THE POWER OF COMMUNITY: BUILDING SOCIAL NETWORKS THROUGH

THE ADVANCEMENT VIA INDIVIDUAL DETERMINATION (AVID)

COLLEGE READINESS SYSTEM

by

TRAVIS WAYNE HORTON

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

May 2016

Acknowledgements

I vividly remember the quote, "In each of us there is a little of all of us," from my first semester of doctoral studies. I could never have imagined how true this statement could be, or that it would so heavily influence this study. That being said, it is bittersweet that I cannot recognize everyone who has contributed to this happening, as I am lucky that it would read like the cast of Ben Hur. However, to my friends, colleagues, mentors, confidants, and students, you have played a significant part in my development and my life.

I would like to show my great appreciation to those that have directly contributed to this work. First, I am thankful for the mentorship of Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky, who has served as my dissertation chair. Thank you for your patience and guidance through this process. I would like to also recognize Dr. Holly Hungerford-Kresser and Dr. Taryn Ozuna-Allen. Thank you for your enthusiasm and input in the subject of this dissertation. Your involvement has greatly informed this process

Speaking of a little of all of us, I would like to thank the guilty parties of Cohort Six. To Throy Campbell, Kristin Compton, Brian English, Jackie Gill, Jared Jepson, Jennifer Luken, Christa Tillman-Young, and Adam Washburn, I am honored to carry with me the lessons learned from you all and for keeping me on the path to graduation. Your insight throughout this journey has not been taken lightly.

To the Immortals, Caleb Alexander, Jeannie Burt, Brad Davis, Geoff Harris, Anna Major, Linda Rodgers, Jennifer Silva, Curt Simmons, Billy Skinner, and Cady Smith. I am thankful that when I have said, "I have a crazy idea…," you have always replied, "You had me at crazy."

To my parents, Jackie and Patti Horton, I give special thanks for nurturing my desire to create and explore. Without the opportunities you provided me, I would not be able to do what I can today.

Finally, none of this would be possible without my wife Ferrah. People who have crazy ideas are not the visionaries. True visionaries see possibilities when no one else can see them. You saw me at this point when we first met, long before I ever knew this was a possibility. You are far more prophetic than I could ever be, and this is as much your achievement as it is mine.

April 25, 2016

v

Abstract

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY: BUILDING SOCIAL NETWORKS THROUGH

THE ADVANCEMENT VIA INDIVIDUAL DETERMINATION (AVID)

COLLEGE READINESS SYSTEM

Travis Wayne Horton, PhD

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2016

Supervising Professor: Barbara Tobolowsky

This case study fills the gap in research on college and career readiness and the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) College Readiness System by examining the experiences of 11 AVID campus community members on a urban high school in Texas to gain their perspectives on the concept of family-feel, as identified by Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mendiola, and Alkan (2008). It goes further by attempting to understanding the role family-feel plays in college and career readiness.

Through their experiences in the AVID community at North High School, over the course of a three-year period, the students, teachers, tutors, and administrator were able to give their perspectives on their nonacademic interactions. In doing so, this study was able to show that, through the lens of social capital, that relationships and networks matter and that student success is influenced by the interactions that exist as community members share resources.

Participants identified family-feel as informal, nonacademic interactions that fostered trust and encouraged reciprocity among community members. Students associated family-feel to their relationships with adults that focused on the importance of the student over the course curriculum, while adults sought to serve as role models and

advocates for their students. Through these interactions, community members were able to forge bonds that allowed for them to share experiences that would enabled the students to feel more prepared for college by giving them a social context of the higher education environment.

Table of Contents

x

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In the United States there has been a longstanding academic achievement gap between student demographic groups. As a result, an increasingly higher number of students are not gaining the appropriate skills needed for college readiness. For example, in two reports issued by the National Center for Education Statistics, African American students scored an average of 30 points lower than their White counterparts in mathematics (Vanneman, Hamilton, Anderson, 2009), while Hispanic students performed 27 points below White students on standardized tests (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011).

This same gap is referenced in a report by the College Board where it found that only 15.9% of Black students and 26.3% of Hispanic students were considered college-ready based on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) compared to 54.7% and 56.6% for their White and Asian counterparts respectively (Wiley, Wyatt, & Camara, 2010). This gap manifests itself in real time with minority students enrolling in less rigorous courses that do not meet admission requirements for most universities. As a result, students, particularly students of color, are not graduating high school as college ready.

13

College and career readiness[1] has become an important driver of educational policy within the past decade. The American College Testing (ACT) program (2014) defines college and career readiness as the ability of a student to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in credit-bearing postsecondary courses at two-year or four-year universities, colleges, and trade or technical schools. Therefore, there is an identified need to enable students to continue to be learners after they have graduated high school, but this definition does not specify what knowledge is needed for "success."

Smith (2014) describes college readiness as "the combination of skills, knowledge, and behavior of mind necessary to fully participate in college-level courses" (p. 6). Conley's (2010) definition contends that students are college ready when they are able "to get the most out of the college experience by understanding the culture and structure of postsecondary education and the ways of knowing and intellectual norms of this academic and *social* [emphasis added] environment" (p. 6). In other words, Conley implies that students need to be prepared both academically and socially in order to successfully navigate the postsecondary landscape. Thus, beyond increasing academic capacity, schools

---

[1] Definitions for college and career readiness and other terms can be found in Appendix A.

also must tackle the task of preparing their students for the social atmosphere of higher education in order to promote college-readiness.

Conley (2010) has identified four interconnected dimensions of college readiness, to go along with his definition, that indicate the multifaceted preparation that contributes to college success. These aspects are: (a) key cognitive strategies, (b) key content knowledge, (c) academic behaviors, and (d) contextual skills and awareness. *Key cognitive strategies* refer to skills that allow students to interpret information, construct arguments, and problem solve. This is what Conley refers to as "habits of mind" (p. 33), but serve as the foundational elements that support ways of knowing. *Key content knowledge* is the subject specific knowledge gained from the course content. For Conley (2010), *academic behaviors* are those organizational and study skills that allow students to actively monitor, evaluate, and direct their own thinking. *Contextual skills and awareness* relate to the knowledge needed to navigate the social norms of the college environment. This includes the informal (e.g., collaborative relationships and social behaviors) and formal (e.g., college admissions, financial aid, degree plans) landscape that enables students to use their knowledge in a manner that helps them succeed within the culture of the college campus.

In his book, *College and Career Ready,* Conley (2010) visually represents this relationship as a series of nested concepts in order to give a comprehensive

15

meaning to being college ready. Figure 1.1 illustrates how Conley views the

relationship between these dimensions.

Contextual
Skills and
Awareness

Academic
Behaviors

Key Content
Knowledge

Key Cognitive
Strategies
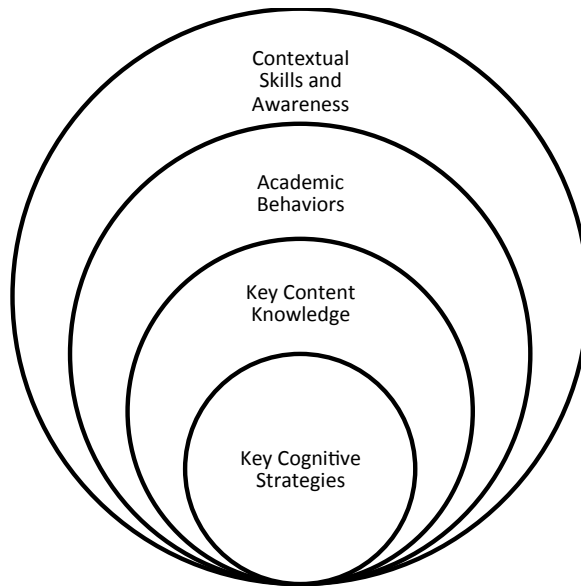
Figure 1.1 Four dimensions of college and career readiness. Adapted from

Conley (2010).

Recently, Kamenetz (2015) and Martin (2015) suggested that these nonacademic

skills are keys to success; this is particularly the case for students who may have

the motivation, but are not ready for college because they are not being taught

these skills. Therefore, these behaviors and contextual skills become an

increasingly important component of a school's push to make students college

ready.

16

Research (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mendiola, & Alkan, 2008) suggests that one way schools can prepare these motivated but underrepresented students academically and socially for college success is through Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). AVID employs instructional practices in elective courses that center on higher-level thinking skills and teaching methods that emphasize writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading (WICOR) strategies in elementary schools to postsecondary campuses (AVID, 2014). The goal of this college readiness program is to provide the academic and social support high school students need to succeed (Swanson, 1989), particularly students who would be first-generation college students, historically underrepresented at postsecondary institutions, and are of low socio-economic status (AVID, 2014). Evidence suggests it is succeeding. Recent data compared national averages of non-AVID White and Asian seniors with their AVID peers and found that the achievement gap closed to within five percentage points for those underrepresented students who participated in the college readiness system (AVID, 2014). (These statistics can be found in Appendix B.)

Part of the AVID College Readiness System's (ACRS) popularity is its ability to retain students in academically rigorous coursework. In fact, schools that have employed this system for at least four years tend to have a higher student retention rate across all four years of high school than schools with less

17

than four years of implementation or no AVID practices at all (Watt et al., 2008). Further, the mere presence of AVID on a campus increases the chances of that school offering more rigorous coursework and higher student enrollment in courses linked to college readiness (Huerta, Watt, & Butcher, 2013).

Much of the published research on AVID is concerned with program retention, focusing specifically on the structural components (e.g., teacher preparedness, academic support, and financial pressures) or the instructional strategies that affect students' persistence in the program, and is quantitative in nature (Black, Little, McCoach, Purcell, & Siegle, 2008; Contreras, 2011; Hubbard & Ottoson, 1997; Huerta et al., 2013; Watt et al., 2008). Studies aimed at giving the students' points of view do exist, but they address the entirety of their academic career (e.g., parent support, college knowledge, classroom engagement, advocacy, and class issues) defined by college readiness (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Cooper, 2012; Curran, Ned, & Winkleby, 2013; Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003), and do not focus exclusively on elements of the AVID experience. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the creation of community within AVID and how the relationships among its students, teachers, tutors, and administrators aid in college readiness.

Brief History of AVID

In 1980, Mary Catherine Swanson, a high school teacher, identified a need to provide access to academically rigorous coursework for the students from low-

18

income areas being bused to her high school in San Diego, California. AVID was her response to this need, because it provided the structure to facilitate student engagement through the use of organization and study skills, collaborative strategies, and academic support.

Since 1980, AVID has expanded to nearly 5,000 schools in 16 countries (AVID, 2014). Top performing schools within the ACRS organization are able to apply to be National Demonstration Schools. These campuses are able to integrate the AVID strategies across all subject levels, such as English, math, science, and social studies classes, and have institutionalized the AVID practices. A National Demonstration School is an ACRS exemplar and roughly 3% of the AVID schools currently hold this designation (AVID, 2014). These campuses serve as teaching schools for others wanting to adopt the ACRS at their institution.

In serving as a teaching school, visitors to these campuses can see the ACRS being implemented in classrooms. They are also able to witness the components of the AVID classroom that are not part of the systems structure, but are included in AVID's training materials. Examples of these elements are team-building activities and goal-setting lessons that are aimed at increasing student comfort levels (AVID, 2015).

Problem Statement

AVID was developed to address the longstanding achievement gap, particularly with first-generation students and students of color. There is much information available on the AVID College Readiness System (ACRS) and the curricular components that it utilizes in order to help students become college ready. However, the published research that is AVID-specific is largely quantitative in nature and is focused more on the benefits that the ACRS brings to a campus or the academic support that it provides. There is limited research that is qualitative in nature allowing for a more in-depth investigation of AVID. The concept of a family atmosphere was identified in one study (Watt et al., 2008), but the main purpose of that study was focused on identifying reasons for student attrition. Furthermore, when AVID is present in qualitative research, it is generally present as one of many resources that the student was accessing. In addition, the work that has been done does not explore the role of social networks within the AVID system and how they contribute to student success. Therefore, it is important to explore the nonacademic interactions of the ACRS that contribute to the creation of the AVID community specifically in relation to family-feel and the access to resources within its social network.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand how members of the AVID community define and perceive family-feel. Previous research identified

that it contributes to the students' college preparation, but failed to tease out what it is or how it contributes to the students' success (Huerta, Watt, & Butcher, 2013). This study will help us better understand the nature of the AVID community, how it is formed, and its relevance for AVID students.

Research Questions

This qualitative case study will gain insights from AVID teachers, tutors, an administrator, and recently graduated seniors to better understand their perceptions of how the sense of community or family-feel contributes to the students' college preparation. Specifically, this study will address the following questions:

- What do AVID teachers, administrators, and students perceive contributes to the creation of family-feel?
- How do teachers operationalize family-feel in their classrooms?
- In what ways do students perceive family-feel contributes to college readiness?
- How does social capital theory explain the concept of family-feel?

Position of Researcher

My personal interest in conducting this study is based in my fascination with human performance and social justice. I am greatly intrigued by people who persist when everyone else expects them to fail. In this case, AVID practices

21

have been found to close the achievement gap for historically underrepresented groups who under normal circumstances would be less likely to succeed.

For the past seven years, I have been the AVID Coordinator of the school participating in this study and I saw how AVID can positively affect students' lives. Today, I serve more as a steward of the program than in any formal supervisory position. I know our students succeed, but I believe that previous research has not meaningfully addressed the social aspects of the AVID community. Therefore, my role as researcher is to explore how the relationships influence student success.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that it expands our understanding of two areas, college readiness and student achievement, by investigating the social relationships and interactions that exist within a primarily academic community. By looking specifically at the AVID community, greater depth of knowledge can be gained on how AVID works beyond the curriculum of WICOR strategies. Since family-feel has been identified as an existing trait in certain AVID communities (Watt et al., 2008), a clearer picture of possible characteristics of family-feel can be understood. Finally, this study helps address the role that social interactions play in the efficacy of the AVID College Readiness System.

22

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter synthesizes relevant research related to the building of community relationships and social networks in regards to the AVID community. Specifically, the topics include: specific background information on the functions of AVID, previous research on AVID, the family-feel of AVID, social networks, the importance of building relationships for college-readiness, and the use of social capital as the theoretical framework.

Background of AVID

In order to increase its fidelity in all settings, AVID developed a set of "essentials" or guidelines that are requirements that each school is graded on annually (AVID, 2013 p. 1). The 11 essentials of the ACRS, illustrated in Table 2, can be divided into three groups of operational policy (i.e., setup, delivery, and support) aimed at the institutionalization of AVID strategies on a given campus (AVID, 2013).

Essentials one through four address the set up of AVID. In this grouping, a campus deals with student selection and enrollment (AVID, 2013). Recruitment of students into the program and access to AVID elective classes during the school day are the procedural components in play here, but key to this block of essentials is the voluntary participation of both students and staff. This practice allows for buy-in from the staff, as it creates an intrinsic motivator, and serves as

a means of commitment for students, because they are choosing a more rigorous course path.

Essentials five though seven are the actual classroom instructional strategies employed by teachers. These are the day-to-day classroom concepts that are used to help students gain the skills necessary for success in rigorous coursework, such as note taking and working in groups. The final essentials, eight through 11, address the support or infrastructure of AVID on a campus. Training of tutors falls in this group of essentials, where the tutor serves the purpose of aiding the students to become competent members of the academic and social community (AVID, 2013). The other essentials in this final group are related to resource management, data collection, and creating a leadership team.

Table 2.1

The Eleven AVID Essentials

Type	Essential	Area Addressed
Set up	1	Campus plans for recruitment of AVID students
	2	Documentation of voluntary participation of students and staff.
	3	The AVID class is part of the regular school day schedule.
	4	All AVID students are on track to meet 4-year college entrance requirements.
Delivery	5	Curriculum has strong components of reading and writing strategies.
	6	Students are practicing note making as well as participating in inquiry.
	7	Students collaborate in group networks.

Role		Essentials
Support	8	Tutor support, training, and proper implementation of student lead study groups.
	9	Fidelity to measurement systems of implementation.
	10	School and district infrastructure management.
	11	Adult networks to provide diverse input for optimal network resources.

Note. The essentials and their grouping are adapted from the description of site team roles found in "AVID Elective Essentials for High School" by McGinnis, R., Mettler, C., & Schiro, P. 2014.

An important aspect of essentials eight through 11 is the development of a site team charged with the implementation and performance of the 11 essentials. Membership in the site team traditionally consists of administrators, AVID Elective Teachers, tutors, and students (McGinnis, Mettler, & Schiro, 2014). Some teams include school district personnel, college representatives, community representatives, and subject area teachers from outside of the campus AVID program; however, this latter group of individuals typically has less contact with students than those individuals at the school (i.e., administrators, AVID Elective Teachers, and tutors). The roles and responsibilities of these main points of contact with students are listed in Table 3.

Table 2.2

Roles and Responsibilities of Key Members of the AVID Community

Role	Responsibility
Administrator	• Supports development of AVID as a campus priority. • Schedules AVID in order to provide student access.

25

	• Assigns a course number to AVID classes to ensure student credit. • Maintains AVID class size. • Provides preparation time for teachers.
AVID Elective Teacher	• Promotes the use of AVID strategies in class. • Helps in training tutors. • Assists in the AVID certification process. • Promotes school-wide use of AVID strategies. • Sets high expectations for student performance and monitors that progress. • Is a respected campus leader with three to five years of teaching experience. • Advocates for students. • Advocates for professional learning.
Tutor	• Provides academic support, particularly for rigorous courses. • Leads study groups. • Provides direct instruction with supervision. • Reports on student progress. • Visits subject classes to observe and assist. • Assists with AVID activities. • Aids in recruitment of tutors. • Serves as a role model for AVID students.
Student	• Possesses the potential and drive to succeed in rigorous courses. • Sets goals and works hard to reach them. • Shows a positive attitude. • Is open to new experiences. • Acts as a model student by using AVID strategies. • Participates in study groups. • Keeps parents informed of progress. • Enrolls in college after graduation. • Is involved in extracurricular activities.

Note. Roles are adapted from the description of site team roles found in "AVID Elective Essentials for High School" by McGinnis, R., Mettler, C., & Schiro, P. 2014

The roles and responsibilities, as illustrated in Table 3, show the basic expectations of the main members of the AVID campus community (McGinnis et al., 2014). It serves to point out that as each role gets closer to daily student contact the responsibilities become less procedural and more relational and interactive. For example, the administrator is responsible for components of the AVID essentials that require little personal contact with students in the classroom. AVID Elective Teachers have similar procedural duties, but also take on responsibilities that rely on their status in the campus professional network to be advocates for their students. Tutors hold the least amount of procedural duties, yet are charged with serving as role models and expanding the network of resources by recruiting their college peers to become tutors.

Some community-building activities are specifically taught in AVID Elective Teacher Training that are designed to help a student become more comfortable in the AVID classroom (AVID, 2015). For instance, activities geared toward increasing comfort levels might take place early in the school year and would focus on *low risk-high comfort* tasks, such as grouping students based on common interests, and would hopefully progress to *high risk-little comfort* activities where students would individually share their thoughts with the group as

a whole. These activities are taught in AVID Elective Teacher Training, but to what degree they are implemented at a campus, or if they are implemented with the intent of creating a community as opposed to being used to acclimatize a student to instruction is unclear.

There are examples of a *high risk-little comfort* activity, such as ropes course programs or adventure-based activities that are used from time to time by a campus. For instance, the school used for this study employs a trip called the *Senior Challenge*. In this activity, students go on a four-day wilderness trip and are put through obstacles designed to challenge the students on a personal level. These challenges are designed to be unique to the student, for example, a participant may be an athlete who has no problem with physical obstacles, so they are challenged in a way that makes them recognize and aid those in the group who are not as physically capable. This trip culminates in the students hiking to the summit of a mountain, which serves as a metaphor for their high school career, where they have a moment of reflection.

Outside of the AVID Essentials, and within the confines of the roles in AVID, there is an institutional concept of family that undergirds the implementation of the ACRS. Yet the term *family* has different meanings from school to school, as well as region to region. For instance, AVID in Texas schools is specifically identified as having a family-like atmosphere, where California campuses are not as strongly identified as such (Watt et al., 2008).

This could be due to the different ways in which teachers serve as advocates for students or in the various forms that tutors serve as mentors.

However, the ACRS does promote the concept of *family* within its organization. For instance, there is an annual contest to recruit student speakers for the AVID Summer Institute that asks students to write essays about their experiences in AVID. One of the prompts for this essay is, "What obstacles have you faced and how has your *AVID family* (emphasis added) helped you to cope and possibly overcome them?" (AVID, 2016). Given that the concept of family is acknowledged, there becomes a need to look at how it is manifested within AVID and what role it may play in AVID's success.

AVID Research

The majority of the research found on the AVID college readiness system is quantitative in nature and focuses primarily on the mechanisms of AVID, such as curriculum and implementation, or on retention and efficacy of students that participate in the system. For instance, Huerta, Watt, and Butcher (2013) used 2009 data of 22,880 AVID seniors, who had been involved with AVID either from high school or from junior high school. They found that the longer students participated in AVID, the more they were prepared for and the more frequently they interacted with advanced coursework. It also found that if an AVID system was in place within a school district, the schools within that district were more likely to offer academically rigorous courses than schools in a non-AVID district.

Therefore, there is evidence that the presence of AVID allows for greater access to rigorous courses and greater academic achievement – critical elements to college-readiness.

College information and academic preparation are also taken into account in a study of four groups of high school students (i.e., 40 students in AVID, 40 students in GEAR UP, 22 students in both AVID and GEAR UP, and 40 students in a control group) from the Rio Grande Valley in Texas (Watt, Huerta, & Lozano, 2007). In this quantitative study of 142 students, there was no significant difference in educational expectations, such as plans to attend and complete college among the four groups. However, the students who were involved in AVID were found to have higher academic preparation, including the usage of Cornell note-taking and higher enrollment in rigorous coursework like Advanced Placement (AP) classes. In fact, AVID students were able to demonstrate greater college preparation, such as knowledge of entrance requirements, than the students in the control group and the GEAR UP students, who use some of the same college readiness curricular components. Thus, there seems to be an element of AVID that goes beyond other pre-college programs that better prepares students for postsecondary success.

Although most of the research has been quantitative (Black, Little, McCoach, Purcell, & Siegle, 2008; Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Contreras, 2011; Hubbard & Ottoson, 1997; Huerta et al., 2013; Watt et al., 2008), there have been

30

limited qualitative studies on the experience of students, who fall into the AVID student profile of low socio-economic level or historically underrepresented in college. For instance, Cabrera and Padilla (2004) tracked two students from kindergarten to college graduation. The purpose of the study was to illustrate how students of Mexican heritage overcame difficulty. However, one participant was in AVID, so it was discussed briefly as providing him with a "culture of college" (p. 153), which was described as participating in college preparation classes, extracurricular activities, preparation for SATS, and help with the application process, all of which are considered a middle-class knowledge that others may not possess, unlike the other student who did not participate in AVID. This was one of the rare qualitative studies that mentioned AVID; however, because it did not explore the AVID experience in any depth, it is necessary to investigate how the various members of the AVID community contribute to academic success.

The Family-Feel of AVID

Watt et al. (2008) conducted one of the few studies that looked at the role of AVID in a student's social adaptation, as defined by Conley (2007). This study compared the responses from 180 AVID students, teachers, and administrators in California with corresponding participants in Texas. The primary data sources were a survey, which included two open-ended questions as to why a student might choose to leave the AVID program, and focus groups that provided additional context to help explain the survey findings. Watt et al. (2008) reported

that the respondents believed that those who left the program did so because they were unwilling to do the work and lacked "individual determination" (p. 35). They also found that the family-like support motivated other students to continue in AVID and become college-ready. Furthermore, the researchers noted that teachers in Texas identified this affective element five times more often than those in California. The explanation given for this difference was that the California students seemed more concerned with deadlines for scholarships and college applications, while Texas students focused more on bonding and academic support (Watt et al., 2008). Considering that the responses about family-feel came from the Texas participants, namely teachers, it suggests that there is a value in looking specifically at this geographic location to better understand the role in plays with these students.

Social Networks

Morgan and Sorensen (1999) set out to test the social capital explanation of schools brought forth in Coleman's (1961) book *The Adolescent Society,* where he studied social networks within Catholic schools. Coleman concluded that student success was defined by intergenerational social closure, which is when parents of student know the parents of another student and relates to the benefits in supporting group norms from this interaction. Morgan and Sorensen used this view to inform their study on 9,241 students in public schools using the data from the *Educational Longitudinal Studies* of 1988 and 1992. What they found was

that Coleman's explanation of norm-enforcing social closure did not translate to public schools. However, horizon-expanding environments, characterized by close ties among students and teachers, fellow teachers, and parents and teachers contributed to student success by expanding educational resources. Unlike Coleman's study, ties among parents were shown to be of little significance; in fact, student networks were shown to increase exposure to opportunity, while parent networks were shown to cause a decrease in resources. This horizon-expanding network, where students are linked to teachers who are connected to multiple resources rather than to parents, has been shown to foster more learning than the norm-enforcing network of the Catholic schools studied by Coleman. In the case of AVID, which is predominantly used in public school settings, this study illustrates how first-generation college students can increase the availability of resources with a horizon-expanding network more so than what can be given through social closure.

Morgan and Todd (2009) replicated this study based on Coleman's continued research on private schools, where he used intergenerational social closure, or dense parent networks, to explain student success. Morgan and Todd used data from 1,918 students collected from the *Educational Longitudinal Studies* of 2002 and 2004. While the results regarding student learning were the same as Coleman (1961) reported, these researchers found that the success of the private school students could be due to a tie to a religious institution in the form

of commitment to the community. Therefore, when a group like AVID is able to have a norm-enforcing component based on dedication to a common goal, there can be an added effect that complements a horizon-expanding network.

This concept of group purpose is seen in a quantitative study of networks within 188 urban schools (Hill, 2008). In this research, Hill (2008) identified three systems that exist within schools: traditional, clearinghouses, and brokering systems. This study categorized a traditional system as having limited resource capacity and a reduced commitment, compared to other systems, to facilitating access to resources. For example, the author qualified a traditional school as the style that proliferated in the 20th century where the school served as a link to the labor market for the majority of students. A clearinghouse strategy possessed substantial college resources, but assumed a limited role in creating pathways to these materials for students and parents. In this example, a school may have a college counselor and provide information to students about college, but it is up to the students to determine how they can use it to make college choice, major, and financial aid decisions. Finally, a brokering strategy provided substantial resources and a high commitment to facilitating usage of these supplies of capital. This reflects the AVID approach. Hill found that the clearinghouse and brokering strategies contributed greatly to college access, but funneled students into different higher education institutions. Schools that operated as a clearinghouse had a higher likelihood of students going to a two-year institution; in contrast,

34

of commitment to the community. Therefore, when a group like AVID is able to have a norm-enforcing component based on dedication to a common goal, there can be an added effect that complements a horizon-expanding network.

This concept of group purpose is seen in a quantitative study of networks within 188 urban schools (Hill, 2008). In this research, Hill (2008) identified three systems that exist within schools: traditional, clearinghouses, and brokering systems. This study categorized a traditional system as having limited resource capacity and a reduced commitment, compared to other systems, to facilitating access to resources. For example, the author qualified a traditional school as the style that proliferated in the 20th century where the school served as a link to the labor market for the majority of students. A clearinghouse strategy possessed substantial college resources, but assumed a limited role in creating pathways to these materials for students and parents. In this example, a school may have a college counselor and provide information to students about college, but it is up to the students to determine how they can use it to make college choice, major, and financial aid decisions. Finally, a brokering strategy provided substantial resources and a high commitment to facilitating usage of these supplies of capital. This reflects the AVID approach. Hill found that the clearinghouse and brokering strategies contributed greatly to college access, but funneled students into different higher education institutions. Schools that operated as a clearinghouse had a higher likelihood of students going to a two-year institution; in contrast,

34

those that initiated a brokering strategy had a greater number of students attending four-year institutions. These findings reflect the drive of AVID to support students in applying to four-year schools more so than community colleges.

In a study of 42 college-age mentors operating within an urban area with few college preparation resources, Ahn (2010) found that access to a network of mentors increased the potential for social resources, as opposed to the availability of resources when not linked to a community. However, within mentor networks, resources were not equal across all players. For instance, some members may have access to both college knowledge and job expertise, while others may simply have college experiences to offer. Dense networks, such as groups that have close social ties between mentors and a diverse pool of outside contacts, were more likely to collaborate and provide access to more varied resources, such as navigation of financial aid options, time management instruction, and essay writing assistance. This result implies that individual mentors who are a part of several groups (e.g., family, work, religious, avocation) can have a greater influence than those who participate in a single group with a diverse membership.

Some student groups are often confronted with obstacles and stressors that they must somehow overcome, such as undocumented status, low parental education, or low socioeconomic backgrounds. Students contending with these stressors require specific resources in order to help them attain a high degree of academic achievement. Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, and Cortes (2009)

35

studied 110 undocumented Latino students (18 % high school students, 34% from community colleges, and 48 % from bachelor-granting universities). This study examined how different resources influence academic success for undocumented students. These researchers identified extracurricular participation, volunteerism, and valuing of school as significant predictors of resilience among all students in the study. They also reported that high-risk students could become academically successful if they could draw upon resources that came from supportive parents and friends and from participation in school activities. These findings indicated that opportunities to develop social support from the school environment play a major role in encouraging student success in high school. This study exposed the need to use qualitative approaches to investigate the manner in which these relationships can affect student success.

Therefore, these studies explored the key role school personnel, families, communities, and other networks provided to assist students to succeed academically. They found that the more networks students are able to access, the more resources they have available to them, which is critical in overcoming challenges. They also suggest that the type of networks influenced student outcomes. The next section explores how connections between students and school contribute to their success.

Building Relationships

There has been some research that linked social support and school engagement. For example, Garcia-Reid (2007) studied 133 Hispanic female students from a Northern New Jersey middle school and found students' social support (i.e., support from parents, peers, and teachers) led to greater school engagement, as defined in the study as factors that led students to view school as "fun and exciting" (p. 171). Most interesting, the support provided by teachers had the greatest influence on the students' engagement. This suggests that teachers play a critical role within the social network to help students develop a sense of self.

Teachers are not the only way to encourage engagement and support. Gaddis (2012) studied the effect of mentors on students. In this research, conducted with 355 youths participating in Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs, Coleman's concept of intergenerational social closure was studied. Like Morgan and Todd (2009), intergenerational social closure was shown to have no effect on student outcomes, the same was found with regard to mentors' racial similarity and or differences in social class. Further, time spent with students and the level of trust that existed between youths and mentors were found to have the most positive influences on outcomes. Because AVID also relies on the use of tutors and teachers as trusted mentors, this study acknowledged the value of their academic and nonacademic interactions to support student success.

37

Another aspect facing Hispanic student engagement at school is their relationships with peers. Rendon (2014) studied 42 Latino males between the ages of 17 and 23 years of age in Los Angeles who either completed or dropped out of high school. She found that neighborhood networks that provided physical protection from outsiders or symbolic protection due to gang affiliation, tended to also come with expectations that run counter to high school completion. Examples of these expectations are skipping class, associating only with neighborhood peers, and enforcing gang territory. Consequently, the main difference between non-completers and those who graduated was found to be a neighborhood-focused connection. Students who chose to participate in activities or organizations outside of their neighborhood managed to avoid the factors, which influenced their peers to drop out of high school. This finding suggests that school offers a positive social component that allows the students to overcome any negative neighborhood influences that could draw them towards more high-risk (i.e., self-destructive or violent) activities.

Along with peers, teachers can have a positive influence on underrepresented students looking to include college as an option. McKillip, Godfrey, and Rawls (2012) discovered in their qualitative study of 30 urban students that their relationships with staff served as the foundation for the school's college-going culture. A tightly bonded student community and the sharing of these bonds with faculty were shown to develop trust within the network. Like

38

AVID, this community shared a vision of college success that offered academic support, but also fostered an increase in availability of resources due to network access. In choosing these positive relationships, students have gained access to influences that develop their cognitive skills.

In her study of five Latina 10th-grade students, Cooper (2012) found that when these students were allowed to engage in activities (e.g., band, athletics, honor societies) that promoted competence, autonomy, group identity, and psychological safety, they categorized their environments as safe, affirming, and productive places. Similarly, AVID provide similarly positive activities as recognized by Cooper.

In conclusion, student relationships with teachers and school peers matter in becoming college ready. Previous research has shown that teachers have a greater influence on developing a student's sense of self and that students who choose positive school relationships, rather than staying with cultural or geographic relationships, often are more successful in school. Finally, previous studies on AVID have focused on its mechanisms and its benefits to schools. They have not explored its more relational aspects (i.e., family feel) even though there is some indication that it promotes college readiness. Therefore, there is a need to explore the perceptions of family feel with members of the AVID community qualitatively to gain a better understanding of how it is perceived to contribute to student success.

39

Theoretical Framework

According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital is the aggregate of resources available when one is part of a group. Putnam (1995) offers a more detailed description by breaking social capital into the components of moral obligation and norms, social values, and social networks. *Norms* are the rules group members will follow when interacting within the group in order to facilitate mutual benefit and reciprocity. He (2000) uses the Golden Rule as an example of norms that bring reciprocity. In order for mutual benefit to occur, norms have to be in place that are influenced by the group's *social values,* which are then strengthened by the trust that is built among group members in order to reach goals. Figure 2.1 shows the elements that can influence social capital (e.g., networks, reciprocity, participation, sense of belonging). For example, Putnam (1993) attributes the success of private schools to a greater amount of engagement among parents and the community in school activities, rather than merely what takes place in the classrooms. This is due in part to the fact that he attributes belonging as an active pursuit aimed at connecting with others in order to achieve like goals.

Finally, *social networks* relate to the group's ability to interact with those inside and outside of their group affiliation. This is an indication of the types of capital that are at play within a network. For instance, *bonding* social capital is norm enforcing, which is based on fostering the specific values of the community, and is exclusive by nature. *Bridging* social capital, on the other hand, is inclusive

40

in that it is the ability for a group to link to resources that are outside of the
community, the more diverse the links, the greater the ability for the group to
strategically expand its horizons (Morgan & Sorensen, 1999). By expanding
horizons, students have access to more diverse resources, which in turn can lead
to better outcomes.
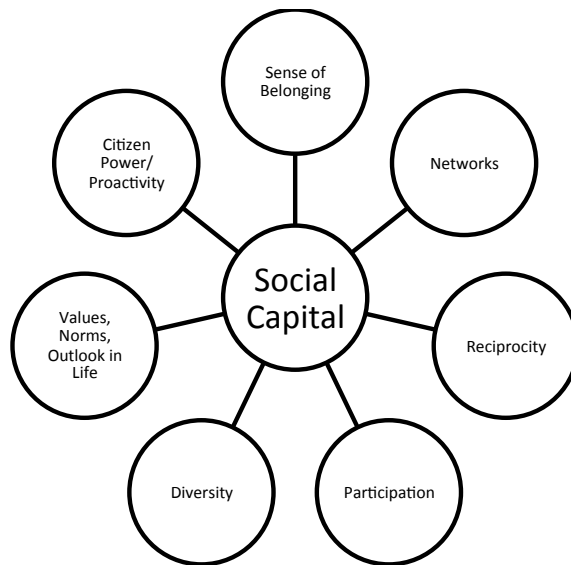
Figure 2.1 Putnam's elements of social capital. Adapted from Bowling Alone:
The Collapse and Revival of American Community *by R. Putnam. Copyright
2000.*

Social capital theory is appropriate for this study in that it helps illustrate
how networks can help individuals succeed. When individuals are members of
multiple groups, then they are able to draw upon greater connections and

41

resources such as more mentoring and member support. In turn, greater levels of participation in voluntary groups relate to greater social capital (Putnam, 2000). Therefore, this framework influenced this study's protocol in that questions were generated in regard to uncovering the social aspects of the AVID community. It was also used to identify the themes that explained the connections among the participants. These social connections are critical to student success. In studying the AVID community through the lens of social capital, it is possible to understand what social aspects contribute to college readiness.

Conclusion

Although much research has reported a strong relationship between rigor and student success, limited research also identified a strong link between students' social connections and their academic success and college readiness. AVID has been shown to produce higher achieving students by providing academic support and increased access to rigor within a family-like environment. The high achievement may be the result of a number of elements. These ingredients may include AVID members having a diverse set of network connections, which provide greater access to resources in an atmosphere of purpose, trust, and commitment. Although these connections have been suggested in previous research, they have not been explored in any depth. Therefore, this study uses the lens of social capital theory, as defined by Putnam,

in an attempt to bring to light the components of the ACRS that lead to community building and, in turn, student success.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This study is designed to gather the perspectives of the teachers, tutors, administrators, and graduates from one AVID campus in regards to their perceptions of the characteristics of their community, specifically the concept of family-feel. In doing this, this study will address the following research questions:

- What do AVID teachers, administrators, and students perceive contributes to the creation of family-feel?

- How do teachers operationalize family-feel in their classrooms?

- In what ways do students perceive family-feel contributes to college readiness?

- How does social capital theory explain the concept of family-feel?

This is a case study because it is bounded to the views of those community members at a one Texas high school, North High School[2], who participated in

---

[2] Pseudonyms are used for the name of the high school and those of the participants. Participant names are derivatives of the higher education institutions they attended.

AVID between 2011 and 2015 (Creswell, 2013). Yin (2014) suggests that case studies must meet three conditions: 1) that they gain the perspectives of the participants; 2) that they do not control actual behavior; and 3) that they have a temporal focus of events. Given that the focus of this study is limited to a specific time period and that relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated, as they have already happened, and the student participants are no longer attending the school, a case study approach is appropriate. As such, this qualitative case study aims to investigate the experiences and perceptions of the participants who were members of this AVID community from 2011–2015 and is not generalizable to other groups, locations, or time periods. Finally, given that previous studies have largely used quantitative methods to study the ACRS, there is a need to approach this topic qualitatively to provide a richer understanding of AVID through the participants' perceptions of interactions within the AVID community (Maxwell, 2013) and to gain insights into their relational experiences.

Site

In order to better understand the development of family-feel and social networks in the AVID campus community, this study focuses on the AVID program at a single high school, North High School, an AVID National Demonstration School in an urban area in the state of Texas. Using an AVID National Demonstration School, as defined in chapter two is helpful, because these institutions have been through a rigorous process of proving that they adhere

44

to the principles and practices of the AVID system (AVID, 2014). Utilizing a single demonstration school will help to minimize the variation in implementation that would exist by including multiple campuses.

North High School is a large, urban public institution located in Texas. It is a school with a mobility rate of 23.7%, causing it to fluctuate between 3,100 students and 2,700 students from the beginning to the end of each school year. Demographically, this school is 35 % Hispanic, 34 % African American, 23 % White, and eight percent other, with 55.8 % of the students qualifying as economically disadvantaged. From an achievement standpoint, this school has a graduation rate of 82.7 % in the 2014-2015 school year, with 46 percent of students designated as college-ready through standardized testing and 68 percent of students designated college-ready through high school transcripts (Texas Education Agency, 2015). Table 3.1 shows how this mobility has changed the demographic nature of the school.

Table 3.1

Demographic Change at North High School 2011-2015

Year	Hispanic	African-American	White	Other
2011	33%	28%	33%	6%
2012	36%	27%	31%	6%
2013	36%	29%	29%	6%
2014	37%	31%	26%	6%
2015	35%	34%	23%	8%

In contrast to this, North High School's AVID community has 293 students enrolled in AVID Elective Classes. While demographically the community holds the same percentages, the AVID student population at this school tends to be at 89 % economically disadvantaged. However, traditionally 100 % of all AVID students have passed standardized tests and graduated within four years. In addition, all AVID students at North High School graduated with transcripts that met college entrance requirements. Furthermore, the students involved in this community generally have a 4 % mobility rate. This difference between AVID students and the rest of the school mimics the success reported by the ACRS, as referenced in chapter two, and therefore makes this an optimal community to study.

Contextually, North High School exists within a school district of 72 schools in North Texas. It is one of six high schools within this district with two junior high schools and nine elementary schools in its feeder pattern. Although this district began implementing AVID in its schools in 2001, North High School, and the junior high schools that feed into it, offered their first AVID Elective Classes in 2007. After starting the certification process in 2010, the school involved in this study became a National Demonstration School in 2013.

Research Design

Data were collected through interviews from various groups within the
AVID community (i.e., teachers, tutors, an administrator, and students).
Participants were recruited from former AVID students who began AVID at
North High School in 2011 and graduated in 2015, and the teachers, tutors, and
administrators who were active in the program during the same time period as the
student participants. I sent invitations via email or hard copy to all individuals at
North High School, who fit the selection criteria, asking them if they would like
to participate in a study for individual or focus group interview sessions,
depending on their role. (Copies of these invitations can be found in Appendices
G through J.)

After ensuring the criteria were met, the participants were selected based
on the order of their affirmative response. Those who responded first were
contacted first and so on. In the event that someone was unable to participate, the
next individual was contacted for an interview[3]. Creswell (2013) states that four
to five participants with different perspectives are enough to identify themes and
to analyze across themes in a case study. For this reason, interviews were
conducted with five students (N=40), three teachers (N=10), two tutors (N=13),

---

[3] Once the participant numbers were met, all remaining individuals were
contacted to inform them of their status.

and one administrator (N=6) who directly participated in the AVID elective classes at North High School during 2011–2015, to better understand the perceptions of AVID personnel and students in regard to social interactions and how family-feel contributes to the students' college preparation. The adult participants were given the option to request an individual interview in order to accommodate schedules and/or comfort level. One teacher, Coach Houston, participated via individual interview due to a scheduling conflict. The rest of the teachers were interviewed in a single focus group and the tutors were interviewed in another focus group. The administrator participated in an individual interview.

The students who participated in the study were involved in the AVID community at North High School for a minimum of three years, so they had been through the entire process of the AVID College Readiness System and could speak to all aspects of the AVID experience. Three female students and two male students were chosen to participate in this study in order to mimic the gender distribution of the AVID population at North High School. (Table 3.3 shows the gender breakdown of the graduating classes of seniors.)

Table 3.2

Gender Demographics of North High School Graduating Seniors.

Graduating Year	Graduating Males	Graduating Females	Percentage Male

2010	2	7	29%
2011	3	9	25%
2012	8	22	27%
2013	8	28	22%
2014	17	34	33%

All fully participated in every aspect of the AVID community, such as field trips, class presentations, and community service events while a member. Because the students were no longer in school, individual interviews accommodated their schedules.

Data Collection

I conducted the interviews with the adult participants first during the fall 2015 school term. The focus group interviews with teachers and tutors took place at my home and were approximately one hour in length. The individual interview with Coach Houston took place at a local restaurant and lasted 46 minutes. The interview with the Mr. Horn, the administrator, took place at his home and lasted 38 minutes.

The protocols for the teachers' and tutors' focus groups, as well as the administrator interview, consisted of questions based on the responsibilities of their roles. (See appendix C, D, E, and F for all interview protocols.) The questions also focused more on the relational components of these

49

responsibilities, as the procedural responsibilities of each adult lent themselves to short answers relating to a requirement of a specific AVID Essential. By addressing the areas of interaction of AVID Elective Teachers, tutors, and the administrator, the intention was to identify deliberate decisions as well as inadvertent actions. Examples of these questions are:

In what ways do you serve as an advocate for AVID among your peers? Why?

How do you engage the students in your AVID classroom?

How would you describe your expectations or norms in the AVID classroom?

The five AVID alumni' interviews were conducted after they graduated to ensure they completed the program and allowed them to speak openly and honestly about their experiences, in case they would have been reticent to do so while still attending high school. The student interviews occurred at off-campus locations that were convenient for the participants. These primarily occurred at their campus or at the public library near them, and lasted an average of 53 minutes.

The goal of the student interviews was to discern more insights into their participation in the AVID community. These interview questions have the potential to garner very personal responses from the student participants and therefore necessitated the use of individual interviews. An advantage to this type

50

of interview is that it helps reduce the stress when sensitive topics emerge or when interacting with marginalized groups (Fontana & Prokos, 2007). Some examples of interview questions are:

Why did you decide to join AVID at North High School?

How would you describe a typical AVID student?

How would you describe a typical AVID classroom?

Interview protocols were developed for the specific role of the participant. All interviews were transcribed. In order to assure anonymity and to provide participants with the ability to voice their perspectives, the participants were given pseudonyms that were used to label their transcript.

Data Analysis

Transcripts for each interview were reviewed and coded for common incidents (Creswell, 2013). The use of the constant comparative method meant that I returned to the first interview transcript to look for any new codes that had emerged after coding the second interview. Then, after coding the third transcript, I returned to the first and second ones again to look for any new codes that were identified. The codes were then condensed in to broader thematic categories (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The themes related to the participants' feelings on joining AVID, their experiences in it, and most importantly, their relationships to other individuals within the community. These

51

codes were then organized by overlaying the framework of social capital theory to arrive at three main areas of focus; sense of belonging, networks, and norms.

Introduction to Participants

As stated, tutors, teachers, an administrator, and five recently graduated students were interviewed for this study. This section offers a brief introduction to each of the participants. (See Table 3.3 for background information on these participants.)

Table 3.3

Adult Participant Information

Name	Gender	Role	Years in AVID	Information
Coach Houston	Male	Teacher	6	Taught AVID in all high school grade levels.
Mrs. Christian	Female	Teacher	8	Taught AVID juniors and seniors.
Ms. Northwood	Female	Teacher	6	Taught AVID juniors.
Mrs. English	Female	Tutor	5	Former English teacher.
Ms. Orange	Female	Tutor	6	Former AVID student at North High School. Has been a tutor for two years.
Mr. Horn	Male	Administrator	5	Longest serving AVID administrator at North High School.

Tutors

Ms. Orange is in her junior year of college and is an engineering major at a local university. She is an immigrant from Mexico and is currently going through the process of becoming a United States citizen. Ms. Orange was brought into the AVID community at North High School for two purposes. First, she provided academic support in science and math, which are the most common areas of need for this school community. Second, she graduated from the North High School AVID program during its early years, which helped her serve as a mentor for current students.

Mrs. English is a former English teacher at North High School. She was not part of the AVID community prior to her retirement. However, she was recruited specifically to aid in building writing skills within the AVID community at North High School, because the students had received low scores on the SAT and PSAT tests. (Table 3.4 shows the background information of both tutors.)

Table 3.4

Tutor participant background information

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	College Status
Mrs. English	Female	White	College Graduate
Ms. Orange	Female	Hispanic	College Junior

Teachers

Three teachers were interviewed for this study. They have been part of the AVID community at North High School for more than three years. Since joining the program, each member has assumed a leadership role among the faculty and routinely trained other faculty members on AVID strategies. (Table 3.5 shows the teachers' and administrator's background information.)

Table 3.5

Teacher and administrator participant background information

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Role	College Route
Mrs. Christian	Female	African-American and White	Teacher	Bachelors and Masters Degree
Coach Houston	Male	African-American	Teacher	Athletic scholarship to one school, transferred to different school for degree.
Ms. Northwood	Female	Hispanic	Teacher	Bachelors and Masters Degree
Mr. Horn	Male	White	Administrator	Bachelors and Masters Degree

Administrator

Unlike the teachers or tutors where multiple individuals serve in the same capacity at any given time, a single person occupies the position of administrator. Mr. Horn was the administrator at the time of this study and has the least daily contact with the students or other members of AVID. Mr. Horn has been with AVID at North High School for over three years. He holds a Bachelor and Masters degree, as well as an administrator certificate.

Students

The students selected to participate in the study were similar to other AVID students – low income and first-generation. For this study, the students were chosen primarily by gender. This was done to mimic the demographic distribution of the AVID community at North High School, which is predominantly Hispanic and split roughly 60 % female and 40 % male. All of the participants were from low-income families. However, being in a state with an international border, not all the students were U.S. citizens. Among these participants, Blaze was an undocumented student, while Carine was first-generation. For instance, Denton, Tarran, and Wesley come from families with a long history in the United States. However, Tarran and Wesley were first-generation college students. Denton's family had some college experience, but no degrees were earned. Table 3.6 gives additional background information for each student member of this study.

Table 3.6

Student participant background information

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Years in AVID	College Choice
Blaze	Female	Hispanic	5	Four-year institution.
Carine	Female	Hispanic	4	Four-year institution.
Denton	Male	White	5	Four-year institution
Tarran	Female	Hispanic	6	Community college
Wesley	Male	Hispanic	4	Community college

Thus, among the three females and two males who participated in this study, all but one of the students is Hispanic with only one student, Denton, who is White. They participated an average of 4.8 years in AVID. Therefore, they started AVID as early as seventh grade (Tarran) and as late as freshman year (Carine and Wesley) of high school. Finally, all were planning to attend a post-secondary institution in the fall. Two planned to attend a community college and three were enrolled in a four-year institution.

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure trustworthiness of this study's findings, three strategies were used to reduce the amount of researcher bias. First, using multiple perspectives (i.e., students, teachers, tutors, and administrator) provided corroboration for the themes that emerged from the data (Yin, 2014) and helped

expose the perspectives of a "culture-sharing group" (Creswell, 2013, p.119) as well as values and beliefs at one AVID demonstration school. It also provided a fuller understanding of the case being explored by ensuring accuracy through lines of converging inquiry (Yin, 2014). Second, all participants were allowed to review the transcripts of their interviews in order to provide feedback as to the accuracy of their responses. None of the participants offered any amendments to their transcripts. Finally, once the transcripts were reviewed and themes were identified, two fellow doctoral cohort members reviewed the analyzed data in order to check for biases and speculation, as well as any possible gaps in logic. A consensus was reached regarding the identified themes, which are discussed at length in the findings.

Limitations of Study

The two primary limitations of this study are related to the nature of this research and my role within the AVID community at North High School. Because this is a bounded study, the participants are members of one community that are speaking about their lived experience during a given time period. The events that took place during the years that these participants were involved with AVID at North High School are unique to this location. Different schools, locations, students, and staff would most likely produce different outcomes, as will groups that existed at different time periods. Yet, the findings may be able to

provide insights into positive learning environments that might prove helpful beyond this one setting.

The second limitation is that of the researcher. The participants that are being interviewed are students and adults that are part of the program that I have managed for six years. As such, I had prior relationships with all participants in the study. All student participants have graduated from the school and therefore are not in a position where their comments will negatively affect them. Yet, they still may feel reticent to critique the program knowing my role in it. Although the adult participants may feel unsure for similar reasons, I am not in a position to evaluate them from an employment standpoint. Furthermore, North High School is in a period of transition where new staff is being trained to replace the staff of the past five years. This allows them the ability to speak openly about their experiences without adversely affecting their employment.

My hope was that our prior relationships provided better access to meaningful responses during interviews, as opposed to an unknown researcher having to develop rapport through multiple interviews before getting to the personally held beliefs of the participants. Yin (2011) points to the role of participant-observer being a sound basis for doing fieldwork, since most research interest begins with prior interaction with the topic being researched. The caveat being that it is important for researchers to be forthcoming to participants on their role as a researcher, and how information is to be shared with those participants.

58

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

As stated, the purpose of this study is to is to better understand how
members of the AVID community define and perceive family-feel and how it
contributes to the students' college preparation. Based on Putnam's (1995)
description of social capital as consisting of moral obligations, social networks,
and social values, the interviews with AVID teachers, tutors, students, and an
administrator provide a deeper understanding of the community elements that
must be in place for all resources and types of social capital to be mobilized.
Thus, the findings describe the moral obligations of the community in the
participants' perspectives regarding their *sense of belonging* to the AVID
community. The availability or access to resources reflects the participants'
perceptions of the family-like structure or *networks* of AVID at North High
School. Finally, the chapter also exposes the social values through the
participants' discussion of their *values* of reciprocity, trust, and accountability.
Figure 4.1 illustrates how these themes interact with each other to help create the
family-feel of this community through the lens of social capital.
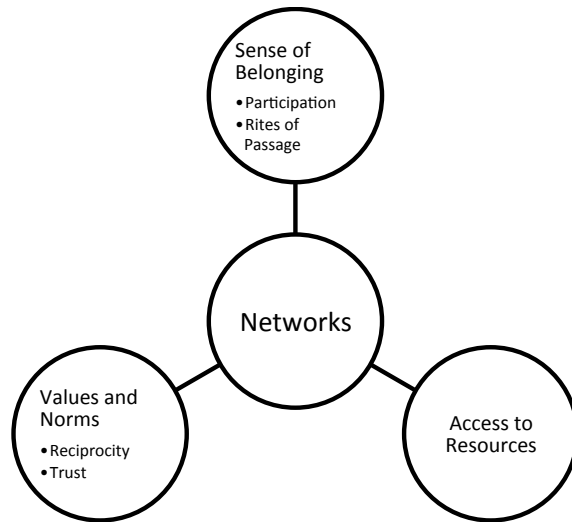
Figure 4.1 The themes associated with social capital as defined by Putnam.

  Adapted from *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American*

Community by R. Putnam. Copyright 2000.

Sense of Belonging

People are able to build communities when their interactions commit them

to others (Putnam, 2000). When these interactions occur frequently within the

same community, it fosters a sense of belonging among those that find themselves

part of the social fabric of the network. Sense of belonging was the first theme to

emerge from the stories of the community members. It is characterized by their

reasons for participating in AVID and the rites of passage as part of this

community.

Participation. Whether they were recommended by a teacher or sought out AVID on their own, all participants agreed that the program provided a purpose for them. Sense of belonging served as the glue of the community because it was the basis for why the members of the community would later interact.

Therefore, sense of belonging is first expressed in terms of each member's participation in the network. This is because all participants in this study chose to commit to AVID. As stated in chapter one, it is recommended that participation in AVID be voluntary (AVID, 2016). All the student participants acknowledged challenges that they faced throughout their lives, yet at no point did they want to leave AVID at North High School. Therefore, this section investigates how the individuals chose to participate in the program, and the rites of passage that contributed to their sense of belonging.

The students came to AVID for a wide range of intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. Denton's external motivation to participate in AVID was, "Because my mom told me to." Others, like Tarran, explained her intrinsic reason for joining AVID was because she, "needed that extra help on knowing what to do next" to prepare for college.

There was no one reason students chose to participate. Some students experienced the pull of positive relationships, as Rendon (2014) found in her study of academic and neighborhood affiliations. In her study, the students who

61

were engaged in school activities were able avoid the high-risk activities of their neighborhood because of their commitment to school. Similarly, in the current study, Wesley joined because his friends were in AVID. He commented that, "they cared about school genuinely. Some others did, but it wasn't a top priority. I wanted to hang around with positive people." As an undocumented and first-generation college student, Blaze was initially unaware of the long-term benefits of AVID. She joined to escape a challenging home life. As she admitted, "my mom had depression. It [AVID] was just a nice place to be at." However, in time, her motivation changed. She explained, "I was here illegally and after high school, I had no plans. So, they're [teachers] like, join this college preparation class." Therefore, though Blaze's initial motivation was to be in a pleasant environment, participating in AVID gave her teachers the opportunity to influence her in a positive direction by exposing her to the benefits of a higher education.

Carine had a similar experience. Her family immigrated to the United States just before she was born. Still, like Blaze, she had no idea that there was anything beyond high school. She, "thought it was only just high school and after that I was done and I would start working," but then a teacher told her about AVID. AVID provided a path to college. She was told, "After high school, you can go to college and get your diploma in whatever career you want. You can be a doctor, a nurse, a lawyer." Since school was something she enjoyed, she joined AVID because, "they promised me that they would get me into college." As her

motivation evolved, she was committed to do well. She revealed that, "I work hard for my grades and if I don't get the grades that I work hard for, then I get very disappointed in myself." Therefore, Carine is intrinsically motivated and joined AVID as a means of reaching her goals.

While Carine had little prior knowledge of college, Tarran, on the other hand, knew the purpose of college and that she wanted to go, but did not know the particular steps to get there. Specifically, she "felt that most of my family wasn't able to go to college, so I needed that extra help on knowing what to do next." Like the other students in this study, she is a first-generation college student. There was little family support in regards to navigating the admissions process, because they lacked the knowledge; therefore joining AVID served a procedural role for her to meet her goals.

Denton had college goals and, unlike the other study participants, knew how to get there, but welcomed the academic support provided by AVID. As he explained, "I have had it [ADHD] since I was four and I've always had struggles with school and my OCD, throughout my whole life, giving me depression and anxiety." Denton did not need AVID to introduce him to the advantages of higher education; rather it provided him with strategies to stay focused and organized in order for him to reach his goals.

Unlike the students, all the adult participants chose to get involved to add value to their work experience, but remained because they felt that they belonged

63

with this group. For example, Mr. Horn answered, "Honestly, it seemed like I was a good fit with the staff that was already involved." Similar responses were given from Coach Houston who stated, "My experience with the teachers at training solidified me wanting to be part of this program."

While Ms. Orange was beginning her career and Mrs. English was nearer to the end, they both returned to this high school out of a sense of service. Mrs. English, who had retired from teaching due to health reasons, was, "looking for something I could still do, I missed working with kids." A friend, who was a tutor at another school, told her about AVID. So, Mrs. English went to North High School to shadow a pair of existing tutors to see if it was something that she could do. She quickly realized that she liked it and felt it was a good way for her to continue working with and helping students.

Ms. Orange's motivation to join AVID at North High School evolved from her personal experience with AVID. In her words, "I graduated [from North High School] and felt that AVID helped me a lot, why not come back as a tutor." Ms. Orange was an undocumented student while at North High School. Upon graduation, she found it difficult to navigate the admission process without support. In order to realize her college dreams, she applied for United States citizenship in order to have a "cleaner" path to college, meaning, "I could apply as a resident instead of as out of state or international." This furthered her desire to

64

return as a tutor since it would help her serve as a mentor for students in her former situation.

The teachers of this study, Mrs. Christian, Ms. Northwood, and Coach Houston, all had motivations similar to that of the tutor participants. Although their individual journeys to AVID were unique, they all joined the community either to find meaning in their careers or to serve as mentors to the students of the program. Mrs. Christian taught at another AVID campus before coming to North High School. Once she arrived at North High School, which was only in its second year as an AVID campus, she was, "asked by my friend, who was the coordinator if I would teach the AVID class." It was her knowledge of AVID at her prior campus and the recommendation of the AVID Coordinator that gave her confidence to join the North High School AVID community. Ms. Northwood saw her chance to join as an opportunity to mentor. She stated, "I saw a lot of students who physically looked like me, Latina, and it was kind of one of those things that I wanted to help with." AVID was an opportunity for her to show students like her that there was a possibility beyond what they could currently see.

Coach Houston shared a combination of the motivations that both Mrs. Christian and Ms. Northwood illustrated. Coach Houston, a graduate of North High School, was recruited from another AVID campus via the coordinator who "sold it to me." He saw his involvement with AVID as a way to return to his alma mater and a confirmation that his talents were of value, because he was

recruited to fill the position of AVID Elective Teacher. He also, "liked the vibe I got from the other teachers," which helped him feel a deeper connection to the faculty at this campus.

As the administrator, Mr. Horn joined the community initially as part of his job, but stayed involved for the same reasons as the other adults. Mr. Horn explained, "I got on board with AVID when I was at the junior high as the Administrator there, and I liked…the program." However, his initial exposure to this community came as a stand-in for the AVID Administrator who was unable to go on one of the field trips. Mr. Horn decided to join AVID because, "as an administrator, you don't always get the opportunity to spend full days or full weekends, or long weekends, where you're with the faculty and students and see so much positivity and so much growth." He stayed involved because it enjoyed the personal connections with those he worked with, which did not exist among his normal duties. Therefore, Mr. Horn, as well as the other participants, were ultimately committed to being part of a community through a desire to get more out of their experience as educators.

It is this unique community that is another aspect of the sense of belonging. All the participants used the word "family" to describe the AVID community, indicating a deeper connection exists within AVID that is not present in either the students' other classes or among the other adult members on campus.

Students explained this sense of family in terms of the atmosphere of the AVID classroom.

As Wesley described his relationships with his teachers:

> I talked to all of my AVID teachers more than any other teacher because the difference is, in AVID, they take the time to know you. Sadly to say, in other classes they are like, I hope you are here, cool, do the work and get out.

Denton voiced a similar attitude, stating, "In my other classes, the subject was more important than the students. In AVID, I was more important than the subject." In fact, all the student participants echoed these sentiments.

This expression of caring could be because the adults of the AVID community routinely described the other members of the community in terms of family roles, as supported by AVID research on student retention (Watt et al., 2008). For instance, when Mrs. English, a tutor, talked to her friends about "my kids," they "always know that I'm talking about my AVID kids, not my own children." Mrs. Christian, a teacher, referred to the AVID Coordinator as the "father" and her role as the "momma," while all the teacher participants referred to the AVID students as "their kids." Ms. Orange, a tutor, described a uniquely "closer relationship" with the students, because they might not "have that at home and they need that support, they need someone to believe on them." Although Mr. Horn, the administrator did not take on a family role in his description of AVID,

he did admit "my closest connections that are on this campus have happened through AVID." Therefore, the teachers, tutors, and administrator feel uniquely connected to their AVID family.

Rites of Passage. To be accepted into a family, there generally are rites of passage that are significant to a person's development in a community. The students, teachers, and administrator in this study all referenced the "mountain trip" as a rite of passage in their AVID experience. This "trip" relates to the AVID Senior Challenge. The interesting thing revealed in each participant's account of this event was that none of the students mentioned anything about the specific activities that took place during this event, but rather spoke of how it strengthened their relationship with other members of their community.

The trip was a metaphor to the students' own educational journeys. For instance, Carine likened it to her journey through high school. She related her feelings to a sense of accomplishment, "That exact same feeling that I felt on top of that mountain, I felt when I graduated high school, because I made it." Blaze saw it as a competition and "not all of your friends make it to the top." Mr. Horn, the administrator, explicitly connected the trip as a metaphor, explaining, "one of my favorite parts of the trip is the after part and talking to kids …about how that metaphor lines [up] with where they've been and where they're going." Therefore, the trip represented how far they had come and the successes they earned.

68

The trip also helped strengthen the bonds between the members of the AVID family. Wesley expressed closeness with other AVID students that developed through the challenge, "They're stronger [bonds] than [with] my other friends . . . Our senior AVID trip had a lot to do with that as well. I feel like a group of us got closer than some families are."

This closeness also registers with the adults of the community. While the tutors, Mrs. English and Ms. Orange, did not attend this particular trip, they did witness an increased maturity with the seniors that took part in the Senior Challenge. For instance, Mrs. English noted that, "you saw that they had to work together, that made such a difference in their relationships." Mrs. Christian explained why the trip helps these bonds form, stating, "you're able to let down your guard and show your weaknesses, and be able to trust other people. Because not in every setting you can do that."

Coach Houston described how the trip also connected the students to the adults who went on the trip, "this is a moment where the kids become one of us," in describing the bonds that were created.   He added, "we all accomplish the same things and on even ground," referring to how the students and adults participated equally in the activities. Therefore, it required the adults and the students to work together to succeed. As a result, all these relationships grew stronger.

69

Summary. Sense of belonging for this community starts with the purpose of participation for its members. Students joined to realize their potential or were pulled by the success of their friends, while adults chose to join in order to find meaning in their profession. As these participants, students and adults, became woven into a social fabric through their common experiences, such as their senior trip, they fostered this sense of belonging through deep connections that allowed them to interact as a supportive family. In forming these bonds, the members of the North High School AVID community set the stage for them to share resources through network interactions.

Networks

As stated earlier, all the participants expressed particular goals that drove them to join the AVID community at North High School. A defining characteristic of their experiences was that the students used their AVID network to access resources to help them achieve their goals. This symbiotic relationship was seen as being part of a collaborative effort to meet the program goals of making students college-ready and closing the achievement gap. There were two primary ways that the students tapped into resources, which were: (a) academic interaction and (b) nonacademic relationships, that created community support.

70

Academic interaction. Academic interaction relates to both the structural components of AVID and how those components are used. These predominantly consisted of the resources that one would expect to be available from a college-readiness system, such as the instruction in study skills, access to college information, and help with applications. According to Wesley,

> AVID students are given the resources to be able to be successful. We're taught the Cornell note style, how to study more efficiently, we're taught to be organized. I'm pretty sure normal non-AVID students are, but it comes faster with AVID because it's presented. You just don't pick up on it.

While these particular resources are embedded in the AVID curriculum, it is important to point out the emphasis on how the skills are transmitted. This academic interaction is supported by research showing that tightly bonded communities are able to utilize resources more efficiently through student self-advocacy (McKillip et al., 2012). The community support was witnessed by Carine when speaking of how her peers helped with her notes by asking, "What's going on? Why aren't you doing it correctly?" Her peers asked these things because they wanted to make sure she was using the strategies offered.

Eventually, the students began to self monitor their transformation to members of a highly performing community. Denton recalled having an internal dialogue asking himself, "What should I write down? How should I take this

71

sentence? Little steps. . . how do I remember this stuff?" When these questions popped up, the students realized that their experience affected them differently than their non-AVID peers who were viewed as being less interested in academic achievement. For example, Blaze revealed, "That hurts when my GPA goes low, even if it's just like [a] point [or] something. I don't like B's anymore." The strategies gave the students a taste of success. So, they were no longer satisfied with average grades. This new awareness of self then becomes a characteristic that members of the community value and therefore becomes the norm of the network.

Summary. In building their network through academic interactions, they were able to lay the framework for their community to become aware of its capabilities to make them college-readiness. In doing so, this allowed them to form the structure of a high-performing community, which was aided by nonacademic relationships as well.

Nonacademic relationships. Clearly AVID strategies helped the students succeed, but AVID also supported nonacademic relationships. This section discusses three nonacademic relationships that benefit the students. These are: community support, resource sharing, and learning from others within the AVID network.

Community support. The adults in the community are also AVID resources playing key roles in supporting the students' success. Ms. Orange stated

72

that tutors are a, "guider, not a giver." In other words, AVID tutors did not function like traditional tutors who serve as academic coaches. Rather, they were there to keep student-led study groups moving forward by helping students solve points of confusion. Since the tutor is there to facilitate student-driven discussion during the tutorial process, their purpose is to serve as a guide for inquiry.

Similar to previous research (Garcia-Reid, 2007), the current study demonstrated that the tutors also served as role models. Ms. Orange speaks of being "an AVID student [formerly]. I am in college. They see me using Cornell notes, so it is a natural thing to be a role model." She represents the next step in the students' process. However, Mrs. English, the retired teacher and current tutor, also modeled the use of AVID strategies, which conveyed the idea that AVID skills are always needed.

In fact, the adults in the AVID community did what was needed to help guide the students in their educational journeys. As stated by Ms. Northwood, "you're the teacher, mentor, you're the parent, the coach…you take on whatever role needs to be taken on…so that students can reach, that they know how to reach." Therefore, the teachers and tutors took on any role to help foster the students' progress as Hill (2008) discussed as a brokering strategy in her previous work.

To successfully guide the students, the teachers had to gain access to information that is changing on a consistent basis. Therefore, the teachers'

greatest resource was their network of connections to various pieces of pertinent information. For example, for many of the student participants, financial aid, course selection, or standardized testing became massive issues that the students knew could interfere with their being able to attend college. Therefore, the teachers tapped their other networks to supply the students with needed information. For instance, Coach Houston states, "as a coach, I have access to NCAA information that can help students pick the classes that will help them become eligible for college athletics." Thus, the adult members of the AVID community became conduits to information for their students.

As the administrator, Mr. Horn's purpose is to, "provide stability…to be a help in things that need to be pushed through," thus providing a safe environment for community interactions to happen. Yet, he changed the role of the administrator by becoming an active part of the community. He revealed, "Instead of going and sitting in in a classroom and doing a walk through or just going in, I was actually out doing the activity with the kids." In doing this, Mr. Horn chose to not be an outside observer, but rather a participating member of the learning community. He stated that he "thought that was good for me to get to interact with them in that way." In placing value on experiencing what the students were doing, he transformed what was in the past a supervisory role (disconnected from the community) into more of a collaborative, leadership position. This led him to encourage and support the AVID teachers to be innovative. He reveals:

It's a pretty cool role to have, to have the people with the knowledge and

the passion that we have, that want to try new things and look at different

ways of doing things, and it's pretty cool when you have people coming to

you wanting to try things that we've never done before or even thought of

before.

He used this stance as a method of ensuring that the community was adapting to the ever-changing world of higher education.

Resource sharing. Nonacademic relationships also allowed the community to access resources based on the experience of the adults. For example, students listened to personal stories that the teachers told and equated those experiences to being college educated. As Carine illustrated,

Every time you [teachers] went on a mountain climb you would come

and show our AVID class about your mountain climb and I was like

"That's so cool. I wish we could go one day and climb a mountain. I've

never climbed a mountain."

Here Carine is recalling a specific moment where teachers were sharing their personal life. Other examples of this sharing were when teachers had children, got married, or finished their graduate degrees. However, what is also seen from this quote is the students wanting to be like their adult counterparts. She recalled that later on in the school year the class was approached about the possibility of doing this activity. She added,

75

You all were like "Would you like to climb a mountain one day?" and I

said "Yeah." and then everyone was like it would be badass to climb a

mountain and you all worked real hard for us to get us that scholarship.

Personal interaction, where teachers openly shared and then invited students to

participate, served as examples of nonacademic ways of accessing the personal

resources of the community members. It is also evidence of a family culture

benefiting the community (McKillip et al., 2012).

      Learning from others. Community sharing of individual successes often

served as motivation for all group members to learn or increase their confidence.

For instance, Blaze recounted her emotions when she saw another undocumented

student succeed.

Phillip [an undocumented AVID student at North High School] got into

college and I was excited about that. I mean, hey, he's being in the same

position I was, being illegal and not having money and he got in, he's

studying, maybe I can do it too. Seeing the seniors above me doing it,

made me want to do it to.

Due to her closeness with AVID students of other grade levels, she was able to

identify those who could guide her in her particular situation. Teachers were also

able to tap into this. Mrs. Christian shared that "each time a student gets accepted

we learn a little." Then, they are able to use that knowledge to help other students

in the community.

Wesley spoke about the help he received from the AVID community regarding getting into college. For example, he recognized the teachers as valuable resources by saying,

> Every single year they [teachers] go through the same thing to help out the senior class [to] get accepted, looking for scholarships, so they have that experience under their belt. That's what they actually helped me a lot with it.

The adults of the community used their personal experiences and any lessons learned from getting previous students accepted to help their current AVID students find their individual paths to college.

Watching what happened to students who left the AVID community also provided incentives to adopt the skills and stay with the AVID. According to Carine, "I also try to learn from others' mistakes and I would see that whenever they got out of AVID, they started going downhill. They started skipping and going to skipping parties and like, not really caring about school anymore."

For Denton, Tarran, and Wesley, escaping their lower socio-economic backgrounds was the payoff for joining a group that placed a higher value on college. Tarran explained, "I just felt that most of my family wasn't able to go to college, so I needed that extra help on knowing what to do next and getting all that next step information to get into a good college." Realizing that her family

was limited in the resources that they could provide, both financially and logistically, she looked to the adults in AVID to provide the access she needed.

The students felt a debt to previous students and vowed to share their own successes with future students. As Denton explained,

> Having no money and not being able to go out and enjoy life sucks even worse. I don't want to live like that and I made that decision senior year and if I graduate, I'm going to go college and I'm going to finish and I'm going to go back to high school and say, I did it.

Therefore, the students were eager to continue to serve the community after they graduated.

Summary. By fostering nonacademic interactions, the AVID community was able to link to the social resources that would prepare them for the personal interactions of college. Finally, by forming these interpersonal connections they were able to create a network that learned from the experiences of others in order to benefit each member. Those benefits were realized, because the group set ground rules, or norms, that supported positive values.

Values and Norms

Putnam (2000,) defines values and norms as existing within a "network of reciprocal social relationships" (p. 19). In other words, communities set values that are reflected by all of its members. In turn, their common goals and values strengthen their bonds as well. Therefore, this section discusses how the values of

the North High School AVID community promotes the creation of norms for its members to become a high functioning group aimed at making students college-ready through a focus on trust and reciprocity.

Trust. Given that AVID is a system that is aimed at first-generation college students and students who have historically been under-represented at four-year institutions, it becomes possible for them to transform the AVID community from a norm-enforcing environment, as witnessed in Catholic schools studied by Coleman (1961) to a horizon-expanding one (Morgan & Sorensen, 1999). This transformation is the result of the student participants who emphasize achieving a level of social equality and adults who are inspired by social justice. Thus, both students and adults use their motivations to commit to the community norms that allow the students to become college-ready.

Because the community shared the common goal of college success, it was important that norms are developed in order to meet this goal. As members became more proficient with learned college preparatory and professional skills, their interactions with each other formed a support structure that lead to accountability. For instance, all those involved in the AVID community had to trust that the other members were going to provide the appropriate resources. This trust leads to an expectation that everyone received an equal benefit in relation to his or her effort. Therefore, all members could be active players in pushing performance boundaries of the community.

All the student participants described their purpose as being that of the driver of the community effort. Carine expressed this concept as, "they thought about me and what I need. It wasn't just a program." When asked to elaborate on this, she used the word "vision" as a needed quality of an AVID student. In her words, an AVID student, "know[s] what they want in the future. They know what they want to be. They know where they want to be. They are not just here for school or just came here because it's class."

Student participants were motivated to take advantage of the resources within the network through (a) realizing family dreams and (b) escaping their socio-economic situation (Perez et al., 2009). Two of these participants, Blaze (recently naturalized) and Carine, who is a first-generation college student, were very close in terms of achieving similar family goals of finishing school and having a better life. These students realized through watching others transform through the AVID program that there was a path that they could follow to improve their life.

Wesley's take on the members of this network is that they are " willing to do what it takes to succeed in life…all along maintaining their dignity, and their honesty, and their integrity." This indicated that there was a values-based component to the purpose of an AVID student. They were willing to do whatever "it takes" in order to succeed, but there was an added element in that they were unwilling to cut corners in order to do it. They were not willing to do things that

80

would reflect negatively on them or the group, and there was a need to come out the other end of the process better than when they entered. They would refer to "integrity" and "honesty" as important values of the AVID community.

Reciprocity. They were also not in school for the grade, but to understand the material and be an active participant in the educational process. Choosing to pursue the material rather than the grade allowed for the AVID classroom to be centered on student inquiry, which changed the atmosphere of the class from that of working for a class rank to one of assimilating contextual skills (Conley, 2010) that would prepare them for college. In order to achieve this, they had to admit what they did not already know. For instance, Tarran explained, "if I wanted to do what I wanted to do [graduate college], I couldn't put on a front and act like I knew everything."

Denton spoke to the values of the network in that he described an AVID student as someone who wants to succeed so much that they are willing to seek help.

> I think it's actually for the ones that actually want to get some help, and to succeed, and they're just not afraid to go out and do what they need to do…people are afraid of help. People are afraid to feel helpless. People are afraid to take advice.

In other words, AVID students are willing to be vulnerable in front of those in their community. In fact, it is this openness to admitting weakness that is what

81

allows for the community members to fully interact with the AVID curriculum in a way that allows for them to pool resources. Therefore, being vulnerable during interactions, both academic and nonacademic, becomes a norm of the community.

By taking a chance and accessing available resources through their AVID community, the students were able to tap into materials and experiences that they would not have been able to had they only sought help from people from their same background. This was possible because of their AVID bonds. Tarran supported this idea when she said,

> In AVID, since it's in groups [small group collaboration], you have already that family bond so you know you're confident to go speak to somebody and you have the same quality of being an AVID student, so you have more in common and more to talk about and expand your friendship.

In describing the norms of the AVID community at North High School, Wesley stated,

> If you ever had any doubts, any questions, any concerns, they [students, teachers, and tutors] were always there for you. Basically, they all held each other accountable, as well, so there were not any excuses for not doing anything.

While at times, this accountability came across as "annoyingly hounding" as described by Denton, being held to a high standard was always received as

82

constructive because, as he added, "It's going to get them to the next level."
Holding each other to task, according to the student participants, came from both
the adults within the community and with their peers. Coach Houston
commented, "We take the tutorials and notes and we make it a point to be the best
at those things." By becoming the best at those things, he contributed to the
norms by holding students to higher standards when faced with performing the
academic tasks of the network.

As students became committed to increased rigor in regard to their
achievement level, those outside of the group began to characterize them in this
manner. For example, Carine recalls, "they [non-AVID teachers] would
automatically expect me to be a good student since I was in AVID. I would think,
oh, crap! I can't mess around because they know I'm an AVID student." First,
this represented the realization that the students, as members of the community,
held each other to a specific set of norms, and secondly, that others outside the
network recognized the existence of this higher standard. As Blaze stated, "what
I do, gives people an idea of what we all do."

Tutors routinely used group norms in order to motivate the students to rise
to the occasion. This typically centered on attempting to bond with students and
acknowledge their presence within the group setting. Ms. Orange's method was
to "build on that trust, because sometimes they would become timid," meaning
students tried not to participate if they felt they did not have anything to

contribute. By using the procedural components of AVID, such as the tutorial process and questioning prompts to build confidence, trust was nurtured in order for the network to optimally use its resources. When a student exhibited shyness or lack of confidence during a tutorial, Mrs. English pushed for them to "ask basic questions." She focused on increasing the confidence in the group because, "when you find that connection with a more quiet kid, you will find them [the student] to be more apt to get involved."

With teachers, accountability exhibited itself more in helping students meet the social demands of college-level coursework. Teachers often focused on the social components of college, namely in teaching students how to own their education rather than depending on parents to communicate with faculty. Mrs. Christian added she wanted the students to be their own advocates by " teaching them what they have to put up with, what they have to tolerate, and what they don't have to accept," and learning how and when to voice their thoughts so that they are also respectful to a college professor.

Along with self-advocacy, reciprocity was stressed within this community in multiple ways. Students made sure that their peers knew and understood that there were high expectations both inside and outside the AVID program. Tutors helped motivate students to hold to these expectations by forming bonds with each student. By using the community bond to hold its members accountable in a

meaningful way, the actions of the AVID program fostered the development of trust.

Perhaps the biggest example of trust was in the Senior Challenge that served as a rite of passage to solidify the trust that the community members have in each other. This event became an opportunity for everyone to completely share of himself or herself in order to have a peak experience. Tarran explained this by saying; "we [AVID students] wouldn't do any of this [AVID activities] if it wasn't for the trust in us as a family." Or as Denton described how he felt about the adults on the trip in saying, "there's just something about ya'll that made us trust ya'll more… we felt more comfortable with ya'll because ya'll actually gave a damn about us." Wesley talked of trust among the students as, "Just being there together for four or five days, that got us pretty closer than we wanted to be." He also talked about building trust with the adults "They [the teachers] make that intent to actually genuinely care for you so you know that you can trust them and confide in them."

By organizing the community along shared values, the members of the network are able to hold themselves to a higher standard of achievement. In order to meet this standard, a set of norms must exist that will bind the group together in their tasks that will lead the students to being college-ready. These norms require its members to be vulnerable, in that they must admit what they do not know, and

be willing to share their academic and nonacademic resources in order to build trust.

Summary

Using the lens of social capital theory, this chapter explored the reasons the students and adults joined AVID and how the use of nonacademic interaction, through community support and resource sharing, allowed members to learn from each other. All of this was shown to contribute to the norms and values of the group through building trust, through rites of passage, and through demonstrating reciprocity during their group tasks. These stages will be used in the next chapter to revisit this study's research questions.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to better understand how members of the AVID community define and perceive family-feel and how it contributes to their college-readiness. Because the large majority of research on AVID has used quantitative methods, focused more on mechanisms of the system, and did not explore the role of the family-like environment, this study looked to answer research questions of a qualitative nature that investigated the perceptions of those who participated in the AVID experience. By investigating the nonacademic interactions that take place within the AVID community, we can better understand the role that social networks play in providing access to resources that aid in college-readiness.

In the chapter, I review this study's research questions and then offer implications related to the findings, specifically those related to policy, practice, and theory. Following this, I address the limitations of the study and the recommendations for future research. Finally, this chapter ends with a summary and conclusion of this research.

Research Questions

The primary method of data collection for this case study was interviews from the perspective of community members during a limited period of time (Yin, 2014). The interviews focused on the non-curricular aspects of the interactions

87

between the participants in order to answer the study's research questions. The following sections provide the details related to these questions.

Research Question 1: What do AVID teachers, tutors, administrators, and students perceive contributes to the creation of family-feel?

In previous research, a family-feel was identified to exist in AVID communities, particularly those in Texas (Watt et al., 2010). This study found that consistent, informal interactions between community members that valued student contributions led to the development of lasting personal connections. These elements contributed to a family-like atmosphere.

Informal interactions were defined as any type of contact or collaboration that occurred outside the AVID curriculum. Over the course of the participants' time in AVID at North High School, many opportunities arose that allowed this type of contact to happen. Informal interactions emerged throughout the students' experience during their high school career. When uneasiness was felt, it was rooted in the fact that they, or their family, had never gone through the procedures for college acceptance so they trusted the adults in the AVID community to fill this void. This is where teachers, tutors, and administrators would step outside of the curriculum and provide information to inform the students about college and the admissions process, financial aid, and other topics in order to allay their fears. Adult participants provided information gained from their personal experiences and previous graduates of the program came back to serve as role models for

students in the program. Seeing their success helped motivate the current students to achieve their goals.

These connections extended beyond the focus on college goals. Students were invited to take part in the adults' celebrations such as when childbirths and marriages took place. They also came together when members of the AVID community encountered serious illness or loss. Through informal interactions, the participants were able to see each other as multi-faceted individuals, rather than merely inhabiting their roles as student, teacher, tutor, or administrator.

The second aspect of family-feel that was discussed was that students routinely felt valued as part of the learning process as they became college-ready. All students commented on how they felt at home in the AVID classroom. Most importantly, the student participants spoke about how their AVID teachers were more concerned about their needs as individuals, as compared to their other classes where they felt those teachers were more focused on the course content. Students could feel that their needs were always a priority in their AVID classes. For example, students commented on how they felt their non-AVID teachers were concerned about them during the 90 minutes they were in class, but their AVID teachers were concerned about them all the time.

From the adult perspective, all adults viewed their roles as being advocates for the students while in and out of the school. The AVID teachers did this by creating a safe and positive atmosphere in their classrooms. Tutors routinely

89

promoted AVID students outside the school when referring to them as "their

kids." The administrator used the successes of AVID students in his role as

teacher appraiser during classroom observations. All adult participants attributed

this ability to advocate for their students to their deep knowledge of the students'

backgrounds and successes.

In order to acquire this deeper knowledge, the participants needed to form

personal connections with each other. For this community, that meant having

individuals who were willing to openly share their history with the students in

order to foster trust. This manifested in adults freely providing information about

their path to college, their current struggles, and their moments of pride. This did

not take place as a means of directing attention toward the adults, but rather as a

means to relate to where the student was at a given time in their high school

experience. For example, students often experienced uneasiness when it came to

submitting their application, not from lack of confidence but from anxiety over

being the first from their family to apply. The teachers and tutors would counsel

the students through this emotional event by relating their experience with the

application process. In doing so, the participants of this study were able to create

strong connections to the adults and each other. Not only did these bonds help

allay students' immediate fears, but it would also lead them to return to North

High School to be tutors, or to volunteer to speak to current students about their

90

experiences in college, or to support the community in times of need, such as illness and death of community members.

Research Question 2: How do teachers operationalize family-feel in their classrooms?

For the teachers of this study, family-feel is a concept that goes beyond the curriculum. On paper, they can follow scope and sequence in order to teach the AVID strategies. However, the teachers did more than that. They operationalized family-feel by blurring, and in some cases removing, the line between teacher and student through shared expectations and participating in the same experiences as their students.

They also shared their own histories. Timing was key in telling these stories so as to impart this information when the students were experiencing similar events, rather than the teacher giving their biography all at once. In doing this, students learned that one teacher struggled with AP classes as well, another teacher had to go through high school as a teen mother, and another had to transfer from one college to another because they did not fit in at their first school. This revealed to the students that their teachers experienced similar things in their lives, which helped them relate to them as individuals. An additional benefit was that teachers were able to become role models by showing that mistakes or obstacles are inevitable, but they need not derail you from achieving success.

Finally, teachers were able to operationalize family-feel by taking part in student experiences as a partner in the inquiry process. In AVID, experiential opportunities put the students and teachers on equal footing. The most obvious example was the AVID Senior Challenge, where the students and teachers had to physically struggle through the same events, such as climbing a mountain. However, it also occurred when the teachers shared their struggles from their college experiences in the presence of the AVID community. That is to say that the students witnessed their teachers having to process their notes, study for tests, and write essays, because those teachers shared the reality of being a life-long learner with their students.

By blurring the lines between the experiences of the teachers and students, the AVID teachers were able to create opportunities for students to relate to them in meaningful ways. By sharing in their struggles, revealing their histories, and holding themselves to the same standards as their students, they were able to create an atmosphere of openness in their classrooms. Through this, they were able to create the family-feel that encouraged a sense of belonging among the students.

Research Question 3: In what ways do students perceive family-feel contributes to college readiness?

Based on prior quantitative research of AVID and its mechanisms, it would be easy to assume that students who can obtain a specific set of skills could

92

become college-ready. However, Conley (2010), in his four dimensions of college-readiness, posits that academic skills and behaviors are nested within a larger category related to the contextual skills of the college experience. These components include the collaborative relationships and social behaviors of higher education, as well as college knowledge, such as college admissions, financial aid, degree plans. Therefore, the students who participated in this study perceived the family-feel of AVID contributed to their college readiness in that it allowed them to witness the responsibilities of a college student through the experience of others, allowed them to share in the processes of completing college requirements, and it created the opportunity to be accepted as a member of a community.

In witnessing college responsibilities, students could experience, in real time, the responsibilities of college by observing and hearing from their tutors, who were in undergraduate studies, or teachers, in graduate school, about their college experiences. For example, when students were giving updates on assignments and deadlines, the adults would in turn share their undergraduate or graduate school progress with the students. When the Federal Application for Free Student Aid (FAFSA) forms had to be filled out in the spring semester of the students' senior year, the teachers and tutors, who were also filling out their forms, guided them. The adults' willingness to share their experiences and the

students' desire to use their teachers, tutors, and administrator as mentors in these processes created a tighter bond.

In addition to applying to college or filling out a FAFSA form, there were many events that served as benchmarks for students as they pursued their college dreams. The student participants spoke of the small celebrations that occurred as they received their college acceptance letters. Adults recalled the transformation that students went through on college trips or on the Senior Challenge. All of which served to reinforce the norms of the community in order to help the students become college-ready.

When reflecting on their high school career, the student participants reported a change in their relationships with the AVID teachers, tutors, and administrators. That is to say that by the time they became seniors, they started to interact with the adult participants as equals. Students described feeling like a fellow college student, from the adults, upon receiving their acceptance letter. During events where all participants were taking part, both physically and mentally, in the same challenges, the student and adult participants mentioned how they all felt as though they accomplished something as peers.

Research Question 4: How does social capital theory explain the concept of family-feel?

As stated earlier, social capital is the components of moral obligation and norms, social values, and social networks in a group. Family-feel was described

as developing a community of support though the use of informal and nonacademic interaction. At the heart of social capital theory is the concept that networks matter. Therefore, social capital theory can explain the concept of family-feel through the idea of reciprocity, the types of social capital available, and the building of trust among the community.

The goal of AVID is to help students get into and succeed into a university by making students college-ready. The student participants expressed that they joined AVID specifically to get them into college. The adult participants all expressed a desire to get more out of their professional experience so that they could become better at their craft or serve as stewards from the educational system that they benefited from as students. The relationships observed between the students and adult members of this community are an example of reciprocity. For example, the students joined AVID in order to prepare them for college, the adults joined in order to have a more personal connection to their students and their job. This arrangement provided for different types of social capital.

First, bridging social capital is what is experienced when diverse groups of people come together. Since one characteristic of AVID students is that they are traditionally under-represented in higher education, the potential for a demographically diverse student population exists, meaning the community benefits by learning from the multiple routes required to get students from different starting points accepted to college. Diversity can also be found in the

adult population from an experiential standpoint. For instance, not all adults will have graduated from the same university, nor will they hold the same degrees. Therefore, there is the potential for a wide array of resources to be available for the students to draw from and an equally varied set of cultural resources that the adults can learn from their interactions with students. This is supported in research showing groups with members that have a wide variety of resources tend to be higher functioning (Ahn, 2008).

Secondly, when people choose to be part of any group, which in this case is AVID, there exists an exclusivity built around accepting the values of the group, in this case the pursuit of a college degree and the active participation in the community. In this case, bonding social capital, as demonstrated by choosing to participate in AVID, is able to provide the structural resources for students to achieve. For example, the adults represented those who have either attended college or hold a college degree. In order for the students to attend college and eventually obtain a degree, they must learn academic skills as well as how to navigate the college admission and degree process. The adults of the AVID community provided the necessary information resources (i.e., capital) to help the students begin their journey to a degree, which is unknown territory for them as first-generation college students.

Reciprocity, bridging social capital, and bonding social capital do not work without trust. Trust is where the family-feel of AVID intersects most

frequently with social capital theory. Students can have the drive to go to college, the AVID community can be diverse in population, and they can all choose to interact under the agreement of reciprocity, but without trust, all of the resources cannot be mobilized for the benefit of the group as a whole. Fukuyama (1999) refers to this as a positive radius of trust.

This positive radius of trust can be witnessed in the AVID community from the moment its members choose to join. When they first join, students form a small group of trusted members and adults represent a separate group. Through meaningful classroom interactions and shared experiences, referenced earlier in this chapter, the ties between these two groups grow until all members are tightly bonded together. Once this occurs, new roles, family-like in appearance, are adopted which creates acceptance within the community. Because the AVID community shares common values or goals, it is able to produce a higher level of social capital overall. Therefore, social capital theory helps explain the family-feel of the AVID community through its reliance on reciprocity, bridging social capital, bonding social capital, and trust.

Implications of Findings

Based on the findings, there are implications that affect future policy, practice, and theory.

Implications for Policy

Statistics for decades have chronicled an achievement gap existing between demographic groups in terms of high school graduation and college enrollment and graduation. Data suggest that AVID is able to close this gap beyond that of other college preparatory programs. This study indicates that there are contextual elements at play within AVID that greatly influence the outcome of student performance. Thus, AVID's successful approaches are not strictly limited to its academic supports or pedagogies, but include relational variables (i.e., family feel).

This study showed that access to important start-up information, such as exposure to the admissions process, knowledge of how financial aid works, and opportunity to interact with people who have attended college, is just as important to college success as academic performance. These are important components to the AVID College Readiness System, which has been shown to narrow the achievement gap. Therefore, this study implies that there may need to be a shift in concentration away from policy focusing on the achievement gap, testing outcomes, and directed to creating policy that addresses the opportunity gap, such as dealing with the lack of resources from both inside the school, such as academic behaviors, and outside of the school, meaning socio-economic issues and life circumstances (Carter & Welner, 2013; Putnam, 2016). The opportunities, provided by the diverse social networks, or AVID's community of

98

support, were very important in helping the students truly become college-ready as defined by Conley (2012).

Implications for Practice

The AVID curriculum covers many academic skills, however, the participants of this study were able to show that building relationships through their interactions within the AVID community at North High School served as the medium for these skills to take root.   By providing opportunities for community members to share of themselves and tap into their social networks, all participants were able to nurture the development of trust so that personal goals could be met (i.e., college acceptance). Trust was an outcome of creating and maintaining a family-like atmosphere.

This study was able to show how social interactions within a tightly developed campus community are able to provide opportunities that my participants deemed beneficial to both the students' college-readiness while increasing the adults' sense of job satisfaction. Thus, other college preparatory programs or support initiatives working with students who do not have a prior history of interaction with higher education should consider how they can also develop and sustain a family feel to more directly support and aid their students in becoming college ready, which happily also led to increases in staff motivation.

Further, in terms of hiring practices, this study was able to demonstrate how the background and network connections of its adult participants greatly

99

influenced their efficacy in the classroom. The resources that a teacher, tutor, or administrator can access from outside the school is just as important. By looking at potential employees in terms of how they can expand the resources available to the school, educational organizations can create a deeper well from which their students can draw in order to achieve.

Finally, this study's adult participants represented a wide variety of paths to degree attainment. By matching employee histories to possible student backgrounds, a mentoring opportunity is created that could positively influence student success. For example, none of the adults in this study followed the traditional path of high school graduation to college to degree. Their circuitous routes to their degrees proved to be eye-opening for the students of this community, as some have or may confront similar challenges on their paths, such as going to community college or even switching universities. Therefore, the ability for a potential employee to relate to the students is equally as necessary as subject content.

Implications for Theory

To date, there has been no published research using social capital theory to explain how AVID helps with college-readiness. This study shows that the networks that people belong to greatly influence the ability of a community to thrive. Putnam (2000) explains this phenomenon through the use of bowling leagues and civic groups, but this study illustrates that it can also be witnessed

within educational institutions in regards to student success. By allowing members to voluntarily join, there is an intrinsic motivation that drives the community's interactions.

Using social capital theory as the lens for viewing classroom and peer interaction provides for non-academic aspects of the educational process to come to the forefront. This study was able to show that reciprocity influences classroom interaction. It illustrates the different motivations that exist in the many educational roles present within a school as well as the importance of trust amongst these roles. Therefore, future research into social networks could prove to be beneficial to both schools and AVID.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

As these findings suggest, family-feel within the AVID community is something that the participants perceived as contributing to their success. However, because this was a case study, these findings are limited to the confines of this community, at a particular time, with a certain group of individuals. Therefore, future research into what contributes to family-feel would need to be conducted in other locations to gain a broader understanding of family feel as it relates to AVID. This trait was unique in terms of AVID in Texas, so studying AVID in other locations and other states as a means to explore the existence of family feel could be beneficial.

While the actual events that these participants experienced are unique to their community, a comparative study of the interactions and events that exist in other AVID communities may yield information on what informal and formal practices exist that lead to a tightly bonded community.

Further, this study used social capital theory to view the AVID community; future studies may want to look at other types of social or developmental theories to explain the interactions that are present. For instance, Tuckman's group development model (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977) may help organize the stages of the AVID community's progress. Other theoretical lenses (e.g., McGrath's Time, Interaction, and Performance Theory, Hackman's Multilevel Perspective, or Ecological Systems Theory) may better illustrate why certain interactions exist or why certain individuals choose to stay in the community.

In addition, it might be fruitful to investigate if other locations have a similar gender population to this school. If so, then it would be necessary to investigate the conditions that lead to a higher female population in relation to the male population of AVID. Also, future research could explore if males and females experience AVID differently and gain different benefits. This work might be helpful to better understand the gender imbalance at this school and others that face similar circumstances.

Finally, the limited qualitative investigations prior to this study suggest that more qualitative work is necessary to help understand why AVID seems to benefit students more than other pre-college options. Qualitative methods will allow a deeper analysis into the process, which may, in turn, help identify other benefits that arise based on the synergistic affects of the various elements of AVID.

Summary of Findings

College-readiness is a driving issue in K-12 education today. Because of this, researchers have investigated the many options available to help students prepare for the demands of higher education. One method school districts are using to help students achieve college-readiness is through the use of AVID. This study's findings contribute to the understanding of college-readiness through the use of qualitative research methods aimed at the benefits of social networks in grooming first-generation college students for life after high school by showing how nonacademic interactions can lead to community members sharing resources in order to better prepare students for success in higher education environments.

Much research exists on the Advancement Via Individual Determination College Readiness System (ACRS), specifically on the structural components of AVID (Black, Little, McCoach, Purcell, & Siegle, 2008; Contreras, 2011; Hubbard & Ottoson, 1997; Huerta et al., 2013;Watt et al, 2008). These studies are quantitative in nature; therefore, this study fills the gap in research by

qualitatively investigating how the social networks of AVID contribute to college-readiness by providing students with the contextual knowledge of higher education.

Through information gathered from interviews conducted with multiple members of a campus AVID community, this case study was able to show that the contextual information, deemed necessary for college-readiness by Conley (2010), was transmitted via the family-feel that existed between the members of this community.   While students used the AVID strategies, it was the relationships that were created between the participants that served as the vehicle for preparing the students for the social rigors and norms of higher education.

The findings of this study also contribute to the understanding of the support structure of college-readiness as indicated by previous studies that focused on student academic careers (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Cooper, 2012; Curran et al., 2013; Horvat et al., 2003). In previous studies, AVID was one of many aspects addressed. In contrast, this study focused completely on the experience of its participants within the AVID community. Participants clearly valued the relationships that existed within AVID at North High School and spoke of how their interactions prepared the students for college and served to define their community. This was informed by the identification of a family-like atmosphere that existed in AVID programs in California and Texas (Watt et al., 2008).

This study was able to expound on the family-like atmosphere by identifying interactions and perspectives within an AVID community that lead to the creation of family-feel. In using previous research that recognized that AVID students demonstrated a higher degree of college preparation than students affiliated with other programs (Watt et al., 2007), this study was allowed to more deeply investigate the culture of the AVID community in order to identify a family-like support structure that helped develop college-readiness.

By using social capital, as defined by Putnam (2000), this study was able to demonstrate how close social networks aid in college-readiness by providing access to non-academic knowledge, such as college norms and behaviors. By learning about college through the various experiences of their teachers, tutors, and the administrator, students were able to better navigate the college admission process and thrive within the higher education environment.

Concluding Reflection

This study's argument began with college readiness being the issue at play when addressing the achievement gap. It identified that AVID was a system used by many schools to address the problem of students needing to become college-ready, due to AVID demonstrating that it has the ability to close the achievement gap. Much research has been done regarding this program, but it has been quantitative in nature and has focused largely on the structure of AVID on a campus. A family-like atmosphere has been identified to exist within this program

105

via mixed methods study, but limited description of what contributes to this feel exists. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the creation of community within AVID and how the relationships among its students, teachers, tutors, and administrators aid in college readiness.

By interviewing student and adult participants on the informal processes of their experience and how they inhabited their role within the AVID community, a clearer understanding of what makes family-feel became apparent. A sense of belonging and importance that did not exist in non-AVID classrooms was identified. Through the interactions between community members and the sharing of resources, these participants were able to register moments of acceptance that lead to relationships that continued to live beyond the student-teacher relationship. It provided further insights into how AVID may successfully address both the achievement gap and the opportunity gap so often faced by underrepresented students.

106

Appendix A

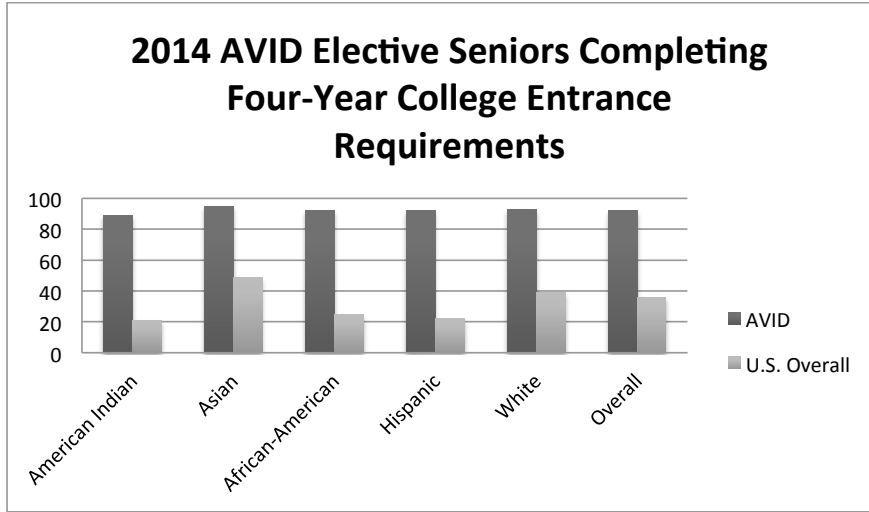Glossary

Glossary

The following terms and definitions were used in this study:

1. Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID): AVID is a college-

     readiness system designed to increase the number of students who enroll

     in four-year colleges. Although the AVID program can serve all students,

     it is designed to focus on the least served students in the "academic

     middle" who have historically failed in the educational setting (AVID,

     2016).

2. Cornell Notes: Cornell Notes were developed in the 1940s by Walter Pauk. His

     note-taking system is characterized by a right hand column for notes, a left

     hand column for generating questions and main ideas, and a summary

     section at the end of a topic.

     (http://archives.avid.org/lesson_plan_cornell_notes.html).

3. Social Capital: As defined in his essay "Bowling Alone" social capital is

     the components of moral obligation and norms, social values, and social

     networks (Putnam, 1995).

Appendix B

AVID Data

2014 AVID Elective Seniors Completing Four-Year College Entrance Requirements

Note. Adapted from "AVID Year In Review" by AVID (2014)

High School Graduates Who Took at Least One AP Exam
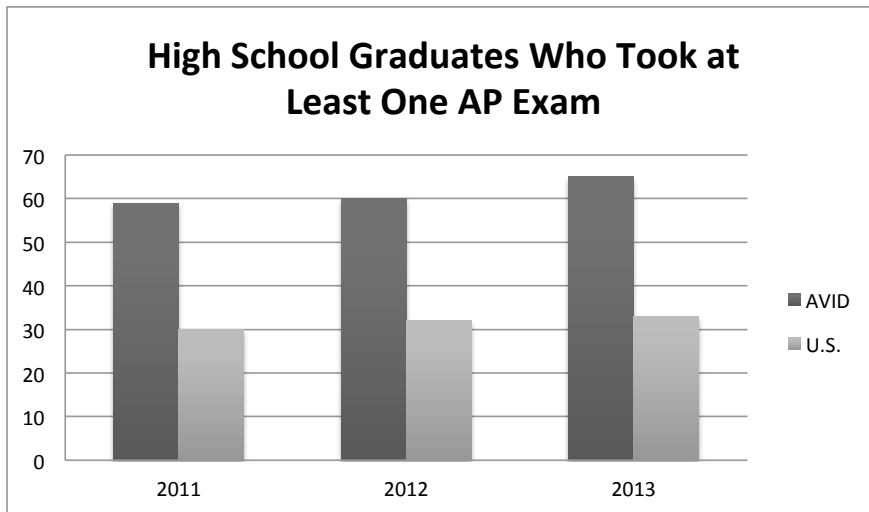
Note. For 2011, AVID (N=27,608), U.S. (N=2,993,120); For 2012, AVID (N=32,799), U.S. (N=2,946,541); For 2013, AVID (N=33,804), U.S. (N=3,022,879), Adapted from "AVID Year In Review" by AVID (2014)

Appendix C

Teacher Focus Group Interview Protocol

Teacher Focus Group Interview Protocol (for interviewer use only)

Date: _____

Group Members:

Name _____

Name _____

Name _____

Personal Information Questions

1. How did you come to be part of AVID at Lamar?

2. How would you describe AVID to someone unfamiliar with it?

3. How would you describe your role in the AVID community at North High School?

4. How would you describe your role among the faculty at North High School?

5. In what ways do you provide and advocate professional learning regarding AVID at North High School? Why?

6. What do you feel are the qualities that you bring to the AVID community?

7. How would you describe your expectations in the AVID classroom?

8. How do you encourage student engagement in the AVID classroom?

9. How do you serve as an advocate for AVID students at North High School? In regards to advanced courses?

10. Is there anything else you want to add about your experience with AVID that we haven't already discussed.

Appendix D

Tutor Focus Group Interview Protocol

Tutor Focus Group Interview Protocol (for interviewer use only)

Date: _____

Group Members:

Name _____

Name _____

Personal Information Questions

1. How did you come to be part of AVID at Lamar?

2. How would you describe AVID to someone unfamiliar with it?

3. How would you describe your role in the AVID community at North High School?

4. What do you feel are the qualities that you bring to the AVID community?

5. Part of your role in the tutor contract is to act as a role model for AVID students, in what ways do you fill this role?

6. You have helped with AVID activities outside of the AVID classroom, how has your participation in such activities fit with your role as a tutor?

7. How do you encourage student engagement in the AVID classroom?

8. How do you view your role during AVID tutorials?

9. In what ways do you serve as an advocate for AVID among your peers? Why?

10. Is there anything else you want to add about your experience with AVID that we haven't already discussed.

Appendix E

Individual Administrator Interview Protocol

Individual Administrator Interview Protocol

Name_____

1. How would you describe your role in AVID?

2. Why did you join AVID?

3. What about AVID has made you stay in the program?

4. How would you describe AVID to someone who was not familiar with it?

5. What do you feel are the qualities of an AVID student? Are AVID students different from other students? In what way?

6. Given your relatively limited exposure to AVID students on a daily basis, in what ways do you interact with AVID students?

7. How would you describe an AVID classroom? Is it different from other classes? In what way?

8. In what ways do you advocate for AVID on campus? Amongst fellow administrators?

9. You have taken part in AVID activities that go beyond the stated responsibilities in the AVID materials; in what way do you feel your participation contributes to AVID at North High School?

10. Is there anything else about your experience with AVID that we haven't discussed that you would like me to know?

Appendix F

Individual Student Interview Protocol

Individual Student Interview Protocol

Name_____

1. How would you describe yourself as a student?

2. Why did you join AVID?

3. What about AVID has made you stay in the program?

4. How would you describe AVID to someone who was not familiar with it?

5. What do you feel are the qualities of an AVID student?

6. Are AVID students different from other students? Why or why not?

7. How would you describe an AVID classroom? Is it different from other classes? In what way?

8. How would you describe your relationship with other AVID students? Adults?

9. You have been accepted to college, in what ways has AVID contributed to you being accepted?

10. Is there anything else about your experience with AVID that we haven't discussed that you would like me to know?

Appendix G

Teacher Recruitment Letter & Email

Dear teacher

I am writing to invite you to participate in my dissertation study regarding AVID. The purpose of this research study is to investigate the creation of the AVID community and how the relationships among its students and adults aid in college readiness. You are receiving this letter because you have taken part in the AVID program at Lamar High School as either a teacher or tutor.

You are eligible for this study in that you have participated in the Lamar AVID program for a minimum of three years.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please complete the enclosed form, and mail it back to me in the pre-paid envelope. You can also contact me by email at travis.horton@mavs.uta.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Travis W. Horton

Appendix H

Tutor Recruitment Letter & Email

Dear tutor,

I am writing to invite you to participate in my dissertation study regarding AVID. The purpose of this research study is to investigate the creation of the AVID community and how the relationships among its students and adults aid in college readiness. You are receiving this letter because you have taken part in the AVID program at Lamar High School as either a teacher or tutor.

You are eligible for this study in that you have participated in the Lamar AVID program for a minimum of three years.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please complete the enclosed form, and mail it back to me in the pre-paid envelope. You can also contact me by email at travis.horton@mavs.uta.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Travis W. Horton

Appendix I

Administrator Recruitment Letter & Email

Dear administrator,

I am writing to invite you to participate in my dissertation study regarding AVID. The purpose of this research study is to investigate the creation of the AVID community and how the relationships among its students and adults aid in college readiness. You are receiving this letter because you have taken part in the AVID program at Lamar High School as either a teacher or tutor.

You are eligible for this study in that you have participated in the Lamar AVID program for a minimum of three years.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please complete the enclosed form, and mail it back to me in the pre-paid envelope. You can also contact me by email at travis.horton@mavs.uta.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Travis W. Horton

Appendix J

Student Recruitment Letter & Email

Dear student,

        I am writing to tell you about the dissertation study regarding. The purpose of this research study is to investigate the creation of the AVID community and how the relationships among its students and adults aid in college readiness. You are receiving this letter because you have taken part in the AVID program at Lamar High School during your high school career.

        The purpose of this research study is to investigate the creation of the AVID community and how the relationships among its students and adults aid in college readiness.

        You are eligible for this study in that you have participated in the Lamar AVID program for a minimum of three school years.

        If you are interested in learning more about this study, please complete the enclosed form, and mail it back to me in the pre-paid envelope. You can also contact me by email at travis.horton@mavs.uta.edu.

        Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Travis W. Horton

Appendix K
Opt In Form

OPT-IN FORM

The Power of Community: Building Social Networks Through the Advancement

Via individual Determination (AVID) College Readiness System

Please complete this form and return in the pre-paid envelope provided

I am interested in learning more about this study. Please contact me using the following information:

Name: _____

Telephone(s): _____

Best time and day to call:_____

Email: _____@_____

Appendix L

The University of Texas at Arlington Internal Review Board Approval

<div align="center">

UT Arlington
Informed Consent Document – Written Version

</div>

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Travis Horton
K-16 Educational Policy and Research Studies,
The University of Texas at Arlington
3603 Ravenhill Ln
Arlington, TX 76016
469-774-3907
travis.horton@mavs.uta.edu

FACULTY ADVISOR
Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky
K-16 Educational Policy and Research Studies,
The University of Texas at Arlington
tobolow@uta.edu

TITLE OF PROJECT
The Power of Community: Building Social Networks through the Advancement Via
Individual Determination (AVID) College Readiness System

INTRODUCTION
You are being asked to participate in a research study about your experience in the
Advancement Via individual Determination (AVID) College Readiness System. Your
participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing your participation at
any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

PURPOSE
The purpose of this study is to better understand how members of the AVID community
perceive family-feel and how it contributes to the students' college preparation.

DURATION
Participation in this study will consist of an interview lasting approximately one hour in
duration. A follow-up interview may be needed in order to gain clarity regarding your
responses.

NUMBER OF SUBJECTS
The number of anticipated subjects in this research study is 11 (five students, three
teachers, two tutors, and one administrator).

PROCEDURES
Interviews will be conducted in the following manner:

IRB Approval Date: **AUG 1 8 2015**   1

- Students will be interviewed individually in order to accurately capture perceptions of their experience.
- The Administrator will be interviewed individually in order to gather information about their experience in regards to their role in the AVID community.
- Teachers and tutors will take part in a focus group interviews based on their roles in order to gain a deeper understanding of their respective responsibilities in the AVID community.

If participating students prefer a focus group interview, or teachers and tutors prefer individual interviews, those requests will be granted. Interviews, for all participants, will take place outside of the campus atmosphere, as to eliminate any pressure of hierarchy or issue of coercion. Participants may choose a location that is optimal for their comfort, such as home, or other locations where audio equipment can be used.

The interview will be audio recorded. After the interview, the tape will be transcribed, which means they will be typed exactly as they were recorded, word-for-word, by the researcher. The tape will be kept with the transcription for potential future research involving social networks and family-feel. The tape and transcription will not be used for any future research purposes not described here.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS
There is no financial benefit to participants for this study. This is a chance for members of the campus AVID community to tell their story. Therefore, there is no direct benefit to the participant for taking part in this study.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
There are no perceived risks or discomforts for participating in this research study. Should you experience any discomfort please inform the researcher, you have the right to quit any study procedures at any time at no consequence.

COMPENSATION
There is no financial compensation for participation in this research study.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES
There are no alternative procedures offered for this study. However, you can elect not to participate in the study or quit at any time at no consequence.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of this signed consent form and all data collected, including transcriptions/tapes, from this

2

IRB Approval Date: **AUG 1 8 2015**

study will be stored in Trimble Hall Room 105 for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be anonymous. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS
Questions about this research study may be directed to [Travis Horton – travis.horton@mavs.uta.edu or Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky - tobolow@uta.edu]. Any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

_____
Signature and printed name of principal investigator or person obtaining consent   Date

CONSENT

By signing below, you confirm that you are 18 years of age or older and have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

_____
SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER   **DATE**

IRB Approval Date: **AUG 1 8 2015**   3

132

Appendix M

The University of Texas at Arlington Internal Review Board Exemption Determination

Institutional Review Board
Notification of Exemption

August 18, 2015

Travis Horton
Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

Protocol Number: 2015-0877

Protocol Title: *The Power of Community: Building Social Networks through the Advancement*
Via Individual Determination (AVID) College Readiness System

<div align="center">

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

</div>

The UT Arlington Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, or designee, has reviewed the above
referenced study and found that it qualified for exemption under the federal guidelines for the protection
of human subjects as referenced at Title 45CFR Part 46.101(b)(1) and (2).

- (1)Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving
  normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional
  strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional
  techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

- (2)Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement),
  survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:(i) information
  obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, either directly or
  through identifiers linked to the subject; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses
  outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be
  damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You are therefore authorized to begin the research as of **August 18, 2015.**

Pursuant to Title 45 CFR 46.103(b)(4)(iii), investigators are required to, "promptly report to the IRB *any*
proposed changes in the research activity, and to ensure that such changes in approved research, during
the period for which IRB approval has already been given, are **not initiated without prior IRB review
and approval** except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject." Please be
advised that as the principal investigator, you are required to report local adverse (unanticipated) events to
the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services within 24 hours of the occurrence or upon
acknowledgement of the occurrence. All investigators and key personnel identified in the protocol must
have documented Human Subject Protection (HSP) Training on file with this office. Completion
certificates are valid for 2 years from completion date.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS ARLINGTON | OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION
REGULATORY SERVICES

The UT Arlington Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services appreciates your continuing commitment to the protection of human subjects in research. Should you have questions, or need to report completion of study procedures, please contact Alyson Stearns at 817-272-9329 or astearns@uta.edu. You may also contact Regulatory Services at 817-272-3723 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

REGULATORY SERVICES
SERVICES

The University of Texas at Arlington, Center for Innovation
202 E. Border Street, Ste. 201, Arlington, Texas 76010, Box#19188
(T) 817-272-3723 (F) 817-272-5808 (E) regulatoryservices@uta.edu (W) www.uta.edu/rs

135

References

Ahn, J. (2010). The role of social network locations in the college access

     mentoring of urban youth. *Education and Urban Society, 42(7),* 839-859.

AVID. (2013). *2013-2014 Certification policy for AVID secondary sites.*

     Retrieved from: https://my.avid.org/files/8825.pdf

AVID. (2014). *AVID's impact.* Retrieved from: http://avid.org/avid-impact.ashx

AVID. (2014). *Year in Review: 2014.* San Diego, CA: AVID Center.

AVID. (2015). *Implementation – high school* [Powerpoint Slides]. Retrieved

     from https://my.avid.org/file_sharing/default.aspx?id=25306

Black, A., Little, C., McCoach, D., Purcell, J., Siegle, D. (2008) Advancement via

     individual determination: Method selection in conclusions about program

     effectiveness. *The Journal of Educational Research, 102*(2)*,* 111-123.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J.G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook for*

     Theory and research for the Sociology of Education, (pp. 241-258)

     Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Cabrera, N., & Padilla, A. (2004). Entering and succeeding in the "culture of

     college": The story of two Mexican heritage students. *Hispanic Journal of*

     Behavioral Sciences, 26(2), 152-170.

Carter, P., & Welner, K. (2013). *Closing the opportunity gap: What America must*

     do to give ever child an even chance. New York, NY: Oxford University

     Press.

Conley, T. (2012). *College and career ready: Helping all students succeed beyond high school.* Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass.

Contreras, F. (2011). Strengthening the bridge to higher education for academically promising underrepresented students. *Journal of Advanced Academics, 22*(3), 500-526.

Cooper, K. (2012). Safe, affirming, and productive spaces: Classroom engagement among Latina high school students. *Urban Education, 48*(4), 490-528.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches.* Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Curran, N., Ned, J., & Winkleby, M. (2013). Engaging students in community health: A public health advocacy curriculum. *Health Promotion Practice,* 1-10.

Fontana, A., & Prokos, A. (2007). *The interview: From formal to postmodern.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Gaddis, S. (2012). What's in a relationship? An examination of social capital, race and class in mentoring relationships. *Social Forces, 90*(4), 1237-1269.

Garcia-Reid, P. (2007). Examining social capital as a mechanism for improving school engagement among low-income Hispanic girls. *Youth & Society, 39*(2), 164-181.

Halpern, D. (2005). *Social Capital.* Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Hemphill, F., & Rahman, A. (2011). *How Hispanic and white students in public schools perform in mathematics and reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress* (Research Report No. NCES 2011-459). Retrieved from National Center for Education Statistics website: http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/studies/2011459.pdf

Hill, L. (2008). School strategies and the "college-linking" process: Reconsidering the effects of high schools on college enrollment. *Sociology of Education, 81*(1), 53-76.

Horvat, E., Weininger, E., & Lareau, A. (2003). From social ties to social capital: Class differences in the relations between school and parent networks. *American Education Research Journal, 40*(2), 319-351.

Hubbard, L., & Ottoson, J. (1997). When a bottom-up innovation meets itself as a top-down policy: The AVID untracking program. *Science Communication, 19*(1), 41-55.

Huerta, J., Watt, K., & Butcher, J. (2013). Examining advancement via individual determination (AVID) and its impact on middle school rigor and student preparedness. *American Secondary Education, 41*(2), 24-37.

Maxwell, J. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

McGinnis, R., Mettler, C., & Schiro, P. (2014). *AVID elective essentials for high school.* San Diego, CA: AVID Press.

McKillip, M., Godfrey, K., & Rawls, A. (2012). Rules of engagement: Building a college-going culture in an urban school. *Urban Education, 48*(4), 529-556.

Morgan, S., Sorensen, A. (1999). Parental networks, social closure, and mathematics learning: A test of Coleman's social capital explanation of school effect, *American Sociological Review, 64*(5), 661-681.

Morgan, S., & Todd, J. (2009). Intergenerational closure and academic achievement in high school: A new evaluation of Coleman's conjecture. *Sociology of Education, 82*(3), 267-285.

Perez, W., Espinoza, R., Ramos, K., Coronado, H., & Cortes, R. (2009). Academic resilience among undocumented Latino students. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 21*(2), 149-181.

Putnam, R. (1993). The prosperous community: Social capital and public life. *The American Prospect, 4(13),* 1-11.

Putnam, R. (1995). Bowling Alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of Democracy, 6(*1*),* 65-78.

Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community.* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Putnam, R. (2016). *Our kids: The American dream in crisis.* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Rendon, M. (2014). "Caught up": How urban violence and peer ties contribute to

    high school noncompletion. *Social Problems, 61(1),* 61-82.

Smith, K. (2014). *Access and diversity in the running start program: A*

    comparison of Washington's running start program to other state level

    dual enrollment programs hosted on a college campus. Retrieved from

    the Washington Student Achievement Council website:

    http://www.wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2014.04.24.052c.Report.Runni

    ng%20Start.pdf.

Swanson, M. (1989). Advancement via individual determination: Project avid.

    Educational Leadership, 46(5), 63-64.

Tuckman, B., & Jensen, A. (1977) Stages of small group development revisited.

    Group and Organizational Studies, 2(4), 419-427.

Vanneman, A., Hamilton, L., Anderson, J., & Rahman, T. (2009) *How black and*

    white students in public school perform in mathematics and reading on the

    National Assessment of Education Progress (Research Report No. NCES

    2009-455). Retrieved from National Center for Education Statistics

    website: http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009455

Watt, K., Huerta, J., & Lozano, A. (2007). A comparison study of AVID and

    GEAR UP 10th-grade students in two high school in the Rio Grand Valley

    of Texas. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 12(2),* 185-

    212.

Watt, K., Johnston, D., Huerta, J., Mendiola, I., & Alkan, E. (2008). Retention of

      first-generation college-going seniors in the college preparatory program

      AVID. *American Secondary Education, 37(1),* 17-40.

Wiley, A., Wyatt, J., & Camara, W. (2010). *The development of a*

      multidimensional college readiness index (Research Report No. 2010-3).

      Retrieved from the College Board. New York, NY.

Yin, R. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Thousand

      Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Yin, R. (2011). *Qualitative research from start to finish.* New York, NY:

      Guilford Press.

Biographical Information

Travis W. Horton is a native Texan. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Texas State University, (1999) then Southwest Texas State University, and later his Master's degree in Instructional Leadership from Sam Houston State University (2010). He has been a journeyman educator since 2003, working as a social studies teacher, athletic coach, ropes course manager, and AVID coordinator.

Travis has developed adventure based education projects such as Freshmen Field Labs, where high school freshmen use college level science lab curriculum to conduct field research, and the AVID Senior Challenge, a four-day adventure trek designed to push students to what Maslow calls the peak experience. Heavily influenced by his time with the Boy Scouts of America and his adventure education work in Russia, Travis looks to continue research in areas that investigate human potential.

Travis, his wife Ferrah, and their two daughters, Laurel and Islay, live in Arlington, Texas where he is an AVID Coordinator and founder of Renegade Dynamics, an adventure education consulting group.