

EDUCATIONAL LIFE HISTORY OF AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL  
VALEDICTORIAN

by

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## **DEDICATION**

In memory of my grandmother, Dr. June Ross, whose own educational trajectory spanned several decades, and who would briefly congratulate me on this achievement before nagging me to begin my doctoral studies.

And to my daughters, Samantha Houston and Rebecca June, that they may build in yet-unimagined ways on the work of the women who have come before them.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*Just because you've taken college classes doesn't mean that you have actually experienced what a higher education place can throw at you. Don't think you know everything, just keep working. Don't give up. It'll be tough, or not, but hey, you've got this. You have done more than many people I know have done, so good job.*

\*\*\*

These are the words Nicole, upon reflecting on her first year of university, wishes to offer students graduating from an Early College High School with their associate's degrees and transitioning to a university setting. Nicole's own story is one of achievement and triumph: born in Texas, she spent most of her childhood in Mexico, transferred to Charles Stewart Early College High School at what should have been the beginning of her tenth grade year, and despite initial enrollment in the wrong courses and immense turmoil at home, she graduated as valedictorian in three years and simultaneously earned an associate's degree.

On first glance, Nicole's story seems like an unusual starting point from which to explore issues of college readiness. She is, arguably, the most academically successful student in her graduating class. She is now attending a major public research university on a full-ride scholarship and completing a pre-med program with aspirations to become a neurosurgeon. And in fact, she initially became the participant in this narrative life history, not because her story fits into easily recognizable dichotomies of college readiness versus underpreparedness, but rather because she sold me a box of Girl Scout cookies one day.

Over the course of our informal relationship, primarily consisting of brief chats on her way to and from the high school's College and Career Center, it became clear that Nicole's story ultimately offers great insight into issues of college readiness, language ideology, and the intersections of gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and mental health during the postsecondary transition. But Nicole defies easy categorization, and her remarkable story defies easy summarization. One could affix a variety of labels on Nicole in an effort to pin down her life story: she is Latina, female, relatively affluent, lesbian, chronically depressed, bilingual. None of these labels, singularly or in combination, tells the whole story, though. Nicole *is* these identities, would not exist as she does without them and their intersections. Yet she is useful as a research participant not because of her filling certain demographic criteria, but because of the informal relationship with which our research journey began. Her taking the time to stop by, day after day, to ask with genuine curiosity how my master's degree was going, and subsequently to share her own academic and personal history so freely, is the starting point for this research journey. An ethic of care and atmosphere of mutual openness and respect have permeated our interactions, and my wish is that this shows through in both her story and its interpretation.

Nowhere in Nicole's life history will the reader find a precise road map or all-inclusive list of programming recommendations to help other students achieve Nicole's level of academic success. Nor does Nicole's complex history offer a measuring stick with which we can rank the achievement of other students with similar sets of circumstances. A danger of life history narrative is the tendency to make universal what stands alone as a singular, nuanced story.

What follows, rather, is one student's story, framed by a discussion of college readiness and intersectionality. Her story raises numerous questions, some of which will be explored in the sections that follow. Nicole's story invites me to ask, if not definitively answer, for instance:

- What do the academic and personal struggles of arguably the most academically prepared university student in a particular school mean for others in her graduating class and their own postsecondary transitions?
- What would have become of Nicole (and by extension, what likely becomes of many of her classmates) had she come to the United States equally academically gifted but less English-proficient, or poorer, or lacking the advocacy of her teachers?
- When class and language and race and gender and sexuality and mental health intersect in shaping an individual's life trajectory, what does it mean for that individual to embrace, or deny, the influence of any of these factors?
- If postsecondary access is viewed as an equity issue, in what ways is one dual enrollment program living up to its equalizing goals, and in what ways could it be perpetuating socioeconomic disparities in college readiness?

In no way, though, are these explorations meant to erase Nicole's singularity or detract from her remarkable achievements. She is, above all else, strong, resilient, and hardworking. Not totally buying into the frameworks I explore in this study, she prefers to consider her difficulties circumstantial rather than systemic, and she prefers celebrating her triumphs to analyzing the origins of the circumstances over which she has had to triumph. She has done remarkably well, and I hope she continues to work towards

including herself in the motivational words she freely shares with her classmates: *Hey, you've got this.*

## **II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

This project is framed by the tenets of life history narrative inquiry, and as such, I have strived for it to remain open-ended and emergent, allowing theoretical lenses to naturally invite a deeper understanding of the data. Critical Race Theory, and in particular a humanizing methodology and the premise of intersectionality, have fundamentally shaped my understanding of Nicole's story. College Readiness as a conceptual framework, and within that the particular features of the Early College High School Initiative, have provided a structure with which I can explore Nicole's educational experiences.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is, simply, "the study of stories" (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 471). A narrative life history involves "extensive interviews" with a single participant, and participants are typically selected partially on the basis of their ability and willingness to remember and reflect on life experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 63). It is important to conceptualize narratives "not as a record of what happened [...] but rather as a continuing interpretation and reinterpretation of our experience" (Bruner, 2004, p. 691-692). These interactions, between narrator and narrative, and between events and our telling of them, have the potential to reveal the participant's particular experience of larger sociological forces such as race, gender, language, and socioeconomic status. Through life history methodology, "a complicated set of stories emerge that may be unexpected, even changing the nature of the research," and "these techniques transform gaps and misunderstandings in mainstream research created by the absence of the standpoints of marginalized people" (Sosulski, Buchanan, & Donnell, 2010, p. 35). Life

histories strive to “provide ‘thick’ description, such that readers might understand a life and then try to see if various theoretical propositions make sense or not” (Tierney, 2013, p. 261). This form of narrative research “acknowledges the complexity of social life” by avoiding predetermined categories of experience and instead allowing a structure to naturally take shape over the course of the life history interview process (Germeten, 2013, p. 615).

However, Riessman (1993) cautioned that one potential shortcoming of the life history approach is that, in transforming interview data into a written narrative, “the transition from spoken to written language is assumed to be unproblematic” (p. 31). In a narrative life history, the bulk of analysis work comes in shaping the narrative itself from collected data (Polkinghorne, 1995). As such, in the methods section of this research project I describe and provide support for the decisions I made in transforming Nicole’s spoken interviews into a written life history.

Narrative life history resists efforts to make a participant’s story representative of potentially harmful abstract ideals. Tierney (2013) demonstrated with the narrative life history of an Hispanic, first-generation college student that narrative serves “neither...to develop theoretical generalizations nor attempt to offer policy recommendations” but rather to “offer a glimpse into one person’s life and hopefully provoke questions and ideas about how that individual lives his or her life and makes sense of it.” (p. 260). Likewise, Nicole’s life history both stands alone as powerful narrative and raises broader questions of race/language, college readiness, and the structural features of dual-credit programs.

Although life histories frequently highlight the stories of middle-aged or older adults, Nicole offers proof that “the young have the ability to be deeply reflective about their lives” and are thus suitable life history participants (Tierney, 2013, p. 261). Adolescent and young adult participants have offered powerful narratives of first-generation college student status (Roberts & Rosenwald, 2001; Tierney, 2013), parent-child relationships (Pratt, Arnold, & Mackey, 2001), social relationships (Paul, 1994), and even the college experience following ECHS graduation (Woodcock & Beal, 2013). As a feminist methodology, narrative life history analysis highlights the stories of participants often omitted from research by virtue of their age, gender, socioeconomic status, or life circumstances (Franz & Stewart, 1994; Gluck & Patai, 1991). This inherently equity-oriented methodology pairs quite naturally with a critical race stance.

### **Critical Race Theory/Intersectionality**

The Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework affirms the power of narrative counterstorytelling to challenge dominant ideologies about race (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). CRT makes the following assertions: that racism is normalized (and thus goes unacknowledged); that white supremacy serves the dominant group both psychologically and economically; that race is a social (not biological) construction; that racialization is differential across times and places to meet shifting needs of the dominant group; and that race is intersectional with gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, disability, religion, educational attainment, and additional personal attributes (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). CRT has been particularly useful as a framework with which to view the educational experiences of non-White youth and college students. Rector-Aranda (2016) argued that school reform and privatization efforts reinforce racism and substandard educational

experiences for youth of color in public schools. At the postsecondary level, McCabe (2009) described the microaggressions and racialized assumptions faced by students of color on a White-majority college campus.

**LatCrit.** LatCrit as a subset of CRT uses an intersectionality lens to examine the experiences of Latina/o populations in the United States. LatCrit is distinct from the larger CRT framework in that linguistic discrimination and immigration policy are areas of particular concern for LatCrit scholars. For instance, Pérez Huber (2010) described the effects of racist nativism, and its intersections with class and gender, on the college experiences of undocumented Chicana students. LatCrit provides a wealth of literature that challenges dominant narratives of low achievement and school failure. Yosso (2006) offered a series of counterstories describing community-driven challenges to negative educational trajectories. Oppland-Cordell (2014) drew on LatCrit theory to describe Latina/o college students' simultaneous positive development of racial and mathematical identities in a calculus class.

Of particular interest to me in my work with Nicole has been the intersections of race and language with sexuality and gender. Mann (2016) described how racist and neoliberal ideologies influence Latina teens' descriptions of their sexual encounters, in particular by obscuring the concept of personal agency. Peña-Talamantes (2013) described the identity negotiations of lesbian and gay Latina/o college students, finding that stigma often leads to compartmentalization of identities, i.e. college self and home self. Velez, Moradi, and DeBlaere (2015) studied "sexual minority" Latina/o adults and the effects of internalized and external racism and heterosexism on psychological distress and self-esteem.

**Linguistic Discrimination.** A significant facet of the Latina/o educational experience in the United States is linguistic discrimination. Vandrick (2015) borrowed from McIntosh's (1990) "knapsack of privilege" in developing a knapsack of non-ESL privilege. From among the items on Vandrick's list:

- I am not labeled "underprepared" because of my linguistic identity.
- My language and writing classes, including classes in languages such as Spanish or French, earn college credit.
- I do not have to wonder if, when asking professors repeated questions about the class, I will be judged as a problem student and/or as "bothering" them.
- People don't say to me with surprise, "Oh, your English is so good!"

As LatCrit theorists and other scholars dedicated to issues of language in schooling repeatedly demonstrate, the opposite of these statements are a reality for many language-"minority" students.

The education of English Learners is a highly polarized (and racialized) issue in the United States, and often states' and districts' decisions are more political than pedagogical. Developmental Bilingual Education, wherein students continue to learn core content in both their native language and in English, has been correlated with higher academic achievement, when compared with transitional (early-exit) bilingual education (Genesse, et al., 2006; Ramirez et al., 1991; Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence, 2002). Nonetheless, the belief persists that English immersion is a more effective or efficient way of developing student literacy, and states and districts either passively fail to offer, or actively ban, developmental bilingual education (Johnson,

2009). In the district in which the present study takes place, bilingual education is only offered through the fifth grade, and secondary students, regardless of their time of entry into U.S. public schools, are provided English-only ESL instruction.

Valenzuela (1999) chronicled the “subtractive process” that “reproduces Mexican youth as a monolingual, English-speaking, ethnic minority, neither identified with Mexico nor equipped to function competently in America’s mainstream” (p. 3). This is a natural result of English-only programs that devalue, or even supplant, Spanish-language literacy among native Spanish-speaking youth. Largely White, monolingual teachers often enter the profession with deficit orientations towards ESL students, orientations that persist in the absence of direct university instruction in alternative lenses (Gainer & Larrotta, 2010). Even “successful” ESL teachers can be complicit in upholding deficit orientations towards their students (Hertzog, 2011). Dual-language programs, though preferable in terms of both academic outcomes and language ideologies, are not immune from deficit ideologies that ultimately champion English-speaking over Spanish-speaking or bilingualism (Pimentel, 2011). At the college level, deficit orientation towards bilingual students can again rear its head. Marshall (2010) described the phenomenon of talented, multilingual students entering the university setting and “re-becoming ESL,” in the sense of having to take developmental-level literacy courses to prove their language competency. Multilingualism as an asset is again replaced by the ideology of non-English language background as a deficit.

**Humanizing Research.** On some fundamental level, caring relationships are an antidote to racialized deficit ideologies targeting Latina/o youth (Valenzuela, 1999). An “ethic of care” can be considered both in K16 program delivery, and as a research stance.

The humanizing research framework “requires that our inquiries involve dialogic consciousness-raising and the building of relationships of dignity and care for both researchers and participants” (Paris, 2011, p. 139-140.). This ideal is reflected in the collaborative, ongoing, sometimes informal nature of follow-up contact with the participant. Moreover, a humanizing research framework requires “that researchers apply these tenets to the ways the findings from research projects get reported” (Irizarry, 2012, p. 293). My goal throughout this project has been to present a narrative analysis that honors Nicole’s lived experience and avoids giving fuel to neoliberal ideologies, while still critically engaging with issues of intersectionality as they present themselves in the context of an Early College High School valedictorian’s transition into the university setting.

### **College Readiness**

Because a major factor driving Texas’s adoption of the Early College High School Initiative has been the effort to increase college readiness and P16 alignment, it is useful to examine the range of ways in which political and academic figures currently define college readiness. The 81st Texas Legislature defined college readiness as

the level of preparation a student must attain in English language arts and mathematics courses to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in an entry-level general education course for credit in that same content area for a baccalaureate degree or associate degree program.

This definition, focusing solely on mathematics and language arts attainment, fits nicely with the state legislature’s emphasis on high-stakes testing as an indicator of academic rigor; however, it neglects the cognitive and sociological factors of college readiness

found in other definitions. Conley offered a somewhat circular definition of college and career readiness:

A student who is ready for college and career can qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses leading to a baccalaureate or certificate, or career pathway-oriented training programs without the need for remedial or developmental coursework. (Educational Policy Improvement Center, 2012, p.1)

However, he went on to identify four research-based “keys” to college and career readiness: cognitive strategies, content knowledge, learning skills and techniques, and transition knowledge and skills. Content knowledge is, in Conley’s definition, just one facet of a comprehensive portrait of college readiness that highlights the metacognitive skills and college-cultural navigation necessary for postsecondary success.

Castro (2013) problematized the Conley model of college and career readiness by examining a college readiness program in Illinois through the lens of critical race theory (CRT). She pointed to racial disparities in students’ college readiness, when measured by the Conley model, and the resultant disproportionate enrollment of Black and Hispanic students into developmental-level community college courses. Castro suggested that researchers “augment” the Conley model using a CRT lens, producing three action items: protect students and communities from deficit ideology; clarify the use of diagnostic and placement testing; and focus on equitable outreach and outcomes. One measure Castro suggested to increase equity in college readiness interventions is a scorecard tracking racially equitable outcomes in college readiness.

In their study of culturally-responsive college readiness programming in a Latina/o community in South Texas, Ozuna, et al. (2016) defined college readiness as “the personal attributes, values, skill sets, and knowledge necessary to enter and succeed in college” (p. 155). Using a humanizing pedagogy framework, the authors arrived at a three-pronged community definition of college readiness, including strong academic skills (particularly literacy), academic support skills (such as motivation and self-regulation), and parental support. This definition, community resource-oriented and born out of a humanizing methodology, could be considered an antidote to the deficit orientation Castro (2013) noted in conventional measures of college readiness.

**Early College High School Initiative.** The Early College High School (ECHS) Initiative creates partnerships between high schools and community colleges that allow high school students the opportunity to simultaneously earn a high school diploma and an associate’s degree. ECHS programs target low-income students, first-generation college students, English language learners, and racial and ethnic minorities, and “other underserved populations,” all of whom are more at risk of dropping out of high school, not enrolling in postsecondary education, or requiring non-credit-bearing developmental coursework in college (Jobs for the Future, 2016).

Compared with their fellow students on traditional high school campuses, ECHS students exhibit higher assessment scores, better attendance, and fewer disciplinary referrals (Muñoz, Prather, & Fischetti, 2014; Edmunds, et al., 2012). It is difficult to attribute these academic benefits to any one feature of ECHSs, and it is important to note that in most instances, ECHS students are a self-selecting group, perhaps likely to have

superior academic performance in any setting. Nonetheless, certain structural features of ECHSs do seem to help encourage student academic success and emotional well-being.

Muñoz, Fischetti, and Prather (2014) highlighted four unique and beneficial features of the ECHS setting: commitment to serving underrepresented students; strong partnerships between ECHS, college, and community; collaboration to offer transfer credits; and access to academic, social, and behavioral supports. Cravey (2013) identified similar themes in his ethnographic work with ECHS students: diversity, respect, responsibility, safety, learning, and caring. Ongaga (2010) noted that students reported academic frustration and social isolation in ECHS settings, but that caring relationships with both teachers and peers were crucial in reinforcing high academic standards and supporting emotional health.

Despite these apparent academic and social benefits of the ECHS initiative, other studies highlight a lack of evidence that students are adequately prepared for a university setting, and lack a of social support for students in the ECHS setting. Thompson and Ongaga (2011) used an “ethic of care” framework to discuss the positive impact ECHS instructors had on students’ academic success and emotional health. However, students in this setting reported a difficult transition to a university setting, where these supports are not as freely given and must be sought out. Woodcock and Beal (2013) noted that all three ECHS graduates they interviewed, despite reporting themselves to be well-prepared for university, had earned at least one grade of C or below. Participants also discussed the opportunity cost of ECHS attendance in terms of the availability of extracurricular opportunities, and some reported lack of adult support in the ECHS setting.

Oliver, et al. (2010) noted a similar potential discrepancy between ECHS student self-assessment and actual academic performance. In a study comparing ECHS students with traditional-aged college freshmen, the traditional-aged college freshmen scored higher than ECHS students on the following measures: attitude towards educators; desire to finish college; study habits; sociability; and receptivity to academic assistance, career counseling, financial guidance, and social enrichment. Conversely, ECHS students scored higher than traditional-aged peers on measures of math and science confidence, sense of financial security, highest degree desired, and educational stress. These measures offer a wealth of areas in which ECHS staff can work to better prepare students for postsecondary transition.

These affective differences between high school-aged and traditional college freshmen perhaps become even more apparent when comparing ECHS students with their community college classmates, many of whom are “nontraditional” students in terms of age, employment, veteran status, family circumstances, and financial situation. Williams and Southers (2010) examined the impact of ECHS students on adult learners in North Carolina community colleges and found that, while ECHS promotes access, the program poses problems for adult learners and instructors, specifically that the presence of ECHS students in community college classrooms may hinder the ability of adult learners to experience meaningful, self-directed learning opportunities. Moreover, they concluded that community college instructors tend to be more experienced in working with self-motivated adults and may have trouble adjusting their teaching to accommodate high school-aged students. This study raises questions about ECHS programming and conflicting goals for community colleges, who have long honored and focused on adult

populations and now, in some cases, must accommodate both adult learners and young adolescent learners in the same classrooms.

Of particular interest to the present study is the performance of Latina young women in ECHS settings. Locke, Stedrak, and Eadens (2014) investigated factors contributing to the academic underperformance of young Latinas in an ECHS, relative to their non-Latina classmates, using a framework of “freedoms,” “unfreedoms,” and “deformed choices.” The researchers identified several “freedoms to achieve,” that is, educational opportunities at the school such as challenging coursework and academic support services. However, the researchers also identified multiple “unfreedoms” experienced by the Latina youth, including academic underpreparedness, competing household responsibilities, and a lack of parental knowledge of college. These “unfreedoms” led to the young women's “deformed choices,” that is, non-ideal choices made as a result of non-ideal circumstances, such as procrastination and tutorial non-attendance. Because the ECHS Initiative champions the goal of increasing diversity and access in college settings, it is crucial that these factors causing differential academic performance be actively confronted.

Much of the research on ECHS students focuses on features that are unique to the schoolwide magnet program model, in particular the importance students place on belonging to a learning community of supportive, like-minded peers and instructors. The campus in which the present study takes place does not adhere to this model: rather, ECHS programming exists within the walls of a comprehensive, neighborhood public school. Nicole’s narrative will highlight ways in which this school’s deviation from the national model was at times an asset and at times a challenge.

**Advanced Placement.** As stated, the ECHS program has at its core the goal of increasing college enrollment and completion among underserved populations. ECHS programming exists as one of many models by which students can earn college credit while still in high school. It is worthwhile to examine how dual credit options such as ECHS contrast with Advanced Placement, the most popular alternative. From 2003 to 2013, the number of students taking Advanced Placement exams for potential college credit more than doubled, as did the number of students earning scores of 3 or higher, considered passing by many postsecondary institutions (College Board, 2014). However, Black and Hispanic students are still underrepresented in both AP course-taking and exam passing, and only one state (Hawaii) has met the College Board’s own standard for eliminating the equity gap for Black students (College Board, 2014).

Despite the organization’s publicized efforts to reduce the equity gap, Advanced Placement as compared with dual credit options still carries the public perception of being a white, suburban program. Klopfenstein and Lively (2012) reported that schools with the greatest number of AP course offerings tend to be large, suburban, and high-SES. Dual enrollment students, in contrast, are more likely to come from rural settings, to be eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and to balance work and school once in college. Only 81% of African American students (as opposed to 94% of Asian American students) attend schools where at least one AP exam is taken, and of this 81%, African American students are more likely than other student groups to attend “Low AP” schools, where fewer total AP courses and exams are offered (Educational Testing Service, 2008). Low-income students of all races are more likely to attend Low AP or non-AP offering schools; and rural, low-income schools are the least likely to offer Advanced Placement,

while suburban, high-income, white-majority are the most likely (Educational Testing Service, 2008).

Because access to AP versus dual enrollment differs based on student income, geographical setting, and race, it is worth examining how these two groups of students fare once enrolled in college. Klopfenstein and Lively (2012) found that dual enrollment students, on average, complete college more quickly than their AP counterparts, but they speculate that this may be due to greater motivation to enter the workforce quickly. Speroni reports that compared to AP students, dual enrollment students are more likely to go to college, but less likely to go to a four-year college; furthermore, this uptake in enrollment is only seen among dual enrollment students whose college courses took place on the college campus (National Center for Postsecondary Research, 2011). This points to the importance of convenience and familiarity of setting when it comes to postsecondary enrollment, and gives credence to the ECHS Initiative's focus on offering classes on the supporting college's campus.

Advanced Placement and dual enrollment programs, in addition to differing in the student populations they target, may also differ qualitatively in curricular content. Peckham (2010) posited that writing instruction in particular tends to be differentiated across socioeconomic lines: writing courses serving working-class populations "train students to be workers" by emphasizing basic literacy, grammatical rules, and workplace writing tasks, while courses serving a higher-income student population tend to emphasize critical thinking, argument formation, and the "language and cognition of power," which for middle-class students is a "continuation of what they have been learning at home" (p. 9, 48). My anecdotal observations, borne out in discussion with

Nicole about her and her AP-taking classmates' performance in the university setting, suggest that on some level, Advanced Placement versus dual enrollment instruction mirrors, and perpetuates, the social stratification Peckham (2010) describes.

In the sections that follow, these lenses of college readiness and intersectionality take a momentary backseat, and it is Nicole's story that drives. After an immersive experience in Nicole's singular, remarkable story, I will invite the reader to again revisit these theoretical lenses, the narrative data having provided depth and nuance.

### **III. METHODS**

Early on in my research with Nicole, I embraced what I perceived as the complexity of life history narrative, and I accepted the fact that my proposal would be more speculative than not. Nonetheless, as the project unfolded, I was frequently met with a sense of insecurity about the ways in which our interviews deviated from my plans and expectations. Ultimately, embracing a humanizing research framework (Paris, 2011) resolved much of this insecurity. This methods section, then, aims in its structure to capture the narrative unfolding of the research methodology itself.

#### **Researcher Positionality**

I am currently the special education department chair at Charles Stewart Early College High School; the 2016-17 school year is my third year in this role and my seventh year as a special education teacher in urban, low-SES, ‘minority’-majority public secondary schools. I have long been interested in the ways in which English-only, ESL policies affect language ideologies in secondary schools in Texas. At my previous campus I informally investigated the disconnect between the school’s International Baccalaureate programming, lauding internationalism and ‘foreign language’ learning, and the school’s deficit orientation towards its large ELL population. So I was certainly positioned to read Nicole’s language experiences through a language ideology lens.

My time as a peer writing tutor during my undergraduate years has undoubtedly shaped my tendency to see literacy, and writing instruction, as paramount to college readiness. I was lucky in that the texts we read in our tutor preparation course were more theoretical than practical, and this early exposure to the sociopolitical implications of writing instruction has stuck with me. Although Nicole’s literacy instruction experiences

(aside from bilingualism) are not a focus of this particular piece, I leave the door open for a larger exploration of the extent to which Advanced Placement and dual credit each align with, and subsequently reproduce, socioeconomic differences in postsecondary preparation. Nicole's outsider status, as a student who entered a working-class public high school after receiving a private education in another country, primes her to pick up on some of these differences.

As a special education professional, I am frequently in the position of championing the 'underdog' students: my caseload consists of youth who, concurrently with disability, have experienced trauma, legal system involvement, substance abuse, homelessness, teen pregnancy, and truancy. My interactions with the larger campus population are limited: I work with students in inclusion classroom settings, participate in campus-wide and extracurricular activities, and teach a homeroom class open to the general population.

However, because my office is across the hall from the school's College and Career Center and shares a hallway with the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) classrooms, I have frequent interactions with the school's highest-achieving, college-bound population. When the college center is closed, students frequently stop by my office to ask questions about an upcoming college field trip or SAT registration - questions my staff and I can answer in general terms due to our close working relationship with the college center. And occasionally, as in the case of Nicole, youth outside of the disability population make the special education office a regular check-in point. Often these are teens interested in future careers in special education or

rehabilitation, and they visit to ask career-related questions, but sometimes, as with Nicole, they just click with me and my office-mates.

I began a master's program in developmental education with an intense interest in underserved students in higher education, in particular students with disabilities. While this continues to be an overarching theme of my work, I have become particularly interested in the transition from high school to postsecondary settings, and the ways in which college readiness programs, such as ECHS, AVID, and AP, either prepare or fail to fully prepare students for success in postsecondary academic settings. Because my heart is with underserved, low-achieving populations, I initially struggled with whether Nicole was a suitable focus of my research. And perhaps I have been primed to see her story as one of (relative) economic privilege. However, I have come to feel that despite the fact that Nicole is somewhat non-representative of the school population, due to her elite early educational experiences, her triumphs and struggles shed light on the college readiness barriers shared by many of her underserved peers.

I am a feminist, and this undoubtedly permeates my worldview and interpretation of data. The idea of narrative inquiry as a feminist methodology resonated with me, particularly in the collaborative, anti-hierarchical relationship building between participant and researcher. Furthermore, I like stories with strong female characters, and Nicole's is one I am forever thankful to be able to help tell.

Finally, it is impossible to live the role of researcher outside of the role of parent. My interviews with Nicole took place over the course of my second pregnancy and the subsequent birth of my child. Just as we timed sessions around Nicole's coursework, family obligations, work schedule, health, and trips to Mexico, we timed them around my

medical issues, midwife appointments, childcare hours, and pumping sessions. What I initially imagined to be a marathon of back-to-back interviews ultimately stretched out over the course of several months. Unexpected benefits of this extended timeline have been the opportunity for more informal contact between interviews, and the ability to follow Nicole over the course of her entire first year of university study.

### **Setting**

Charles Stewart Early College High School is an urban, open-enrollment public high school in Texas and a member of the city's Independent School District. Students enroll primarily by virtue of happening to live in the area, although a handful transfer in from neighboring areas to participate in the Early College program. Stewart recently celebrated its fiftieth year of operation. From its opening through the early 1990s, Stewart was considered a state, and national, leader in high school football. However, the school's athletic prowess was eventually overshadowed by declining enrollment, high dropout rates, and safety concerns, culminating in an on-campus murder in 2003. In 2009, Stewart, along with a handful of other schools in the area, was slated for shutdown by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) due to repeated low test performance. The adoption of a Community School model of offering social work, mental health services, food and clothing assistance, parenting classes, a teen parent daycare, and community agency partnerships, is credited with the school's recent turnaround and rising academic performance (Coalition for Community Schools, 2016.) Going beyond the rhetoric, the sense that Stewart is a community school is palpable: students (even those who are truant from their classes!) congregate on the school grounds, going to either informal or school-sponsored sports practice or using the wireless before school, staying well past seven in

the evening for tutoring, more sports practice, free dinner, or just socialization time after school. Evening and weekend events are well-attended by students and their families.

Currently, Stewart's enrollment is around 1300 students. The school population is approximately 80% Hispanic and 15% African American, with growing populations of White and Asian students. The neighborhood surrounding Stewart High School is undergoing gradual gentrification, and the White enrollment is expected to continue rising to reflect the shifting demographics of the neighborhood. Historically, the African American student population at Stewart matched or outnumbered the Hispanic population, and neighborhood gentrification is displacing the African American student population more drastically than the Hispanic population. One-third of students at Stewart are considered English language learners, and Spanish is by and large the most prevalent home language. A sizeable minority of students at Stewart are considered refugees, and officially there are nearly fifty home languages represented at the school. The school's standardized test performance has been considered Academically Acceptable by the TEA's metrics for the last several years following the 2009 near-shutdown, although reading and writing performance continue to lag, with most recent English End of Course Exam passing rates barely above 50%.

### **Participant Selection**

Nicole's and my life history narrative research process began, in an informal capacity, during the 2014-15 school year, months before our first formal interview. Nicole frequented the high school's College and Career Center, which happened to be across the hallway from my office. She was popular and well-liked, at least among the adults at our school, so she would pop in frequently to say hello to my office-mates, some

of whom had known her throughout her three years at Stewart. My first real interaction with Nicole was when she stopped by to sell Girl Scout cookies: we chatted briefly during that interaction, and this became the first of several informal chats between us. We would mostly discuss her college plans (early on, she had been offered a full-ride scholarship to a local competitive public university) or upcoming school events. By late spring of 2015, I came to know that Nicole would be both the valedictorian of Stewart, and one of only two ECHS associate's degree graduates. It was around this time that I was cementing my own plans to do narrative inquiry with ECHS participants. Although I originally planned to interview students who had opted out of, or only marginally participated in, the ECHS program, it occurred to me to describe the project to Nicole. She was enthusiastic (throughout our relationship she has enjoyed hearing my talk of research endeavors and graduate school. Her own plans include schooling well beyond the undergraduate level.) We exchanged contact information and made plans to keep in touch over the summer.

A week later, Nicole's valedictorian speech became the first event in which she was simultaneously Nicole-the-person and Nicole-the-prospective-research-participant. Her speech struck many theoretical chords with me: *critical race theory! Linguistic discrimination! Intersectionality!* And I came to realize that I wanted her to be the sole participant of a narrative life history study. I coded the speech, noting in particular what I saw as evidence of linguistic discrimination. During the speech, she recalled in detail the experience of taking a language proficiency exam on her first day of enrollment in Texas: "I *still* cannot believe I did not remember the word 'hammer' in English!" This is a story she repeats often.

After graduation, Nicole left immediately for a month-long trip to Mexico, but we corresponded by text and email, working on plans to meet up and discuss the project. We did finally meet, at a Subway across the street from the high school, Nicole escorted by her two younger brothers. We spoke at length, and I explained my basic ideas for the project. Nicole liked the idea of organizing the narrative chronologically, with ‘chapters’ corresponding to periods in her schooling (early childhood, kindergarten, elementary, middle, high school.) She gave me some background information about her educational trajectory: she had been born in Texas but moved to Mexico to be cared for by her grandmother due to a serious illness in early childhood. She had attended private kindergarten, public elementary and middle school (with concurrent private English tutoring), and the first few months of private high school, before moving back to Texas and enrolling at Stewart. Upon enrollment at Stewart, Nicole immediately faced language proficiency testing, placement in courses of which she had already completed the equivalents in Mexico, and an eventual move into accelerated classes and the ECHS program due to the advocacy of her teachers, who noted her advanced academic skills.

I chose Nicole, in large part because of our informal relationship and her interest in the research process, but also due to her incredibly unique situation: newcomer to U.S public schools, joins Early College program, graduates high school and community college simultaneously in three years. But, as Paris (2011) reminded, “we choose participants as individuals, yet cultural analysts are most interested in the ways that individuals are windows into the meanings and activities of cultural communities” (p. 142). For Nicole my hope has been that her unique circumstances offer a window into larger questions of race, language, and college readiness. I was initially hesitant to choose

Nicole, because I wanted to avoid perpetuating what Pyne and Means (2013) referred to as the “Successful Hispanic” narrative, wherein I would inadvertently “simplify and homogenize the day-to-day experiences of underrepresented students, erasing contradiction and struggle,” or even create a “false measuring stick by which ‘less successful’ students are seen as problematic” (p. 190). This struggle dissipated, though, when I more fully embraced a humanizing research and narrative methodology framework, both of which anchored the data in Nicole’s lived experience, raising questions about larger issues while ardently avoiding any tendency to simplify or emblemize Nicole’s complex life history.

In addition, Paris’s (2011) humanizing research framework, a “methodological stance, which requires that our inquiries involve dialogic consciousness-raising and the building of relationships of dignity and care for both researchers and participants,” (p. 137), as well as Irizarry’s (2012) adoption of the same stance, served as anchors to me as I navigated the seeming conflict between research and relationship. The humanizing framework allowed me to be open with Nicole about the personal constraints on me as a researcher, particularly my need to balance data collection with work obligations, parenting, and the physical demands of a difficult pregnancy. Likewise, Nicole was empowered to invite me into her life beyond the bounds of our interview topics: we checked in with each other frequently by text, email, and Facebook; she connected with a paramedic friend of mine for possible job-shadowing; we continued our informal chats the many times she came to Stewart to visit her former teachers or attend school plays; and we maintained open dialogue regarding her academic struggles and mental health needs. The humanizing framework profoundly shifts the conversation about the

researcher's stance by acknowledging research as a relational process and inviting the researcher to proactively create circumstances that allow for healthy, empathetic relationships with participants.

### **Pseudonym**

The name Nicole is a pseudonym, and I am using this pseudonym against the participant's wishes. From the outset of this project, I provided Nicole with the option to either adopt a pseudonym or have me use her real name. I revisited this question with her several times, before and after each interview as well as by text and email. Each time, Nicole stated that she would like her real name used. After our third and final interview, during which Nicole revealed information about sensitive topics such as her mental health status, sexual orientation, and strained, abusive relationship with her father, when I asked her about using a pseudonym she replied:

It's just, like, this like saying 'Oh yeah, um you're belly's falling out.' 'Oh yeah, the sack of meat, of fat, oh okay. No, the sack of fat on my chest. Oh, okay. I don't care.'

Despite Nicole's insistence that the emotional 'weight' she described in her interviews was in fact no more than a 'sack of meat,' I ultimately adopted a pseudonym for her. I feel that Nicole is relatively young and early in her academic career, and while she is welcome to share her story as recorded in this document as widely as she wishes, I do not want to take away her right to non-disclose information on these topics, should she change her mind at a later date.

Likewise, names of schools, towns, and individuals have been changed to reduce the possibility of revealing Nicole's identity.

## **Interviews**

We met for our first formal interview in November 2015, in the university's student union. Nicole was late for our meeting time because she had been at the bookstore purchasing a study guide to prepare for one of her upcoming finals. She was visibly anxious and tired throughout the interview, frequently yawning, trailing off, or losing her train of thought. I asked her several times if she wanted to end the session and reschedule. However, she insisted on wanting to talk, and indeed as the interview went on she lit up recounting some of her favorite educational memories. We kept a chronological flow to the interview, touching on key events from each of Nicole's major eras of schooling. When the topic shifted to her current academic performance and upcoming exams, Nicole became more anxious, ultimately requesting that we not discuss this because it was stressing her out. She was preoccupied with worry about maintaining the GPA requirements for one of her scholarships. However, at the end of the interview she expressed gratitude for the opportunity to talk about her experience. We ended with some light, off-topic conversation and made plans to meet again.

A couple of weeks after this first interview I ran into Nicole at a school play on the Stewart campus. According to her, she was there to get her mind off of final exams, which were happening that week. My husband and preschooler were in attendance with me, and this was one occasion in which Nicole's and my navigation of the dual roles of research and relationship was awkward. We mutually agreed not to talk shop that evening; she was at the play to mentally disconnect from final exam preparations. Aside from some small talk, we ended up speaking very little. She seemed somewhat nervous

about the presence of my spouse and child, and besides, I wanted her to feel free to reconnect with former classmates who were also in attendance.

Nicole went to Mexico for a month over Christmas. We met for our second interview in late January. This time we were meeting in the high school library, because Nicole had recently badly sprained her leg and was therefore living at home and commuting for her one on-campus class (her other classes that semester were online.) She was again somewhat late for our appointed meeting time. The overall interview process felt rushed and somewhat personally disconnected. Even though we were in a private conference room within the library, our attention was occasionally divided by nearby noise. The questions I asked detracted from the desired narrative, chronological flow, and Nicole's answers were somewhat perfunctory. The conversation did not flow naturally as it had during the previous interview. I had decided to try to narrow the focus to specific themes I had picked out of the first interview: namely, linguistic discrimination and postsecondary transition. I used touchstones from the initial, chronological interview to structure these follow-up questions, but nonetheless my decision to ask topical, rather than narrative-oriented, questions led to interview data that deviated significantly from a narrative structure and was ultimately difficult to incorporate into the narrative analysis. I struggled to maintain a natural, conversational structure to the interview due to my surprise that the data so contradicted my assumptions. In previous interactions with Nicole, especially online, I felt that her comprehension of current events embodied a critical race theory framework. So I was surprised to discover her unwillingness to view her own experiences through this framework, instead framing and reframing her story

using the lens of personal responsibility within a structure without questioning the institutional structures themselves.

After taking time to reflect on the second interview, I found ways in which Nicole's narrative of the postsecondary transition process and her own college-preparedness opened up new lines of inquiry. However, this time I was determined to adhere with more fidelity to a narrative style of questioning. Asking topical questions in the second interview was a deviation from the narrative, open-ended structure I envisioned, and it produced data that was hard to incorporate into the narrative analysis. So for the third interview, I realized that the narrowing-down I envisioned would not be a narrowing-towards specific topics of my selection, but rather a further narrowing of the time scale. Rather than following up on *topics* of interest, I would follow up on *times* of interest. The resultant interview was lengthy, substantial. The conversation had a natural flow, which the second interview had lacked. Our narrowing-down of the time scale at times filled in gaps in the previous data, at times offered illustrative details, and at times challenged the positions implied by previous interview data. We ended this interview with a sense of completion, agreeing to do any necessary follow-up work primarily by phone and email.

### **Analysis**

Polkinghorne (1995) distinguishes from “analysis of narratives” and “narrative analysis”: whereas analysis of narratives comprises the collection and subsequent analysis of participants' narrated data in search of common themes, narrative analysis consists of synthesizing narrated data into a cohesive story (p. 12). In narrative analysis,

the bulk of analytical work is in the transformation of interview data, supplemented by contextual research, into a narrative text.

In the case of Nicole, her communication style naturally inclines towards narrative: in discussing her life history she tends to offer episodic stories to illustrate points, rather than summarizing or theorizing about her experience. In fact, the times where our interviews were most successful (natural conversational flow and free sharing of details) were when I trusted this episodic style and did not try to pin Nicole down on taking theoretical stances towards her experiences.

Nicole tended to think of her life in “chapters” roughly corresponding to eras of her schooling: early childhood, private kindergarten, public elementary school (with the important sub-chapter of private English tutoring), public middle school, public high school (and her transition into American schooling and ECHS), and the first year of university. The first step in my narrative analysis was to sort the interview data chronologically, into these chapters. I then removed obvious redundancies, as well as interview parts that didn’t “translate” well into print (such as Nicole narrating as she showed me photos of a school project she’d done in high school.) Much of the remaining data fit neatly into the narrative, chronological storyline. Places I struggled were where Nicole broke from her episodic tendencies and, either on her own or due to a question of mine, mused on more abstract topics (reflecting on her own personality, work ethic, and tendency towards depression). There were places where I had to make judgment calls about which of these elements to include in the storyline, and where to include them. This judgment was informed by a notion of plot, an element guiding the researcher to “select from the myriad of happenings those which are direct contributors to the terminal

situation of the story” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 8). I shortened or cut data that did not contribute to the emerging plotline (lengthy descriptions of school projects.) One particular difficulty I had was in incorporating data that broke from the episodic structure (often due to my own breaks from a narrative questioning style) but that I felt were important due to the insight they offered. Viewing the condensed interview data in chronological form was a necessary precursor to allowing a plotline to emerge. Although the final narrative analysis does not adhere to the “chapters” with which Nicole sorts her own story, I believe a sense of educational eras as signposts remains.

The emergent plotline that follows this chapter is framed around Nicole’s motivational self-talk: *you’ve got this, you can do this, just keep going*: words she freely offers her peers but struggles to internalize for herself. The plotline traces the development of Nicole’s *fighting will*, her *fresa* personality, which Nicole considers an asset in her efforts to maintain high academic standards despite a variety of barriers. The reader is invited to follow her early development of high academic standards in private kindergarten, her tumultuous adjustment to the culture of public elementary and middle school, and her further struggles to fit in upon entering U.S. high school. Glimpses of the intersectional forces that helped to shape Nicole’s pathway emerge in the narrative: conflict with her father following her coming out, socioeconomic differences between herself and her peers, and inconsistent access to mental health services. Nicole’s experience of language ideologies permeates the narrative: although she denies any feeling that she was wronged, her high school trajectory in the U.S. zigzags through various language-based structural barriers. The chronicling of these barriers in no way serves to imply a lack of achievement on Nicole’s part, and I believe that framing her

story with the motivational adages Nicole so freely offers helps her story ultimately remain one of achievement and perseverance. Finally, the reader is invited to journey with Nicole through her first year of university study. Arguably among the most prepared students in her high school graduating class, Nicole nonetheless experienced academic and para-academic difficulties in her transition to a university setting. Again framed by Nicole's own motivational words, the story of her postsecondary transition is one of both struggle and triumph.

Nicole is fully bilingual and biliterate: her academic achievement records and her daily oral and written language demonstrate a mastery of both Spanish and English. Nonetheless, there were times in our interviews when Nicole's language usage was what could be considered idiosyncratic. I wanted the narrative to be richly detailed and full of Nicole's voice; but I wanted to avoid portraying this talented bilingual student as deficient or incorrect in her English usage. Preston (1985) described the relationship between written transcriptions of speech and the speaker's presumed competence when he discussed "academic misspellings" of dialect: "they all create a false impression of the speaker, or, worse, they suggest a negative or condescending attitude by the reporter towards his or her informant" (p. 329). I would argue that directly transcribing some of the grammatical features of dialect and/or L2 English creates a similar effect. Therefore, by and large I homogenized the linguistic features that I worried might contribute to a deficit view of this talented bilingual student's language abilities. I kept the features that, while nonstandard, were not outright errors, and which contributed to a sense of Nicole's voice. The Cuban-American poet and scholar Gustavo Perez Firmat referred to his code-meshing as "interlingualism, where I can take advantage of the happy accidents that

occur when my two languages bump into each other” (Dick, 2001). While Nicole does not typically choose to code-mesh, at least not in academic contexts, at least not with me, I nonetheless embrace the term “happy accidents” to describe some of her beautifully idiosyncratic language choices.

### **Interpretation and Validity**

Nicole was, by and large, more comfortable keeping her story personal and singular, as opposed to treating it as representational of sociopolitical issues. In adherence to the humanizing research framework (Paris, 2011) as well as in an effort to ensure validity (Polkinghorne, 2007), I took a collaborative stance with Nicole on my analysis of the data. She was reluctant to participate in this type of collaboration, typically answering me with “whatever you think is best” or “it’s up to you” when I approached her with possible interpretive stances. However, one thing Nicole made clear was that she did *not* view her story through the lenses of critical race theory or linguistic discrimination. Given my own sense that these lenses fit naturally with the narrative data, I revisited possible resolutions to discrepancies between researcher and participant theoretical stance. Vindrola-Padros and Johnson (2014) distinguished between “narrated,” “nonnarrated,” and “disnarrated” data, which is a more traditional approach to narrative analysis that would have offered freedom to read between the lines of Nicole’s story, reflecting on the significance of her insertions and omissions. This freedom, though, seemed to stray from a collaborative, humanizing approach. Andrews (2002) offered four approaches to conducting feminist research with participants who do not identify with a feminist framework, and the one I find most in line with a collaborative, humanizing approach is “research as dialogue,” which approaches potential conflict between the

researcher's and participant's frameworks from a standpoint of egalitarianism and mutual perspective-taking. However, I ultimately adhered to Hartman's (2015) approach of "strong multiplicity," which bypasses the idea of either intratextual or interpersonal conflict, instead treating conflicting interview data as evidence of the frameworks' and issues' inherent complexity. Adopting this stance, I was able to include the elements that (to me) implied a linguistic discrimination framework, while also including Nicole's outright rejection of this framework's appropriateness.

My hope is that in the narrative analysis that follows, the reader is immersed in Nicole's life history. I have endeavored to allow her story to speak for itself, while inviting the reader to contemplate issues of intersectionality and college readiness implicit in Nicole's words.

#### IV. NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

In the story that follows, the reader is invited to follow Nicole on her journey from kindergarten, through twelve years of schooling, and into her first year of university. A driving force in this story is Nicole's strength of will and determination to maintain high academic standards despite personal difficulties. Her story, while singular and remarkable, will raise questions about college readiness, intersectionality, and language ideology. Nicole was the valedictorian of her Early College High School and earned an associate's degree; yet her narrative sheds light on her (and by extension, many of her peers') academic and social underpreparedness for higher education. Class, sexuality, and language have intersected in a complex, sometimes seemingly paradoxical way for Nicole: in her story are both instances in which she faced barriers because of her identities, and instances in which she perpetrated classism and language ideology against her peers. Nicole's story, because it is so nuanced, defies easy answers and instead invites exploration of the inherent complexity of college readiness as framed by critical race theory. These questions will be revisited, but I invite the reader first to focus attention on the story itself, which, like Nicole herself, is complex and nuanced, and which resists being fully pinned down by any ideological stance.

##### **Narrative**

*Just keep working. Don't give up. You've got this.*

That's what all my old teachers say to me, and it's what I read online. It's the same thing I would tell this year's seniors. If only I believed it myself. I'm trying. I used to have that fighting will, but now I just feel so tired.

So much of what I went through last year, I feel like it squeezed out every last drop of my will. With dad taking me for these long lectures, or else making me clean the house all night before I could even start my homework. It got really bad after I came out. And my girlfriend I had last year, Ashley, she's the one I mostly relied on for emotional support, but my dad always assumed I was out to do illicit things with her. He wanted me to live at home this year, to help him take care of my little brother. When I submitted my application for housing, I feel like that was the last brave thing I did.

What got me through it all was the fact that I'm what we used to call 'fresa.' It's kind of like preppy or stuck-up. Some people have called me a bitch. At my private kindergarten in Mexico, we were all that way. The kindergarten was so much work; they had us multiplying all the way to 12x12. When my grandmother moved me to public elementary school, I was way ahead. The other kids in my class were still learning to draw lines and circles. Bullies took advantage of this and made me do their work. But I was the type of person who didn't like to share. In fact, I'd get into fights a lot. I once stabbed a guy who stole my backpack. Luckily, my grandmother did massages at her house, and a lot of the teachers went to her, so I never really got into trouble. But without being the way I am, I never would have gotten through senior year, with all the school stress, and everything at home.

Being that way has made it hard to make friends here. You have to remember, I'm not like other students from Mexico and Central America. For one thing, I didn't just have public school English in middle school, which was really poor. I mean, my dad took English back in middle school, and he couldn't find a job when he came here, because he would ask people for *work* and they would give him *water*. By the time I got to middle

school English, I was pretty much teaching the class. I knew more than the teacher.

Because in fourth and fifth grade, my grandmother sent me to private English school with this teacher who was very renowned. I would go every day after school, and we learned so much. She taught us that the word *autumn* is very beautiful, but here in the U.S. people say *fall*, because ‘it falls’ or something, and I just think that’s so ridiculous, so I always say *autumn*. But because of having those classes, I was really not like the other students who came here from other countries.

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On the first day I enrolled here, they made me take a test to see if I would stay here at Stewart or if they would send me to Newcomer Academy, which is where students go who really don’t know any English at all. And the registrar could tell from the way I was nodding when she spoke, even though I was too nervous to speak back, that I understood English, so she didn’t want me to have to take the test, but it was just procedure. The test came out good, I guess, since I was able to stay at Stewart, but it was tedious, and I was so nervous. I even forgot the word for *hammer*, which was very embarrassing.

At first, they put me in all regular ninth grade classes, plus the math and writing intervention classes for students who had failed the STAAR test in middle school. It was actually my teachers who spoke up for me and said I should be in more advanced classes, so then they moved me to pre-AP. Except I still had to take Spanish, which was a waste of time. We were doing like second or third grade work even in the Advanced Placement class. I would have taken French, but apparently the French teacher had just quit. But

then I took the TSI test that spring, and I got to enroll in my first community college class over the summer

At the start of my sophomore year, I guess they were finally able to translate my Mexican transcript or something, because they realized they made a mistake and I should have already been a junior. So then I had to take all these extra classes, on top of the community college, to graduate in three years.

But my teachers here always wished that other students had even a little bit of my work ethic. I used to help out the ESL teacher with tutoring Spanish-speaking students to get ready for the STAAR test. And it was very interesting helping them to learn English. I tried to get them to feel the sentences cohesive and get at more than just the literal meaning. But I saw that they adapted very quickly to what I would call the likeness of the American student. They just seemed to lack a willingness to learn. All through elementary and middle school, a lot of my classmates were that way. But the people I went to kindergarten with, they're more like me. You really have to learn that willingness to work hard from an early age.

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I need to find that strong will again. I swear that I'm trying. The counseling center here at the university is helping a lot, and also what I've learned from other students, and online from Tumblr. The community college classes were fun, but they don't always relate to my classes here, and it's not as easy. Finding my classrooms has been something new, and figuring out how to get help from professors, when classes are really large, and a lot of them are like, "I'm just here to give you the lecture." I've tried out different

tutoring sessions, but nothing has really clicked. I have to make a certain GPA to keep my scholarship, and that's been difficult.

But the students in my classes, especially the ones who took AP instead of early college, they seem to have a lot more methods of studying. Like index cards have always been the most useless thing to me, but I've learned ways of doing different things with the index cards that I never would have imagined. I'm also taking most of my classes online this semester, and that helps, because it's forcing me to actually read the textbook. I always used to just rely on listening in class. And a lot of my ways of studying I've learned on Tumblr. Like something called bullet journals, where you make a page for each day and then write a to-do list.

The best thing this year has been just being away from home, which is very toxic at times. Being able to do some of the things I always used to see on American TV: going to my first homecoming game. Going to the lake. Going to I-Hop in the middle of the night. But school stress has been really rough, and overconfidence on my study methods. Having to build my own support system since I don't really have the support of my family. Getting in with the counseling center.

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I think it's important for the seniors at Stewart to know that just because you've taken college classes doesn't mean that you have actually experienced what a higher education place can throw at you. But like people tell me, and like I'm trying to believe, *don't give up. You've already done more than most people have. Just keep going.*

### **Framework for Discussion**

In this story, some of Nicole's words are difficult to swallow, especially for the researcher committed to a critical race understanding of college readiness. I would like for Nicole's story of academic success to provide insight into the specific contributing factors that helped her; instead, it often feels that she achieved despite, not because of, her high school experiences. A deeper look at the narrative data will ultimately reveal places in which various institutional factors either promoted or hindered her academic and personal success.

Nor is it easy to hear Nicole projecting some of the same language ideologies that impeded her educational access, towards her immigrant peers. Nicole does not embody what Pyne and Means (2013) refer to as the "Successful Hispanic" narrative; hers is not a straightforward, made-for-TV, neoliberal tale of a hardworking student who (probably with the help of a young white teacher) rose above home circumstances to attain academic distinction. Quite the opposite, in fact: Nicole's early childhood was permeated with markers of privilege, such as the opportunity to participate in private, bilingual education. She was caught off guard by becoming a recipient of negative language ideologies upon enrolling here, although she does not identify her experiences as such. Her eventual adoption of these same ideologies towards her immigrant peers makes the progressive reader feel uncomfortable, but at the same time it serves to illustrate the flip side of pseudo-meritocratic ideologies. Adopting an intersectional stance towards the reading of Nicole's story bypasses ultimately fruitless efforts to rank Nicole's experience of barriers relative to that of her peers. Intersectionality instead allows nuance, even contradiction, to thrive in the narrative of a student who both experienced, and at times adopted, deficit ideologies.

## V. DISCUSSION

A narrative analysis ought both to stand alone as an in-depth exploration of the participant's lived experience, and to invite questions about broader contextual influences on this experience. It is with an abundance of respect for Nicole and for her desire that her story stand alone that I try on the interpretive lenses of college readiness and intersectionality to reread her story.

### **College Readiness**

Nicole's perception of her college readiness, compared to that of her classmates, invites questions about the ECHS program, especially contrasted with other postsecondary transition programs. Besides herself, Nicole was aware of two other ECHS graduates, one from Stewart and one from a neighboring high school, who attended the same university, but for the most part she was the only ECHS graduate in her university classes. Of those two fellow ECHS graduates, Nicole reported one was doing well, and one had to drop out of university for family financial reasons.

Given Nicole's outstanding academic performance as a dually-enrolled high school student, I was surprised by the extent to which she felt she struggled academically her first year of university. During both the fall and spring semesters, Nicole earned borderline grades in some of her classes and struggled to meet the grade point average requirements of her scholarships. Her narrative highlights the following roadblocks to university transition: family circumstances, lack of relatedness between community college and university courses, lack of exposure to the non-academic aspects of college life, and the availability and quality of academic and emotional support at the university.

These factors echo the research on college readiness and line up particularly well with a CRT-oriented understanding of college readiness (Castro, 2013; Ozuna, et al., 2016).

**Family circumstances.** The framework of “deformed choices” is particularly useful in understanding some of the academic struggles Nicole has faced in college, and some of the decisions she has made (Locke, Stedrak, & Eadens, 2014). The parental support component is crucial to Ozuna, et al.’s (2016) community definition of college readiness, and this component has sadly been lacking for Nicole. Following her father’s rejection of her sexual orientation, Nicole has faced academic as well as personal repercussions. Nicole’s father did not approve of her living in the dorms, despite the fact that when she has temporarily lived at home, getting to class on time has been a logistical barrier:

He had just gotten divorced and he needed help with Daniel, but I’m just like, “No. How am I gonna help you to wake him up,” because traffic is horrible. I stayed a whole week at home, and I got to school late for my 8 a.m. Or I wouldn’t be able to find a parking spot. So I was like, “Okay, I have to leave super early, so I cannot wake up Daniel for him to go to middle school, I’m so sorry. So there’s nothing I can help you with.” So even if I stayed I wouldn’t be of much help.

At the time of our last meeting together, Nicole was planning on living at home the following semester and saving money to get an apartment on her own. She was even considering leaving UCT for a semester in order to accelerate her EMT training and obtain a higher-paid job:

If I’m at home more than a week, it’s very stressful. I don’t know how am I going to handle it during the fall because I’m gonna be super busy. With school, twelve

hours, an internship of ten hours, plus EMT classes[...]That way I can get a little more stability for my work hours, and I can get out. Because just being at home is very toxic at times. I was thinking of taking the semester off from here to be able to do that. To be able to save up some money for the spring to at least get an apartment. Meanwhile I would get another job with the EMT certificate. That was my original plan, to not put so much stress on me. But now I will have to stop working and stop volunteering.

For Nicole, valedictorian of an urban public ECHS, to be struggling academically and even considering taking a semester off college is understandable given the immense amount of family stress and financial responsibility she is currently facing. In their discussion of Latina young women in an ECHS, Locke, Stedrak, and Eadens (2014) identified “unfreedoms,” i.e. constraining factors, influencing academic performance, including competing financial and household responsibilities. These unfreedoms in turn led the young women to make “deformed,” i.e. not fully informed/consensual, academic choices. Over the year, Nicole has changed trajectories from full-time enrollment in a pre-med program to part-time enrollment, the possible move to a less time-consuming degree, an orientation to immediate employability as an EMT, and a possible semester off from university. None of these are inherently bad or harmful choices, and it is possible that one or all of these might bring Nicole increased happiness. Nonetheless, these choices are “deformed” in the sense of being based more on immediate constraining circumstances than on self-oriented, long-term planning.

**Academic alignment.** Foundational goals of the ECHS Initiative include postsecondary curriculum alignment and organizational partnerships bridging the high

school-college gap (Jobs for the Future, 2016). So it is worthwhile to contrast Nicole's own postsecondary transition with these stated goals. Nicole was surprised by the rigor of her university classes, when compared to her dual credit work:

It was very easy and fun to take the CCC courses. And while some relate at UCT, it's not as easy.

It bears repeating that Nicole was the valedictorian of Stewart ECHS, so her academic performance in dual enrollment courses presumably surpassed that of most of her ECHS classmates. For her, then, to be surprised by the increased rigor of university coursework is a good indication that for the middle-achieving graduate of ECHS, the academic experiences in dual enrollment courses were not aligned with university expectations.

Additionally, Nicole's narrative indicates that she has struggled to develop study skills relevant to a university setting. In the ECHS setting, she was able to use more rote learning skills that have been inadequate at UCT:

I have some classmates here who took AP classes instead of Early College. They have more methods of studying. I have always relied on my memory and understanding the things in class. So with them and with Tumblr, I have learned many ways. For me index cards are the most useless thing. But ways of doing things with the index cards, things that I had never imagined. Or ways of taking notes. How to make everything more effective. I've learned to start actually reading the books rather than just relying on the professors.

An important facet of P16 alignment is the extent to which the thinking skills and cognitive strategies required for university success are aligned (EPIC, 2012). Despite her

high achievement in the ECHS program, Nicole's study skills have not been aligned to the requirements of a major public university.

Another metric of academic alignment for dual enrollment programs has been time to degree completion. Dual enrollment, in comparison with Advanced Placement, is correlated with shorter time to college degree completion (Klopfenstein and Lively, 2012). Students graduating from ECHS, at least in theory, have completed the first two years of college and should be able to graduate with a bachelor's degree in two additional years. For Nicole, this has not been the case, and in fact she states she plans to spend four years at UCT working towards her bachelor's degree:

I decided that I wanted to get a certificate in forensic science. I already got my minor in Spanish through AP credit. And I have to do pre-med and it's a bunch of science. So I could either do it in two years with seventeen hours a semester, or I could just do twelve and be a little bit chill and spend four years in university.

Granted for Nicole, multiple factors have converged to extend her time to degree completion (pre-med coursework, the decision to earn a forensic science certificate, and the decision to enroll in twelve credit hours.) Nonetheless, if time to degree completion, and the associated cost savings, is a primary metric used to support ECHS programming, it is worth considering what additional steps ECHSs could take to build academic alignment and streamlined degree completion. Particularly for students like Nicole who plan to earn a bachelor's degree or higher and who have an academic major in mind, perhaps it would make more sense to take two years of coursework towards the academic major, as opposed to two more generalized years of courses leading to an associate's degree.

**Non-academic college skills and access to supports.** Another defining aspect of ECHS programming is the availability of academic and social support services to guide students through the rigorous curriculum (Jobs for the Future, 2016). As a community school, Stewart ECHS was able to offer Nicole a range of academic and social services: tutoring, flexible scheduling, on-campus therapy, access to basic needs. Upon leaving Stewart, Nicole struggled with lack of easy access to similar supports in a college setting:

Finding my classrooms has been something really new. And trying to get help from professors, because of huge classes or they just are very stuck on “Well, I am just here to give you the lecture. You have to do this.” It’s been pretty rough. And although they have these tutoring sessions, and plenty of them, I have not found one that clicked, or I haven’t been explained but made more confused.

ECHS students who take their dual credit classes on the high school campus rather than at the partnering college, as is often the case at Stewart, or whose partnering college is small and architecturally self-contained, as is also the case at Stewart, may struggle to geographically navigate a large university campus. Nicole spoke repeatedly of being late to her classes (and likewise was late to our on-campus meetings.) Unless ECHS graduates like Nicole are actively recruited for freshman orientation activities, they may be placed into the bucket of “transfer student” and miss out on a lot of the navigational and logistical instructions pertinent to a large public university.

Another struggle for Nicole has been accessing academic tutoring on the university campus. She perceives her professors as closed-off and taking the attitude of “I am just here to give you the lecture.” And as far as tutoring sessions, she has “not found one that clicked.” This is consistent with Thompson and Ongaga’s (2011) finding that

ECHS graduates benefitted greatly from academic and social supports in the ECHS setting, then struggled to independently access similar supports upon transition to a university. This finding points to a need for ECHS programs, in addition to providing well-rounded supports, to actively instruct students in self-advocacy and help-seeking behaviors relevant to a university setting. Nicole has developed coping strategies on her own, such as taking twelve credit hours at a time, enrolling in online courses whenever possible, and using social media to learn study strategies, but there are places in her narrative that indicate time and stress (and university GPA) could have benefitted from guidance in these areas.

**Structural features of Early College High School.** Her participation in the Early College High School program at Stewart is a pivotal aspect of Nicole’s educational narrative. Likewise, its identity as an Early College program permeates the rhetoric surrounding Stewart High School. Once slated for shutdown by the Texas Education Agency as a result of several consecutive years of subpar assessment scores and a staggering dropout rate, Stewart High School ultimately regained its standing as academically acceptable and remained open, largely through community efforts and the adoption of a community school model of social services delivery. The school prides itself on being a “schoolwide” Early College campus, which in practice means that all students are exposed to information about postsecondary education and training opportunities, while those who are “TSI-ready” are tutored on the Texas Success Initiative test, a prerequisite for community college enrollment, as early as the eighth grade, and then placed into community college courses upon passing the TSI. In Nicole’s graduating class of almost 200, about 50 students took at least one community college

course, while only two graduated with associate's degrees. This model, of an Early College program existing within the walls of a comprehensive neighborhood high school, deviates significantly from the traditional Early College High School (ECHS) model, and aspects of Nicole's narrative raise questions about both these deviations, and the traditional ECHS model itself.

Traditional ECHSs are schoolwide magnet programs in which all students participate in a four-year sequence of courses leading to a dual high school diploma/associate's degree. Much of the research on ECHS focuses on features that are unique to the schoolwide magnet program model: small campus size; a cohort model in which students take a similar sequence of courses; limited extracurricular options; extensive academic and social support; and the cultivation of a learning community (McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Cravey, 2013; Woodcock & Beal, 2013). Because it is within the walls of a comprehensive neighborhood high school, and because students can enter and leave the program flexibly, taking their first college course anytime from the beginning of ninth grade to the semester of graduation, Stewart lacks many of these structural features.

Small schools, and small learning communities within larger schools, facilitate social support, extracurricular participation, higher graduation rates, and even college readiness (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009), so it is no surprise that the small-school, cohort model is the national norm for ECHS programs. Stewart, though smaller than other schools in its urban district, has a total enrollment of 1300 students, significantly larger than most self-contained Early College High School programs in Texas, and its Early College population, though growing, currently represents less than a tenth of

enrolled students. Nicole speaks frequently of the social isolation she experienced at Stewart. To Nicole, the majority of her peers were not “like” her; rather, they “seemed to lack the willingness to learn.” She had trouble making friends her own age; classmates saw her as “fresa,” preppy or standoffish. The social dynamic at Stewart was similar to that of the public elementary and middle schools she attended in Mexico, which Nicole contrasts with the private kindergarten she attended, where her classmates were “pretty much like” her. The lack of a cohort of like-minded peers was perhaps confounded by the fact that Nicole was a three-year graduate of Stewart: she reports that many of her closest friends were a year behind her. Regardless, Nicole spoke frequently of isolation, different-ness, among her peer group.

Ultimately Nicole reconciles this outsider stance as a positive personality trait, stating that were she not “uptight,” she “wouldn’t have made it” through the familial and academic challenges of her final year of high school. She hints, as well, that this otherness was not unique to her experience at Stewart ECHS. Throughout elementary school, Nicole was bullied. And through her first year of college, she struggled to make friends on campus, stating that her main social supports were online friends, current twelfth graders at Stewart, and the university counseling center. So for Nicole, the school-within-a-school format of ECHS programming cannot be solely blamed for her sense of isolation. However, it is worth speculating whether a cohort model could have positively impacted Nicole’s social experience at Stewart.

Though her ability to participate in extracurricular activities was limited due to her family circumstances, Nicole placed great importance on her ability to attend pep rallies, go to the prom, and take high school electives such as art. Nicole spoke with me at

length about various art projects she completed during high school, and in fact one of her pieces, a conceptual skyline drawing, still hangs in the halls of Stewart a year and a half after her graduation. Nicole was frustrated by some of the general electives she had to take (Spanish was “a waste of time”) and even more so by her inability to take other electives (she wanted piano but it didn’t fit her schedule; she found the school offering her a questionable P.E. credit to be “incredibly sad”). Nicole did not attend her first high school football game until after graduation, due to her father’s restrictions on her whereabouts. Although she was permitted to attend the prom, the experience for her was fraught with stress: her father’s disapproval of her recent coming-out, as well as car trouble that eventually led to Nicole and her date missing the dance. These aspects of the comprehensive high school experience (electives, athletics, prom) play heavily into Nicole’s telling of her life history, and her access to them is due to Stewart’s deviation from the ECHS model.

One aspect of the Early College High School model that was replicated in Nicole’s experience is extensive staff support. Nicole speaks fondly of most of her high school teachers, both within and outside of the ECHS classes, as well as of her school guidance counselor and in-school therapist. It is worth noting here that in addition to being an ECHS, Stewart is a community school. The Community School model entails partnering with social service agencies and community organizations in order to offer students and families services such as healthcare, food and housing assistance, adult literacy and parenting classes, mental health and substance abuse counseling, and teen parent childcare (Coalition for Community Schools, 2016). Nicole’s ability to access social, emotional, and material support from adults on campus can perhaps be attributed

to the community school model at least as much as to the ECHS programming. Woodcock and Beal (2013) in fact noted a gap between the ECHS model's goal of adult support and students' lived experiences in the program: though students accessed academic support from adults, they reported feeling disconnected from their instructors, both at the high school campus and at the partner university. Further, the students reported significant sociological risk factors (peer drug use, etc.) yet did not report experiencing socioemotional support from guidance counselors or other adults on campus. In contrast, Nicole had positive relationships with both her guidance counselor and her on-campus mental health therapist; there are many teachers with whom she formed close relationships, and whom she continues to visit at Stewart; her narrative hints that she accessed other social services as well (learning that Nicole lacked consistent access to basic needs as a result of her father's reaction to her coming out, the school offered material assistance, as well as an extra study hall period for her to rest and catch up on school work.)

For Nicole, Stewart's dual identity as a comprehensive public school and an ECHS created unique opportunities, as well as unique challenges. Nicole's narrative indicates that she benefitted from electives, extracurricular opportunities, and social-emotional support services available through the comprehensive public school; however, she struggled to fit in due to the lack of a cohort model or sense of being among like-minded peers.

**Contrast with Advanced Placement.** When asked to describe university classmates who seemed prepared for college-level work, Nicole shifted to a focus on

students who had taken Advanced Placement classes in high school. Nicole described significant qualitative differences between herself and those students who had taken AP:

I have some classmates here who took AP classes instead of Early College. They have more methods of studying. I have always relied on my memory and understanding the things in class. So with them and with Tumblr, I have learned many ways. For me index cards are the most useless thing. But ways of doing things with the index cards, things that I had never imagined. Or ways of taking notes. How to make everything more effective.

Nicole and I went back-and-forth on this topic quite a bit, and while she struggled to put into words the exact difference she saw between herself and her AP-graduate classmates, what stuck out to me was her contrasting her own reliance on memory with her classmates' "methods of studying." Peckham's (2010) discussion of class differences in writing pedagogies would suggest that Nicole's experience of rote memorization in her dual credit classes is in line with working-class educational experiences, while the more critical thinking-oriented study skills her AP classmates displayed are in line with middle-class educational experiences. Arguably, having experienced both elite (private kindergarten; private English school) and working-class (urban ECHS) schoolings makes Nicole more inclined to notice the differences in educational outcomes between her dual enrollment experience and her university classmates' AP experience. This is not to argue that ECHS programs have at their core a focus on rote memorization and surface-level skills, or that AP courses naturally promote critical thinking; rather, in some instances the programs fail to avoid reproducing socioeconomically differentiated educational outcomes.

## **Intersections of Race, Gender, Language, Class, Mental Health, and Sexuality**

Nicole defies easy categorization, but nonetheless facets of her identity play out heavily in her life history. To understand Nicole, particularly those aspects of her story that feel surprising or even contradictory, it is helpful to adopt an intersectionality framework. Nicole self-identifies as Spanish-English bilingual, high-socioeconomic status (SES), clinically depressed, and lesbian. Each of these identities, and even more so the interplay between them, contributes to Nicole's understanding of her lived experience.

**Socioeconomic status.** Relative to her high school classmates, Nicole comes from an affluent background. Her educational life history is filled with stories of opportunity. First, an elite private Montessori kindergarten cemented for Nicole her lifelong work ethic:

Something that really stuck with me was *Do it right the first time or don't do it at all*, which can have a really bad effect on me emotionally when I don't do it right. Although Nicole acknowledges this philosophy can be psychologically damaging when taken to an extreme, she also credits it with her survival during especially difficult academic and familial experiences:

I feel like without it, I wouldn't have made it through my senior year with my dad not letting me study during the night because after I came out, after school he would get there and he would either make me clean the house or take me on long talks that would last five hours.

Nicole is grateful that values of stubbornness and determination were instilled in her from a young age, and rightfully so: these personality traits became survival skills at the peak

of Nicole's tumultuous final year of high school. And though Nicole credits her elite educational setting in early childhood with these traits, she struggles to conceptualize the opposite: that the lack of these challenging academic experiences in early childhood could have something to do with her classmates' from low-SES settings academic struggles:

In kindergarten, everyone was the way I was. I am really grateful for having made it out to be that way because I feel like otherwise I would have been a lazy person. Not stuck with things.

Nicole tended to use terms such as "lazy" to describe the bulk of her public-school peers. To some extent she resisted attempts to link these differences in school habits to differential experiences or economic opportunities.

In our second interview, which as I mentioned was more topical than chronological, we did briefly converse about the possible economic influences on this difference in study habits:

JR: Do you feel like it's more of a personality thing, rather than any differences in your upbringing or experience?

N: Yeah, probably, although um...I still know some of the people I went to kindergarten with and compared to the uh, other people...my kindergarten as I mentioned was private. Montessori program and everything. Um, and I know them and they're pretty much like me. While people that I know from public schools have been maybe...maybe there's one or two that have been like me, but the other ones are just not interested into putting the effort or, yeah.

JR: So do you think it's um, the differences in what they got in those early years of school? Do you think it's family differences? Do you think it's a lot of different...

N: I think it's the first years of school.

After making the above statement, Nicole abruptly finished this conversational thread. I did not push a continual return to the topic of socioeconomic influences on school success. Rather, this exchange caused me to reflect on the degree to which Nicole *needed* to reject a privilege framework in exchange for a narrative of hard work and persistence. Nicole worked extremely hard to attain her level of academic success, persisting through both academic stressors and difficulties at home. McIntosh (2015) pointed out that adopting a privilege framework can be challenging for participants, because "The U.S. educational system generally rests on the myth of meritocracy - that people get what they individually want, work for, earn, and deserve" (p. 233-234). It is one thing to help an underserved student begin to conceptualize the structural barriers to achievement; it is quite another to expect a student who attained high achievement, despite structural barriers of her own, to reject the meritocracy myth.

Crosley-Corcoran (2014) described her own navigations of intersectionality in the humorously titled blog post, "Explaining White Privilege To A Broke White Person." Conversely to Nicole, the author is straight, White, English-dominant, but grew up deeply impoverished and fiercely rejected the existence of White privilege until understanding it from an intersectionality lens:

There are a million ways I experience privilege, and some that I certainly don't. But thankfully, intersectionality allows us to examine these varying dimensions

and degrees of discrimination while raising awareness of the results of multiple systems of oppression at work.

The goal of the present project has been to adopt an ethic of care framework, allow our mutually trusting relationship to empower Nicole to tell her story as she sees it, and then to gently try on various theoretical lenses as a way to provide context for some of Nicole's experiences. Hence, I did not expect, nor did I encourage, Nicole, an academically successful young woman recently emerging from numerous challenging situations, to adopt my enthusiasm for intersectionality. Nonetheless, I find the framework useful, particularly in making sense of Nicole's attitudes towards her own, and peers', work ethics and educational trajectories.

Perhaps an even larger economic determinant on Nicole's life has been her grandmother's decision to enroll her in private English classes in fourth and fifth grade. Nicole credits these classes with her English proficiency. She experienced a depth of language discussion that is missing from many public school first-year language courses:

She taught us that autumn means such a beautiful thing. And so we were questioning why is it called fall in America, and not autumn, and we concluded that people were like, "Okay. It falls." And I just feel like it's so ridiculous, and I just like calling it autumn better.

The above conversation between students and teacher is certainly more in line with the "middle-class habitus" of which Peckham (2010) speaks. I have noticed that Nicole has an excellent meta-understanding of the English language, and more generally of the process of language learning, and I suspect that this rigorous, critical thinking-oriented

elementary language class has had a lot to do with that. Nicole's understanding of language systems allowed her to tutor immigrant ESL students at Stewart:

Trying to explain while making them try to learn the words, try to pronounce everything, trying to make them feel the sentences cohesive instead of trying to get the literal meaning, which may not be the thing that it means.

Mixing pronunciation and vocabulary development with more holistic, global language skills such as literal and implied meaning of text, certainly sounds like a high-quality language acquisition program, one that is perhaps similar to what Nicole received in Mexico. Again, though, it is difficult for Nicole to parse economic opportunity and educational experience from what she classifies as personality traits:

Compared to me, the people that I knew who came here from other countries just seemed to lack the willingness to learn and to work and adapted fairly quickly to what I would call the likeness of the American student.

There is certainly a body of research on the effects of American public schooling, over time, on immigrant students' study habits, so I can certainly understand, at least anecdotally, what she means here. However, Nicole classifies her ESL peer-tutees as students who, on almost an intrinsic level, "lack the willingness to learn." The importance of providing academic language and content knowledge acquisition in the home language is a foundation of bilingual education (Shin, 2012). So students placed abruptly into structured English immersion are likely to lack academic vocabulary, and possibly content knowledge, in either language, due to a lack of educational experiences that build on their home language content knowledge.

Nicole, though, has difficulty seeing her ESL peers' difficulties as being caused by substandard language programs, even though she is aware of the inadequacy of public school English as a foreign language:

The thing is, I went to a private school for English. So I had an advantage over other people. Because middle school English in Mexico is pretty poor.

Nicole shares an anecdote of her father, who took English as a foreign language in middle school, struggling to find employment in the United States because of confusing the words *work* and *water*, and she speaks of her own boredom in English classes at her public middle school. Again, Nicole hints at an awareness of the economic determinants of success, and while to some extent she recognizes her own economic privilege and opportunities, she does not commit to the converse premise, that her peers' struggles could be partially due to lack of economic opportunities.

**Sexual orientation.** Nicole reports that she came out during her senior year of high school, and her experience as a lesbian Latina mirrors Peña-Talamantes's (2013) finding that Latina/o lesbian and gay youth often construct separate home and school identities. At Stewart, a Hispanic-majority and relatively LGBT-friendly high school, Nicole was able to be open as a lesbian without any major fear of social stigma: she openly dated other young women and intended to go to the prom with a same-sex date. Conversely, at home Nicole faced numerous repercussions for coming out as lesbian: shaming; denial of access to food, clothing, sleep, and study time; and, as her narrative hints, perhaps even physical abuse:

[...]with my dad not letting me study during the night because after I came out, after school he would get there and he would either make me clean the house or

take me on long talks that would last five hours. And then wouldn't let me go to sleep unless the house was completely spotless[...]And I feel like senior year distracted every single drop left of my will. With dad beating it up.

Velez, Moradi, and DeBlaere (2015) described the additive effects of externalized and internalized racism and heterosexism on psychological distress, life satisfaction, and self-esteem of Latina/o sexual minority adults. Nicole's sexual orientation intersectionalities were not a major focus of the present study; in fact, she disclosed her sexual orientation only midway through our work together. Thus, in our narrative interviews I did not attempt to tease out internalized versus externalized racism versus heterosexism. But in the context of our interviews, Nicole's distress about the consequences of her sexual identity on her home relationships emerged as a strong narrative thread. At the time we collaborated on her narrative, she had not yet explored her campus LGBTQIA organization. I speculate about to what extent this is an example of her generalized difficulties with forming new social relationships in the university setting, and to what extent this is because she is struggling with the guilt and shame of her family's rejection.

**Mental health.** Although I did not go into this study with the overt intention of studying this aspect of her experience, Nicole's narrative life history highlighted chronic depression, exacerbated by family circumstances. Nicole reports that she was depressed as far back as her time in Mexico, but lack of family support was a major barrier to treatment:

I'm just so tired all the time. I blame being sad all the time. A long time ago they were like, "We're gonna give you depression meds." But it never happened because I moved here. And then, "We're gonna give you depression meds" but it

never happened because my dad didn't want any of that. And so now they're like, "Okay, you're chronically depressed." I still need to get to the right clinic, because they're not the ones that did the med stuff. They were like, "Okay, you need to go to this other place."

As a teenager, Nicole's lack of access to mental health treatment was due to her father's lack of consent for treatment. Cummings and Druss (2011) reported lower mental health service use among Hispanic teens with depression, when compared with White teens. Whether Nicole's father's decision stemmed from cultural stigma against mental health treatment is purely speculative. It is clear, however, that multiple factors coalesced to exacerbate Nicole's chronic depression and prevent its medical treatment.

Nicole was able to access therapy in high school; as a Community School, Stewart has a staff mental health therapist. However, she reflected on the stigmatizing experience of having a teacher publicly disclose her access to therapy:

Mr. Mondragon, was too much of a jokester. Didn't know how to keep to himself. He spilled in class that "Hey, therapy called. You need to go." He got called on that. He was really feeling really badly afterwards. He really apologized. But he still was not nice.

Nicole reports that she benefited from the experience of receiving therapy in high school. However, the university setting has meant disjointed access to services. At various points, Nicole has either been on a waiting list for sliding-scale therapy, or experienced discontinuity of services during school breaks, or struggled to access the correct clinic for medication management. These are consistent with what Miranda, et al. (2015) reported as barriers to minority college students' access to mental health services: discontinuity of

care, financial and time constraints, and treatment stigma. Similarly, Heilemann et al. (2016) found that while second-generation Latina women accessed mental health services at a greater rate than their parents, stigma persisted.

My adoption of a humanizing methodology and ethic of care has been particularly useful in my navigations with Nicole of her mental health history. I am by no means a trained therapist, and throughout this project I have allowed space for Nicole to discuss her mental health needs as she has chosen to, but I have been cautious to avoid providing amateur therapy or supplanting her access to trained mental health professionals. I initially struggled with whether it would be appropriate to continue the project at all given Nicole's degree of anxiety and distress at a few points in the process. However, she stated to me on numerous occasions that she found the narrative life history interview process to be beneficial in her processing of past events. We maintained an open dialogue about her efforts to access resources, and I shared some of my own history of seeking treatment for depression. Nicole portrays depression in her life history as one of many factors that have shaped, challenged, and ultimately strengthened, her.

**Language ideologies.** Nicole's status as a bilingual student and the impact of language ideologies on her high school experience permeate her telling of her life history. When she initially enrolled at Stewart, Nicole was required to take a language placement test to determine whether she would attend the district ESL newcomer campus, stay at Stewart and take ESL classes, or be enrolled in on-level English classes. In her valedictorian speech she relives the embarrassment upon forgetting a common noun during the test: "I *still* cannot believe I did not remember the word *hammer* in English!" Nicole scored well enough on this exam that she was not considered to need ESL

services. The classes she was initially enrolled in, though, were remedial-track, test-preparation ninth grade courses: a “double block” of Algebra, and an on-level English I class paired with a class called Practical Writing that was used by Stewart as intensive reading and writing intervention in preparation for the End-of-Course exam.

Advocacy on the behalf of her teachers eventually got Nicole moved into honors and pre-AP, and subsequently ECHS, courses. However, at the start of Nicole’s second year of high school, yet another enrollment error was discovered: based on her Mexican transcripts, which had finally been reviewed, she was actually supposed to be a junior. For the next two years, meeting the goal of graduation at the end of her rightful senior year meant taking summer school and doubling up on core coursework for the rest of her time at Stewart.

Despite what is, to me, a plurality of evidence that language ideologies negatively impacted Nicole’s educational trajectory at Stewart, she actively rejects any notion that she was a victim of unfairness. In fact, at times that I hinted that I perceived a deficit orientation, she was quick to defend the school’s practices:

It was just procedure [...]

If I had lived here and someone from Mexico came, I would have assumed that they didn’t know English, to be honest [...]

I guess they finally were able to translate my Mexican transcripts.

I struggled with how to proceed with both the narrative interviews and my analysis of them, given Nicole’s insistence that deficit ideologies had not colored her experience.

Within Hartman’s (2015) “strong multiplicity” approach, complex issues are likely to invite complex or even self-contradictory stances, and this contradiction is preferable to

oversimplification. In Nicole's case, two realities simultaneously exist: the reality that she overcame academic and personal obstacles in making an incredible academic achievement, and the reality that the process was perhaps made more difficult by the presence of language ideologies. The fact that Nicole prefers to focus on the reality of her own triumphs and achievements is understandable, but I will contend that the lens of language ideology, understood in an intersectional context, is still worth trying on.

It can be worthwhile to frame Nicole's experience of language ideology in terms of privilege versus lack of privilege, especially as she is uncomfortable adopting an interpretation that implies outright discrimination. Revisiting Vandrick's (2015) "knapsack" of ESL privilege is particularly helpful here:

- I am not labeled "underprepared" because of my linguistic identity.
- My language and writing classes, including classes in languages such as Spanish or French, earn college credit.
- I am often encouraged to consider applying for honors classes and prestigious programs and prizes. (p. 57)

These statements, read in the opposite, identify places where Nicole's lack of linguistic privilege upon entering U.S. public schools delayed her ultimately positive educational trajectory. Nicole's initial labeling as underprepared meant that she was placed into test preparation-focused, double-block English and Algebra classes. Despite passing the proficiency exam in English, she was not initially encouraged to apply for the ECHS program, an occurrence which runs counter to the narrative of Stewart ECHS as a schoolwide, open-access program.

I was particularly troubled by the fact that Nicole's transcript being from Mexico and in Spanish delayed her placement in the correct grade level courses by an entire year. There are multiple staff at Stewart who are fluent in both English and Spanish, working in all areas of the school: administration, teaching staff, clerical, and support. Moreover, there are staff at the school who are personally familiar with the Mexican educational system and the correspondence in grade level between Mexico and the U.S. So it is surprising, and unacceptable, to me that a whole year went by before formal review of the transcript occurred. Nicole faced social repercussions as a result of her moving cohort years:

By the end of my sophomore/junior year, other students were angry because I had been put with the juniors and they thought that I was a sophomore. And since I was number one in the class it made them all go down a rank.

This feels, on some level, unfair both to Nicole and to the students who assumed themselves to be valedictorian and salutatorian prior to Nicole's move into their cohort. When discussing her social isolation experienced at Stewart, Nicole names her "fresa" personality and the change in cohort years as the main contributing factors. The fact that Nicole was still able to graduate in three years, complete her associate's degree, and represent the school as valedictorian is a testament to her incredibly hard work and to her academic talents.

A deficit orientation towards multilingualism, sadly, seems hardwired into the U.S. public school system (Gainer & Larrotta, 2010; Hertzog, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). Even "successful" teachers are not exempt, as Hertzog (2011) demonstrates; furthermore, even successful, multilingual staff are not exempt. At all points in the enrollment process,

Nicole encountered successful, Spanish-English bilingual staff persons. Though the school registrar advocated for Nicole to be exempted from the proficiency test based on her obvious verbal comprehension in English, Nicole was still made to comply with the testing. A deficit orientation, in this particular scenario, has led to a devaluing of the linguistic capital of multilingual staff, as well: at no point were any of the Spanish-proficient staff who worked with Nicole asked to provide even a cursory reading of her Mexican transcript for guidance on course placement.

Another troubling aspect of Nicole's educational trajectory as a bilingual student is her lack of challenging coursework in the Spanish language. Nicole quickly exhausted the range of Spanish courses available at Stewart, and even Advanced Placement Spanish was "a hassle":

Taking Spanish was a hassle. Because I had spent fifteen years of my life already speaking Spanish, having learned grammar and everything. And then having to come here and do the basic things that I would have done maybe in second or third grade was just a waste.

It seems surprising that a dual-enrollment program in a Hispanic-majority high school would be unable to offer Spanish literature courses, or unable to differentiate instruction, above and beyond elementary-level grammar. Nor could Nicole participate in the foreign language experience at Stewart by enrolling in a third language: as she reports, the French teacher had just quit (and, over four years later, has yet to be replaced, though the school now does offer American Sign Language in addition to Spanish.) ESL-only campuses do not have at their forefront a goal of increasing students' academic skills in the home language, and I have often found the 'foreign language' policies at schools to

be a somewhat humorous illustration of this circumstance. For a school in which nearly a third of students are considered English Language Learners, and the vast majority of these native Spanish speakers, not to offer ‘foreign languages’ other than Spanish, robs a large segment of the population of the opportunity to take an introductory foreign language. Nor are these bilingual students given the opportunity to work on college-level academic reading and writing skills in Spanish, evidently not even in Advanced Placement Spanish courses for college credit. A system that views English language learners through a deficit lens likewise devalues the multilingual competencies of all students, and a perfunctory attitude towards ‘foreign language’ offerings is but one symptom of this.

A deficit orientation towards English language learners carried over into Nicole’s descriptions of her peers from Mexico and Central America:

Compared to me, the people that I knew who came here from other countries just seemed to lack the willingness to learn and to work and adapted fairly quickly to what I would call the likeness of the American student.

I in no way wish to denigrate Nicole, who took on the extra role of ESL tutor at Stewart despite her own academic and personal challenges. Yet I find it disheartening that the prevailing deficit orientation towards multilingualism has carried over, at least in this instance, into a student’s conception of peers. In her studies, Nicole has been hardworking, fastidious, perfectionistic. She would perhaps describe the majority of her peers from any language background as lacking “the willingness to learn,” and perhaps in comparison with her own academic efforts this is understandable. Yet I find it to be a disturbing symptom of a campus culture of deficit language ideology, that a student could

come to implicitly equate ESL status with lacking willingness to learn. Middle and high schools in Stewart's district do not offer bilingual classes beyond the fifth grade (although secondary-level dual language programming is being piloted now.) So students who come to the United States as teenagers are supported solely through the demonstrated-less-effective ESL program (Genesse, et al., 2006; Ramirez et al., 1991; Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence, 2002). Then, when these students struggle to perform linguistically and academically in an ESL setting, deficit ideology urges us to question the students' work ethic, not the effectiveness of the programming itself. Nicole herself was blessed with rich, creative English instruction, as well as high-level literacy instruction in Spanish, prior to coming to the United States. Her own bilingual competencies have helped her navigate the academic and social circumstances of ECHS and, now, university. I in no way blame her personally for adopting a deficit orientation towards the ESL population at Stewart. Again here it is helpful to view Nicole's experiences and beliefs through an intersectional lens, and to think about the ways economic privilege and language learning intersected to provide rich opportunities in two languages.

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Nicole is an academically talented young woman who overcame numerous personal and institutional barriers to achieve valedictorian status and earn an associate's degree over the course of three years at Charles Stewart Early College High School. Her achievement is so significant as to make it difficult for Nicole to buy into the premise that there were, in fact, structural barriers to her educational attainment. In reflecting for a final time on Nicole's story, I would like to revisit the questions that framed this study. As is typical of narrative life history, the data do not offer easy or straightforward answers. What follow, rather, are a reflection on the insights offered by the present study, and an invitation to further research.

The ECHS initiative has as its core the goals of bringing college curriculum to underserved populations and reducing the time and cost associated with bachelor's degree completion. The program strives to ensure academic and social support, as well as continuity and alignment between ECHS offerings and upper-level university courses. As a high-achieving ECHS graduate, Nicole is uniquely situated to reveal places in which her alma mater realizes, or falls short of, these goals. Nicole received extensive academic and social support while at Stewart, and while this enabled her to achieve academically despite personal barriers, she has struggled in the university setting as a result of lack of easy access to similar supports. She has had difficulty finding her classes, managing her time, accessing tutoring and counseling, and developing the study skills needed for academic success. Due to a combination of personal and academic decisions, despite earning an associate's degree in the ECHS, Nicole is still planning to take four years of university to complete her bachelor's degree.

The present study began with an exploration of whether Nicole, by virtue of her incredible achievements, was even an appropriate starting point from which to examine issues of college readiness. As among the most academically successful students in her graduating class, Nicole has nonetheless experienced academic difficulties in the university setting, and these postsecondary difficulties are likely amplified in her high school classmates who experienced less academic success and fewer opportunities for college preparation at Stewart. Nicole's educational trajectory as a high-achieving student within the ECHS program points to areas of need that are likely relevant to many ECHS graduates: improved ECHS-university alignment, and direct instruction in skills aligned with Conley's (2012) model: help-seeking behaviors, cognitive strategies, and thinking skills. Nicole herself offered a spontaneous solution to this alignment gap, during one of our interviews, one that would be easy and essentially free to implement:

Before every semester here at UCT they have this whole thing about "Hey, we're gonna teach you about time management. If you want to come, you're invited.

Study skills. All for you. Freshman 15? Let me give you some tips to lose it." And since normally at the beginning of the year at Stewart the students have maybe one or two weeks free before CCC classes start, this time could be used for that.

Certainly the cognitive strategies and help-seeking behaviors needed for postsecondary success could not be taught in a single-day seminar. Rather, they require institutional refocusing on student self-determination in all aspects of program design. But Nicole is correct in pointing out that many of the university-transition skills could be taught in short, focused sessions throughout students' time in ECHS.

Nicole's academic experience also points to a need for ECHS campuses to refocus their stance regarding educational equity. Because postsecondary access, particularly within the ECHS model, has been viewed as an equity issue, it has been worthwhile to examine how Stewart in particular both achieves and fails to achieve equity. The ECHS initiative is deeply committed to improving postsecondary access for underrepresented populations, and it has been successful in this goal. But Nicole observes differences between her education and that of her university classmates who took AP classes in suburban settings, and these observations align with research on the demographic differences between AP and dual-credit programs. ECHS programs ought to be encouraged to think more deeply about educational equity, not only measuring it in numbers of representatives from various demographic groups, but also zeroing in on, and actively resisting, tendencies towards socioeconomic reproduction in the educational strategies of ECHS classrooms.

An intersectionality lens in looking at Nicole's life history helps us move beyond a more surface-level conception of discrimination versus equal access, and instead look deeply at the ways in which race, gender, language, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status and disability intersect in shaping the lives of minority students, and perhaps what these intersections mean in terms of educational programming and policy decisions. It is hard to read Nicole's story without getting the sense that her experiences and her identities are deeply intertwined, and a difference in any one factor could have remarkably altered her educational trajectory. Nicole's story invites speculation as to what would have happened to her educational trajectory if, for instance, she had been

equally gifted but less English-proficient, or of lower socioeconomic status, or if she had lacked teachers who noticed and advocated for her giftedness.

As an affluent student, relative to her high school classmates, Nicole had early childhood and elementary educational experiences that set her ahead academically. In Montessori kindergarten, Nicole, alongside her elite classmates, developed a strong work ethic and a “fresa” personality, both of which she credits with helping her achieve academic success despite personal struggles. In her two years of intensive private English tutoring, Nicole attained a level of bilingual fluency that many of her immigrant classmates in a public school ESL setting were unable to access. Nicole’s level of English proficiency upon entering U.S. public schools perhaps also aided her ninth grade teachers in noticing so quickly that she was academically gifted and advocating for her placement in more challenging classes. English Learners are historically underrepresented in gifted and talented programs, and I would speculate that this is particularly true in settings dominated by English acquisition-oriented, as opposed to biliteracy-oriented, pedagogies. Local standardized testing data supports the notion that English Learners underperform their English-native peers, not just in English, but in math, science, and social studies. English-dominant ideologies in the secondary school setting hinder English Learners’ opportunities to demonstrate their content knowledge on nonlinguistic tasks, so if English Learners, as a group, are “underperforming” according to standardized testing, it stands to reason that academically gifted English Learners are underidentified for challenging academic opportunities. Further, in ESL-only programs, challenging core content academics are not made accessible to students who are proficient in languages other than English.

Nicole herself experienced structural barriers caused by deficit language ideologies at Stewart: embarrassing language placement testing, initial placement in standardized test-preparation classes, lack of access to foreign-language classes or appropriately leveled Spanish literature classes, and delayed translation of her Spanish-language transcripts. Nicole found these circumstances embarrassing, frustrating, annoying, “boring,” or “sad,” but she denied adoption of the belief that she had been affected by deficit ideologies. Nicole freely discusses the ways in which her socioeconomic status, mental health status, and sexual orientation have impacted her life trajectory, but she denies the influence of negative language ideologies. In not identifying these ideologies as having existed, or having impacted her, Nicole has been freed to make the seemingly paradoxical move of applying deficit ideologies towards her ESL peers, characterizing them as lazy and unwilling to work. This move cannot be understood except through an intersectional lens. By understanding that Nicole has accepted or rejected the influence of various factors on her life trajectory, it is possible to move past the apparent hypocrisy of her characterization of ESL students and instead come to understand that class, language, sexual orientation, and mental health have worked in complex, intertwined ways to shape her.

Nicole’s minority sexual orientation did not cause her difficulties at her relatively inclusive high school, where she was able to openly date other young women. But coming out caused her serious discord at home, culminating in physical abuse and lack of access to basic personal needs. While in high school Nicole was able to access social services on campus, including mental health counseling. Clinical depression has been part of her identity as far back as her time in Mexico, but Nicole experienced an

exacerbation of her symptoms as a result of trauma at home. Throughout the years, Nicole has lacked consistent access to mental health services, when a minor due to her family's stigmatizing beliefs, and now due to lack of easy access to income-based counseling and psychiatry. Although Nicole had a supportive network of fellow LGBT students at Stewart, she has not yet accessed the university's LGBTIQ student group.

Access to social supports helped Nicole not only survive a crisis senior year but attain valedictorian status. Her transition to high school is marked with lack of continued access to supports and resources. An intersectional framework suggests a holistic view of what adequate support would look like for university students in similar situations; this framework brings some sense of meaning to seemingly disparate data points. Nicole is able to be simultaneously affluent, underserved, bilingual, high-achieving, deficit-oriented, Latina, lesbian, and clinically depressed. Her struggles and achievements offer insight into the needs of ECHS students, both during and after high school, whose intersectionalities likewise present points of conflict and struggle.

### **Future Research**

Like any data-rich narrative study, Nicole's life history invites more questions than can be answered in a single research project. Areas for future research springboarded by this life history include:

- College readiness of Stewart ECHS students who do not complete the associate's degree. As part of a traditional public high school rather than a stand-alone campus, Stewart is uniquely structured. The school philosophizes that this structure promotes a 'college culture' for the entire student body. It would be

worth examining the college awareness, attitudes, plans, and preparedness of students who opt out of, or partially participate in, the ECHS program;

- Differential college readiness of AP and ECHS students, and the degree to which these programs reproduce or confront socioeconomic stratification;
- Experiences of language-“minority” ECHS students who have been served by either ESL or bilingual programs: the language ideologies experienced by, and academic success of, each group;
- Effects of postsecondary transition programming for ECHS students focused on self-determination and help-seeking behaviors; and
- Disability access within ECHS entry testing, coursework, and postsecondary transition.

Examining these questions will undoubtedly invite a ripple effect of additional lines of inquiry, many of which are well beyond the scope of Nicole’s interview data.

For a moment, though, I wish to return to the beginning, to where this particular story began, and I wish to offer my deep gratitude to Nicole, a talented young woman whose brief chats with me evolved into a months-long research endeavor, during which time she was generous with her time and open about her life. This story, nor the ones it springboards, would not exist without her.

**APPENDIX SECTION**

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW DATA ARRANGED CHRONOLOGICALLY

*Identifiers have been removed. Color coding indicates data that did not fit neatly into chronological format but nonetheless informed the final narrative analysis.*

### Early childhood

I moved to Mexico, my grandma took me when I was like three months old. I was super sick, when I was little. So I spent like two weeks in the hospital, one at home, two weeks in the hospital. So, since my mom had a day shift and my dad had a night shift, it was really difficult for them, so then Grandma came when I was two months. She stayed for a month with them, and then she went to Mexico with me, and I was there and she enrolled me for the first year of kindergarten. She kind of kept me and she would come visit, and also would like stay, like in contact over there. By age four I was enrolled in my first year of kindergarten.

For one of my birthdays, we came. Because it was Holy Week, so it was totally free and it was my birthday during that week. And so we brought some pinatas with the shape of the Powerpuff girls. I remember that the police stopped us, because like the migration they thought that like, apparently people were taking little babies inside the pinatas and brought to the U.S. that way. And so I remember that was the last birthday with my mom. I have been sick actually that day. Because I still got really sick until maybe age five.

So at age four, just one day my mom was selling stuff from the house and she was like, 'Hey sweetie, let's go,' and I said 'No, I wanna go with Grandma to the Casa Blanca,' white house. And Grandma came into the room and my mom said, 'Are you leaving?' And Grandma said, 'Yeah,' and she had her luggage ready. And my mom kinda like freaked out and she started like packing stuff into her car and tried to get everything. And so Dad arrived a little bit later and my mom had sold like pants of his, things of his and taken the money saved that he had. Grandma and I left and according to my dad he went three days later to where my mom was staying. Because actually her friend had convinced her of leaving him. Because he was Mexican. And so after two days her friend was like, 'You know what, I can't do this. I'm gonna kick you out of the house because uh yeah, I don't trust you with my husband.' She went to a motel or something. And my dad went three days after. And she was like, 'I will do anything. Please let me back. I am so sorry.' And then he saw how she had my brother Anthony on the sink, like to shower him. And because Anthony is his son, he's like second born, he felt really bad and that's the only thing that made him kinda want to say 'Yes, you can come back,' but his pride said no. I don't know when but she moved back to Indiana with her dad.

### Kindergarten

I loved the uniform so much. It was this little, like a gray skirt, plaid skirt, but it had this little suspenders. It was like a white shirt, and so when it was cold I wore this red sweater with a little black line, black and white line, and it was like super comfy and cute, and Grandma of course she knitted one for me. And it was super itchy. And I told her I hated

it. And she was like, 'No you're gonna wear it,' because it's like hotter, warmer than the other one. I was like, 'Fine.'

I remember my first day of class in Mexico. When I entered I was four. Because I entered late, they put me in second grade of kindergarten. Because we started at three. That day I really didn't want to leave my grandma. Also I started crying because every Monday, my kindergarten they would have like police officers that would do the national anthem, like with the trumpets and everything. And since like it's like a war cry, it was super scary for me. Like, I had never heard it. I started crying, full blast, like 'I want my mom,' ...well, more like 'abuela, please don't leave.'

I remember being able to multiply all the way to twelve during kindergarten. They taught us that. I remember they were super strict about writing. Like in my elementary school they weren't. So my writing kinda got messed up. But in kindergarten they were so strict. I had such a beautiful handwriting. They made me get such a beautiful handwriting. But it was all based on having to - 'oh, yeah, this 8 isn't circular enough. Write the whole thing again.' And we had this storybook that had all these stories that we had to copy and everything, and it was like, okay, do it in this moment or you cannot have lunch.

I remember doing too much work. Because they let me. I was four. Here you are four and you get into the first grade of kindergarten or whatever. There you start at three. Because I was four they let me do second grade, but I had to do twice amount of work because I was a year behind.

Something that really stuck with me was like, do it right the first time or don't do it at all, which can have a really bad effect on me emotionally when I don't do it right.

I still talk to my kindergarten principal. She's incredibly proud of me. She, because a friend of mine recorded the speech online, he uploaded it to his YouTube channel. I've been able to send her the copy and she shows it to everyone that she can.

### Elementary school

So by the time I was in first grade, Grandma didn't subscribe, enscribe, enroll me in the same, in the elementary from the same kindergarten. Because she didn't know if my mom would want me back for elementary.

I used to be very sick as a child. So I would cry a lot. My mom is like, very nervous? So I would really kill her nerves. So Grandma took care of me. And she was just like, ready for whenever my mom would want me back. Which never happened.

I was enrolled into public school so that she wouldn't - because you have to pay for the whole year in that one. Which was a lot because I think in elementary for the one year, like it's free books and all, it's four hundred. Like that was back when I entered. Now it's eight hundred. But the private school, it's about eight hundred monthly, plus the books.

Which is why like, instead of, because you have to pay it like up front, so she didn't want to do that. So she enrolled me into public school.

Because I was so advanced in first grade, people would take like an hour on assignments! And I was done like after five minutes. Which bullies took advantage of this and had me write in all of their little papers. They had us doing like little circles and sticks, like to practice the calligraphy. And I was like, 'I am done with this. Why are you making us do this?'

There was this one time in which - I was a very selfish person. In the way that I was just like, 'okay, this is mine, that's yours, don't touch what is mine or I'll punch you.' So there was this one time this one guy asked me to give him some of my soda because he was thirsty. I refused to. And then like he made me feel bad about it. And I was like, 'fine.' And I just put it on the little desk. And he turned back because it was just like a desk, and a sit there, like a bench kind of thing. He turned back and I had left the soda open. It jumped and got everything wet.

So the bully of the class, he went and was like, 'oh, what's this. You got dirty the notes of my friend. You're gonna do his notes, and my notes, and the notes of the gang.' Which I finished it pretty soon, but that was like, yeah, first he made me clean.

I have a kid who stole my money always. It was a whole gang.

My first grade teacher I was best friends with her daughter. She got cancer and I was there as much as I could for them. Until she sent her to Texas to live with her uncle. Where she got assaulted by her cousin. She came back. She wasn't the same. Like, she left for fifth grade. When she came back for sixth grade it wasn't the same. And then she dropped out in February of sixth grade.

My second grade teacher, she hated me. My grandma, she gives massages and all, so I would have lots of teachers go to my house. I had been taught in kindergarten how to add and subtract and all. Multiply even. And my principal, she would go always to get massages. And I would get help from her sometimes. Because there was this one occasion in which I was taught subtraction another way in second grade. Other way than the one I had been taught in kindergarten. And she didn't like it. So I got help. So my principal, she helped me with an example. Like, I forgot to raise that example because she was like, 'oh, no, that's not the way you write a number. Your numbers. Okay, write me the number 3 here, like big.' And I wrote it, and she was like, 'that's your grade.' Just because of that one. Because my number 3's didn't look like the whole straight and then the curve. My number 3s looked curved like that. And just because I had forgotten to do that, to raise example.

And she always was calling on me, like if I had just done a small noise. 'Oh, write the lines of *I am not an ambulance and I shall remain silent in the classroom.*' She really disliked me.

Third grade, she started liking me after my grandmother started giving her massages. Oh, she didn't like anyone. She was always mocking us or throwing markers at us. There was this one project. We did reproductive system. We were supposed to do like the cardboard and then do each part in different colored page. It had to be cut and drawn and all. And I did it and she asked, 'what is this, is it ET the alien?' Yeah, and everyone bursted laughing.

But there was this one time I could have really gotten in trouble. Well, two times. Because I would always get bullied. One of them, I used to have like, you know the backpacks and stuff have the two little things it only has one? It broke. And so people were playing with it. And then I took it, and then I just kinda stabbed the guy. And he bled and all. And then like, he complained, and then the teacher was like, 'ugh.' This was after my grandmother started giving her massages. 'Ugh, it's nothing, that's why you shouldn't play with her stuff. Just go back to your work.' I was like, 'yes.'

Or this one time she left. And they had taken my pencil bag. They were throwing it as if it was a ball and I had to get it. Like, the cat and mice? And I just pushed someone on the floor. I sat on him. I pushed his arms all the way as I could until he started screaming. And begging for the others to get the bag to me. And she got back right after I got my bag.

Fourth grade I had a teacher who was, people have always called him sick. And he had to stop teaching for a while because he was sick. But he was pretty much weird. Every time that boys would go to get their notes checked, he'd start like, maybe caressing their backs or like 'hey, come sit here' and stuff. But then he got sick so he stopped teaching. For a while. And we had a substitute. She was the most amazing person. She would not only like, because for the whole that semester that he was teaching, I would get F's. Like 5's. I would get those. Like nothing bigger than a 6. And that was like for the majority of the class. And so afterwards, with her, she literally asked us, 'why do you have F's with him, and with me you are all having like this bigger grades?'

But she lost her opportunity of being hired, because she didn't want to pass this one guy who really deserved to fail. But his dad was a doctor. And so he was paying the school. So, even though she really wanted, because she was just a substitute, even though she really wanted to get hired there, they wouldn't do it. Because of the doctor. But she was amazing. She even had time to teach us some English at the end of the year. To try to teach us at least ABC's and tell us movies.

I still keep in contact with her. And she's very proud of me. She sometimes even gives me money. For savings for emergencies. She's just amazing. She wants to take me places when I go these two weeks to Mexico. I just know that she thinks I can excel at everything. And that I will do so with no difficulty because I am me.

Fifth grade, he showed us movies every Friday. But we did need to work our asses off. He did fail several people and they couldn't just not want it, like appeal it or whatever. Because he had some strong influence in the school. So he did fail people. I don't remember much of like the whole teaching. I know that it was the first year that we were introduced to teaching with the smart boards. It was amazing. I know he would say I did it for myself.

Sixth grade. The most difficult teacher ever. The worst reputation...She had us work double. Once I got caught in a crossfire of paper ball fight. That day, for my bad luck, my grandpa had been in town, and he was taking me to lunch, gorditas, and I couldn't pick them, because my teacher had taken away my recess. For having seen me try to throw the paper ball back at the person who hit me. She also goes to my grandma. She has said that she knew I would do great stuff. It doesn't seem that great. She really thinks and really thought that my friendship with the daughter of my first grade teacher wasn't something good. Because she had many problems. But she is grateful for having had me as a student.

I don't see why. I'm just me. Nothing special. I'm just here.

I just do what I gotta do. That's, don't we all. I like the feeling of approval. Of validation. Of feeling like I'm doing something right. Of having peoples tell me that I'm doing it right. Pleasing people.

## English Tutoring

When I was in fourth grade, my grandma was recommended by this friend of hers to do private English school. In Ciudad de Mexico where this lady was like a really renowned person that teaches English. And each month it was 400 pesos, and then like the books, they were 200 pesos each. So for the first month we spent about 80 bucks, because at the time the dollar was at 10 pesos. So I started going there during the afternoons. She wouldn't allow us to speak in Spanish. I already had some little background because I would always come on the breaks to here.

My dad speaks English, but if my English can be bad at times, his is really bad. He would speak Spanish. My stepmom, she would speak English like most of the time, unless she had to communicate with my grandma, which was super rude of her. This one time, so I had a stepbrother, because, okay, now they are divorced. I enter his room wearing these flip flops that, because I didn't have any he had given them to me because they didn't fit to him anymore. So I enter his room to see what was he doing like in the video games, and so I walked in, and I just hear him saying 'Ow, no,' something gibberish. And then I just started crying because like, he sounded so mean, and I left the flip flops there, and then I was like, 'Zach doesn't - Zach asked me to give him back the flip flops.' And then like, my ex-stepmom goes, 'Uh, you already gave them to her, and they don't fit you. Why do you want them back?' And he goes, 'No, what I told her to be more careful because she stepped on my pinky toe.' I mean, I understood it had to be related with feet.

I started going to English classes on my bike every afternoon. I really like that teacher. She taught us that autumn means like such a beautiful thing, and I cannot remember the meaning at the moment. And so like, we were questioning why is it called fall in America, and not autumn, and we just concluded that people were like, 'Okay. It falls.' And I just feel like it's so ridiculous, and I just like calling it autumn better.

We would have tons of games. There was this one that was called the knot. I just know we grabbed hands and did this whole knot, but I do not remember the purpose. But it had something to do with English and sitting. And then 'place changes.' No. 'place changes if you're wearing a red shirt or whatever.' It was really fun. I stopped going in sixth grade because sixth grade was like super difficult according to what I had heard. It was just too much homework. I'm a super procrastinator and didn't start my homework until like ten p.m. I would normally sleep at one a.m.

### Depression/family

Now I have to sleep more than that. It makes me so sad because I may be trying to study and then just like suddenly pass out. I need to not pass out any more. I can't handle the tired anymore. I'm just so tired all the time. Blaming being sad all the time. Yeah, just started with a counselor. For a long time, a long time ago they were like, 'we're gonna give you depression meds.' But it never happened because I moved here. And then, 'we're gonna give you depression meds' but it never happened because my dad didn't want any of that. And so now they're like, 'okay, you're chronically depressed.' I still need to, because they're like, not the ones that did the med stuff and everything, they were like, 'okay, you need to go to this other place to do this.'

Like, it was pretty bad during high school, and then as soon as, like the day after I graduated, it was so difficult to wake up before 9 a.m. Or even 12 a.m...a.m.? Noon. Yeah. And so like the day after I graduated, I woke up at 7 a.m., before my alarm rang. I was like, okay, I feel so free, stress free. And I was like that for a month and went back with the CCC class that I took. And then like in the last month, my dad was like, super distant and super angry because I was moving into the dorms. He had just gotten divorced and he kinda needed help with Diego, but I'm just like, no. Like, how am I gonna help you, like to wake him up, because traffic is horrible. I've been staying this whole week here, like at home. I have been getting late here for my 8 a.m. Or I have not been finding a parking spot. So like, 'okay, I have to leave super early, so I cannot wake up Diego for him to go to middle school, I'm so sorry. Uh, so there's nothing I can help you with.' So even if I stayed I wouldn't be of much help. And anyways, he has called him so that he would wake up, because he won't wake up for anything.

### Middle School

In middle school we had these whole things that were like computers, textiles, typing, electricity, technical drawing. And we had to take a test to be put into one of them. I was

in computer. The first and third year is computer stuff, and the second year like you switch with typing skills.

So for middle school I start at 2 pm and ended class at 8:10 p.m. That middle school in specific was in my elementary. So the elementary took the morning hours and the middle school the afternoon. We had seven classes per day. Fifty minutes. And then a twenty-minute lunch. We don't leave classes. The professors, teachers are the ones that move to the classes. Each classroom accommodates a maximum of 45 people. We're divided into Group A, Group B, Group C. Like, first A, first B, second grade - second A, second B. It's equivalent here to like seven, eight, nine. But there it's first through third.

## High School

I arrived here October 18th. I started school October 23rd. I didn't like the testing of 'uh, well, yeah, we don't know how much English you know, so, uh, we're just gonna choose whether you go to International or stay here.' That was the Monday. I found it easy, but there was this speech thingy where I got nervous and forgot what the name for 'hammer' was. I didn't know what the hell was I doing. I was like 'okay, I'm gonna do this.' And it came out good. It was tedious. I was so tired.

According to Ms. Martinez, that she saw me, she asked me a question like the first day I went, and I just nodded because I just still was very afraid or ashamed of saying something like, wrong. But she saw that I understood. And she said that she didn't see any necessity for me to take the test. Because there are people who come from other countries who don't understand at all and those are the people they send to the International. So, I mean, it was just procedure.

They put me in Algebra 1, math lab, English 1, writing lab, biology, geography, PE, and this one was for me to choose either Spanish or dance. I chose Spanish. I guess I was too late for the testing out of it. Also the French teacher had just quit. I actually was placed into Spanish 3. By the end of the semester, like all my teachers had requested for me to be placed into advanced classes. So I was put into Biology Pre-AP, Geography Pre-AP, everything Pre-AP. I was moved into another math lab for some reason. And I stayed in the same Practical writing.

My teachers really pushed that first semester for me to be moved into pre-AP classes, which I am really grateful for. Although I did miss those first teachers. I really think they were the best.

I still was left in the writing practice with Ms. Edwards to keep practicing. Because even though I was moved to English Pre-AP with Ms. Fournier, that year Ms. Fournier used to be there. On the first day of class I saw her and and I was like, huh, where was the teacher? And she said, 'hey are you lost?' 'Uh yeah, I'm looking for the teacher. I'm a new student.' I was just pretty ashamed, I was like, 'oh yeah, it's just that you look very young and...'

So then I was moved to Ms. Fournier's class, which was amazing. See. And that was because Ms. Tamayo, the one who made me take the test, for English, she was testing me like on the reading ones, so she was seeing my scores and she was like 'oh okay, 1300, okay, you need to be moved.'

And then like, I was enrolled - I was made to take the ACC, the TSI. Freshman year, I took it. The first time I passed everything except the writing part, I believe. No. It was the reading part. So I took it again like a month after and I passed it completely. The summer I took speech as my first class.

For the second year they were like, 'hey, so we kinda made a mistake and we now see according to your records that you're a junior. But, um, you have to take these summer classes.' So I had no electives that year. I was enrolled into English 2 Pre-AP, Chemistry Pre-AP, Physics the regular one because I needed to have taken Algebra 2 already. I was enrolled into Algebra 2, Geometry. I didn't have to take PE again, why? Because apparently I had taken soccer. I don't know when. I never did soccer in Mexico. Actually, Mexico the PE that we have, like the last time I took it was in middle school, and the PE that we had was girls watching boys playing soccer.

I had taken piano classes in Mexico. I was starting and stuff and I really wanted the class but it was not available. And so, they were like, 'uh, yeah, we're gonna give you a music credit. Don't worry. You have your fine art.' And I was like, 'Okay, fine, I guess.' I also took world history. I took chem, phys, the two maths, English, world history. Oh, I took psychology through CCC. I took Spanish 5.

And then like the spring semester I took Drama from CCC, which was super freaking awesome and I loved it so much. We did four plays - *The Laramie Project*, *Fences*, *Four Colored Girls*, and I cannot remember. And we had to do this, either found art, questions, a project, or something else that I cannot remember.

So by the end of the year of the my sophomore slash junior year, they were angry because like, I had been put with the juniors and they all for the whole year thought that I was a sophomore. And so they were angry with me because I was skipping a grade and how was I supposed to be sitting with them when I was a sophomore. And then like, I even heard some talk, they were like, 'I don't know, but didn't she move, because she's like number two at the moment' or something, and I was like, 'Please kill me.' But apparently like, the register I asked and she told me that I was number one, so I don't get.

That summer, I took English Composition I and II to substitute my English 3. I took US History I and II. I hated history so much. I had the whole summer full of classes. I only had like one week of rest before school started. And I of course spent it in Mexico, and I put braces on because...I, my retainer had broken.

I started senior year. My first period, I didn't have one. Wait, no, I didn't have a fifth period. What I had for first period was a computer thingy with Coach Mitchell. Second

period I had English, apparently. But also third period, because I had English Composition I apparently. And then like, for second period I had uh, I mean third period, I had uh, British Literature. So I had to see Brown twice that day. And then like, he was like, 'hey, you're - are you sure you're' And I just went back to my counselor that day like, he let me skip that class to do that. Then fourth period it was, because CCC hadn't started yet, but I had government, US Government at CCC.

So, I really wanted art, but art for that period was like the third year of printmaking. So, I was like, okay, then I want something mathy. And I was put into statistics. I hate stats so much. That was such a waste of time. Seriously. I could have taken something else. I would have rather PE.

So, sixth was forensic science. Seventh was, seventh and eighth were geology. What was fun was when our professor, we went on a field trip and he made us lick this one rock, without, and then after that he told us that it was fossilized poop from 5 million years ago. But I liked that. Also I fell many times. I got so scraped on my back and my belly, like part of my arm.

I know one of them we went to like, Trinity College. I don't know but some moment we went to the Road 360...we, I know, I remember that at some some point we went to Llano. Actually like, the place that looked the prettiest and stuff, they didn't let me get on at, because they were like, 'nope, you're gonna fall and scrape yourself more.' And I was like, 'but it looks so pretty and I wanna take a picture, and...' I really thought I was gonna fail geology. Like, seriously. But I got a B. I don't know how I got a B. I think I collected so many rocks during that field trip that were for extra credit, so I don't know if that B was only because of that extra credit or something. Because I was doing so low. Like, I did super low on my exams.

And like, I really hope that it happens like that this semester for medical terminology and freaking biology. Because like, for medical terminology, okay I just have two exams left. And we don't have a final. So I really need to get an 88 or a 90 at least on both exams to be able to pass with at least a 70. Biology, I really hope the final thing happens because I just need it to happen. Like seriously I need it to happen. Because I really need a 3.0. For scholarships and stuff.

I made a B on government and I was like, okay, I'm glad. I fell asleep during this class sometimes, even though Professor Powell would call on me and be like, 'hey, are you awake?' And I would like wake up and stuff, but he was like, super boring. I mean, he wasn't super boring, but like, government is government. And I've never been interested in it.

### Foreign language classes

I felt [English as a foreign language] was pretty time-wasting in the sense that, like I took three English classes because it was for seventh, eighth, and ninth grade. And so each

time I learned, my peers would copy from me, or I would be the one teaching. I really wish they had offered more languages, or more advanced classes instead, but that was not the case. All of [the English teachers] are native speaking Spanish speakers.

[Spanish as a foreign language was] a hassle. Because I had spent fifteen years of my life already speaking Spanish, having learned grammar and everything. And then having to come here and do the basic things that I would have done maybe in second or third grade were just a waste.

*Would you agree that your middle school English teachers kind of saw you as an expert in English compared to the rest of the class?*

Yes. They wouldn't let me answer things.

*Was that the same sitting in Spanish classes here?*

Yes. Spanish, geometry, classes in general.

*It seems really kind of different to go from, in Mexico almost being like an expert in both languages. Do you feel like the assumption when you came here was kind of different than that?*

If I had lived here and someone from Mexico came, I would have assumed that they didn't know English. Being honest. And also, English order is a little weird. Like, in the time that my dad was learning English when he was in middle school, he was taught the word *work*. And when he came over here he would ask for *work* but people would give him water. So he kept asking for work and he kept getting water. Until one day some Hispanic guy told him 'hey, no, you don't ask like that. You say, hey, I want a job.'

The thing is, I went to a private school for English. So I had an advantage over any other person I knew. Because middle school English is pretty poor.

During my last semester at Stewart I worked with Ms. Tamayo in an after school program helping in tutoring students from Mexico and Central America to get prepared for the STAAR test. It was nice to explore some other cultures I had never really interacted with, like Cubans, their accent? It's pretty different from everything I had known. But trying to help them was something different because I had worked in the past trying to help my peers in Mexico. But here trying to explain a little bit more while making them try to learn the words, trying to pronounce everything, trying to make them feel the sentences cohesive instead of trying to get the literally, literal meaning, which may not be the thing that it means. It was something very interesting. And hard because even I do not understand the difference between shut up, shut out, shut down, like what makes it so different?

*Do you feel like your high school experience was similar to or a lot different from other people who came to the United States from Mexico and Central America?*

I feel it was different for the fact that the people that I knew, they just seemed to lack the willingness to learn and to work and adapted fairly quickly to what I've seen. I would call the likeness of the student - American student.

*What do you think made that - what do you think made it go that way for them and not for you?*

I have always been pretty driven. And I dislike getting help. And I dislike stuff that is not my own. And I get pretty anxious when I don't do my work.

*Do you feel like it's more of a personality thing, rather than any differences in your upbringing or experience?*

Yeah, probably, although I still know some of the people I went to kindergarten with. And compared to the other people - my kindergarten as I mentioned was private. Montessori program and everything. And I know them and they're pretty much like me. While people that I know from public schools have been - maybe there's one or two that have been like me, but the other ones are just not interested into putting the effort.

I think it's the first years of school.

College

I have heard plenty about for many the first semester being the toughest, and for some maybe the fourth, fifth or whatever. I had certain personal conflicts that made it even rougher. It was very easy and fun to take the CCC courses. And while some relate at UCT, it's not as easy. With the whole switch classroom thing, it's been like something really new. And without being able to, maybe have all this work from your professors because of huge classes or that they just are very stuck on 'well, I am just here to give you the lecture. You have to do this.' It's been pretty rough. And although they have these tutoring sessions, and plenty of them, I have not found a one that clicked, or I haven't explained but made more confused.

With all the emotional things that happened my senior year, I feel like I really lost my self-drivenness, my self-discipline. So this semester I'm working on that. So what I did was, almost, actually four of my classes are online, so that's self-paced. So I'm trying to keep myself on track, become more organized, which I have never been. And just try to keep myself focused and just make a better me for this semester and for the next to come.

I'm taking physical anthropology, that's online. Chemistry, that's *online*. Introduction to Roman Culture or something like that, online. Psychology of sexuality online. And then I'm taking calculus. That's my 2:00 p.m. every Monday through Thursday. And then I

have ULN which is University Leadership Network. And it doesn't count for anything but it's one of the scholarships and I need to take it.

I like having Fridays off. I really feel like it's better to have the full teaching class in an hour and a half, rather than having spread in like fifty minutes Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and then having to go to the TA sessions on the other days.

My favorite class, I can't decide. I'm between Roman culture and psychology. Although I really like my calculus professor this time. Last time before moving to pre-calc I tried two or three professors and they were really bad.

I'm taking psychology because if I want to change my major to that, I have to have one psychology class done at UCT.

One of [the other early college students] had to drop out. Something about her family, her mother's been difficult about giving her her taxes for the FAFSA, so. I only know one other person. She's from Stewart. She's doing well. Right now from what I know she's working on the process of getting a job. But out from that she's doing pretty well.

*What about students who are in your classes who came from taking more like AP classes from where they went to high school, so not the early college thing. Do you see anything similar or different as far as transitioning to college?*

They have more methods of studying. I normally, I have always relied on my memory and of understanding the things in class. Because whatever I can't remember I didn't pay attention or something. So with them and with Tumblr I discovered something about study blurs. And so I have learned many ways, like for me index cards are like the most useless thing. But ways of doing things with the index cards, things that I had never imagined. Or just the way of taking notes. How to make everything more effective.

For my AP history, I remember that what we would do was just be given a sheet of paper like weekly, with tons of questions that we needed to research on, write essays on, just a lot of writing about it trying to get it.

*As opposed to like your CCC classes.*

Yeah, were okay, just read the textbook, maybe research on this for a research paper, so I feel like I learned more in CCC classes rather than in that AP history.

*Do you see any things that could be done differently in Early College classes that would give students more study skills or a better variety of study skills?*

I don't know but they could maybe try - before every semester here at UCT they have this whole thing about 'hey, we're gonna teach you about time management. If you want to come, you're invited. Study skills. All for you. Freshman 15? Let me give you some

tips to lose it.' So, and since I know that normally at the beginning of the year the students are like maybe one or two weeks free, this time could be used for maybe that.

Or trying to encourage them on things like bullet journals. That's what I'm trying to do this semester to stay organized. Bullet journal is something where you kind of write your things about the past, present, and future. In the first two pages you write an index. Then, say, you skip some pages, then you make for the future, six months. In the two pages you divide it into three sections. Write the name of the month. Then you write, next page you write like each month individually. Like, you write everything you have to do for that month. Next page, you write daily for that month. And so after that you go through it, and everything that cannot, that isn't that important, that you can skip in that, or that if you leave there will it be kind of a waste of time or something, you scratch it out and put it over here in the page of the six months.

And so everything you write you put like a dot next to it. If it's like an important event you make a circle or something. And so for that dot if you didn't do it that day but you still need to do it, it's still of relevance, you write like a little arrow to the right. If it's not, to the left. And so whatever was to the right, you pass it to the next day, and write the tasks that also you need to do for that day.

And so I've been working pretty hard on it. So far I've done the whole thing until May. And what many people do is they personalize that. So instead of just being boring they make drawings, put quotes, they do bunches of stuff. There's a lot.

*So what advice would you give um, students who are about to graduate from Stewart with an associate's degree and going to a competitive university like UT?*

Just because you've taken college classes doesn't mean that you have actually experienced what a higher education place can throw at you. Don't think that you know everything, just keep working. Don't give up. It'll be tough, or not, but hey, you've got this. You have done more than many people I know have done, so good job.

*What made them finally realize like, oh hey, you've finally taken the ninth grade?*

After they finally were able to translate or whatever my transcripts.

*So you had your transcripts like on the first day you came, right?*

Yeah. But they were Mexican. In Spanish. So I guess, I don't know. Because I had began to take piano classes in Mexico. And I really wanted to be placed into a piano class to continue. And that would be awesome. I have a piano at home. But, yeah. It never happened.

I had the option of being placed into either dance or Spanish. Of course, I am the clumsiest left, least coordinated person. So I chose Spanish.

*It's strange to me that since there's a lot of staff at Stewart who are bilingual, that it took as long as it did for your transcript to really be looked at.*

I literally have no idea what happened. It was not until the year after that I was told I didn't need to take any art and stuff. And apparently, because in middle school in Mexico I did have PE. Which was in ninth grade. And I had started high school which was the tenth grade. So I guess my PE from there passed or whatever because I only had to take one year. Instead of one and a half. And apparently I did soccer. Which is very strange. And they took my credit as if I had done full semester or whatever. I have full credit out of nowhere. Which made me incredibly sad.

Maybe they just wanted me to catch up. Which I had already like resigned to spending another year there and just like being chill and experiencing the whole high school thing that I would see in shows in Mexico. Like having a locker or going to prom or going to the little school parties or, what's the other one, going to a football game, going to a basketball game, maybe even if I had been capable, joining the cheerleaders. I don't know. I wasn't allowed. It was not until this year that I went to my first homecoming game.

And last year my car, I was, after my dinner, well my car had been malfunctioning when I went to pick up my prom date. And so we went to dinner and I knew that my car like, it was like okay, it says that the battery might have a problem, but I already called my dad and he said it might just be that it needs to be checked, like you know how like every several miles you have. And so he and my prom date's dad told me not to worry. And so we went to Olive Garden. And then just there when we arrived to a parking spot it died. And then after dinner we got a jump. And we're driving to my house to change cars. And like two minute drive from home, it died again. So we were stranded there. And I never made it to prom. Which, I spent good eighty dollars to not to go to prom, two hundred dollars on a fantastic dress, plenty of tears because my dad wouldn't let me at first.

He was really angry at me still because of the whole coming out thing. Which he thinks that I was gonna do something bad. That it happened because something bad was gonna happen at the prom. That I was gonna have sex with my best friend.

We got into a fight during the summer. We've been trying to solve things little by little. But it's certainly not really the same. She thinks that I led her on. At first like before the whole coming out stuff to my dad, like I really, really really was into her, but she said that she only wanted to be friends with benefits. When I wanted something serious. And then afterwards when I got with my ex who I didn't know was her ex. She let me know about all her feelings. And I'm like, 'I wanted something serious and you just said this.' And then she said, 'No, I only said it because I didn't want to put pressure on you.' And I'm like, 'I would have asked if I felt like you had actually wanted something, but no.'

That happened and then during my senior year I had to do so much stuff I am not proud of. To be able to get some minor stuff that I needed to get because my dad was really angry at me. There were times like I would go to the store with my stepmom and my brother because I was forced to because she would pick me up after school, from the CCC classes? And I would say like, there was this specific occasion, 'hey, uh, can you buy me this cereal?' 'No, you don't need it.' And then my brother two seconds later, 'hey, can I have this cereal?' 'Yeah, get that and any other box you want.' And he wouldn't give me any money, so I had to do so much stuff. To be able to get what I needed.

If I'm at home more than a week, it's very stressful. Which I don't know how am I going to handle it during the fall because I'm gonna be super busy. With school, twelve hours, an internship of ten hours, plus what is it called, EMT classes. Which I missed the deadline for the summer. Which is why I'm doing it in the fall. Because that way I can get a little more stability than my either four or twenty-four hours a week that I deal with this. And I can get out. Because just being there is very toxic at times.

*Did you have friends in elementary school?*

After a while, yeah. One.

*How do you think other kids saw you?*

Uptight. Like very - they call it fresa. It's like preppy. Very teacher's pet or very bossy or very just like this. Too much.

*Did other kids in kindergarten see you that way too, or was that more when you got to elementary school?*

Elementary. Kindergarten, everyone was the way I was.

Which I am really grateful for having made it out to be that way because I feel like I would have been a lazy person. Not stuck with things.

Still in high school people, like high school here, I had a kid like the first month who wanted to date me, and I was like, no. I don't like you. No thank you, bye-bye. He called me that way. And that was like my major cause of bullying on my first year here. So yeah, some people here take me as a bitch. Because of being that way.

And I feel like without it, I wouldn't have made it through my senior year with my dad not letting me study during the night because he would have me like, after I came out, after school he would get there and he would make me either clean the house or take me

on long talks that would last either five hours or something. And then wouldn't let me go to sleep unless the house was completely spotless. Which is why I begged to have a free period in which I could do homework. I really think like that I wouldn't have made it without it. Because there were so many times I just wasn't strong enough but I needed to just stick with it.

I'm the most introverted person who is always hanging alone because I'm afraid of people. I do not really feel comfortable. And I feel like much less since I feel like senior year distracted every single drop left of my will. With dad beating it up. All that stubbornness, all that effort, doesn't seem to exist anymore. As much as I may try, it's just so much harder to try to do the stuff that I know I normally would do, accomplish. Excel at.

It just seems more easy, more appealing, to give up. Which I swear I'm fighting. Trying to go back to having that fighting will. But maybe I just need to rest a little bit to get it back instead of just trying to force myself to have it back.

Because I was thinking of living at home this year. I was seriously considering it. And then I had to give a speech at Wendy Davis school for girls? Where I really fucked up the speech. I got so nervous because, okay, when I first did my senior speech, the valedictorian speech, I was told to talk about myself. I was never told to talk about anyone else. And I really hated that idea. And so I just tried because I feel really uncomfortable talking about the whole, 'oh, I did this and I did that.' And so I just started improvising because I got so nervous to the point that I couldn't see. I was improvising and I was shaking so bad, and I just had a terrible breakdown. So I went to Ashley's house. Where she helped me a lot. And I stayed a long time there. And, I should have told my dad, but he got really pissed off at me. And he, when I got home he started yelling at me, saying that I had gone there to do illicit stuff. When I just was having a breakdown and I really needed comfort. Which is something that he does not understand.

It was just terrible for me. I felt like it was terrible. I felt like I was gonna mess up in the senior speech. But then when he did all that, I was like 'okay no, I will not stand this.' So I just submitted my application for housing. Well, accepted the contract. And, yeah, that was the last thing that I feel like was brave of me to do.

So anyways in the last week before the graduation it was when I was told that I need to change the speech all over because, 'oh, yeah, we just read it' two months after they had told me, and 'it cannot be just about yourself, you have to include your peers,' and so I had to literally change it in one day. And continue adding some changes like, throughout the day, and get Ms. Akin to help, and I literally had to memorize it so I wouldn't, I would do it with the least nervousness. Which I still had three messed ups in the the graduation. But still. I mostly delivered it by memory. Which I feel was what made me feel more confident about it? And because for the Wendy Davis, I had just been told, 'oh, yeah, you need to give your speech.' 'Oh, okay, sure. I don't think I can.' 'Yeah, you have to stand this way and you have to say it more this way, deliver it with, with your chin, whatever, just show confidence.' And 'No, no. Don't slouch.' That wasn't helpful

at all.

I am on the six week wait list for a sliding scale counseling center. Yeah. From here, through the summer it would be a little bit more expensive. After six weeks they will call me if I still want it.

Every person has their own limit. And I just feel like I maybe could do more. But maybe I'm wrong and this is all I've got. And there is no more.

*What do you think went really well for you this year?*

Being away from that. Being able to explore things I would have never done if I had stayed at home. Going to City Lake. Walking around. Maybe being out past 8:00 p.m. Going to I-HOP. Having a midnight snack. Hanging out with friends. Which I did a lot last semester, but then it just, too much drama. High school friends I still get along with. Mostly like my high school friends were people younger than me. Never my senior year partners. I never got along with them because they wouldn't talk to me. Because they didn't like the fact that I made them go a place down in the ranking. So. Oops.

*What things did not go as well as you would have wanted them to go?*

School stress. Overconfidence. Overconfidence on my studying methods. I thought my studying methods in high school would work in here. Which is mostly like just pay attention. If you learned it in class, you learned it. If not, you didn't pay attention enough.

*What study methods have you had to kind of adopt to be successful here?*

Actually reading the books rather than just relying on the professors. Actually this year I'm so ashamed. I, this semester I enrolled all in online classes. Which has helped my introverted self. So yeah that forced me more to read the material. As opposed to going to class and all. Actually paying more attention at the reading stuff rather than hearing it. Or seeing it in a way that would be explained by the speaker.

Not really having the support from family is really tough. But you've got to have some way to cope and a support system.

*What's your support system right now?*

Online friends and counseling center here.

I'm excited about, heck, I'm taking classes. Never mind. A friend is visiting me from Indiana. Which I am looking for. This summer has me excited over being able to actually build my CPR buddy. I want to create the whole scene. Not just the body and all, but a

whole scene. I am excited about watching *Orange is the New Black*. And also *Daredevil* the second season. And for the fall, *Jessica Jones*.

I am not looking for being the housemaid. I am not looking forward to being my brother's mom. I am not looking forward to being yelled at or being kept in the kitchen for hours or being told that I need to speak when I don't want to. Provide arguments to stuff that I don't want to do. Or say. I am not a lemon you can extract juice from. I'm juiceless all the time. My dad dared to suggest that I could, during the fall I could still work, I could still volunteer at the hospital, I could still do my internship here, do my school here, and do my EMT class. And that being on two hours of sleep wouldn't kill me.

Because I was thinking of taking the semester off from here to be able to do that. To be able to save up some money for the spring to at least get an apartment and all. Meanwhile I would get another job or something already with the certificate and all. That was my original plan, to not put so much stress on me. But now I will have to stop working and stop the volunteering.

I am CPR certified, as of the 16th.

*And you want me to use your name? Or a made-up name?*

I don't know. With what I've said, what would you see most fitting?

*It's really just what you're comfortable with. I mean, I know that you've talked about some very personal things. I know some people would feel like they don't want their real name attached to that. So if you're not sure, I'm happy to not use your real name. If you'd rather I use it, I'm happy to use it.*

I don't actually really care. Like, what happened happened. It's just, like, this like saying 'Oh yeah, um you're belly's falling out.' 'Oh yeah, the sack of meat, of fat, oh okay. No, the sack of fat on my chest. Oh, okay. I don't care.'

Middle school would have been really, if I told you, I would take a long time. Because I had like seven teachers. I remember more some than others.

Ide. She was my first grade, I mean seventh grade. She was my biology teacher in first and then my government, like civics teacher in third. She was super strict. She made us, like instead of a normal notebook, she made us do like this notebook like the spiral? But with colored pages. And we had to write our notes from the notebook super neat. And very creatively. And very good looking on this colored pages. That was for both biology and civics. And we had to do stuff three times if it wasn't pretty enough the first time or if you were missing information. She at the end of the year, because I was gonna go see my mom for the first time in since I was born, I was making like a scrapbook kind of thing. And she took it away from me. Because I was doing it in class. Because we were doing nothing but still we were in class. She took it away from me. And then like

afterwards she asked what it was and I told her. And then she said ‘Okay, but I want it finished by Monday. And I want you to show me.’ It was a Friday, so I only had two days.

I didn’t know my mom had gray eyes. I thought she was blonde. But no, her hair was light, like a dirty blonde, light brown. She gave me a purse. A Minnie Mouse shirt, she guessed my size. And it really fit. And many stuff more.

I was so nervous that time. We went to Pizza Hut. I ate the whole pizza by myself from nervousness and I still wanted more. I was so sick the next day. Even before getting there, I was so nervous I got the burns.

## Middle school

In first grade, I made this notebook with questions. Like each page, a question. It was called chismographo. Like *gossipiher*. So, like, you would pass it to people and they would answer questions yes and no. And one of my friends, she was bored in math class. And she took it out. And so the teacher confiscated it and gave it to her. To Thede [the assistant principal.] And one of the questions was ‘draw the teacher that you hate most.’ We have given Ide, the biology teacher the nickname of The Witch because she really looked like some sort of a mix of a vampire, dead, witch. I drew her. And my friend, she drew Thede. With a really long nose and big eye like toothless. We got in so much trouble, but I not as much as her. From there and on she hated my friend. And as for me, she did say that she was incredibly disappointed.

I still talk to her and all sometimes. And she just keeps telling me like just keep going. You gotta do what you gotta do. Suck it up. She’s very tough. And she hated my aunt when she was in college with her. Because apparently my aunt was very followed by guys. And she became girlfriend of this guy who Thede liked. And now the guy is my uncle. She really disliked my aunt.

This one is not as positive. He was my second grade civics teacher. My friend was throwing little balls of paper at me. And some of them will hit him in the forehead. And I would see them going down. He never caught her. But, because she was hitting me also I decided to throw it at her. He did see that one. And he started lecturing me in front of the class. ‘I thought you were more mature.’ And stuff like that. And from therein on, I, for the rest of middle school I had the whole ‘Oh, Nicole, I thought you were more mature.’ Which made me so angry all the time because they just wouldn’t let it go.

But he was a drunke. He appeared in the newspaper twice because he had crashed in front of the school. Because he was drunk. He was husband of the principal of the elementary. And my fourth grade teacher, the one who would grab boys and all. The principal from the elementary let him keep his job. And he was brother of the principal of the middle school. So it was a lot of influence. Like, oh, yeah, you keep my brother with a job, I’ll keep your husband with a job. But I think they have finally fired him.

High school

[My teachers] really liked me. Because I actually did my job. Not like the other students. And in some talks that we had, they wished that the students had at least a little bit of what I am. Because that way maybe they would learn a little bit.

*Who was your favorite high school teacher?*

Definitely not Ruiz. Too much of a jokester. Didn't know how to keep to himself. He spilled in class that 'Hey, therapy called. You need to go.' And I was like...He got called on that. He was really, feeling really badly afterwards. He really apologized. But he still was not nice.

My, my favorite person in the whole school, not teacher was Mrs. Lindley. She was the counselor, no, like advisor for L-R I think. She was fantastic. She was really amazing. Like, most of the best things happened with her like things she said or like the first day of class. She had a red light so I was enrolled in Spanish. She forgot that it was a B-Day. So she took me to my A-Day class. And then like she was, because she gave me a really fast tour. She said, 'You know what? Don't trust me. I don't even know where am I at.' And then took me to Ruiz's.

But I cannot decide for my favorite teacher. I'm between the math department or the English department.

Oh, and Aguirre. I'm really sad I only had art for a semester. I could have improved so much in drawing. You know, I used to draw a lot when I was in middle school. But then my grandma found my drawings and according to her they weren't something a girl should draw. Because they weren't flowers or animals or views. [I was drawing] people or like, anime or like angel anime. So she took my notebook and ripped them from there. And I hadn't drawn anything unless it was for school until Aguirre's class.

*What are things that the high school could have done a better job of to prepare you for what going to a university would really be like?*

I don't know. Even though there's already some separation between normal and Pre-AP and AP, if the separation gap becomes bigger or something it would be really bad for some students. Like if some students do want to work those are the ones that are in the highest thing. But those who do might advance more than those who just stay in the normal.

*So like you see the people who are already motivated and then the people who aren't...*

Just aren't trying to do anything and just want to stay in that place.

*But you think maybe if the school were to push them into a more challenging*

Maybe a little bit, or I don't know, I really think that they should be implemented since kindergarten when you're starting to be yourself and learn and develop. The way you learn, the way you act. Instead of being so lenient, I really think that it's then when you should start doing all the work. Rather than just 'Oh, it's naptime.' I literally learned all the way to 12x12 in kindergarten. I really think that was something that really helped me.

*Do you think it's a lost cause by the time people get to high school?*

Yes. Some people may want to, but if it's not something that they have done, they will see it as very difficult and they will abandon it.

*So if Early College High School, one of the goals of the program nationally is to capture students who didn't get that quality of education from kindergarten all the way through. So now they're at a point of not necessarily having the background knowledge and experiences but now being in college classes.*

That can shape them. Yes. It's known that you're saving a lot, which might be a good motivator. But it's still having to put from themselves. I knew two people who just didn't want to do it and who failed their classes on purpose because they didn't want to do the classes. So it all depends on the person. And I really think that they should maybe like, even if it's not kindergarten, just in elementary. Like just try to push a little bit more. Even if it's middle school. Heck. Sometime before high school.

If the person has the really good motivator of 'Oh, I don't want to be in the situation of my family's at. I'm gonna take advantage of this. I'm gonna do this. I'm gonna do that so that I can be better and provide a better future for me, my family, my kiddos, whatever.' If they have that kind of motivation, maybe. Or just do it for themselves if they see what's going to be ahead. If they have a job already and see that they aren't like really doing much. If that situation all can influence it. If this is like, 'Oh, yeah. I'm doing this but by doing this that is free at the moment, I could maybe do more. Even if it's like get a job that will earn me two dollars more than what I'm doing at McDonald's, that will be very beneficial.

I decided that I wanted to get a certificate in forensic science. I already got my minor through the AP. Minor in Spanish. And I have to do pre-med. And so I'm just like okay, I could either do it of like seventeen hours a semester, or I could just do twelve and be a little bit chill. So, yeah I could finish early, but I also could finish just in time. Because I have to do the whole pre-med and it's a bunch of science. You know how horrible science altogether is. Terrible.

## APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIPT OF VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

*Identifiers removed. Color coding indicates initial thematic analysis.*

Greetings, fellow students, parents, teachers, distinguished staff members, and everyone else who has come here to celebrate the Charles Stewart Early College High School graduating class of 2015!

I would like to give a special recognition to my grandparents, who are here to celebrate my graduation today, all the way from San Luis Potosi, Mexico.

[Previous sentence repeated in Spanish.]

Everyone of us has a story of overcoming challenges. My story started three years ago when I was forced to leave everything I knew and loved and depended on in Mexico to move to Spring, Texas. Imagine. At fifteen years of age, having to leave everything you have ever known to move to another country. This time in my life was terrifying. And exciting, all at the same time. I had to readjust to a language I barely knew, a new culture, and a new way of life.

In the middle of all of this, I discovered Charles Stewart Early College High School. Stewart was the biggest school I had ever seen, and I thought I would be [so? easily?] lost. However, Stewart became a place of tranquility and peace for me. I made great friends and found that many of the teachers and staff became extensions of my family. Through the love and support of all of these new people, I discovered myself. My Stewart family encouraged me to reach for the sky, and as a result, I stand before you today as the valedictorian of the class of 2015.

I may technically be a junior, but I am graduating today with both a high school diploma and an associate's degree from Central Community College.

I will be entering the University of Central Texas in the fall to begin my long journey of becoming a neurosurgeon.

Although my story might seem amazing, my story is comparable to the story of every student in my graduating class. We have all overcome obstacles, big and small. We can all testify that one teacher or counselor or staff member who has picked us up and encouraged us too when we were at our lowest point. I must thank everyone in the Stewart family for everything they have done. To College Career and Resource Center, everything you do for us is truly appreciated, and many of us would not be here, graduating, without all of your help. Ms. Tamayo, you have been with me since Day One, when I took that language test. I still cannot believe I did not remember the word hammer in English. Ms. Valdez, continue being the wonderful principal you are, and continue to inspire the kids to do their best. One day I will pay you back those fifteen dollars you lent me. Family, thanks for being here.[...]

These people are just a few of the many who have shown me that I can reach my goals.

Last semester, my geology class went on a field trip to collect stones at fourteen different places. The rocks on the ground were nice, but *no*, we needed the ones that were at the top. The climbing was hard, and I fell, several times. Maybe I shouldn't have chosen such a slippery path, but each time I fell, *I got back up* and kept climbing until I had achieved my goal and reached the top. Throughout the climb, I learned from my mistakes and looked for alternative paths. Truthfully, all paths take time, effort, and determination. Always remember that nothing is impossible. A simple apostrophe can change the word *impossible* to *I-apostrophe-m possible*.

Fellow graduates, after we walk across this stage, everything about Stewart High School will be a fond memory. Some of us will go to college. Others will join the military, and others will start their careers. Wherever we go and whatever we become, always cherish this moment, and remember that we can achieve any goal, even those that seem impossible.

Long live Stewart High!

## APPENDIX C: FIELD NOTES

*Identifiers removed.*

11/13/2015

We met for our first interview at Nicole's chosen location - a study area in the student union of her university. In a lot of ways this was her comfort zone more so than mine. I made an effort to leave with enough time to find parking, scope out our meeting spot, and settle in with a Starbucks drink. She was fashionably late, which is somewhat unlike her. We texted a few times and she said she was making a purchase at the co-op bookstore nearby and was on her way.

As soon as she arrived our conversation was easy, natural, full of laughter, and enjoyable. She, did, however, look extremely tired, and would continue to "blank out" throughout our conversation. I asked a few times whether this was in fact a good time to meet, but she insisted she wanted to. We chatted casually about her classes, her bookstore purchase (medical terminology study guides), and her family. I noted her new haircut: short in back, long in front, with a bright blue streak. I gave a little bit of an overview of the plans for today's session, reminding her that when we had last talked, she was in favor of presenting the story chronologically. She was still amenable to this idea so I said that I would be asking questions about different chapters or times in her life, starting from very young. We played with my audio recorder app, making sure it still worked, and then began.

A couple times, the first early in the interview, I was surprised something I had "run with" from one of our initial conversations had been a misunderstanding: her dates of living in the US and Mexico. I thought she had moved abruptly to Mexico around the age of four but found out she had moved there at four months old and traveled back and forth frequently over those early years. The long-term move became more cemented at age four, but the pattern of frequent travel was the same over the years.

Sometimes because we were being so casual and natural in my conversation I found myself into speech habits that are not necessarily particularly useful as an interview: a few times I found myself finishing sentences for her and had to consciously stop. I also found myself inserting empathetic commentary along the lines of "Wow, you must have been/must have felt..." and again would have to make a real effort not to insert or assume.

One time that I intentionally put aside my researcher role was when Nicole got into discussing her ongoing depression. I really felt that my role at that point was to use my training in youth mental health and encourage her to seek out campus resources. I even shared some of my own experience. I was reassured to learn that she was in the process of seeking counseling and possible medication. I don't know whether to include any of this in the final write-up.

As far as the actual content of the interview, I definitely want to explore Nicole's language experiences more with her. Twice in the interview she connected an anecdote about not knowing an English word with feelings of shame (the flip flop incident with her step brother, and the hammer incident that she also told in her graduation speech.) She talked a lot also about her own perfectionism and I know that this is partially attributable to that, but I also want to know more about ways in which her U.S. environment might have set her up to feel ashamed about being a language minority. And how this might have been different - the opposite? - in Mexico.

I find myself worrying about Nicole - the stress of upcoming finals her first semester of university - she has to maintain a certain GPA or risk losing her scholarship. She seemed so tired and so stressed out. And I hope that she seeks out the help she feels she needs.

12/3/2015

I happened to run into Nicole tonight at the high school play - she was there to take a break from final exams and cheer on her old theater buddies. I introduced her to my husband and daughter and we made a little bit of small talk. She was clearly still stressed about finals but made it clear that she was not going to think about them this evening. Compartmentalizing seems really important to her and it's something I've noticed in a variety of settings as we've talked. I thought about following up on the conversation with Fiona, and Nicole's subsequent disappearance from facebook, but decided not to. Nicole let me know she'd be in Mexico for the month over Christmas, so that would postpone our next interview until the beginning of the spring semester.

1/22/2016

This interview was weird. We met at the high school library, at Nicole's request, which I found out was because she's currently living at home due to a sprained ankle, and all but one of her classes are online this semester. She seems clearly happier and less stressed with the new school schedule! She ran into several high school acquaintances, both staff and students, and said hi. When we got into the room we were using for the interview, though, there was some awkwardness. I reviewed a little bit what we had discussed in the previous interview, gave Nicole the opportunity to review transcripts (she stated that "my English is not always the best, so reviewing the transcripts wouldn't really help. Whatever you got out of what I said is fine.") I reiterated that the transcripts were available to her at any time, and further that if she later thought of something she wanted to rephrase or omit, she was welcome to notify me. I pulled up the interview questions on my computer, set up the recorder app, and told her that this round would be a little more "scattered" because instead of a chronological overview, we would be doing more of a keying in on specific topics. Nicole was agreeable to this. Throughout the interview I felt like I had to shift gears quickly and on my feet, without a lot of time to strategize, as a result of things not going the directions I expected. Because of this, the interview felt short and insubstantial. I am looking forward, though, to reviewing both transcripts and looking for places the contradictions and surprises offer depth and nuance. Totally puzzled, though, as to where to go for interview #3.

5/5/2015

In reviewing and re-coding both transcripts in preparation for my third and potentially final interview, these are my thoughts. First, I think I need to go more general, in a sense. In the second interview I tried to narrow the topic in the direction of my various hunches, and when these didn't play out, at least not in the ways I expected, the result was a jolting, awkward interview. There were times, in retrospect, that maybe I didn't fully explore lines of reasoning with her, because of my surprise. So there are definitely places I could go back.

I am interested in questions of identity. How she sees/saw herself. How she believes others see/saw her at various times. There's a lot of this reverting back to character traits (my self-discipline, my hard work, etc.) and I think it would be interesting to have her honestly assess how she/others saw her at various points.

I want to ask her guidance in dividing her narrative into chapters. I see it as:

- a. Move to Mexico and Kindergarten
- b. Elementary (incl. Private tutoring) and Middle
- c. Move to U.S. and High School
- d. First year of college

And then for each chapter I am curious:

- a. How did you see yourself?
- b. How did people your own age see you?
- c. How did the adults in your life see you?

This process might offer insight into the questions I want to explore of privilege (affluence, private education, ties to US including second generation citizenship) and discrimination (language experiences and deficit construct upon entering US schools). Or it might not do that at all.

I also want to explore a little more about her perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of her high school education (rote memorization and lack of elective choices were two weaknesses she mentioned indirectly.) Again, though, indirectly. Maybe going back to the chapters in life and for each one something like:

- a. What was something (inside AND outside yourself) that helped you be successful?
- b. What was something that held you back?

In doing this I really hope to see more of her concept of success vs failure and intrinsic vs extrinsic factors because this seems like an area where she is personally conflicted.

As well, I want to review with her some of my initial assumptions re: themes, specifically:

linguistic discrimination upon school entry versus reasonable assumption making

And I want to press her a little more on the qualitative differences she noticed between AP students and ECHS students

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