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**The K-12 Educational Experiences and Identity
Formation of Na' N̄uu Davi in Washington State**

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**The K-12 Educational Experiences and Identity
Formation of Na' N̄uu Davi in Washington State**

by

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Dedication

Esta tesis está dedicada a Na' N̄uu Davi (de Oaxaca, México) radicados en los Estados Unidos. Aunque cuestiones sociopolíticas nos han injustamente forzado salir de nuestras tierras, sigamos adelante practicando nuestra bella cultura y forjando espacios en lugares que históricamente no se hicieron para nosotros. Nuestra comunidad será tratada con dignidad y respeto algún día, pero mientras tanto, sigamos adelante luchando por el porvenir de nuestra comunidad y el futuro de nuestros niños. También dedico este trabajo a los N̄uu Davi que han sufrido en el sistema educativo de este país por diferencias lingüísticas y culturales. Es difícil ser personas indígenas tratando de mantener nuestras raíces y la vez estar en lugares donde somos tratados como marginales, y que la única solución de sobrevivir es a través de la asimilación a la cultura predominante. Son precisamente por estas razones que debemos luchar y seguir adelante con nuestra cultura porque podemos coexistir sin la pérdida de nuestras raíces.

This work is dedicated to all indigenous individuals of Na' N̄uu Davi who as children suffered in the educational pipeline due to their cultural and linguistic differences from their English and Spanish speaking peers. To have been born an indigenous person is a beautiful thing. Let us not continue be silent to the injustices our communities face on the daily—from school settings to labor camps. Our lives and contributions are worthy. We must not internalize our value as human beings from outside cultures that perceive us otherwise. Let us live with much love and abundance. And, ALL children live.

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Abstract

The K-12 Educational Experiences and Identity Formation of Na' Ñuu Davi in Washington State

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In this project, I look at how individuals of Ñuu Davi background came to an understanding of their social position while in the United States' K-12 educational pipeline and how it contributed to their life goals (academically and personally). Some questions addressed are: How does resilience work for students who face multi-layered barriers in education? How do they negotiate their identity? How do acquired skills in school become useful beyond academic settings? Does their acquired knowledge and path of resistance allow for civic/social engagement?

Although the focus of this project is very specific, children of individuals of La Mixteca Baja region of Oaxaca residing in Washington State, the findings of this research are relevant in other places where Ñuu Davi (Mixteco) students are present and are being served in the educational pipeline. I see the importance of looking into this community's children's experiences, struggles, and needs in school in order to best equip them to navigate unfamiliar spaces.

This exploratory research project stems from my personal experience as a Ña'a Davi (Mixteca) growing up in the Pacific Northwest—juggling three cultures and languages—and the curiosity of learning about the experiences of others from the same background, particularly in education.

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Preface:

My personal experiences growing up as a Ña'a Davi (Mixteca), often categorized as a monolithic Mexican within the United States' educational system, as well as the obstacles I overcame due to language barriers led to my desire to pursue this project. For much of my educational trajectory, my agency was virtually nonexistent. I was excluded from accessing the same education as my English proficient peers or those who spoke Spanish, as neither are my native language. I am one of the first in my family to attend an institution of formal learning (K-12). My parents never had the opportunity to attend school or become literate. They migrated to this country from their native Oaxaca for better opportunities to support our family. Their journey has driven me to help seek out greater opportunities for indigenous communities. The inequities and injustices my family faced during my youth, which many indigenous communities continue to face for various sociopolitical reasons, inspire me to do my best to help influence educational policy that is inclusive of the aforementioned community. It is important to address the Ñuu Davi community's needs and struggles in school in order to best equip them to navigate unfamiliar spaces because they are dealing with twice the barriers Spanish/English speaking Latinos deal with. It is my goal to help identify the unique needs of this community so that they may be included in the education system here in the United States.

Chapter 1: Setting the Stage

“Issues involving pain, contradiction, or self-criticism are often avoided, omitted, or ignored in most academic work, when in reality studying human beings involves emotional human experiences that are sometimes filled with anguish and suffering while attempting to survive.” –Luis Urrieta, Jr. (2003)

INTRODUCTION

There has been an increasing migration of indigenous people from southern Mexico, specifically from Oaxaca, into the Pacific Northwest of the United States in the past few decades. For the most part their stories get mixed in with the greater migration stories of other immigrants from Mexico and Central America. The stories often concern the sociopolitical conditions they live once they migrate to the U.S., often focusing on their migratory status. There are also many stories about Latino educational experience, but those, too, are generalized (breaking into national identities, at most, but never beyond that). Although, there is some ethnographic work done on the indigenous communities of Oaxaca (Zapotecos and Mixtecos, who represent the largest indigenous linguistic groups in Oaxaca) by scholars, for example Lynn Stephen (2007), they are predominantly focused on these groups’ lives before migrating to the United States and the type of labor lives they lead after they migrate here.

A lot of the existing work reports the conditions of indigenous Oaxacan communities, considered the “mostly-illiterate mass that does not know how to integrate into U.S. society,” sometimes touching base on their quotidian livelihood in the face of marginalization in their work places, and their navigation through racial and ethnic

hierarchies (Nagengast et al. 1992). The limited work that exists on the Mixteca region¹ is predominantly focused on La Mixteca Alta due to its accessibility over the other regions, Mixteca Baja y Mixteca de la Costa. Although I see the value in the already established works done on this indigenous community, the discourse on the life experiences and the educational experiences of children of Na' N̄uu Davi living outside of the native Mixteca region (of Oaxaca, Mexico) is missing. Currently, there are no in-depth studies on the educational experiences of these communities or their children's educational experiences in the United States educational system.

IDENTITY FORMATION IN OAXACA

In Oaxaca (a state in southern Mexico), indigenous populations face struggles in how they identify themselves politically, socially, and economically. Their struggles stem from their identity from birth. Their occupations and life accomplishments as deemed by mainstream society in Mexico will determine where they stand in the social structure. An indicator of success and accomplishment, similar to the United States, is becoming educated. However, these communities do not have proper access to education. First, most teachers are not well prepared to teach a community that is mostly monolithic, with little to no understanding of the Spanish language (Aguilar 1991). Language barriers create struggles in the classroom settings, and are furthered if a teacher is not culturally sensitive to the multi-ethnic and multicultural society that characterizes the population they are serving. Second, the impoverished conditions many live in force families to

¹ The Mixteca region stretches over three southern Mexican states: from western parts of Oaxaca to neighboring parts of Guerrero and Puebla.

migrate within the country to work in agricultural farms to provide income to the family. This disruption in a child's education is very common and likely leads to a student not returning to school. The very few that make it through a couple of years of schooling, often times are deprived from furthering their education because of the proximity of their village to the nearest town that offers the option for more schooling. The average school attendance for an indigenous person of Ñuu Davi is no more than four years (Clark Alfaro 2008; Aguilar 1991). The students who form a part of my work have experienced this in their hometown back in Oaxaca or have parents who experienced this as children living in Oaxaca.

EDUCATION ACCESS IN OAXACA

The first implemented initiative to improve the education in the state of Oaxaca was in the 1930's during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas. He addressed the needs of the poor far more aggressively than any twentieth-century Mexican president (Handelman 1997: 37). Bettering the educational system in Oaxaca was not meant to completely better an individual, but instead used as a vehicle to strengthen all of Mexico—economically, socially and politically. Indigenous groups were viewed as a symbol of an unsuccessful Mexico—poor and underdeveloped (Aguilar 1991). This education reform did not bring about the changes the administration intended because of language and cultural differences. Majority of the population they set forth to educate was mostly monolithic. The lack of common understanding between the teachers and students created a difficult situation on both ends. In order for the indigenous students to prosper, their native

language was pushed away. Acquiring education in general transformed the indigenous students in becoming more acculturated to the mainstream culture.

The lack of understanding of the cultural differences (languages, beliefs, ways of practicing their traditions, etc.) made it harder for the system to actually work. Indigenous communities wanted to integrate in the education system so they can better themselves when it came to intermingling with the rest of the Mexican society. However, they still wanted to hold on to their roots, something the Mexican government wanted to diminish through education (Aguilar 1991: 232). Their position in society was caused by their “outdated practices and traditions” and that education was the key to fixing them. Indigenous groups within the state of Oaxaca have not had much progress in climbing the social hierarchy because of mass poverty and due to a structure that is not indigenous people friendly. Their resistance to “modernization,” acculturating to mainstream society has been due to a push erasure of their language and traditions. The Oaxacan poverty is rooted in deeply traditional indigenous societies that had resisted outside influences for centuries (Wilson 1974: 143). With their resistance, they have maintained and conserved their communities and ways of life without having to immerse themselves in alien ideals that suppressed them. Presently, Oaxaca continues to be far behind other states in terms of economic prosperity, health, and literacy (Barajas 2014: 55; Velasco 2014: 87).

In Mexico, the southern states are the most impoverished, with “Oaxaca having the most living in poverty (11.1%), followed by Guerrero (10.6%) and Chiapas (8.3%)” (OPHI Country Briefing January 2015: Mexico 2015: 5). These three states also have a high population of indigenous people. Migration of indigenous Mixtecan Oaxacans is not

new due to their poverty-stricken conditions (Clark Alfaro 2008: 6; Alcalá & Reyes Couturier 1994: 87). Many Mixtecan Oaxacans have partaken in migration within Mexico in the early 1960's—mostly going to the northern states of Mexico to work in seasonal agricultural labor (Alcalá & Reyes Couturier 1994: 58). My own parents often traveled to Sinaloa and Chihuahua with their families to work in the agricultural fields when they were children. By the 1980s, migration had become a path to survival for the inhabitants of the Mixteca (Velasco Ortiz 2005: 38). Slowly Mixtecan Oaxacans began migrating further north into the United States, in the fields of California, Oregon and Washington State. My father was a migrant child when he first came to the United States in the 1980's looking for work to contribute to his family's financial needs. The history of complexities in the process of socialization of Na Ñuu Da'vi is one that is not new *and* carries a long trajectory of inequities in access to education.

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

My positionality in this project is constructed through being a Ña'a Davi. My role is a “complete participant” as per participant observation definition (Babbie 2013). My interest in the educational experiences of Na Ñuu Davi in the K-12 pipeline arose from my own personal experience of growing up in the Pacific Northwest—juggling three different cultures while attempting to find a sense of belonging within them—and the curiosity of learning about the experiences of others who are from the same the background as myself, and in particular in education. I want to preface that nobody but a community member can properly justly speak on behalf of their community. Although I

strongly identify myself as a Ña'a Davi, I acknowledge that I am also in a position of privilege with regards to my education and how my understanding of things have been influenced by people outside of my community. With that said, I want to state that I attempted to the best of my ability to do justice to the representation of the powerful, and exceptionally courageous, individuals of Na Ñuu Davi who graciously contributed to my research.

For the most part of my life, my justification on my social position as a person and student has been predominantly based on people outside of my community's perception. This project process challenged me to think beyond books and what I have been conditioned to believe in academic settings, which for the most part consisted of my cultural background being "marginal," "deviant," "backwards," "uneducated," and "people of the past," and sometimes overtly romanticized, anything but something worthy, of rich in culture, history, etc. The very core of who I was/am has been layered by residues of borderless colonialism. What I mean by this is that regardless of where my family has lived in the North American continent, oppression of who we are as people has followed us. In my parents' native land, they lacked a national identity because they were "too indios" or "or too inadequate." Here in the United States they also lack that because of further language barriers. However, they have been grouped into the Mexican category when in reality they were denied that back in their "country of origin." This form of colonialism has known no geographical borders. It was with this struggle as an Indigenous person/student that led me to this project, which is only the very beginning of seeking more answers to this unique, yet enriching, experience.

The uneasiness I feel when I read others' work (while done with the best intentions) pertaining to a part of my identity and upbringing that does not fit well that pushes me to contribute effort in this matter. In this project, I look at how individuals of Ñuu Davi background (both U.S. and non-U.S. born) came to an understanding of their social position while in the United States K-12 educational pipeline and how it contributed to their life goals (academically and personally). In my work, I focus specifically on students who are descendants of La Mixteca Baja region in Oaxaca, Mexico now residing in the Greater Seattle area. My participants represent three villages between two districts in Oaxaca: Silacayoapan and Huajapan de León. Previous research done on La Mixteca has been predominately focused on La Mixteca Alta due to its accessibility to the towns, whereas la Mixteca Baja has been a place of little research (Terraciano 2001: 320). The Oaxacan Mixteca is divided into upper, lower, and costal zones, corresponding with the altitude of the terrain: namely Mixteca Alta, Mixteca Baja, and Mixteca de la Costa. Ultimately, these divisions also cause a variation in the Mixtecan language, which is another prime concern because what little is known about La Mixteca (Alta) should not be converted to a monolithic Mixtecan experience.

Some guiding questions of my work are: How does resilience work for students who face multi-layered barriers in education? How do they negotiate their identity? How do acquired skills in school become useful beyond academic settings? Does their acquired knowledge and path of resistance allow for civic/social engagement? Although the focus of this project is very specific, children of individuals of La Mixteca Baja region residing in Washington State, the findings of this research are relevant in other

places where Ñuu Davi students are present and are being served in the educational pipeline. I see the importance of looking into this community's children's experiences, struggles, and needs in school in order to best address them and equip these students to navigate unfamiliar spaces. Beyond the aforementioned reasons for this project (the need to look at the children of indigenous peoples' educational trajectory), this work is of significance to me personally. Seeking answers to uncertainties I had growing up, particular with those who share the same background as me, helps me better understand my current position as a member of my indigenous community, and the greater Mexican-American (Latin@ community). Throughout the thesis I will also include my own personal perceptions as I also identify myself as part of this community. There needs to be a way for children of indigenous communities to improve their level of education without detriment to their culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

i) Social class implications on education

Education is very political as it is deeply implicated with economic and social standing of an individual (via their parents/family). The more resources and network a student has through their parents, the more likely he/she will do better in school and become a successful contributor in society. Annette Lareau (2000) contributes to the ongoing debate pertaining to a child's future (aspiration(s) and opportunities available to them) based on their family's social positioning and involvement in their educational journey. Lareau in her research (grounded on Bourdieu) demonstrates that "social class

has a decisive influence on the connections between families and other social institutions” (Lareau 2000:167). Furthermore, she claims: “class-linked patterns grow out of the defining characteristics of social class, rather than being a manifestation of individual’s aspirations” (Lareau 2000:167).

Adding to Lareau’s work, I will look at other multi-faceted barriers that students of Na N̄uu Davi background underwent when they were going through the K-12 educational pipeline. Although Lareau’s work specifically focuses on different socioeconomic class in the White community, it is relevant to my work. In Mexico, people are more likely to be classified in the social structure based on their class, which is dependent on peoples’ cultural background with regards to how far removed they are from their indigenous heritage. Many times my indigenous community gets generalized with the rest of the Latino community when there are inherent differences. For one, most of the times, indigenous people get place in the lower strata of society based on structural racism that has existed towards them and that continues to be perpetuated based on their physical attributions and language. For those who live in the United States, they find themselves navigating two dominant cultures and languages. That’s something that was relatable when looking at a group that is often times lumped all into one once they arrive to the U.S. At the same time, my intentions are not to generalize, as it would be equivocal. One thing many Latinos have over indigenous people from Latin America is also a colonizer’s language. Although on the surface the struggles may be the same, there are more in-depth, ascribed, differences that cannot be understood by simply coming, or

being, from the same country of origin. The big take away is the “inter-institutional linkages” among social class and family life, and how it affects a student’s education.

ii) When indigenous people are not Latinos

There is previous research focusing on indigenous communities and how they fit in the greater Latino community (by nation of origin) in the United States. In *“I’m Maya, not Guatemalan, nor Hispanic”—the Belongingness of Mayas in Southern Florida* by Hiller et al. (2009), they focus their work on the sense of belonging of Maya/Guatemalan immigrants in South Florida, from the perspectives of first and second generation immigrants. This is done by focusing on the lived experiences of these individuals who work towards positioning themselves as indigenous individuals who are often times lumped into the ethnic category of Hispanics (Hiller et al. 2009: 1). The Maya/Guatemalan distinguish themselves from non-Maya populations (by means of language and cultural practices, etc.) to construct an identity that empowers them, to separate them from those who’ve oppressed them (Ladinos in Guatemala).

One story that stands out to me is Sergio’s account of his experiences in school while growing up (Hiller et al. 2009: 12). His story is one that “[resists] labels and categorizations others impose on him as a Maya and those of his people” (Hiller et al. 2009: 14). His story is one that also touches on the notion of “internalizing racism” into his identity—and how that carries weight into other parts of his life, but dismisses them because it has been something his people have dealt with in the past. This particular story touches many of the shared experiences the participants of my thesis expressed. And, I,

too, saw my own story in Sergio's story. At the same time it made me realize that we *do very easily* dismiss subtle acts of racism because it has been a very common thing throughout our lives, and thus we've become to an extent sterile to it. This is problematic.

The first step in addressing this issue is to speak about particular experiences that have shaped our community—Na N̄nuu Davi in the United States, specifically in Washington State. Emotional traumas are hard to rid of, and particularly when certain things have been so engrained in us by outside forces and we've become complacent to those beliefs. It's a form of internalizing a position of disempowerment, a lack in agency. Part of the solution, I believe, is to be proactive in healing from our previous experiences through conversations. I will add on to this discourse by bringing in stories of a couple of Na N̄nuu Davi who grew up in Washington State.

iii) (Im)migrant indigenous student educational experience

In my work, I look at indigenous students whose parents (or themselves) are from la Mixteca Baja region in Oaxaca, and whose educational experiences occurred in the United States. As part of my work, I wanted to share the experiences of a group that has been historically absent from mainstream Mexican discourse of (im)migration and education. The indigenous immigrant student experience shows that there are multifaceted barriers these students must overcome beyond those that are traditionally spoken about—no access to education in their native languages, previous education access in country of origin (or lack thereof), and other cultural practices that affect how they are perceived by their peers and educators. Laurie Olsen in her book, Made in

America: Immigrant Students in Our Public Schools (1997), explores and shares the experiences of immigrant students and the educators who teach them. Her work offers a “a hard look at the ways in which our schools still sort and consign students to very different futures based on their skin colors, class, and language (Olsen 1997: 239). Olsen explores the complexities of being an immigrant student in school setting where preconceive notions of a student’s background play a strong role in how successful he/she will be during his/her time there.

Many educators have two diverging ideologies simultaneously: one pertaining to creation of access and agency (“integration, fairness, and equal opportunity”) and the other on straining students through a blindfolded notion that education is created equal for all (“all students are equally positioned and free to participate in school and that matters of achievement are the result of the individual choices students make”) (Olsen 1997: 10-11). This resonates a lot with the typical discourse of equity in education via meritocracy myth, however, at the same time, Olsen challenges us to also comprehend the fact that educators, as much as students, are victims of a contested territory that is politicized and polarized by power dynamics that stem from a system that is too complex to address holistically. However, as she notes in her conclusion, “the silence of educators and refusal to acknowledge the social, political, and economic implications of their role in marginalizing immigrants and racializing children are a continuation and perpetuation of myths that inequities are the result of individual capabilities and efforts” (Olsen 1997: 250).

In here work, Olsen concludes that the new Americanization project is one that constitutes immigrant students giving up their home language and cultural identity by means of “academic marginalization and separation; the requirements to become English-speaking and to drop one’s native language in order to participate in the academic and social life ...and the insistent pressures to find and take one’s place in the racial hierarchy of the United States” (Olsen 1997: 240-41). As much as Olsen laid out the causations of inequities in education, we are forced to re-think, re-address, and re-conceptualize what is, or what must be a priority in addressing this phenomenon. The structures of inequality will remain intact in schools so as long as there continues to be silences amongst certain groups that are privileged in a certain way but do not act. The blame will continue to be put on the individual or minority-group cultures based on the fact that they have failed to acclimate to a certain environment (regardless of whether or not they are equipped—i.e. social capital). We need to critically reflect what our roles are within the communities we come from, the communities we form a part of, and the communities we serve, because those who hurt the most are culturally and linguistically diverse young people. I will take a further step on this issue in my project by adding narratives of experiences of young people who are usually not heard of in main discourse pertaining to education.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research methodology I utilized in this research is snowball sampling from Na’ N̄uu Davi Community in Everett, Washington, and surrounding areas. All research was conducted in English. Because the participants I worked with are from a

group/community that has been extremely marginalized, I am protecting the identity of study participants by not including their names in any part of the research. They will be assigned a pseudo name. The only information that will be taken into consideration, and that will not pose any risk to the participants, is their sex, age, educational level, occupation, and if they were born in the United States. The participants were provided with a verbal and written explanation of the research project. The qualitative interviews consisted of eight open-ended questions regarding their educational trajectories.² Each participant elaborated extensively on particular questions that pertained more to their experiences. The approximate duration of each interview was between 60-80 minutes and took place in various locations where they felt most comfortable talking about their experience (cafés, participant's home) throughout the Everett-Seattle Area. The initial aim for number of participants was twenty (10 men, 10 women) 18-28 year olds of Nuu Davi background living in Everett, Washington, and surrounding area. In the end, the total number of participants was fourteen (seven men and seven women) due to conflicting schedules during the summer of 2014 when I conducted the interviews. There were some follow-up inquiries over the phone and via Skype into the fall of 2014. The usage of technology was crucial to get this project done (recording of interviews; follow-up of interviews via Skype, etc.).

Another methodology I utilized in my thesis is Bagele Chilisa's concept of the four R's—*accountable responsibility, respectful representation, reciprocity, right and regulations* of the researched. Knowledge comes through the building of relationships,

² Interview questions available on pg. 71

fostering genuine relationships with participant(s) and their community. I firmly believe in “the construction of knowledge has to be done in a manner that builds and sustains relationships” (Chilisa 2012: 114). Chilisa points out that knowledge is something that is socially constructed by people who have relationships and connections with each other, and because the participants of my research are from a group/community that has been extremely marginalized, I wanted to ensure that they (and their experiences) are respected at all times. A researcher really cannot have a perspective of knowledge itself (in regards to the study they are conducting) without taking into consideration the reality and the values of the participant(s) and their community. Coming from the same background/community as my participants, I built a good rapport with them. Moreover, people who connected me with some of them are individuals who were viewed positively in our community. There was a strong trust component.

My intention with my project was to provide my participants the freedom to express themselves and not feel they needed to follow a formal structure. I only asked questions when I needed clarification on something. One of the fundamental aspects of this research was the establishment, and maintenance, of good rapport. From the very beginning, I told my participants to share only what they felt safe (comfortable) sharing with me, and the readers of my work. Accountability is very important to me, so I told them that they were provided an opportunity to collaborate, if they wished—through reading and checking my work throughout the process. The reason for this is that I wanted to honor their experiences as best as I could and that if there were misinterpretations, or something they wanted to omit, I would honor it. The method of

collecting their narrative is done through interview transcripts. I am not representing my participants, just shedding light on some of their educational experiences growing up.

I would also like to note that throughout my thesis I will be utilizing the term Na' Ñuu Davi when talking about my participants and people from la Mixteca Baja region (of Oaxaca, Mexico) now residing in Washington State because that's how we identify ourselves. The term Na' Ñuu Davi is the accurate (or as close as possible in real time) term referring to a person from La Mixteca Baja background; it is written out utilizing the Latin alphabet based on its pronunciation in Tu'un Davi.³ The alphabet does not do complete justice to the language, as it is deficient for purposes of phonetic transcription. The term "Mixtecas/os" derives from the Aztecs and is a term that continues to be used by people outside of our community to identify us. It is a term that stems from an ongoing form of colonization of this particular indigenous community (Terraciano 2001: 319). If one were to go to Oaxaca in the region where my family is from, you will not hear the local community refer themselves as "Mixtecas/os." We become, or labeled, "Mixtecas/os" when we leave our native land, both in Mexico and the United States. The Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (INALI) has attempted to establish terms to distinguish the variations of the Mixteco language, however, as a native speaker I've seen some discrepancies in the variations presented. Moreover, for me it's more of a concern pertaining to how knowledge of these cultures, languages, and histories are disseminated

³ "Tu'un Davi" is the language Na' Ñuu Davi speak. It translates to Mixteco language. However, I want to note that this is how people of La Mixteca Baja region (in the two districts of Oaxaca covered in my project) claim the name of their language to be.

and how that becomes accepted knowledge of these groups by individuals who are partially misrepresenting them.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to the idea of “funds of knowledge,” people have knowledge based on their life experiences (González et al. 2005). In my project, I utilize Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit). Because my research is on a group that has been marginalized and whose stories are often not told in the mainstream discourses pertaining to education, I found it most fitting to use the “counter-story” methodology derived from CRT (Solórzano and Yosso 2002: 32). This method is a way to expose, analyze, and challenge the mainstream stories of the racial privilege, which in the case of my studies are individuals in mainstream culture in the United States and Latin America, more specifically Mexico, who have held a diminutive perspective towards the indigenous community in my study. In my work, I will include both narratives from participants and weave in my own personal narrative as I identify myself as part of Na’ Nuu Davi. I examine counter-narratives from interviews conducted with fourteen individuals of Nuu Davi background who attended school in the United States, particularly in Everett, Washington and surrounding areas.

Furthermore, also utilizing Latino Critical Theory will allow me to elaborate on the struggles of the Na’ Nuu Davi educational experience(s). This framework is centered on critically examining the social and legal positioning of Latinos in the United States and to provide measures that can alleviate them from their struggles. I am following

LatCrit four main functions as per Francisco Valdes: 1) production of knowledge (of Na' N̄uu Davi), 2) the advancement of transformation (in educational equity for the aforementioned community), 3) the expansion and connection of the struggle/s (of this community to the greater Latino struggle in the United States), and 4) the cultivation of community and coalition (Fernández 2002: 47). My analysis is further framed using Holland et al.'s (1998) work, *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*, particularly their concept of "figured worlds." Figured worlds represent the rules, guidelines, or social forces that influence but do not completely dictate the ways people speak, behave or conduct their practice within social spaces. It is my hope that by utilizing these frameworks, I will come to a more impartial understanding of the educational journeys of the Na' N̄uu Davi community in the Greater Seattle area and to bring forth their experiences.

PLAN OF THESIS

The following chapters are broken down in specific findings/themes that came up in the study. Chapter 2 covers the state of education for Latinos living in Washington State and provides an overview of education of Latinos in the United States. Chapter 3 focuses on the key findings of my research (the identity formation of the Na' N̄uu Davi, and the barriers and agency they have with regards to educational, professional and life aspirations). In Chapter 4 I will cover on this "notion" of citizenship, looking specifically at what does it mean to be U.S. born, but raised in a different cultural background other than that of mainstream Mexican background, to be homogenized within the Mexican

culture. Finally, I will conclude by drawing limitations to the research project and recommendation in better the educational services to students of Na' Ńuu Davi background.

Chapter 2: State of the Latino Education in Washington State

INTRODUCTION

It is often implied that education is the great equalizer in American society—that through meritocracy students, regardless of their cultural background or upbringing, can achieve upward mobility and thereby return to their community to mobilize younger generations of students to achieve the same. However, students whose needs are not addressed are less likely to achieve their full potential limiting them in their life trajectories in this country, therefore creating further barriers for students who come from disadvantaged background(s). Education is an extremely political academic field, and particularly when dealing with bettering the services for, or the experiences of, minority students. Issues of race, language, and the social position of these students come to the fore—as the question is always whether they are worth the investment. While it is uncomfortable to know that while there is a demand for higher educational institutions to diversify their campuses in Washington State, like everywhere else in the nation, students who need the most support are deprived of it.

By 2018, 67 percent of all jobs in Washington State will require some postsecondary education.⁴ There is a demand for a well-educated workforce, specifically in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) because those fields drive Washington’s economy (Microsoft, Boeing, Amazon, Starbucks, Costco, etc.). As the Latino population continues to rise in the next decade, what does it mean to be a majority

⁴ Gates Foundation, 2015

ethnic-minority that is not well-equipped to take on work that demands post-secondary credentials? What implication does this have on the identity and overall well-being of this group, including their representation in career/professions in institutions of higher learning? More importantly, what does it mean for Latinos, including those of indigenous backgrounds, living in central and eastern Washington to continue living below poverty-level conditions, where they have no choice because the decision-makers are individuals who view them as little more than manual labor? While there has been a slow progression in the number of Latinos, (including indigenous individuals) attaining a high school diploma, with even fewer earning higher education credentials, this is hardly indicative of Latinos' overall capacities. I have a strong interest in education policies that affect my indigenous community in Washington State.⁵

U.S. LATINOS AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Currently, there are 52.9 million Latinos in the United States⁶ with people of Mexican ancestry dominating the nation's Latino population at 64.2 percent. Overall, in comparison to the Latino population in the U.S., Mexicans have lower levels of education attainment. Roughly 10 percent of Mexicans ages 25 and older have matriculated from higher education institutions (obtaining at least a bachelor's degree), in comparison to thirteen percent of all U.S. Hispanics and 29 percent among the entire U.S. population. It

⁵ Some of the data I provide here are ones I've gathered by looking at all school districts in Washington State, going individually at each school district site to create a percentage of Latino students represented in each Washington State county and region.

⁶ This figure comes from a PEW Hispanic Center report, released in April 29, 2014, which provides an estimation of the educational attainment and overall presence of Latinos in the United States as of 2011.

should be noted that only 27 percent people of Mexican heritage obtain a high school diploma, ranking fifth overall in comparison to Latino population when they are the overwhelming majority in this group. Only Puerto Ricans (29 percent), Cubans (29 percent), Peruvians (28 percent), and Ecuadorians (28 percent) beat Mexicans in the Latino population overall completion of high school.⁷ In correlation with their educational achievement is also the poverty level. Twenty-six percent of all Latinos currently live in poverty. In Washington State, the counties with the highest levels of Latino poverty are largely rural and represent the counties with significant proportion of Latino residents. These are also locations where the fastest growing segment of K-12 population of these counties is Latino students (Contreras 2013: 20). In order to address poverty in these regions, Washington State is trying to ensure equitable educational opportunities critical to generational and economic sustainability.

If upward mobility is correlated with meritocracy, it should be noted that Latinos⁸ now make up one-fourth of all public school students. According to the United States Census Bureau, one out of every four public school students nationwide was Latino in October 2012. Overall, in the U.S., Latinos accounted for 29 percent of public pre-school students; 27 percent of public school kindergarten students; 25 percent among elementary school students; and only in public high school, Latino student population was at 23

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ This term in this content also encompasses people who identify themselves as Latino—in the Pew Hispanic Center, “Hispanic” is utilized to describe people whose heritage can be traced from Spain and other Latin American country.

percent⁹. A couple of questions remain: If Latinos are a growing majority, how do we go about addressing the disparity that exists in the opportunity gap for this population? Furthermore, how many of those Latinos have further barriers they need to deal with because they are indigenous? How do we mobilize a heterogeneous group that has been deemed an uninterested or unengaged group, when in reality it's not for certain that their needs are addressed adequately? How are these communities to become and be seen as political actors who contribute to society? Ultimately, how can Latino students matriculate through higher education institutions if the foundation of their formal K-12 schooling is not effective in preparing them?

LOOKING AT LATINOS IN WASHINGTON STATE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Since the mid 1980's up until 2007, the Latino student population in Washington's K-12 public schools grew by 372 percent in contrast to 6 percent for white students (Contreras 2009: 3). Throughout central and eastern Washington's rural communities, Latinos are the majority—not the minority. Latinos often exceeded more than 75 percent of the school district student population. While Latino student populations have been growing substantially in the K-12 public schools, they are not represented in higher education. Latinos consistently rank at the bottom or near bottom on state assessments and other indicators of academic achievement (Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction 2014). This numerical shift in Washington State Latino populations and subsequent underachievement caught the attention of the

⁹ This can be attributed to high drop-out rates.

Department of Education in the early 2000's. The Washington State Legislature passed ESHB 2687¹⁰ in 2008 to examine the minority achievement gap and compile recommendations to ameliorate the widening disparities. This task was spearheaded by a team of researchers at the University of Washington and their findings reveal that although, "the path of lower achievement for Latino students begins early, the opportunities for intervention and investment in Latino students at every step in the educational system is a challenge that the state of Washington cannot afford to overlook" (Contreras & Stritikus 2008: 4). Presently, these academic achievement disparities continue to exist, whilst disproportionate resources and allocation of funds to ameliorate the student opportunity gap in Washington is also an issue. Between the years 2007-2011, there was an increase in poverty level in Latino communities, from 25 percent to 29.9 percent¹¹, in comparison to the 26.1 percent overall in the U.S. Latino communities. Washington State's education system is underfunded, but continues to outperform most other states on national assessments.¹² It currently stands as one of the fastest improving states in the country—improving in every category (math, reading, writing)—resulting in remarkable progress. However, Latino students in Washington State are not enrolling in higher educational institutions at rates that will ensure individual or community sustainability for the next generation.

It is critical, in this global and education-based economy, that all students have access to equitable public education, both for the well-being of the individual and the

¹⁰ Contreras, Frances, and Tom Stritikus 2008: 4

¹¹ United States Census Bureau, 2014

¹² Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, February 2013

economic advantage of an educated work force. Nearly 20 percent of kindergartners in Washington State are Latino, and in less than 20 years the work force will consequently be comprised of one Latino for every four non-Latino individuals (Contreras & Stritikus 2008: 11). Washington State passed Senate Bill 5973 in July 2009¹³ that explicitly mandated the diffusion of cultural competency into instruction, curriculum, and professional development to address the Washington State K-12 achievement gap in order to provide all students an excellent and equitable education, after realizing *and* recognizing the importance of investing in the growing Latino population, and other ethnic minority students. Cultural competency refers to “knowledge of student cultural histories and contexts, as well as family norms and values in different cultures.”¹⁴ Furthermore, accessing community resources, community and parent outreach, and skills in adapting instruction to students' experiences and identifying cultural contexts for individual students that will encompass cultural competency.

According to “The Condition of Latinos in Education: 2015 Factbook” released by Excelencia in Education, 65 percent Latinos are graduating from high school, and of which 70 percent enroll in higher education (Santiago et al. 2015: 3). However, only 22 percent earn an associate degree or higher. Latino students in the U.S. higher education are disproportionately enrolled in 2-year institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 2013). Furthermore, Latino students in 2-year

¹³ This information is retrieved from Access Washington—Official State Government Website (Washington State Legislature)

¹⁴ K-12 Education - Achievement Gap, SB 5973, 61st Legislature, State of Washington, Chapter 468, (2009).

colleges needed remediation. These statistics again demonstrate the inadequate preparation Latinos receive in K-12, and how this affects the options available to them when it comes to higher education.

Although the aforementioned information is very important to understand the conditions of the educational attainment and access to Latino students, there is no breakdown on how many indigenous students are served within that community. The necessity for that information is partially why I started this project. I see the importance of looking into this community's children's experiences, struggles, and needs in school in order to best equip them to navigate unfamiliar spaces, such as the United States educational system. The underlying questions remain: How are we creating safe spaces for students in schools? How do we ensure that students who are from vulnerable populations have equal access and opportunities to education?

Chapter 3: Agency, Barriers, and Identity Formation

FINDINGS

There were many findings in the interviews. However, I will focus on reoccurring themes from the participants pertaining to their upbringing and educational experiences.

The reoccurring themes were:

- Identity formation (cultural implications);
- Barriers (language differences, racial and ethnic discrimination, and access to resources);
- Agency (access in educational, professional and life aspirations)

I will elaborate on these findings in the discussion section. Indigenous students' understanding about how racial and ethnic discrimination in Mexico and United States have affected their group position in the larger society. Their awareness helps combat racial-ethnic stereotypes through academic grit, family and community relationships, and social network support through peers and people outside of their community to enable them to survive in society and succeed in school.

U.S. EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

My participants were mostly first-generation formal education attendees.¹⁵ With exception of one participant's parents, the rest of my participants' parents had less than a second grade educational attainment. Five of my participants' parents had no formal schooling. One thing worth noting from participants of my studies is that those who made it to higher education (8 participants), only three went straight into a four-year university

¹⁵ Demographic Profile of 14 Study Participants can be found on pg. 72

whereas four of them entered a 2-year college. The process of acquiring information about post-secondary education is a common issue that came up from all participants. Although most of the students now reside in the greater Seattle area, eleven of them moved there from central or eastern Washington, predominantly agricultural areas in the state. These students' families began working in the agricultural sector when they first arrived to the United States. The students who are U.S born are first generation U.S-citizens.

For the students that came from migrant working families, the very beginning of their educational journey was difficult because they were constantly moving. According to a study done by Garza et al. (2004), "poverty and mobility are two main factors that impact migrant children" (Garza et al. 2004: 20).¹⁶ Adding language barriers for ten of those eleven students, it was multiple times difficult for them to adapt to the school environment. In the same study it is indicated that students from migrant working families are usually behind grade level 6-18 months. Moreover, of the fourteen participants, four of them were born in Mexico. Of those four, three were brought to the United States to reunite with their parents well after they were 7 years of age. When they arrived here, school was very difficult for them since they did not have a proper education in Oaxaca.

The Na' N̄uu Davi I interviewed for the most part underwent similar difficulties when they entered the U.S. educational system. Thirteen of the fourteen participants were

¹⁶ This information comes from their study titled, *Resiliency and Success: Migrant Children in the U.S.*

in English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Language Learner (ELL) programs to learn English. Some of them experienced bullying for not speaking Spanish or English, and for being different. In a study done in California (where many Mixtecan communities reside) by David Barillas-Chón (2010), he noted that “the mistreatment of the Oaxacan students took the form of a repeating cycle: first, the mocking of the indigenous students by peers, then a silencing of the Oaxacan students, followed by continuing mocking by peers who interpreted the Oaxacan’s silence as an inability to understand” (Ruiz & Barajas 2012: 128). This was a similar experience many participants of my study spoke about during their early years in the U.S. educational pipeline. For some, it carried on to middle and high school. The following passages are from participants talking about their educational experience in elementary school. Overall, they had a difficult time integrating into the system in elementary school due to differences in language, culture, customs, and appearances. This resulted in them not being socially comfortable in the school settings and just being unengaged to avoid problems. The following statements are from three participants:

“I don’t really have good memories of elementary school, but those years are the ones I remember the most, um, you know...especially 2nd and 3rd grade because I used to be made fun of...I guess, um...like...you know, bullied.”—Karina (26 years old)

“From what I can remember my experience for K-12 was a bit of a struggle, especially in the socializing area. I was seriously a “loner” from K-4th grade. In those grade years I lived in Yakima but we moved to Everett the summer going into 5th grade. I remember I struggled a lot in socializing in 3rd and 4th grade

where I would be outside walking or just swinging on the swings. I remember going to summer school every year. I feel that even though I didn't like summer school it really helped my academic performance in school."—Maria (20 years old)

"When I began my education in a public school setting I remember kindergarten most vividly due to being distinguished by my appearance and being grouped with Spanish-speaking Latinos who spoke it as their first language in contrast to it being my third. For the most part, elementary school was the beginning of my understanding that I was living within three different cultures in the United States of America."—Miguel (20 years old)

As indicated in Lynn Stephen's study, "the pressures on children to assimilate and specifically to leave behind their indigenous language and identity can be very strong" (Stephen 2007: 215). Although this was the case for some of the participants, for the most part they persevered against it to maintain a part of their identity. For Karina (26 years old), her experience with bullying continued into middle school. Similar to how she dealt with students in elementary school, she continued to avoid students who made fun of her. In her own words:

... people made fun of me or looked at me funny or whatever for being indigenous, for being a Oaxaqueña. That's when...that's probably why I stayed so quiet in middle school, you know. I didn't want problems. I didn't want kids to make fun of me. I've been bullied before, and you know, like, I knew how that felt. So I just preferred to keep things to myself, you know. But even though some of them knew about it, but I just, I kinda didn't think much more about it.

According to Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, UCLA professor who has worked with indigenous communities in Los Angeles and surrounding areas, the bullying experiences these indigenous students undergo is not merely a bullying practice but racism that stems from a legacy of colonial Mexico (Rivera-Salgado 2012).

While Karina continued to be bullied in middle school, it was then when she also found a safe space/outlet. She joined band and started making friends and being comfortable around some peers. Up until high school, the biggest concerns for Karina, in the educational system, was not her academic progress, but her sense of belonging and feeling safe at school. While interviewing her, she mentioned the anxiety she felt every time she had to go to school and wonder about what her bully-peers were going to do to her. She spent a lot of her time pondering about how to avoid particular students. One thing that struck me was Karina never seeking support from teachers to deal with a situation that was obviously interfering with her safety, physical and emotional well-being.

Beyond being marginalized by their Latino peers, indigenous people experience marginalization from mainstream society, which homogenized them as monolithic Mexicans and very often misclassifies their needs and abilities in academic settings (Triste 2014: 150). For Karina, it was not until her third year in high school when she began focusing on her education and options post-high school:

It was my junior year when I, uh, actually started focusing more on my education, just being more organized, you know. That did really help me out because, uh, you know...in college, you have to be very well organized to do well and stay on top of all of your priorities...Classes that helped me transition to college work,

uh, were my English classes... Mr. Ferderer...it was like the life skills I took away from him...because of a teacher that really impacted his students and believed in them, and believe in them to be able to go to college. I can't give credit to other teachers, really because they were just there to be there. There, was, uhm, like no effort to connect with students, or really, you know, showed that they cared and where there because they wanted to. Um, I can only credit three teachers, really—the ones that cared about how I was doing, the progress I made, and wanted me to do better and be in better places later on. Like Mr. Ferderer, he always wanted me to do better. He would give me books to read during break, and, um, during the summer...

According to Beth Hatt, “all those involved in the institution of schooling help shape who we think we are...and who we think we can become” (Hatt 2012: 439). In Karina's experience, her English teacher played a crucial role in how she perceived herself competent, capable of success, in school. Mr. Ferderer showed compassion towards his students, and that he believed in them.

Karina had her struggles while she was in college, but through the social skills she gained in high school and up to those days of her life in the educational system, she was able to navigate through them successfully. She also learned to appreciate her cultural background more:

Going to college made me appreciate more my indigenous background, you know, appreciate more our culture...or to be more accepting of it or whatever, to be more proud of it, because people would be like, “Oh, you know how to speak an indigenous dialect?”...because before people used to make fun of it...

Karina's college experience was a lot different from her K-12 experience. She told me that she became more involved in social settings in college. This was a challenge

she put on herself to get a bit more out of her comfort zone. As a result, she spoke up more, became active with community service through student groups such as Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán (M.E.Ch.A) and Reconociendo la Identidad con Educación y Sociedad (R.A.I.C.E.S), and through service learning projects from her major (Community Health). She was a founding sister of the Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority her junior in college. She was also crowned Queen for a Homecoming Community event pertaining to Latinos at Eastern Washington University in her sophomore year in college. She has come a long way from being the quiet and shy girl she once was. However, she still does not feel all too comfortable speaking about her earlier years in school because they are painful. Karina shared with me only a part of her overall experience, because speaking about some things still opens up wounds.

Another participant, Ana (18 years old), is currently a first-year college student. At the time of the interview, she had just completed high school. Ana was born in the United States and grew up with a strong Nuu Davi cultural background. She speaks Tu'un Davi fluently and recognizes herself as a Nã'a Davi. However, when it came to how she identifies herself with outside people, she just responds to being Mexican because she is still trying to figure out who she is. Similar to previous participants, she encountered difficulties in grade school pertaining to language differences. It was through the English Language Learners (ELL) program and summer school in elementary school that she acclimated to "grade level". Ana equates her educational experience overall as mostly positive, once she had a better grasp of what was happening in her surrounding. A

particular part of her educational experience she emphasized on during the interview was middle school. First, pertaining to her social circle:

In eighth grade, I would say hit me the most because it was my last year of middle school. Academically, my grades were so important to me. I would do what I can to succeed... I would receive awards for my hard work and I liked that. However, it did collide with my social life because I was told by many that I was in the "wrong group". Since I hung out with a lot of my Asian friends that year, rather than my Hispanic friends. I was known to be a "want to be Asian" and got asked: "Why are you hanging out with them? Aren't you Mexican?" But for me, I felt like I kind of fit in with them because we had the same interest on academic basis and a bit of social basis. My Hispanic friends hung out with others who were just into gangs, drinking and all that nonsense and I wasn't into that. So, I would say eighth grade was when I started wondering who am I? And where did I really fit?

Ana ties success to doing well academically. She also experienced what many Nuu Davi students experienced while in school, being questioned about their loyalty to their ties to Mexico. Her peers' concerns or interrogations of why she hung out with the wrong ethnic group stems from the same form of mockery they experienced when they didn't fit the conditions to be "Mexicans" via language or particular cultural indicators that they did not possess (Ruiz & Barajas 2012; Barillas-Chón 2010).

The second component of Ana's educational experience that was hard for her to understand was her placement in ELL in eighth grade when she had graduated from the program in elementary school. This experience made her realize that there were particular expectations of her due to her background:

In eighth grade, it gave me an idea where I stood because I was put into an ELL team. This had me wonder why I was placed there, since I've always done so well. I remember I asked my teacher if she could tell me why I was there and all she said was, "This was a team for people who need a bit more help on academics." And, honestly a majority of the students in that team were Hispanics/Latinos. But what I questioned was, I was put here because of who I was and not because of where I stood academically... like I'm Mexican, so they thought I needed the help rather than looking at where I was placed in previous years and how well I've done. This frustrated me because I felt like I was being limited on challenging myself, since what we learned were repeats of topics that I knew already, since I was taught about them already in the previous year. And I was also questioned a lot by others why I was in that team because everyone knew it was an ELL team, and I didn't know what to say to them. So I did feel a bit out of place because I wasn't at the same level as my other friends who were learning Algebra already, since they were in the honors team. But, it help me stay motivated...in becoming an educated person because I learned that we are all going to face obstacles, limitations etc. but we have to learn how to deal with them or face them.

Many educators, from teachers to supporting staff, believe that poor students are linguistically deficient. In the language deficiency stereotype, language is assumed to be a marker of intelligence (Grant, Oka, & Baker 2009). The stereotype is based on three assumptions: 1) poor children enter school inadequately prepared with regards to vocabulary they need to succeed due to lack of parent disinterest in education, 2) the use of particular English is reflective of their inferior capacities to learn the language, and 3) for non-native English speakers, the marker of their class status is their involvement in the English Language Learner program, or any program that caters to them acquiring a good grasp of the "standard" English.

Most of these students earn a label of disadvantaged and at-risk, and group them according to their English language proficiency. What Ana experienced in eighth grade was a form of tracking in education. Academically, Ana did well. She also participated in extracurricular activities in high school. When it came to apply for college, she was able to get support from staff at her school. It was another foreign process for her as she is a first-generation college student. In the end, Ana chose to start at a local community college because of her contribution to her family. Ana is a big support to her family, especially her mother, when it comes to baby-sitting her younger siblings. She is currently studying criminal justice and hopes to transfer to a four-year university in two years. Ana has a strong interest in social justice.

Omar (23 years old), another self-identified person of Ñuu Davi, shares similar experiences of struggle upon entering grade school, especially in the English language acquisition. He recalls elementary school being tough years for him—he entered the educational system not knowing English. He was put in English as a Second Language (ESL) class. He also attended summer school to become acquainted with the dominant language. Omar did not generally have issues making friends, however he did grow up wondering how to self-identify when he interacted with his Latino peers. His identity was always ambiguous because he looked different:

They never understood me. They just thought I was being White-washed for not speaking Spanish. They would tell me sometimes that I looked more Indian than them. Or sometimes some of them would think I was Asian, especially after they would hear me speak our language. The reality was that I did not speak Spanish at all. My parents do not speak Spanish. The only languages I know well are

Mixteco and English. I probably know English more now because that's the language I mostly communicate in. I speak in English with my parents too. They understand me fine. I always had a hard time explaining things to people because either the conversations would become jokes or dismissed all together because "I took things too seriously."

Omar's understanding of his identity and his experience was not uncommon. Another participant, Pablo (22 years old), shares the same experience pertaining to being taken seriously when talking about his identity. The concern becomes one that goes beyond just the interactions these young men have with their peers. They have a hard time explaining their unique cultural backgrounds not because they do not want to talk about it, but because there's not a place for them to express themselves. This goes back to how subtle acts of racism have become okay in our society, in our broader Mexican or Latino communities. Indigenous people have been historically seen as part of the lower strata in society and they are consistently reminded of that through the way they are treated. The younger generations, although born in the United States, do not escape from this. They are categorized as different because of how they physically look. Phrases such as "just joking" or "you take everything so serious, calm down" on their peers' end have become an excuse to express the internalized racism that exists even within *mexicanos*.

Pablo emphasized on how difficult it was for him to be held back in third grade because all his friends moved on to fourth grade, but he remained behind because he did not have a good grasp of the English language. This caused discomfort in Pablo because his peers saw him as "dumb" for staying behind when he did not feel that way—"being dumb." He couldn't understand why some of his peers did not understand that he was

different (not in a bad way), that he had more barriers to overcome to be in the same “intelligence level” as them. He said that this particular situation, being held back resulted in a negative experience for him:

All of my ‘friends’ thought I was dumb and some of the kids at my school would make fun of me because I was the ‘old third grader that was so stupid and couldn’t pass third grade.’ Kids were so mean. I started not caring in school. I started not paying attention in class and became a ‘troublemaker’ because people would provoke me and I reacted. I remained a trouble child until around 7th grade. In a way I made up what people made fun of through being a tough guy...the turning point for me was the end of 7th grade when one of my teachers had a conversation with me that things were going to get tough in high school if I continued being the way I was. My parents, especially my mom, would also tell me that I needed to get myself together in order to get further in life. I knew I wasn’t a bad person. I started doing my homework and everything in 8th grade. I was not a stellar student, but I wanted to make my parents proud. I exited out of ELL the end of middle school. The first time I was a ‘normal’ student was in high school.

Pablo is currently enrolled in a two-year college working towards a nursing degree. He is also currently working part-time to finance his education.

In the DREAM Act discourse, there is a generalization that is utilized, in particular by undocumented youth, and that is “if [a student] had papers, legal status, [they] would not work as hard because government would be paying for [their] schooling, [they] would thereby be less dedicated” (Pérez 2012: 32). This is completely skewed as that misconception does not hold true for all US born Latina/o citizens, and attributes to structural racism. As can be seen in Pablo’s experience, this does not hold true. He does

not have easy access to affordability of college. The experiences of high-achieving undocumented students are completely valid, but to what extent does this differ from an indigenous Latina/o student who comes from a low socioeconomic status, who has twice the language and cultural barriers and also had to work her/his way to earn their educational attainment—working multiple jobs, traveling between home and school on public transportation, and having to deal with familial circumstances?

José (23 years old), another participant in my study further informed about the financial impediments in pursuing a higher education. Like my previous participants, he resiliently made it through high school successfully with the support from his teachers as well as figuring many things out on his own. When it came to the pursuit of higher education, many of these students experienced similar circumstances as other Latino students who were first-generation and of low-income families. José had a difficult time transitioning from high school to a 4-year university that after the completion of his first-year he returned home to attend a community college. Part of this reason too was José's financial contribution to his family. Because his father was not working at that time, José's found himself in a situation where he had to contribute financially to his family whilst attending school. During this time, José attended school half-time and worked full-time. However, due to the straining of the schedules both for school and work, José left school and would go back to school whenever he could—one quarter at a time. At the time of the interview, José was on a break from school, working full-time. His hope is to return to school and get a degree in physical therapy.

Alberto (25 years old), another participant, did not have an opportunity to pursue a higher education because he did not receive the support he needed to get there. Furthermore, being the eldest child in his family, he had financial obligations. Upon his graduation from high school a couple of years ago, Alberto began working in construction. He continues working in construction and is of financial support to his younger siblings and parents. Alberto identifies himself as a part of Ñuu Davi, however he only communicates in Mixteco with his parents. For Alberto and his siblings, English is the predominant language they communicate in. He speaks very little Spanish, which he's learned from some co-workers.

Another participant in my study, Jesus (19 years old), talked about the difficulty he had graduating from high school. Jesus described himself as a dedicated student who consistently earned good grades throughout his educational experience. From all of the participants in my study, Jesus was the only one who attended pre-school. When he entered K-12, he was well acclimated to the U.S. educational system. Jesus did not have major issues with his identity as an indigenous student until high school. He reminisced about some students who would make jokes about him being Oaxacan, but he never made much of it. His major concern was when he entered high school. Jesus encountered some educators who were very vocal about how they perceived people from Oaxaca. There was one particular ESL teacher, who also was one of the coaches for the high school's boy soccer team, who consistently publicly poked fun of students who were from Oaxaca. He would say things about their height, their skin tone, or how they couldn't learn as fast. Moreover, he would tell some students "stop acting like a Oaxaco." This bothered Jesus

because it was one thing for his peers to “joke about” his identity but another when a staff member, an adult, would say such things. Jesus did not feel comfortable around this particular teacher, but saw him everyday because he was one of his soccer coaches. When he would speak up about his uneasiness with the commentaries of his coach, he would be immediately shut down because he was accused of being “too sensitive.”

Another thing Jesus recalls was that in high school he did not receive as much support as he had wished pertaining to school. His counselor was not helpful, as she did not take genuine interest in his coursework. He was often placed in low-level classes and it was his teachers who would advocate for him to be switched out to other at-grade level classes. Jesus was consistently placed in “wrong” classes. It got to a particular point where Jesus did not care as much which classes he was placed in because his primary concern was to financially help out his family as he took on part-time jobs. One of the things that affected Jesus’ educational experience was an event that forced him to go to Mexico with his mother:

In 11th grade, I went to Oaxaca with my mom because of family matters. We ended up staying there for about 5 months. I had no choice. I ended up leaving school with little notice. When I came back, my high school refused to take me back because I was gone for too long, even though I had given them notification that I was going to be out of the country. I had to go present myself at the county court because of “truancy.” I was also sent to the alternative high school because I had to catch up on my high school credits. From there it just became really hard to do school. The people at the other school were nice, but they had very bad perception of all the students who were there. I did not like it, but I went there just to finish with a high school diploma. It was embarrassing because people would

think I must have gotten in big trouble for me to be going there because that's normally where students who have been suspended or had other behavioral issues went when their schools no longer wanted to deal with them.

In Jesus' case, his lack of agency in navigating the greater educational structure left him with no choice but to attend the alternative high school he was assigned. One of the things he told me during the interview was that during this difficult time period, he had to figure everything on his own because his parents couldn't do much for him due to language barriers. He also reflected that although it was hard, he's glad that he was able to receive his high school diploma. It made his parents proud because they never had an opportunity for formal education in their native Oaxaca. He hopes to enroll at a community college in the future because for the time being he is financially helping his family.

As previously stated, four participants were brought to the United States from Mexico to reunite with their parents, of whom three were women. Two of the three women participants arrived to the United States on the offset of teenage years. They had a difficult time integrating in mainstream society. Eliza and Emilia had learned to speak Spanish while they were living in Mexico, however their writing ability was not at it's strongest. They started off in English Language Learners classes. Students not able to speak or demonstrate acquired skills in Standard English are more likely to be perceived as "less intelligent" (Hatt 2012). With the conflicts of not feeling like they were learning at a fast pace as their fellow peers and the unwelcoming environment their peers created, Eliza and Emilia ended up dropping out of school, 10th grade and 11th grade respectively.

Stefani (19 years old), on the other hand, arrived to the United States when she was seven years old. She had difficulties integrating into the school system at first because of language and social barriers. She was raised in Oaxaca by her grandparents and primarily spoke Mixteco. Stefani also never really attended school while she lived in Oaxaca. Entering school in the United States and being there for eight hours a day for five days a week was something very new to her. She also missed her grandparents very much as she saw them more as her parents than her own biological parents. She had emotional strains when she first moved here and would always ask her mother to send her back to Oaxaca with her grandmother. Stefani eventually learned to be ok and tried her best in school. Because of her age when she entered elementary school, she was put in second grade, but was many years behind. She was consistently behind at every grade level—she knew enough to get through each grade. Stefani’s experience also demonstrates how programs like ELL fail to address their lack of literacy and written knowledge in both Spanish and English (Ruiz & Barajas 2012). Nuu Davi students who enter ELL/ESL upon arrival to the United States are not equipped to even partake knowledge embedded in such programs. The following is what she told me about when she started school:

I always felt really dumb in school because I was in my own island in the back of the class doing other work my classmates were not doing. I didn’t even know my ABC’s and I was in second grade...it was really bad, uh,...I did not know any better though...I also did not have the nicest teacher. But, I think she tried to understand me, I am not sure though. What helped me was my ELL class, which I went to for half of the day.

Many young Na N̄uu Davi face similar experiences when they arrive to the United States. The difference in access to public education in Mexico and United States vary drastically and overall affects how students who come from Mexico integrate into the educational system here. Whereas in the U.S. students enter particular grade levels based on age, in Mexico students advance from grade level to another based on their academic standing and their level of understanding (Oliver Ruvalcaba & Torres Robles 2012: 121). These differences work unfavorable for young people when they arrive here. Furthermore, because of these differences students are set up to not succeed when they are not provided with adequate support. Ultimately, differences in culture and language lead to further misguided tracking of these students' progress.

Students because they do not speak English are separated and tracked in ELL classes. Research has demonstrated that student in these programs have reduced access to higher education and preparatory courses for college (Ruiz & Barajas 2012). Furthermore, language barriers between parents and teachers reduced these students' access to educational resources that may be available to them (Velasco 2014). Because school classrooms often have greater emphasis on discipline and teacher control to provide a more structured and formal space for learning, students easily become disengaged or alienated from the rest of the class if they are not at-level as their other peers. School classrooms do not always encourage a personalized relationship between students and teachers in spite of research indicating that caring and supportive environment is critical for students to grow as learners, and overall as human beings

(Matsumura et. al 2008; Valenzuela 1999). Furthermore, the cultural differences and disconnect between languages of the demographics of student population can create an unwelcoming environment for a student who has no prior exposure to a school system like the United States.

In Stefani's case, although the regular academic year was difficult, what helped her get through school was summer school. In her own words:

What helped me the most to catch up was summer school. I went to summer school every year until 9th grade...my parents, especially my dad, stopped talking to my sisters and I in Mixteco. They would only talk to us in their broken Spanish because they wanted us to be better than them. I don't know... it was really silly...but year after year, I've gotten used to not speaking our language anymore. It used to hurt my feelings, but now I am not sure how I feel about it...

Stefani's parents saw their native language as an impediment to upward mobility due to the negative stereotypes and discrimination associated with being indigenous. Outside perceptions have weighed a great deal in creating a status of "inferiority" and "uselessness" of Tu'un Davi in this family's lives. These beliefs have been propagated by the hierarchal structures in Mexico, which stem from the residues of the country's colonial past, and are strongly endangering the future of the Tu'un Davi as younger generations are speaking it less, or not at all. Their actions, thereby, are done in an attempt to escape the prejudices associated with being indigenous as their language is a clear indicator of their indigeneity. What implications does this have on the future of a culture that has existed for so long, but due to the consistent imposed racial and ethnic

hierarchies of power in both Mexico and United States, some young people are not retaining their identities?

Another participant, Ricardo (27 years old), was brought to the United States when he was five months old. He grew up in the United States, however he also struggled when he entered K-12 because his primary language was Tu'un Davi. He told me that what helped him get through, contrary to my other my participants' life experiences, was hanging out with his Spanish-speaking friends in his neighborhood. The following is Ricardo's statement pertaining to his early childhood:

I would hang out with my two neighbors a lot. They only spoke Spanish. What bonded us was our desire to play all the time, and our inability to speak English when we were in school. At first we did not understand each other, but we would just play with our toy cars, bikes or tag...and slowly I started learning some words here and there. I was not afraid to say things and not make sense...I think that's what really helped me learn some Spanish...consistently trying and not caring if I said things incorrectly.

Ricardo described himself as a mostly average student throughout K-12. He did enough to pass his classes with mostly A and B-average grades, kept himself out of trouble, participated in extra-curricular activities, and was in his high school's soccer team. He told me that he took Advanced Placement courses in English and Spanish. Ricardo aspired to attend college but due to his migratory status, his aspirations were cut short. He realized the reality of his situation when he was a junior in high school, fall of 2003. In Ricardo's words:

I learned that the opportunities for higher education were not accessible to all students back in 2003, my junior year in high school. I always knew I was not born here, but I did not know the drastic limitations of not having a Social Security number. I was left out as the rest of my friends who could apply to scholarships for college did. At that time, no one in my school was able to help me, and I also did not seek the help. Almost every form I saw pertaining to financing for college asked to provide 9-digits I did not have. When you are in that situation, it's always a risk to disclose your 'legal' status to people. There was no way I could have afforded to attend. That specific event made me realize that school was not going to really get me anywhere...During my senior year, I stopped trying...you know really caring. I did enough to graduate. I knew I was going to graduate...but I started skipping and not doing my homework. It was hard, but you just had to play it cool and act like you were not going to college because you did not want to not because you couldn't. It was a reversed mentality, but at that time I had no clue about HB1079¹⁷...I doubt people in my school really did too...It was passed in May 2003, and in effect for the 2003-2004 school year. I know this much now...way after I left high school...sometimes I think what I could have done if I had that knowledge, but unfortunately that is what happens when you're the first one in your family to even attend formal school and graduate from high school. I know better now when it comes to telling young boys in the same situation I was in.

Ricardo is now a permanent resident of the United States. He received his residency well after graduating from high school. When he graduated from high school in 2005, he went to work in construction. He still works there.

¹⁷ The House Bill 1079 was introduced by Washington State Representative Phyllis Gutierrez-Kenney and approved by Washington State Legislature in 2003. Under the bill (signed by Governor Gary Locke), undocumented students are considered as "residents" for purposes of higher education and are permitted to pay "in-state" tuition rates to attend public colleges and universities in Washington State.

At the time of my research last summer, he was studying for his Citizenship test. Although Ricardo is a very bright individual, and without a doubt will pass his test when he takes it, he confessed to me that he is hesitant to take it because he's not sure yet if he wants to be a citizen of this country, although it's all he knows. Ricardo told me that he's comfortable with what he has. His employer offered him an amazing opportunity to attend technical college where he got certified for his job to earn twice as much as he earned when he began working for the company. Ricardo informed me that he works for well-intentioned people, that they really look out for their employees—their future and well-being. In spite of Ricardo not attending school, he is deeply invested in improving the quality of life for his community. He is actively engaging young men to do well in school through his mentorship and using his life experience and story to inspire them to further their education because the opportunities are there, they just need to act on them.

An individual's perception of self is (re)constructed for the most part in social settings such as schools. And, with that the perpetuation of power structures that exist in society—how schools serve as little societies that create very specific notions of citizenship, varying for all, depending on who they are or where they come from (Ruiz & Barajas 2012; Barillas-Chón 2010). Although identities are continuous, residues of the harm caused whether or not intentionally at various instances in a student's educational journey can manifest in varying ways later on in their lives.

Emilia (25 years old) entered in the United States when she was fourteen years old. She left Oaxaca to reunite with her parents in Everett, Washington. When she arrived

in the U.S., her parents enrolled her in school because they thought that it was best for her to become educated to have more opportunities. Emilia told me the following:

In Oaxaca—in San Antonio, the town I come from—we did not have good education, you can only go up to 5th grade. After that, you have to go to the nearby town and you have to pay fees. When I arrived here, I was done with school for a while. I knew how to write Spanish, maybe not great, but I had the basics. I came here to work.

What Emilia brings up in her response is a complex social condition pertaining to educational access for Na'Ñuu Davi from small villages in Oaxaca, Mexico. A village runs the risk of losing funding, and more importantly its school, when there are not enough students enrolled (Oliver Ruvalcaba & Torres Robles 2012: 120). There are two predominant reasons for the low enrollment: 1) the difficult circumstances indigenous students face in the schools such as humiliation from their instructors for not understanding subject discourages them from going back and 2) students and their family migrate during certain seasons to bring income for the family.

As mentioned earlier in my work, it is difficult for students of Na'Ñuu Davi background to enter school and succeed the way their educators expect them, both in Mexico and United States. In part, language barriers play a crucial role, but moreover it's the lack of preparedness of educators to work in a community that has greater needs than mainstream culture(s) in both countries, respectively. Furthermore disturbing is the fact that when low enrollment is present, schools are removed from these villages. This has created a form of exclusion of indigenous people in the Mexican educational system

because it removes the educational aspirations and opportunities for the small number of students who are able and desire to attend school in spite of unwelcoming environments.

Emilia talks about her educational experience in high school as a negative one. She was not mentally prepared to enter school, and in her words, “start over.” Emilia started in the 9th grade once she was enrolled. Although she was in ELL, she had a hard time acclimating because in order for her to understand what was happening, she had to re-learn the basic information in Spanish first. The way she was treated by some of her classmates also discouraged her from wanting to stay in school. In Emilia’s words:

I had a hard time with everything when I moved here. I hated it. The teachers did not understand me. The students in my class did not get me. Some of my Mexican friends did not get how I did not know “basic” things in Spanish. Although we were from Mexico, they did not come from Oaxaca. They did not know that it was different than other places. We do not have that many opportunities over there, especially in school. I never said anything to them because I did not want to be in difficult situation with anyone. It was hard. I only lasted in school for a year and a half.

When Emilia left school, she began working at a fast-food restaurant. She told me that she changed jobs frequently because she did not have a valid social security number.

After many changes of job (approximately six years after she dropped out of school) and the difficulty this cause her and her family, she decided to enter an evening adult basic education English class at a local community college. She’s signed up for those classes three times, but due to her job schedules, she was not able to be a consistent student the first two times. On her third attempt, she committed to sticking through the

entirety of the course. It took a lot of will on her end to continue forth with the class because it was difficult for her for not having basics down. However, contrary to her experience in high school, she was more determined to succeed and people were more friendly. Since the composition of her class was mostly recent immigrants, they were at all different levels and were more grown up and compassionate than her teenage peers in high school. While she was taking the basic English course, Emilia was encouraged to earn her General Educational Development (GED) through a partner program at the school. During the time of the interview in summer of 2014, Emilia was enrolled in math and science courses to help her prepare for the GED.

Eliza (28 years old) arrived in the United States during her pre-teenage years, at the age of twelve. When she arrived, she was enrolled in school. She started 7th grade here. Eliza describes her educational journey as a tough one at first, but she was fortunate to have very caring teachers. Eliza describes herself as a motivated student and tried her best, even if things were difficult.

I always tried my best. I learned English in six months. It was not perfect English, but I was able to communicate with people from the U.S. and I was also able to translate for my parents. At first, it was very difficult in school because some kids in my ELL classes made fun of me and called me names for being “too dark” and looking “very india,” but I did not listen to them. These were Mexican kids making fun of me. I never understood why there was so much separation amongst mexicanos in my school. I love my culture and language, so I continued speaking it. My parents would always remind me to not forget where I cam from. How could I? That’s the language I grew up speaking. When I first arrived here, I missed my grandma terribly. I would call her almost everyday. It was also hard to

eat American food in school. It was just a strange place for me. I grew up not having running water, or even hot water...we didn't even have bathrooms back in San Antonio. Everything I came to here was a luxury.

It was Eliza's resilience and determination to succeed that drove her to graduate from ELL courses by the end of her 9th grade year. She began taking 'normal' classes her sophomore year in high school.

However, a family tragedy is what led her to drop out of high school during her junior year. In her own words:

I was beginning to get comfortable in school and do very well when I had to leave. I did not have another choice at that time. My father got stopped on his way to work one morning. He's not from here, so he got sent to ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement]. My dad was detained in the Tacoma Northwest Detention Center for three months before he was deported to Mexico. That was a devastating time for my family, my mom was left to pay all the bills and rent by herself. So as the oldest child, I looked for work. My mom did not want me to leave school, but I did not feel right going to school while my family struggled. I have three younger sisters...and well, they're little. I began working at a McDonald's flipping burgers; I also had another job at Dairy Queen. I haven't returned to school. I would like to someday, but I have a kid now myself, so it makes things a little harder. I just tell my sisters to stay in school and to graduate. One will graduate next year. Knowing English is very important in this country and so is education. I want my daughter to become as educated as possible someday.

Although Eliza is not where she had hoped to be when she first entered school, she has hopes to return. Given the lack of opportunities available for a proper education in the

small town she comes from in Oaxaca, and her family's economic needs, she values education very much.

Jennifer, contrary to all of the other participants, entered K-12 fluent in English. She did not experience any difficulties, instead she was often sought out to help out with translation. In Jennifer's words when I asked her about her educational experiences:

I went into school already speaking English fluently due to growing up with a "white" babysitter. In first grade I was sometimes pulled out of my classroom to help translate for students in Kindergarten. This was in 1993/1994 so at the time there weren't Spanish-speaking teachers and staff. If anything, maybe just one teacher that I can recall. In terms of academic performance I was always an above average student. In first grade I excelled in my reading and placed first in my classroom for showing most improvement and surpassing my reading goals. The most memorable grade for me in Elementary is 3rd grade due to my teacher. Her name was Karen Ricky, Mrs. Ricky. She made 3rd grade unforgettable because of her caring, warm, and patient ways. Once again in my 3rd grade classroom I was a model student when it came to spelling. I excelled in that subject and was among the top 2 strongest spellers in our classroom.

Jennifer's elementary school experience was very contrary to the experiences of the other thirteen participants of my study. This experience nevertheless is very important to include because it shows the unique experiences Na' Nuu Davi undergo in the United States.

Jennifer encountered difficulties with transitioning to middle school. However, they were not due strong cultural differences, rather stereotypes that exist in the Latino community overall. Nevertheless, it is through this transition that Jennifer also discovered

the importance of her “raices” and awareness of her identity and positionality in terms of where she belonged.

Middle School was more challenging in terms of social adaptation. The reason I say this is because during this time my circle of friends changed drastically. Once I entered 5th grade, I found that my closest friends and those I spent time with on a daily basis were all white for the most part. I still talked to my Mexican friends but they were not the ones I was spending recess with and sitting with at lunch anymore. It was at this time that a reality set in, something I was always blind to, naïve about. My raices were different from those that we looked at as "white" whether I liked it or not. I had a culture which did not originate in the states and that "white" folks did not necessarily understand but it was definitely nothing to be ashamed of. This was an interesting change in me for several reasons. I realized I had purposely segregated myself from "los Hispanos" in the beginning of Middle School because of stereotypes that were planted in my head. I'm not sure where these negative stereotypes came from or how I learned about them but they were seeded in my head. Overall, Middle School was a pivotal point in terms of my social adaptation but also in self-acceptance of my roots in a predominantly "white" society. My awareness of identity was awakened.

Jennifer was a stellar student throughout her K-12 academic career. She graduated with Honors from high school, placed in the top 25 graduating seniors out of a class composed of more than three hundred students. In high school, Jennifer took Advanced Placement courses, when she took the exams and passed, she was able to earn college credits. College was something she always considered, although she did not necessarily know how to get there. In her words:

Through MEChA I received the opportunity to visit several college campuses during my junior and senior years of High School. My counselor served a role in helping me prep for college but honestly I think he could have done more. College visits, teachers, the counselor, and recruiters were all a crucial part in my journey to prep for college. I learned a little bit from each one.

Surprisingly, Jennifer's transition and adaptation to college was not very difficult and this had to do with the fact that she was determined to succeed and was very proactive on ensuring her experience was as positive as it possibly could be. She was also in touch with people who were already at the college she attended.

I was sad to leave my friends behind and to split ways but I had a few friends that were already attending EWU so it made things easier in that sense. Actually, my freshman year I lived with a high school friend who graduated a year before me. She invited me to room with her and it completely worked out. I joined CAMP (College Assistance Migrant Program) right before starting classes at EWU. This was a smart decision for myself because it immediately allowed me to be exposed to a group of caring staff that I knew were looking out for my best interests. It also introduced me to other students that were on the same boat as me, fresh out of high school and new to the college life. This made my transition easier. My parents met a few of the staff and were immediately comforted knowing I'd be surrounded by these folks. My dad later shared with me that my mom cried most of the way home after they dropped me off in Cheney the first time. I had a support system but unlike high school, middle school, or grade school, I felt like I had to seek them out rather than them come to me. This is the reality of college though; each student is responsible for his/her success and it takes a lot of initiative to seek a strong support system when needed. Being a part of CAMP helped me establish one even before classes started.

When I asked Jennifer about her cultural background being a *oaxaqueña* and how that influenced her goals and dreams, she responded that she saw it as a motivation. She was the first person in her immediate family to receive a degree from an institution of higher learning. Part of her drive was also setting an example for her younger siblings and to challenge the stigmas that existed in society towards Latinos.

By the time I graduated high school I realized that a piece of society still perceives Hispanos/Latinos as individuals who have nothing to contribute and are a burden to our country. Due to this thought, I've always been driven to be a better citizen and do my part by being a productive person in my studies and my way of living. I had a very positive experience in K-12 and I think this greatly contributed to my eagerness to seek a college education....For example, I think a big part of why I drifted away from my Latina friends in the early years of Middle School was due to these stereotypes. I had the belief they would become pregnant or join gangs and for this reason I kept my distance. I'm not sure how these ridiculous ideas made their way into my head but they did. Thankfully, logic and better judgment overpowered these ideas and I learned to see them as students with the same possibilities of success as any other.

Dole and Csordas (2003) examined how the identity formation/creation and maintenance of the Navajo group is kept within and outside of the reservation. Because identity is continuously being formed, given the positionality of individuals in the spaces they form a part of (whether by choice or not), it's hard to balance an identity when people have very set notions of what it means to be 'x-y-z.' One thing that was heavily emphasized in this article was *tradition*. What constitutes to be of Navajo background has changed as young people find themselves leaving their reservation (i.e. going to

institutions of higher learning). Some newer generation refer to their cultural practices as “things” they do that constitute being a part of a given community. However, their notion of what it means to be native is very different than that of their grandparents’ generation (Dole & Csordas 2003: 66). These findings are transferable to the Na N̄uu Davi’s experiences in the Pacific Northwest. The unique positions Na N̄uu Davi find themselves in make them “creative cultural agents” as they navigate various figured worlds, constantly negotiating their identities and their positionalities where ever they go. As for the participants of my study, the focus was predominantly on their K-12 educational trajectories and how their experiences shaped their life aspirations or their perceptions of opportunities available to them.

Chapter 4: Citizenship—Ni de aquí, Ni de allá

DO MARGINALIZED INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES GAIN ACCESS TO “CITIZENSHIP”?

In my study, the notion of “citizenship” or of belonging was another common topic students talked about. Some questions that came up were: “What does “citizenship” constitute? Who has the right to claim citizenship? Does it happen through language? Commodities accumulated? Education attained? Dismissing of traditions? It goes beyond just defining/ identifying those born in a nation. Many times, those who do not have access to citizenship rights are considered as “floaters” because they do not have a place where they can truly call home (Zhang 2001).

The Na’ Nñuu Davi individuals in my study many times felt conflicted with whether they were *really* citizens of the United States when they were growing up. This sentiment was stemmed from how they were treated, how they were identified by outside groups and how they perceived themselves with regards to that treatment. For many of them, most of the times, they felt like they lived in the peripheries—“othered” in a country in which they were born in. However, they were not treated as citizens who had dreams and aspirations.

While they were children, they were helpless and did not possess a means of voicing their concerns and standing up for themselves against the power structures that oppressed them. They underwent the process of being “homogeniz[ed], dehistoriciz[ed], dehumaniz[ed], and abnormaliz[ed]” (Zhang 2001: 33). However, their understanding of their social position came through as they grew up and learned to negotiate their identities in various spaces and places. Many of the participants I interviewed talked about the

sense of pride they feel for being of indigenous background and that although it was unfortunate the experiences some of them lived as children, their past does not define them. Their self-determination and actualization as human beings, have led them to become proactive in working with what they have. On documents, some of them are U.S. citizens. However, twelve of them emphasized that they first identify as being a part of the Na' N̄uu Davi community before being a citizen of the United States. They embrace their cultural upbringing because to them it's a beautiful thing for their culture to still exist in spite of the historical marginalization their community has endured first in Mexico, and now elsewhere outside of their native Oaxaca. Majority of the participants in my study informed me that they practice their citizenship to this country by being proactive in their communities at large. Collectively, to the Na' N̄uu Davi I interviewed, citizenship meant being positive community members and being civically engaged in ways they can. Most of them are currently serving as mentors and role models to their younger siblings, relatives, and other young people of their communities.

I cannot talk about “citizenship” without talking about the experiences of (im)migrants integration into the United States for two reasons: 1) some of the participants of my study are immigrants and do not have legal status in the country, adding further issues they have to deal with on top of many barriers they have for being indigenous; 2) the parents of all participants of my study are immigrants. The difficult situations their parents underwent, or continue to undergo, because of their legal status, affects all of them.

Castles and Miller (2009) emphasize the notion of inclusion of an immigrant in two ways, either as an individual (without taking into account of cultural difference or group belonging) or as a part of a community of immigrants (taking into consideration their culture, language, and traditions). They posit that in order to understand “incorporation of immigrants,” one must understand the historical experiences of nation-state formation. This concept (nation-state), looking at the ways in which emerging nation-states dealt with new immigrants, and those of ethnic minority background(s). The United States was formed through the immigration from Europe, genocide of indigenous people and displacing the future generation. In the process of explaining how historical context plays a role in the integration of new (im)migrants, assimilation is brought up to emphasize the idea of immigrants “being incorporated into society through a one-sided process of adaptation” (Castles & Miller 2009: 247). Castles and Miller furthermore elaborate on assimilation being replaced by the principle of integration, an adaptation that was “a gradual process that required some degree of mutual accommodation” (Castles & Miller 2009: 247) thus inferring to integration as a gentler form of assimilation (which ironically has now shifted to incorporation).

Another term that was elaborated on was *multiculturalism*. It meant two things: one, an official acceptance of cultural diversity and the existence of ethnic communities; and two, public policy—implying both “the willingness of the majority group to accept cultural difference and state action to secure equal rights for minorities” (Castles & Miller 2009: 249). So in other words, throughout history, the politics of terminology (what it’s supposed to mean and on whom it’s supposed to be utilized) has determined for

a great part the positioning of individuals in society. Terminology—stigmas, labels—have determined peoples’ aspirations, dreams, goals. It demonstrates the true power of politics of terminology, thereby affecting the politics of identity (individual and collectively). It’s hard to wrap my mind around the notion that those who do not have a voice do not have complete autonomy to be, and or fulfill, their desired individual—because there are limitations to what they can be or achieve.

The participants of my study talked about their parents’ migration to the United States and their struggles once they arrived here. Those life experiences affected their educational journeys and their perceptions of opportunities available to them. The residues of their parents’ migration struggles have had lasting effects in their lives. Many of the participants of my work talked about the effects of their families’ history and struggles affecting their upbringing and the way they’ve come to understand their position in the United States. The ten participants who were born here, and are first-generation United States citizens, briefly mentioned the difficulty of living in a multi-status family.

Castles and Miller in the section titled, “Status of the second generation,” talk about children of immigrants. Here in the United States, “a child born to immigrant parents becomes a citizen, even if the parents are visitors or illegal residents” (Castles & Miller 2009: 271). It made me think about the proposed U.S. Birthright Citizenship Act of 2009 that went against the United States Constitution, 14th Amendment. I recall feeling really upset about this because it was very personal. It essentially delegitimized my existence and what I stood for at that point in time for being an “anchor-baby,” a person

illegally born here, due to my parents' migratory status. I was bothered by it so much because I was fed up with the reality of my community being '*rejected*' in both Mexico and the United States.

Often times, mainstream culture see minority culture as a threat to "cultural homogeneity and national identity," as such migrant languages and cultures "become symbols of otherness and markers for discrimination" (Castles & Miller 2009: 273), ultimately playing a role in how those languages carry on to future generations of those migrants. When I read this—I thought about the U.S. educational system, the socialization process for people of this country—where we are taught to follow particular traits of what it means to be a good and faithful citizen. The "English-only movement" in the 1980 is also a clear example of the threat "migrant languages" bring to the United States. Many anti-racists laws stem from fear, not a comprehensive understanding of the communities that will be negatively affected. So the question is, when will people stop making laws out of fear? Why is fear so strongly instilled in us, and how that affects the way we carry out our duties that affect other human beings? How does one go about the process of inculcating the notion of having compassion?

Castles and Miller draw the following conclusion: all the different approaches to incorporation of immigrants are problematic. In their own words, "differential exclusion is useless once settlement takes place; multiculturalism appears to lead to persistent separatism, and assimilation can perpetuate marginalization and conflict" (Castles & Miller 2009: 275). Furthermore, these issues stem from host societies' unwillingness to deal with two issues: one, racism, and two, inequality resulting from globalization and

economic restructuring. I am left with a couple of questions: How does one, ultimately, deal with racism, though? It's so embedded in our society.

One thing I am left with from is Wilson's quote from *Research is Ceremony*: "If research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right" (Wilson 2008). This research project, along with initiating a conversation with these individuals regarding our cultural background and educational attainment has definitely changed and shaped my outlook on what is most meaningful to me and why I do what I do. By initiating a dialogue about the educational experiences of Na' Nuu Davi students in Washington State, my hope is to further the conversation beyond the Greater Seattle area to best address and equip students to navigate unfamiliar social spaces such as school.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

This study addressed several gaps in literature on the indigenous Latino educational experiences in the United States. Experiences of Latino education and immigrant Latinos' education have been well documented. However, when it comes educational experiences of indigenous students, more specifically from Oaxaca, Mexico, there is limited research. My hope with this exploratory study is to start a conversation around addressing the needs of indigenous students who often time face multiple barriers in acclimating to the United States K-12 educational pipeline. Children of Na Ñuu Davi have multiple language and cultural barriers to overcome before being able to learn in the academic setting.

Most of the participants spoke about how their personal experiences (social interactions) that made them conscious of the inequities they faced while growing up, and how that fostered a process for their self-identification. The participants' age also determined which nation, or parts of their cultural background(s), they identified with—a negotiated process that allowed them to have autonomy in their identity and agency formation. Many of the stories shared deal with discrimination and racism based on difficulty in language acquisition (that was seen often interpreted by outside people as resistance in assimilating to mainstream culture of the United States), not being enough of 'this and that' (U.S American, Latina/o, Mexican) and their cultural practices. According to Garza et al. (2004), resiliency is defined as “the ability to confront and to resolve problems and the capacity to utilize personal or social resources to enhance

limited possibilities” (Garza et. al 2004: 11). This definition fits well in the experiences of these Na Ñuu Davi students. Their tenacity in the face of adversity allowed them to continue forth with their aspirations. They were active agents of their construction of success—whether that meant for them to further their education or work to support their families.

The most difficult part of the thesis process hearing about stories that touched home for me, undergoing from first-hand some of the experiences these students underwent. Collectively, some of us managed to survive an educational system that was not designed to meet our basic needs as people. As much as this project was to provide a space for my participants to tell their stories of navigating the K-12 educational institutions, it was also a space for me to find answers, contributing to a form of healing from past experiences. The stories shared in this thesis provide valuable insight into historical and structural conditions of individual and collective identities of Ñuu Davi individuals of the La Mixteca Baja in the Greater Seattle area. People can be of the same country (city or state), but that does not mean they all have some outlook on, or values in, life. They all also acclimate differently to the receiving cities, states in the U.S., all a matter of opportunities and resources available to them based partially on their networks, or networking skills—which are heavily dependent on access to literacy of the dominant language. In my work, I was very cognizant of the reality of generalizing, grouping, or categorizing people. In misrepresenting some data and then have it disseminated creates, to an extent, this notion of false information. We all are from different places, have

different values, go into particular fields of study for various reasons, but how can we do justice to/for people who are part of our study?

Ñuu Davi students deserve the right to exist with dignity, prosper without worry of material and social hardships, and that they are deserving of opportunities to pursue happiness, have aspirations, and achieve success, regardless of where they come from. We should not be defined by our family's background, the obstacles we endured growing up, limited job and/or educational opportunities due to language barriers, or immigration status.

Some educators are becoming aware of the needs of indigenous students, however there are ways to go. Carter and Goodwin (1994) posit that in order to address race issue, educators must “acquire ways to cope with race as a social, educational, and personal construct” (Carter and Goodwin 1994: 292). The disparities in educational attainment of some students of color stem from the ongoing debate and dialogue that has ignored racially based social scientific paradigms undergirding education while subsuming race under the rubrics of ethnicity and culture. Na' Ñuu Davi have experienced a lot of deliberate racism, humiliation, social exclusion, and socio-economic inequality and marginalization based on their ethnicity.

Most of these young people are taking on roles of being active social actors—paving ways for younger generation of Na Ñuu Davi to embrace their cultural identity, and to be proactive. They do not want to continue to be silenced by structures that repress their community. In Anzaldua's words, they do not want to “vivir sin fronteras.” The borders the Na' Ñuu Davi have been numerous, too many, yet they continue to persevere.

LIMITATIONS

The study was very region and community specific: The greater Seattle Area. The research does not include other indigenous communities and their struggles. Further work needs to be done to include more stories, especially for young people that did not graduate from high school. Also, it would be beneficial to look at students' birth order to compare the level of opportunities available to them in comparison to their older or younger siblings. Furthermore, looking at differences in experiences based on gender would be beneficial to draw on the discrepancies if they exist on what impedes one group to achieve academic advancement over another. Because my project was the first step in recognizing the necessity to study Na N̄uu Davi's educational experiences in the United States, specifically in the greater Seattle area, not everything that makes this community's experience unique was covered.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Work together to find better ways to create safe spaces/integrate students of indigenous backgrounds in school settings without them having to deal with:

- Discrimination
- Generalized as monolithic Mexican/Latino
- Bullying

2) On the personal level, a recommitment to affect change in educational services. It is a personal goal of mine to go back in my community to work in the educational sector and affect local policy upon completion of my graduate program. There needs to be a way for

children of indigenous communities to improve their level of education without detriment to their culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON EXPERIENCE IN DIRECT SERVICE

I believe that creating an inclusive college-going culture for all students in every elementary, middle and high school can better prepare Latinos, including indigenous students, for college and succeed. The earlier they are exposed to the idea of college and are nurtured to believe that they are capable of achieving success, the more likely it is that they will live up to the expectations and fulfill their goals. This would also be a good step towards reducing the high school drop out rates in our community. Although high school dropout rates have decreased for Latinos, they remain higher in comparison to African Americans and Whites (Santiago et al. 2015: 7). The rate at which Latinos graduate from high school is also greater than the typical four years. More attention needs to be paid to how we can work with these students to ensure that they graduate on time, or that if they graduate in non-traditional time they are well informed about the options available to them.

A school climate that endorses a college-going culture is one that positively shapes the learning and development of young people. An ideal college-going environment is one where students appreciate academics, have a desire to succeed and a drive to attend college, and become lifelong learners. However, in order for a college-going culture to be effective, all educators must send strong consistent messages that every student is college material. Teachers should encourage all students to enroll in

college-preparatory courses. Students benefit most if they begin taking these types of courses in middle school, to ensure best chance of success in college. A culture of college-readiness requires an effort from everyone—staff, students, families, and community—and a form of accountability on all ends to ensure ultimate success. The most fundamental component for this to happen is to create spaces for partnership; to understand how the opportunities available to students benefits the entire community.

Lastly, an effective college-going culture also incorporates a mentoring program. Fostering positive youth development and academic success is essential. These efforts benefit youth (as well as their communities) by establishing best practices that lead to improved academic performance and emotional well-being among young people, and by heightening their awareness of the importance of social responsibility. Moreover, when young people receive mentoring from individuals in various professional sectors, they are more likely to develop broad interests. They also learn other social skills that they otherwise would not in academic settings, such as understanding the importance of being proactive, making healthy choices, and learning how to become advocates for themselves and their communities. We need to implement change that can ensure individual and community sustainability for the next generation of Latinos, indigenous communities included.

Interview Structure & Questions

(semi-structured interview)

Questions:

*Italicized questions are guiding questions if participants need clarification or examples of main question.

- 1) Tell me a little about your K-12 educational experience.
What are your memories of K-12? Tell me a little about each grade level (elementary, middle, and high school). Which grades/school levels do you recall the most? Why?
- 2) Can you tell me a little more about your experience in high school—specifically 11th and 12th grade with regards to preparation for college?
- 3) What was the college application process like? How did you go about the process? Did you have support from school staff?
- 4) How was your transition from high school to college like?
- 5) What was your college experience like?
*What was your campus climate like? Did you feel like you belonged there? Were there support systems when you needed them? Tell me a little about the support system you had (or not) to become matriculated. *Support systems (family, on-campus organizations, peer-network, etc.).*
- 6) When did you become fully aware of your social standing/space within society and did that affect your educational attainment?
- 7) Did you see your identity as an impediment, or motivation, to pursue a post-secondary education? How did your experience in K-12 (academic and social) affect your self-perception/identity, and ultimately contributing to your long-term goals/aspirations?
- 8) How do you identify yourself? (*Mexican-American, Chicana/o, Indigenous, etc.*)

Table 1: Demographic Profile of 14 Study Participants

Sex	Age	Completed High School?	College Education?	U.S. Born?	Practice Mixteco language?	Occupation
F	18	Yes	Yes. Community College. Studying Criminal Justice.	Yes	Yes. Mixteco-English-Spanish	Full-time student, part-time retail.
M	19	Yes*	No	Yes	Yes. Mixteco-English-Spanish	Works full-time at a restaurant. Plans on going back to school.
F	19	Yes	No	DACA	Yes. Mixteco-Spanish-English	Works full-time at a restaurant.
F	20	Yes	Yes, 4-year University. Studying Psychology.	Yes	No. Understands it, but refuses to speak it. Speaks mostly English.	Full-time student.
M	20	Yes*	Yes. Community College. Studying civil engineering.	Yes.	Yes. Mixteco-English-Spanish	Full-time student. Works in landscape on the weekends.
M	22	Yes.	Yes. Community College. Studying Nursing.	Yes.	Yes. Understands Mixteco, but limited speaking ability. Speaks mostly English.	Full-time student. Works at a fast-food restaurant.
M	23	Yes.	4-Year University, Community College (currently not attending)	Yes.	Yes. Mixteco-English-Spanish	Works full-time.
M	23	Yes.	Yes. Earned Associates Degree in Business Administration.	Yes.	Yes. Mixteco-English. Limited Spanish.	Works full-time.
M	25	Yes.	No.	Yes.	Yes. Mixteco-English. Limited Spanish.	Works full-time in construction.
F	25	11 th grade	No.	No.	Yes. Mixteco-Spanish-English	Works full-time in fast-food restaurant.
F	26	Yes.	Yes. Has a Bachelor's of Science degree from a 4-year university. Majored in Public Health and Early Childhood Development.	Yes	No. Spanish-English. No understanding of it, other self-identifying as Mixteca.	Works full-time at Early Childhood Development Center.
F	26	Yes.	Yes. Has a Bachelor's of Science degree from a 4-year university. Majored in Public Health and Communications.	Yes	Yes. Mixteco-English. Limited Spanish.	Works full-time in Public Health administration.
M	27	Yes.	Yes. Certification from 2-year technical school.	Permanent Residency	Yes. Mixteco-English-Spanish	Works full-time in construction.
F	28	10 th grade	No.	No.	Yes. Mixteco-Spanish-English. Limited English	Works full-time in fast food restaurant.

* Non-traditional. Alternative HS

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