William R. Black at (813)-974-6097 or email at wrblack@usf.edu.

Should you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research study, questions in general, or have a concern, complaint, or wish to discuss any issue related to the research study process with a person/s unrelated to this specific research study or its research team you can call the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813)-974-9343.

Consent to Participate in this Research Study
The decision to participate in this research study is entirely yours. Should you choose to participate, please sign this form provided the following statements are true:

I freely agree to participate in this research study. I understand that the information collected will be utilized for educational purposes. In addition, I understand that I may
Appendix H (continued)
withdraw from the project at any time. I understand that the risk to me as a result of my participation in this study is similar to the risks people encounter in ordinary living.

___________________________________                 ______________________
Signature of person participating                                    Date

_______________________________
Printed name of person participating
Appendix I

Critical Informant Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before participating

As an educational research institution the University of South Florida (USF) encourages students to conduct research studies. More often than not, a research study requires people to serve as participants within the study. Such is the case in this research study. This form is intended to provide information to you, the potential participant, about this research study. The research study in which you are being invited to participate in as a critical informant is: The Adult Basic Education/Under-aged General Education Development Program: An Element of the Latino High School Dropout Phenomenon.

The principal investigator or researcher, person responsible for conducting this research study, is Carlos Diaz. Another person involved in this research study process is the dissertation committee chair, Dr. William Black of USF’s Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

The research you will be participating will take place at a site agreeable to you and the principal investigator, Carlos Diaz.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to identify the factors and the process by which second-generation Latino high school students chose to enroll in an Adult Basic Education (ABE)/Under-aged General Education Development (GED) program and to gain insight into what the study’s participants believed resulted from choosing to enroll in the program.
Appendix I (continued)

**Study procedures**

If you choose to participate in this research study, you will be asked to:

- Be involved in reviewing the researcher’s interpretation of the study’s individual participant interview responses and the researcher’s initial and final data analysis.
- Provide your interpretations and commentary of the researcher’s initial data analysis in a written format.
- Participate in an interactive discussion, which will be audio-taped for the purpose of transcribing for utilization in the final analysis of the research study, with the researcher and three other critical informants within a focus group format regarding the researcher’s final analysis.
- The interactive discussion will take place at a time and location mutually agreeable to you, the other critical informants, and the researcher.
- The research study will take place over a 12-week period.

**Risks**

The risk to you as a participant is considered to be *minimal* in the sense that it is at the same level of risks people face every day in ordinary living.

**Compensation**

You will be given a gift card in the amount of $25.00 for participating in this research study at the conclusion of the interview process.

**Confidentiality**

We are required to keep your records resulting from this research study as confidential as humanly possible. Specifically:

- Audio-taped recordings and transcripts will be accessed for the purpose of analysis by the researcher and a team of critical informants who will help the researcher.
- Audio-taped recordings and transcripts will be kept under lock and key for a period of five years and then destroyed.
Appendix I (continued)

- All participants of the research study will remain anonymous. To ensure this, false names will be created for each participant.

It is possible that other people may need to see your research study records. By law, anyone who sees your research study records must also keep them as confidential as humanly possible. The people who may need to see your research study records include:

- The research team made up of the researcher, the critical informants, and the dissertation committee chair.
- Government agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services and/or people from USF’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the purposes of making sure this research study is done correctly and that the research team is protecting you and your rights.

Since it is likely that all or part of this research will be published, we will take extreme care to protect your identity and publish nothing which would let others know who you are.

Voluntary participation/Withdrawal

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. You should absolutely not feel any pressure to participate. You are free to participate in this research study, and you have the right to withdraw for this research study at any time without penalty.

Questions, concerns, complaints

Should you at any point in time have questions, concerns, or complaints about this research study you may call Carlos Diaz at (813)-541-0116 or email at cjdiaz2@mail.usf.edu. In addition, you may call Dr. William R. Black at (813)-974-6097 or email at wrblack@usf.edu.

Should you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research study, questions in general, or have a concern, complaint, or wish to discuss any issue related to the research study process with a person/s unrelated to this specific research study or its research team you can call the Division of Research Integrity and Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813)-974-9343.
Appendix I (continued)

Consent to Participate in this Research Study
The decision to participate in this research study is entirely yours. Should you choose to participate, please sign this form provided the following statements are true:

**I freely agree to participate in this research study.** I understand that the information collected will be utilized for educational purposes. In addition, I understand that I may withdraw from the project at any time. I understand that the risk to me as a result of my participation in this study is similar to the risks people encounter in ordinary living.

___________________________________  ____________________
Signature of person participating                         Date

___________________________________
Printed name of person participating
November 9, 2012

Mr. Carlos Diaz
7017 Rivergate Avenue
Tampa, Florida 33637

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00008873
Title: The Adult Basic Education/Under-aged General Education Development Program: An Exploration of the Latino High School Dropout Phenomenon. Dear Mr. Diaz:

On 11/8/2012 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above referenced protocol. Please note that your approval for this study will expire on 11/8/2013.

Approved Items:

Protocol Document(s):
Dissertation Proposal submit 6-19-12 am comm recs 8-20-12.doc

Consent/Assent Documents:
Informed Consent Document ci.doc.pdf
Informed Consent Document p.doc.pdf
Appendix J (continued)

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes. (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Please note, the informed consent/assent documents are valid during the period indicated by the official, IRB-Approval stamp located on the form. Valid consent must be documented on a copy of the most recently IRB-approved consent form.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813 974-5638.

Sincerely,

John A. Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board