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Speaking the language of integration: a case study of South Boulevard Foreign Language Academic Immersion Magnet

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SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF INTEGRATION:
A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH BOULEVARD FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACADEMIC
IMMERSION MAGNET

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Educational Theory, Policy & Practice

by
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B.A., Brigham Young University, 1994
M.A., Texas A & M University, 1998
August 2008
DEDICATION

To my parents, for their unfailing love and dedication and for just “getting me.”

And to Brent, without whom my world would be a severely impoverished place.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my adviser and mentor, Dr. Petra Munro Hendry. Thank you for all your support, feedback, criticism, and for knowing when to push, when to pull, and when to let me work things out on my own. Thank you for assuring me that I really could finish this project when I worried it might never happen. Your commitment to education, democracy, equality, and good teaching inspires me. I want to thank Dr. Miles Richardson for always being on my team and for giving me straight-up advice when I needed it. Thank you for just being nice—many times, I needed a friend more than anything else! Thank you to Dr. Denise Egéa-Kuehne for advising me early on in the Ph.D. program. Thank you to Dr. Ann Trousdale for nurturing my love of good literature—for adults and for children—and for the friendly, encouraging advice you gave me on more than one occasion. A special thank-you to Dr. Margaret-Mary Sulentic Dowell for stepping in at the eleventh hour and for giving me numerous pointers along the way.

I want to especially thank the South Boulevard teachers, administrators, and students with whom I have had the pleasure of associating over the last six years. Thank you for allowing me into your school and into your lives to do this research. Thank you in particular for teaching my children and for being a part of creating a positive, healthy school environment for them. I entrusted them to you for six years, and that is no small thing. I have tried to repay that debt over the years by helping when I was able, but I know that in the end, I no doubt came up short. A special thank you to the South Boulevard parents I have known over the years. It has been an honor to be part of such a diverse group of parents who are committed to their children’s education.

A special thank you to my three beautiful children: Kennedy, Marin, and Stuart. I hope I didn’t miss too many things or yell too loudly or do too many huffy breaths after your umpteen
requests to get you another drink of milk, practice a duet with you on the piano, watch you ride your bike or jump on the pogo stick, read a book to you, or help you with homework. Or that if I did, you will quickly forget and maybe even forgive. I feel profoundly privileged to be your mother and hope I live up to that privilege—at least occasionally. And to my husband, Brent, who believed in me more than I believed in myself. And who read many drafts of many papers (somewhat begrudgingly, I think, because I often didn’t like his feedback), took over carpool duties with little or no advanced notice, listened to countless cries of “I can’t do it!”, and did many baths-books-bedtimes solo—and almost all with a smile. I could never have done this—or much else, for that matter—without you. And even if I could, I wouldn’t want to.
PREFACE

“Public schools are not merely schools for the public, but schools of publicness: institutions where we learn what it means to be a public and start down the road toward common national and civic identity. They are the forges of our citizenship and the bedrock of our democracy” (Barber, 1997, p. 22).

I’m from Texas. My parents are university professors. My three siblings and I are all products of Texas public schools, which served us remarkably well—academically and socially. Like so many other Americans, we lived in a mostly segregated neighborhood: all of our neighbors were White and middle-class. We went to school, however, with kids from all walks of life. Our classes had healthy mixes of Whites, Hispanics, Blacks, and Asian-Pacific Islanders.

In the first grade, I had a crush on a Black boy named Horatio. My parents looked up his phone number in the phone book and allowed me to call him the night before Valentine’s Day to ask if he would be my Valentine. My mom painstakingly braided my blonde hair in cornrows for Show-and-Tell Day so I could look like some of my classmates. In the fourth grade, Héctor sat at our lunch table and kept us all laughing with his silly antics.

I shouldn’t paint an idyllic portrait of the public schools I attended. Sure, there was tracking—especially in the later grades when we started getting into honors and college prep classes. And all my closest friends were White, like me. There was one Black friend in our group, and her Black friends sometimes called her an “Oreo” for hanging out with us. But life requires us, or at least it should require us, to interact with people who are different from us. We can pick our neighbors, and unfortunately we all too frequently pick people just like us, but we can’t pick our co-workers, and we can’t pick people with whom we interact in gas stations, grocery stores, movie theaters, restaurants, and other public places.

The United States has a tradition that Horace Mann launched more than a century ago with the common school movement. Mann, often considered the father of American public
education, hoped public schools would be the great equalizers. According to Goodlad (2004), “central to our traditions is the idea and ideal of a free public school, available to all, commonly educating—the common school” (p. 34). I don’t mean to paint an idyllic portrait of the common school movement, either. “Common” schools, after all, were not really for everyone; they were only for Whites. But they were the beginning of an ideal—something toward which we should continue working. Public schools should be much more than just places children go to learn how to read and write and do arithmetic; they should be places wherein children learn what it means to be a human being and where they learn to interact with and appreciate other human beings—particularly those who are different from them.

We have not yet achieved this ideal of universal, equal education, but we almost seem to have given up on the struggle. In many parts of the country, faith in the public school system is waning. I live in just such a part of the country, in Baton Rouge, the capital of Louisiana. When I moved here seven years ago, my oldest daughter was three, so I was several years away from worrying about where she might go to school—or so I thought. I experienced something akin to culture shock when other pre-school moms began to ask what school Kennedy would attend. At first, I shrugged my shoulders and named our neighborhood school, assuming that all of our children would go there. After all, I went to public schools, and I think I’m okay. During two years of pre-school, I did not meet a single parent whose child was actually going to attend that school. Not only were they not going to that school; it was a moral imperative to keep them out of it. One mother told me: “I would dig ditches before any child of mine ever set foot in a public school in East Baton Rouge Parish.” A father said: “I would get a night job delivering pizzas just to keep my kids out of those schools.” I began to doubt my original naiveté regarding where my daughter would attend school.
And so I visited some of these supposedly terrible schools from which I should surely want to protect my children. They seemed like just schools to me. Some were in shockingly poor condition, but nonetheless, I was impressed by how not terrible they were. I began stopping conversations whenever I announced that my little tow-headed daughter would be attending South Boulevard Elementary—a public school. And not just any public school—a public school downtown (code = there would be Black people there). It didn’t matter that it was a magnet school with a unique foreign language\(^1\) immersion program; it was still a public school. People asked me in hushed tones if I had been to the school at night. They asked if I worried about what would happen to my daughter if there were no other White kids in her class.

And thus began something of a seven-year campaign for me, championing public education to everyone I know. I didn’t realize how important public education was until I saw it being attacked and abandoned by so many. My friends have grown accustomed to my soap-box speeches about how I can think of nothing more dreadful than my children attending school with only other White, middle-class, conservative, religious Southerners. I try to explain to people that it’s important to me that my children interact with other kinds of children—particularly since we live in an almost entirely White neighborhood and go to an almost entirely White church. We live in a very segregated society. Without public school, their opportunities to know and learn from children from other races and socioeconomic groups would be greatly diminished.

So what is the purpose of education? There’s an academic purpose, of course, but that one will remain unexamined for now. Education, and by that, I mean “public schooling,” serves an even more important social purpose: preparing students for life in the real world, a real world

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\(^1\) I use the term “foreign language” because it is part of the school’s name and because that is the term with which most people are familiar. Other terms that are sometimes preferred because they do not use the word “foreign” are “second language,” “world language,” and “target language.” “Target language” tends to be used primarily among foreign language educators.
that is increasingly diverse and complex. That real world is full of people from other countries and other parts of this country; it’s full of people who speak other languages; it’s full of people from varying socioeconomic statuses and diverse religious persuasions. That is the world in which I want my children engaged; that is the world I want them to begin experiencing at an early age. And the institution of public education is the only real way that my children and others will have that opportunity.

I’m no different from any other mother or father: I also want the best for my children. I do not want them to be endangered; I do not want them to be bullied; I do not want them to be exposed to violence and other uncomfortable situations. I want them to learn; I want them to strive for excellence; I want them to stretch. But I want them to stretch not only academically; I want them to stretch morally and civically as well. Like other parents, I seek what I consider to be the best education for my children—and for me, that includes much more than standardized test scores, sparkling physical facilities, and the number of White faces in their classrooms. For me, that position is consistent with my beliefs about the purpose of schools as educating the hearts and minds of students for life. Cremin (1961), a historian of American education, asserts that for John Dewey, the purpose of schools was “not merely to make citizens, or workers, or fathers, or mothers, but ultimately to make human beings who will live life to the fullest” (p. 122-123). It is that purpose of education which I advocate and in that spirit that I begin this dissertation.
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ABSTRACT

Racial segregation and an achievement gap persist despite the promises of *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954). In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, public schools are 83% Black, while nearly one-third of all children attend private schools which are 86% White. South Boulevard (SB) Foreign Language Academic Immersion Magnet Elementary is a counterexample because it has achieved integration and academic achievement well above district and state averages on high stakes tests. This research explores the culture of SB’s immersion magnet program in relation to its success as an integrated public school with high student achievement and explores the factors that motivated a diverse set of parents to choose public education over private education.

This one-year ethnographic case study of SB is based on document analysis, interviews, and participant observation. In-depth interviews were conducted with 53 students, parents, school faculty, district administrators, and school board members. Using purposeful sampling, participants were selected who represented diverse backgrounds and perspectives. On-site participant observation (including classes, recess, lunch, PTO activities and meetings, and school board meetings) was conducted for one academic semester and follow-up observations the following semester. The data were broken down into units of meaning that served as themes that were first subjected to a systematic content analysis and then the constant comparative method.

SB’s achievement of integration and academic achievement is a counternarrative to dominant narratives that focus on the achievement gap and deficit models of minority culture. The primary explanation for SB’s success is the unique culture created by the immersion curriculum. SB has a culture of academic rigor in which teachers have high expectations of all students. The second language creates a new culture of power that equalizes cultural and
linguistic differences that may privilege or marginalize students elsewhere. SB has a culture of multiplicity that values diverse perspectives and includes a unique immersion subculture in which all students are equal participants. SB has a culture of community characterized by trusting relationships between members of the school community that emerge out of commitment to the immersion curriculum rather than geographical boundaries.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to *The School and Society*, Dewey (1915/2001) wrote the following regarding the purpose of schools:

We are apt to look at the school from an individualistic standpoint, as something between teacher and pupil, or between teacher and parent. That which interests us most is naturally the progress made by the individual child of our acquaintance . . . Yet the range of the outlook needs to be enlarged. What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy” (p. 5).

The legacy of our public school system is dualistic and contradictory. Do schools serve a primarily social or academic purpose? Do they contribute to the common good and promote democracy, or maximize benefits to individuals? Historically, public schools have been seen as central to democracy. Thomas Jefferson, Horace Mann, John Dewey, and Jane Addams envisioned a society where universal public education helped promote a more egalitarian, democratic society comprised of an educated citizenry. During the Progressive era, education was seen as a vehicle of social change; schools could bring about social justice and equality. Cremin (1988) summarizes Dewey’s philosophy of education as a “social process nurturing the continuing social, intellectual, and aesthetic growth of individuals and, through that growth on the part of individuals, the continuing renewal and regeneration of society” (p. 172).

Regardless of their potential, public schools have not achieved the illusive dream of democracy and equality. The Supreme Court’s *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) decision sought to fulfill the promise of democracy in our nation’s schools. Despite that promise, little progress has actually been made toward the achievement of desegregated schools (Bankston & Caldas, 2002; Kozol, 2000; Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Many schools are not only still separate; they are still unequal. The foundation of democracy is an educated citizenry that can dialogue across racial, linguistic, religious, and cultural differences. The achievement of integrated public
schools that provide opportunities for students to engage in that kind of dialogue is critical for the promotion and growth of a more democratic society.

Our society has also failed to establish schools where all students receive a high quality education. Instead, schools have privileged some students over others, which is the antithesis of democracy. Spring (2004) has referred to our public schools as “sorting machines” in which students are sorted by teachers, counselors, standardized tests, and curricular tracks. Large differences in achievement (as measured by standardized test scores) between different groups of students—Blacks and Whites, girls and boys, and socioeconomically-advantaged and socioeconomically-disadvantaged—are another sign that schools do not provide equal educational opportunities to all.

Multiple explanations have been posited for these “achievement gaps”—an idea that Hilliard (2003) suggests is actually a social construct rather than an objective reality. Hilliard argues that using the term “achievement gap” creates a binary that essentially pits Whites against Blacks, but uses White achievement on standardized tests as the norm. Some education scholars propose structural explanations for the achievement gap, positing that schools are structured in ways that reproduce the kinds of inequities inherent in our socioeconomic system (Apple, 1990, 2006; Kozol, 1991, 2005; Spring, 2004). Others place the onus of poor academic achievement directly on the individual students and their families, positing that minority and socioeconomically-disadvantaged students come from a culture of poverty that causes them to underachieve in schools (Coleman et al., 1966; Payne, 2005). All these explanations for differences between White and Black achievement absolve schools and society of any guilt in contributing to lower achievement of some minority groups. They suggest that there is nothing

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2 I use the terms “socioeconomically-advantaged” and “socioeconomically-disadvantaged” rather than “poor” or “at-risk” because they have a more positive connotation.
schools can do that will improve student achievement; the blame lies squarely on the shoulders of the socioeconomically-disadvantaged and minority children and their families, who are intellectually, linguistically, and culturally inferior to Whites.

Hilliard (2003) posits that we should not begin discussions about student achievement by searching for student deficiencies, but suggests instead that we examine other kinds of gaps—namely, what he refers to as the “quality-of-service gap.” Hilliard identifies the quality of instruction as the “key element in success or failure” (p. 132). Kozol (1991) similarly identifies differences in teacher quality, school infrastructure and resources, and per-pupil expenditures as contributing to differences in achievement on standardized tests between White and minority students. These explanations look to school-related factors rather than student deficits or faults.

Despite the ideal of desegregation as an avenue to achieving democratic schools, our society has failed to create schools that are integrated or that provide educational equity. In light of these failures and disappointments, the institution of public education is now being threatened. Public schools are roundly criticized as being inefficient, uncompetitive, and ineffective. The right to opt out of particular public schools and instead select private schools, home schooling, or elite suburban schools is seen as a privilege of being a citizen of a democracy. Assigning children to particular public schools is even seen as un-American because it takes away the right to choose and freedom of association. Numerous states have adopted voucher plans that give parents money to use for private school tuition. Many states, Louisiana among them, have recently adopted proposals that grant tax deductions for a portion of money spent on private school tuition (Scott, 2008, March 9). Corporations are opening schools—turning education into for-profit business ventures. More and more parents are opting out of schools altogether and
choosing to home-school their children. Public schools are no longer the default choice of many Americans. We cannot afford to take them for granted.

We are at a critical juncture in the history of the institution of American public schooling in which we must re-evaluate the purpose of public schooling. What kinds of values and beliefs are critical to democratic education? What kinds of school cultures will best enable us to create schools that are sites of democracy? Despite the failures of school desegregation, we are still bound to our historical vision of schools as incubators for democracy. Integrated schools are a critical component of that historical vision. In the quest for equity, however, educational quality cannot be overlooked. In a quote popularly attributed to Mother Teresa, “We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.” To give up on the objective of equitable, integrated public schools would be, in the words of Carter G. Woodson (1933/2000), “moral surrender” (p. 96).

Current Context of Education in Louisiana

The failure of our society to create schools that would serve as the equalizers Horace Mann imagined is visible upon close examination of the educational context of Louisiana, a state that is experiencing the disintegration of public education. Louisiana public schools, as elsewhere, have not achieved one of their most important social objectives: the creation of racially integrated schools wherein students learn what it means to be part of a diverse world which includes people of all races, creeds, languages and religions. Louisiana has one of the highest percentages of private school attendance in the nation (17%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).³ The national average in terms of private school attendance is approximately 11% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In East Baton Rouge Parish (EBRP), one of the largest school districts in

³ Only Delaware, Hawaii, and the District of Columbia have similarly high rates of private school enrollment. Data obtained from the American Community Survey, which is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau.
the nation that includes 92 schools with an enrollment of approximately 45,236 students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 (Lussier, 2007). 29% of all school-aged children attend private schools (Louisiana Department of Education, 2005)—more than twice the national average. Approximately 13,200 Louisiana school-aged children (or 1.4% of the total school age population) are being home schooled, which is slightly less than the national average of 2.2%4. The Louisiana State Department of Education estimates that the number of home schooled students has increased by approximately 500 students per year since 2000.

In the fifty-four years since the Brown decision (1954), the following strategies have been used to desegregate EBRP public schools: freedom of choice integration, in which students were permitted to integrate voluntarily; forced busing; and implementation of magnet programs. One of the longest-running desegregation lawsuits in the country—Davis et al. v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board (1961)—which was originally filed in 1956 by Black activists in Baton Rouge, officially ended at midnight on July 14, 2007. Superintendent Charlotte Placide carefully announced that the EBRP School System was “commemorating” rather than “celebrating” its closing in a special ceremony—complete with media press kits, official declarations by then-Governor Kathleen Blanco and Baton Rouge Mayor Kip Holden (neither of whom attended the ceremony), and speeches by community activists and leaders.

Despite decades of desegregation efforts, Baton Rouge, a city divided fairly evenly between Blacks and non-Blacks (Brown, 2007), still has a dual school system that is highly segregated by race and becoming more so with time. When EBRP opened its doors for a new school year on August 10, 2007, the system of private schools was 86% White; the public school system was 83% Black (Lussier, 2007) and plagued with embarrassingly poor physical facilities and poor student achievement as measured by the state’s own standardized tests. In 1981, the

4 Data obtained from the 2005-2006 Louisiana State Education Progress Report.
year before court-ordered busing began in Baton Rouge, approximately 45% of EBRP public school students were Black. School desegregation in Baton Rouge has failed.

Louisiana public schools have also not achieved their academic objective: providing a high quality education for all students. EBRP is one of the lowest-performing districts in Louisiana. In 2006-2007, it received a District Performance Score (DPS) of 72.3, placing it 51st out of 61 districts in Louisiana. The highest-performing district, Zachary, received a DPS score of 110.1; the lowest-performing district, St. Helena Parish, received a DPS score of 54.6. School districts are also given DPS labels or “stars” every year. Table 1.1 defines the DPS scores and the labels associated with them. In 2006-2007, EBRP received a performance label of one star.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>DPS Ranges</th>
<th>Louisiana school systems in each category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five Stars</td>
<td>140.0 and above</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Stars</td>
<td>120-139.9</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three Stars</td>
<td>110-119.9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Stars</td>
<td>80.0 – 99.9</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Star</td>
<td>60.0 – 79.9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academically Unacceptable</td>
<td>Below 60.0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is worth noting that only Louisiana public schools are evaluated according to this set of criteria. Private schools are not evaluated according to this accountability system. Private

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6 The District Performance Score (DPS) is what the state Department of Education calls a “roll-up of all K-12 student data” in the district and combines test scores (LEAP, iLEAP, and Graduation Exit Exams (GEE)), student attendance, and dropout rates. The test scores comprise 90% of the score and remaining 10% is divided equally between attendance and dropout rates.
7 Data taken from the Louisiana State Department of Education. Title of report: 2006-2007 District Accountability Ranking Tables.
8 District Performance Accountability results are available on-line on the Louisiana State Department of Education website (www.louisianaschools.net).
schools are also not required to assess their students using the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP)\(^9\)—the standardized tests by which all Louisiana public schools and their students are evaluated.

In EBRP schools, there is a persistent achievement gap between White and Black students, with significantly more White students scoring proficient or above on the Grades 3-5 standardized tests. In 2005-2006, 47% of Black students scored basic or above on the English Language Arts portion of the LEAP (Grade 4) and i-LEAP\(^{10}\) (Grades 3 and 5) tests, while 79% of White students scored similarly. The gap was even bigger on the mathematics portion of the tests: 45% of Black students and 81% of White students scored basic or above.\(^{11}\)

There is another achievement gap between socioeconomically-advantaged and socioeconomically-disadvantaged students in EBRP, where 77% of all students qualify for free or reduced-price meals through the national school lunch program,\(^{12}\) a commonly-used indicator of poverty. This percentage is significantly higher than the national average of 41% (Baton Rouge Area Chamber, 2006). In 2005-2006, 47% of socioeconomically-disadvantaged students and 80% of socioeconomically-advantaged students scored basic or above in English Language Arts (ELA). In math, 46% of socioeconomically-disadvantaged students and 79% of socioeconomically-advantaged students scored basic or above.\(^{13}\) In sum, EBRP schools have not

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\(^9\) The LEAP is a criterion-referenced (CRT) test that measures how well a student has mastered the state content standards. The LEAP is administered in grades 4 and 8.

\(^{10}\) The i-LEAP is both a norm-referenced (NRT) and a criterion-referenced (CRT) test that thus results in two types of test scores: a score that represents students’ performance according to the Louisiana state standards (CRT) and a score that represents students’ performance compared to national norms (NRT). The i-LEAP is administered in grades 3, 5, 6, 7, and 9.

\(^{11}\) Data obtained from the Louisiana State Department of Education District Accountability Subgroup Component Report.

\(^{12}\) “Socioeconomically-disadvantaged” refers to students who qualify for free or reduced price meals through the national school lunch program, which was initiated in 1946 by President Harry S. Truman after he learned how many young men were rejected from the World War II draft due to medical conditions caused by childhood nutrition.

\(^{13}\) Data obtained from the Louisiana Department of Education District Accountability Subgroup Component Report.
been successful either in creating diverse student populations or in providing high quality education to all students.

**South Boulevard: A Counternarrative**

Within the context of increasing school re-segregation and unacceptable differentials in student achievement as measured by standardized tests, several EBRP magnet programs are successfully integrating their student populations and increasing educational quality—the two original objectives of magnet programs. The EBRP School Board has relied heavily on magnet programs as desegregation tools. The Consent Decree (1996) to the desegregation lawsuit states that magnet programs are “the primary tool for desegregating the predominantly Black schools in the inner city and, with only a few exceptions, that is where they are placed” (p. 2).

This case study explores a school—South Boulevard Foreign Language Academic Immersion Magnet [hereafter referred to as South Boulevard]—in Baton Rouge, Louisiana that is a counternarrative to many contemporary dominant narratives about public schools. South Boulevard is an inner-city magnet school that is majority Black and majority socioeconomically-disadvantaged that parents are choosing, that has students who represent multiple dimensions of diversity, a high level of parental involvement, and high student achievement with the additional benefit of second language acquisition. In this section, I outline the ways in which South Boulevard’s foreign language immersion magnet program is a counternarrative and is therefore an apt place for discussions about how we could shape future school reforms to better accomplish both integration and academic achievement for all students. I conclude by introducing the research questions this study sets out to explore.

First, South Boulevard does not have the best and brightest students in the system. While potential students are tested to guarantee that they are at least on grade level, South Boulevard’s
program is not an elite gifted and talented program, yet their 2006-2007 fourth-grade LEAP scores placed them fifth out of 53 EBRP elementary schools in reading and fourth in math. This level of achievement is particularly significant considering that South Boulevard is a foreign language immersion program, which means that students receive more than half their academic instruction in either French or Spanish. The standardized tests they take, however, are administered and written in English. According to Bankston and Caldas (2002), scholars of Louisiana school desegregation history, other magnet programs in Louisiana that have successfully attracted non-Black students are elite, gifted programs, such as Ben Franklin High School in New Orleans and Paul Breaux Middle School in Lafayette.

Second, South Boulevard does not have a separate, integrated magnet program in an otherwise majority-Black, non-magnet school, like many magnet programs across the country. All current South Boulevard students participate in the immersion program.¹⁴ Perhaps most importantly, the student population of South Boulevard is actually becoming more integrated. South Boulevard, an urban school located in a historically-Black neighborhood in downtown Baton Rouge, was originally built in 1949 as an all-White school and then changed to an all-Black school in 1959. In 2001, the Black/non-Black ratio at South Boulevard was 80% Black and 20% non-Black. Its student body in 2007 is 58% Black, 42% non-Black with 59% of the students eligible for the free or reduced lunch program.

Numerous studies indicate that White parents will not voluntarily send their children to schools with student populations that are majority Black, socioeconomically-disadvantaged, and

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¹⁴ South Boulevard’s foreign language immersion program was a program-within-a-school (PWS) prior to 2002, when the school began the process of transitioning to become a dedicated magnet. In 2002, there were two kindergarten classes: one Spanish immersion and one French immersion. This was the first year there was no regular, non-immersion kindergarten. Therefore, beginning with the 2007-2008 school year, South Boulevard became a completely dedicated magnet program, with all students participating in either the French or the Spanish immersion program.

¹⁵ I use the terms “Black” and “non-Black” because these are the terms that have been used in demographic records throughout the era of court-ordered desegregation.
from single-parent families—regardless of the quality of education or innovative curricular offerings. Bankston and Caldas (2002) document that between 1996 and 1999, the EBRP School Board spent $6.8 million on magnet programs designed to attract White students (Bankston & Caldas, 2002), yet the overall percentage of White students in the system decreased. In Baton Rouge, more than half of the magnet programs created by the Consent Decree (1996) were eventually closed because they failed to attract non-Black students. Rossell (2003) similarly demonstrated that only 13% of White parents in a national survey said they would be willing to send their children to magnet schools in minority neighborhoods if the magnet program were three quarters minority and one quarter White. Williams, Hancher, and Hutner (1983, December) found that “mix of student backgrounds” ranked ninth out of a list of 11 factors considered by parents in selecting schools for their children. Maddaus (1990) interviewed White families regarding the school choice process and found that only two out of 39 preferred racially integrated schools and only one of those two actually chose an integrated school. Prins’s (2007) qualitative research indicated that White parents in California transferred their children out of a majority-Latino school to a majority-White school because they were prejudiced toward Latino/a children and their families. The racial and socioeconomic diversity at South Boulevard refutes these studies.

Third, the unique foreign language immersion curriculum offered at South Boulevard was the main characteristic that motivated parents in this study sample to choose South Boulevard. They valued the immersion curriculum enough to overlook the inconvenient location of the school in relation to their residences and the deteriorated condition of the physical facility. This finding is dissimilar from other studies that suggest that school location is the primary consideration in school choice decisions (Rossell, 1985b; Rossell & Armor, 1996). An early
study of a school choice program found that over 70% of parents in Alum Rock chose school location as their primary consideration in choosing a school (Bridge & Blackman, 1978). Rossell and Armor (1996) also identified the length of the bus ride as important to parents. While many parents in this study sample lamented the poor condition of the physical facility and wished the school were closer to their homes, they overlooked those liabilities for their children to have the benefit of learning a second language.

Finally, in spite of the prevalence of immersion programs in Louisiana, there is a paucity of published research available on these programs. No article in either *Foreign Language Annals* or *The Modern Language Journal*—the two main foreign language education journals—mentions immersion education in Louisiana. Only a few authors (e.g. Caldas & Boudreaux, 1999; Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 2000; St.-Hilaire, 2005) have published their work on Louisiana immersion education. This lack of published research is particularly significant because Louisiana has the highest actual number of immersion programs in the United States (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2006).

This study explores the relationship between race, education, and curriculum within the microcontext of South Boulevard—a school that is delivering on some of the promises of the *Brown* decision (1954) where other programs and initiatives have failed to achieve identifiable results. South Boulevard has fulfilled the social objective of public schooling by achieving a diverse student population. While other public schools in EBRP and around the country are re-segregating, South Boulevard’s foreign language immersion magnet program is becoming more integrated. South Boulevard has also fulfilled the academic objective of public schooling by providing an academically rigorous education that results not only in high academic achievement as measured by standardized test scores, but also includes the benefit of second language
acquisition. If integrated schools are a societal goal, as I strongly believe they should be, then studies such as this one that explore the success of one program in desegregating its student body and providing a high quality education that includes second language acquisition are important. The purpose of this research is to explore the factors that enable South Boulevard to provide an equitable, excellent, democratic education for all students.

**Research Questions**

Using case study research (Stake, 1995, 2000; Yin, 2003) and ethnographic methods (Spradley, 1979, 1980; Wolcott, 1999, 2005), this study explores the following questions:

1. What role does the foreign language immersion magnet program at South Boulevard play in desegregating its student population?
2. What factors (political, socio-cultural, historical, and curricular) motivate parents to choose South Boulevard over other competing possibilities?
3. How do stakeholders evaluate the success of South Boulevard in desegregating its student population?

**Organization of Chapters**

This first chapter introduced the problem and outlined the context in which the study takes place. Chapter Two reviews the literature regarding the academic and social effects of school desegregation, the desegregation efficiency and educational quality of magnet programs, and the history of Louisiana immersion programs and their effect on student achievement. Chapter Three outlines the research design and describes the procedures I undertook to gather and analyze the data. The subsequent chapters report on the findings. Chapter Four tells the history of South Boulevard within the context of themes pursuant to race, education, and curriculum that are both historical and contemporary. Chapter Five describes the immersion
culture and pedagogy at South Boulevard and their impact on student learning. Chapter Six describes a unique culture of integration created by the immersion curriculum that promotes positive cross-racial and cross-cultural relationships, both between students and between students and teachers. Chapter Seven describes the culture surrounding school choice in East Baton Rouge Parish and explores the factors that motivated parents to choose South Boulevard for their children. Chapter Eight provides a summary of the study and offers some concluding remarks regarding the future of South Boulevard and implications of the study for continued work towards providing equal and excellent education for all students.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Schooling is by its nature and by human nature a differentiating force, not a democratizing force. It is not a leveler of people but a selector among people (Gaarder, 1976, p. 151).

I began this case study of a foreign language immersion magnet program with an assumption that was challenged throughout the research process. I believed that if school desegregation accomplished its two primary objectives—achieving racially balanced student populations and providing an equitable and excellent education for all students, the promise of equal education would be fulfilled. However, immersing myself for a year in the complex issues surrounding race, education, and curriculum—both geographically at South Boulevard and intellectually—forced me to see the literature in a different light. Some of the bodies of literature that I reviewed in my original dissertation proposal were not as important as I anticipated they would be in terms of my research findings. Still, they served an important, sensitizing function—highlighting aspects of the research questions that I needed to know more about in order to proceed with the study (Blumer, 1986; Daly, 2007).

Much of the academic literature reflects a tension between two competing objectives of school desegregation: the social objective of creating racially balanced schools in which all students can thrive emotionally and socially and the academic objective of creating environments in which all students can thrive academically and intellectually. Should schools strive primarily to democratize students and society or to differentiate between students according to their race, gender, religion, language, or intellectual capacity? Do we have to choose one objective over the other, or might schools accomplish academic and social objectives? Conducting this study made me realize that there is much more behind school desegregation than simply counting Black and White faces in school desks. Is a racially-balanced school necessarily a good one? Who
determines what “racially-balanced” is, anyway? Should schools reflect the racial composition of the neighborhoods in which they are located?

During fieldwork, it felt awkward—almost absurd—to be sitting in a corner of a classroom at South Boulevard making tally marks as I counted Black and non-Black faces. I felt embarrassed on more than one occasion when I would get to a student who was not easily identifiable as either “Black” or “non-Black”: what box did those children go in? There are numerous biracial children at South Boulevard. Did those children count as “Black” or “non-Black,” or even worse, “other”? More importantly, what difference did it make whether I put a tally mark in the “Black” or “non-Black” column when I was referring to the same child, regardless of where that tally mark ended up? Due to court-ordered desegregation, however, there have only been two categories of students counted in EBRP schools: Black and non-Black.

As I struggled to situate my findings within larger bodies of research, two fundamental assumptions of much of the academic research concerned me. First, much of the literature focused on non-Black students and their families. Many studies focus on the reasons why many White and middle-class parents have abandoned urban public schools for private or suburban schools (Bankston & Caldas, 2002; Rossell, 1985a; Rossell, Armor, & Walberg, 2002). But what about the voices of Black families—those who stay in urban public schools as well as those who leave? Others focus on school characteristics that influence White and middle-class parents to return to public schools (Levine & Eubanks, 1980; Perkins, Sullivan-DeCarlo, & Linehan, 2003; Stanley, 1982). Again, why the consistent focus on White families?

Second, many studies focus on the underperformance of urban and minority youth, framing the conversations so that White achievement is the norm (Coleman et al., 1966; Herrnstein & Murray, 1996; Rossell, Armor, & Walberg, 2002). No one even considers the
possibility that White achievement may not excel at all (Perry, 2003). White, middle-class students are the measuring stick against which all other students are measured. According to Singham (1998),

Perceiving the academic performance of white students as the norm and that of blacks as a measure of the problem naturally leads to the proposing of solutions that have as their basis the attempt to persuade blacks to ‘act white’ or at least to adopt white values. But the implicit notion that black behavior and values are somehow inferior to whites’ makes these solutions offensive and unacceptable to many blacks (p. 14).

Much contemporary debate focuses on identifying what is wrong with urban and minority youth that makes them unsuccessful in schools and then suggesting ways in which schools might fix their supposed defects or deficiencies (Barton, 2004; Jensen, 1969; Orr, 1987). All too often, we seem to begin with the assumption that urban and minority youth are not successful in schools because they are socioeconomically-disadvantaged, intellectually inferior, undisciplined, and come from “broken” homes led by single mothers with absent fathers (Bankston & Caldas, 2002). Too little attention has been paid to what Kozol (1991) identified as “savage inequalities”—the sometimes grotesque differences in resources, teacher quality, class size, physical facilities, and curricular offerings found between urban, suburban, and rural schools.

As I approached this study, I did not want for it to be about Black families or White families. Rather, I wanted it to be about families. I wanted to explore the reasons why different kinds of parents choose to send their children to South Boulevard—not just on the reasons why White, middle-class families choose South Boulevard, even though that is part of what makes South Boulevard unique. While it is interesting that many White and middle-class parents choose South Boulevard when so many other similar families choose private or suburban schools instead, many socioeconomically-disadvantaged and minority families also choose South Boulevard. I wanted to portray the sentiments and voices of minority and socioeconomically-
disadvantaged families as well as the voices of White and socioeconomically-advantaged families.

There is more to the story than figuring out why White parents choose to send their children there. There is more to the story of South Boulevard’s success than just figuring out what their test scores are in relation to other schools. Schools should be places that meet both the social and academic objectives of students, families, and, ultimately, society. South Boulevard is successful because all students—including socioeconomically-disadvantaged and minority students who tend to underperform their White and middle-class counterparts in other settings—perform well on standardized tests. It is successful because of the quality of social relationships present at the school—not just because it has met a predetermined racial quota. It is successful because diverse kinds of parents choose to send their children there—White, Black, Hispanic and Asian; college-educated and high school graduates; engineers, professors, police officers and bank tellers; socioeconomically-disadvantaged and wealthy; highly religious and non-religious. Lastly, it is successful because students learn to speak a second language there. They learn to communicate with whole other countries of people—and in so doing, also learn how to better communicate with people in their own community.

In this chapter, I review three bodies of literature that sensitized me to the issues I faced during the research process: 1) the academic and social effects of desegregation, 2) magnet programs and desegregation, and 3) the context of Louisiana foreign language immersion programs and their impact on schooling. This review focuses on school desegregation in the United States. This choice does not imply that lessons cannot be learned from the ways in which other countries have grappled with the intersections of race, education, and curriculum. Studies which recognize the unique historical, socio-cultural, and political contexts surrounding school
desegregation in the United States, however, are more immediately relevant to the research questions of this study.

**Effects of School Desegregation**

Early school desegregation studies (Coleman et al., 1966; McPartland, 1968; St. John, 1970; St. John & Lewis, 1971) sought to determine whether desired outcomes of school desegregation policy were being achieved. Rist (1979) responded to this research objective in the following quote:

> The presence of varying adaptations within the desegregated school setting should give pause to those who ask “Does desegregation work?” An honest answer . . . is that it depends first on which group one is interested in and second, on how one defines whether a program is or is not working” (p. 9).

Two sub-themes emerged from the review of this literature that reflect the tension discussed at the beginning of the chapter between academic and social educational objectives: 1) the academic effects of desegregation, most of which focus on achievement scores, and 2) the social effects of desegregation, including intergroup relations, social networks, and informal segregation. This body of research is important to the present study for two reasons. First, these studies helped determine school desegregation plans and policies that ultimately impacted the way school desegregation unfolded in EBRP. Second, the academic and social outcomes of desegregation are important because knowledge of them may influence parental choice in determining which school to send their children. One of the research questions of the present study is to explore the political, socio-cultural, and historical factors that motivate parents to choose South Boulevard over other competing possibilities.

**Academic Effects of Desegregation**

Much of the research during the 1960s and 1970s explored the effect of desegregation on the short-term academic achievement of students in desegregated schools as measured by
standardized test scores. Some focused primarily on the effects of desegregation on Black achievement (Bradley & Bradley, 1977; Coleman et al., 1966; Crain, 1971; Mahard & Crain, 1983; St. John, 1970; Weinberg, 1975), while others considered its effects on both White and non-White achievement (Cohen, Pettigrew, & Riley, 1972; Hansen, 1960; St. John & Lewis, 1971; Stallings, 1959). Hansen (1960), Weinberg (1975), and Crain and Mahard (1978) agreed that there is no evidence that desegregation had a negative impact on the achievement of White students.

The results of this vast body of research regarding the effect of desegregation on minority academic achievement are inconsistent. A primary cause of this inconsistency is the difficulty associated with isolating and controlling for those factors other than interracial contact that might account for differences in achievement. Some of these factors include: school environment and resources, teacher quality, class size, per pupil expenditures, ability grouping, socioeconomic status, parental educational attainment, family attitudes relevant to school achievement, and students’ academic aptitudes.

Perhaps the most influential investigation is *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (EEOS), in which Coleman et al. (1966) made several controversial conclusions. Coleman et al. (1966) concluded that the influence of family background was a more important predictor of verbal achievement scores of Black students than school environment, education spending, or teacher variables. In re-analyses of the EEOS data, Armor (1972b) and Smith (1972) corroborated these findings, concluding that family background variables were the strongest predictors of achievement. One important implication was that educational equality (as measured by student achievement scores) would not be achieved by equalizing school facilities and resources alone. The focus was thus shifted away from schools and to families.
Coleman et al. (1966) also found that the verbal achievement scores of Black students increased as the proportion of White students in a school increased. Therefore, they concluded that the social composition of the school was an important predictor of Black achievement. The result was the “lateral transmission of values” hypothesis, which held that the positive relationship between Black student achievement and the proportion of White students in the school was the result of Blacks’ acquisition of the achievement-related values of White students.

McPartland (1968) also re-analyzed the EEOS data and indicated the need to study the racial composition of the classroom rather than the overall school. McPartland indicated that Black verbal ability scores increased as the proportion of White classmates increased in predominantly White and predominantly Black schools. However, that increase was virtually eliminated when classroom racial composition was held constant. Thus, McPartland (1968) concluded that the main predictor of Black achievement was the proportion of White students in the classroom, rather than the overall school racial composition. Patchen (1981) also noted the need for desegregation research that focuses on the racial composition of the classroom as opposed to the whole school. These conclusions became fundamental in determining school desegregation policy and were a catalyst for the implementation of busing policies to achieve racial balance in public schools (Armor, 1972a; Bradley & Bradley, 1977; Gerard & Miller, 1975).

These studies touch on some of the issues addressed in the introduction that made me uncomfortable during the research process. Coleman’s (1966) conclusions, which essentially blame socioeconomically-disadvantaged and minority families for their children’s underachievement, are disturbing and indicative of larger issues related to class and race in this country. They suggest that Black students do better if they attend schools with White students.
What does it say about our societal attitudes towards race that these studies suggest that just sitting next to a White student makes Black students more successful in school? These studies privilege Whiteness and imply that Blackness is almost something that needs to be remedied, or at least mitigated, in order to achieve in school.

As Perry (2003) argues, “most of our educational institutions continue to institutionalize ‘whiteness’ as the culture of power” (p. 74). In fact, much of what we consider to be “natural” and “right” about our schools is actually no more than an extension of White, middle-class American values. Hammerberg (2001) asserts that “[w]hen we rationalize what is ‘good,’ ‘better,’ and ‘best,’ we need to remember that it is history and power (not what ‘really’ is better) that name and essentialize that which is ‘good,’ ‘better,’ and ‘best’” (p. 85). Setting up schools that privilege Whiteness serves an important function in maintaining the status quo or in maintaining what Kozol (2005) calls our system of “apartheid schooling.” Research studies and books such as The Bell Curve (Herrnstein & Murray, 1996) that confirm the alleged superiority of Whiteness also nurture the unfortunate public perception that Whiteness is best (Coleman et al., 1966; McPartland, 1968; Stallings, 1959).

The effects of desegregation on student achievement continued to be debated after the publication of these early studies. Several authors (Pettigrew, Useem, Normand, & Smith, 1973; St. John, 1970; Stallings, 1959; Weinberg, 1975) demonstrated that desegregation had a positive effect on non-White academic achievement. St. John (1970) concluded that Black students in desegregated schools generally fared no worse, and in most cases better, than students in segregated schools. Rodgers and Bullock (1974) and Cohen, Pettigrew, and Riley (1972) agreed that school desegregation has no negative effect on the academic achievement of Black, White, or Hispanic students. In their meta-analysis of the effect of school desegregation on student
achievement, Mahard and Crain (1983) concurred, concluding that while the relationship is not perfectly linear, most studies indicated a positive relationship between achievement gains of Black children and desegregation.

Other authors, such as Bradley and Bradley (1977) and St. John (1970), were reluctant to draw conclusions about the academic effects of desegregation, citing inconsistent evidence and methodological shortcomings in research design which made it difficult to establish conclusive causal relationships. Crain and Mahard (1978) argued that they were unable to draw overarching conclusions about the effects of desegregation and achievement because of the high degree of variability across contexts of desegregated schools, cities, and regions. Their response to the question of whether desegregation improves student achievement was that “sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t” (Crain & Mahard, 1978, p. 47).

**Social Effects of Desegregation**

There is also a significant body of research that explores the social effects of desegregation (Crain, 1970; Schofield, 1991; Schofield & Sagar, 1979). This body of literature seems particularly relevant to the findings of this case study because it goes beyond simply quantifying Black and White students in schools and seeks to explore the quality of social relationships in desegregated schools. Allport (1954) posited that intergroup contact would lead to reduced intergroup prejudice if it occurred in a positive context, which he defined as one characterized by equal status between the groups, common goals, lack of competition between the groups, and institutional sanction for the contact. Allport (1954) also asserted, however, that unless the interracial contact occurs in a positive environment, it might reinforce stereotypes and exacerbate intergroup hostility. The theory of intergroup contact inspired extensive research on

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16 For detailed information about the methodological problems associated with the school desegregation and achievement studies, see St. John (1970) and Bradley and Bradley (1977).
the social outcomes of desegregation in much the same way as the Coleman Report (1966) inspired research on the academic outcomes (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2000). Allport’s findings are important to the present study because they point to the importance of school culture in helping students establish positive cross-racial relationships.

Significant research has explored the importance of school factors in intergroup social contacts. In a two-year ethnographic case study of the patterns of informal segregation within desegregated schools, Clement and Harding (1978) focused on the school’s role in cross-social-race interaction among students. They described school factors that influenced cross-social-race relations, including direct intervention from teachers (e.g. assigning students to cross-race pairs and groups), extracurricular activities and roles (e.g. cross-race participation in clubs), and the lack of established within-class ability grouping and academic ranking of students. Schofield and Sagar (1979) focused on the effects of teachers’ attitudes and classroom practices on intergroup relations. They critiqued what they call the natural progression assumption, which posits that positive intergroup relations will develop naturally without overt changes in school policy or teaching methods that promote them. They discussed structural issues as they relate to intergroup relations, such as the degree of visibility of academic honor rolls, the importance of cooperative dependence in reaching shared goals, length and variety of contact, seating policies, and group versus individualized work. They concluded that positive intergroup relations do not develop naturally and that teachers need specialized training to understand the impact of their attitudes and behavior on intergroup relations.

Findings from this study likewise highlight the importance of school factors in contributing to cross-social-race relationships. Cross-racial relationships at South Boulevard are common and exist, in large part, because of the ways in which the immersion curriculum creates
a unique culture that nurtures relationships, both between students and teachers and between students. An important element of that immersion curriculum at South Boulevard is the foreign language immersion teachers, who possess attitudes and perceptions both of their students and of schooling that are distinct from those held by many White, middle-class teachers. This subject is addressed further in Chapter Five.

**Magnet Programs and Desegregation**

The idea of magnet programs began as a way to desegregate schools after other measures, such as freedom of choice integration plans and forced busing, had been largely unsuccessful at achieving racially-diverse schools. The federal magnet program began in 1972 as an amendment to the *Emergency School Aid Act* (ESAA) of 1972, a federal desegregation assistance program. The objective of magnet programs is to create racially balanced student populations without forced busing or re-drawing of attendance zones. Creation of magnet programs was further encouraged by the Supreme Court *Milliken v. Bradley II* (1977) decision, which permitted courts to order states to fund additional educational programs that would attempt to remedy effects of past segregation. Magnet programs also aim to provide enhanced educational quality by providing unique curricular offerings and instructional delivery methods.

According to Metz (1986), magnet programs are “racially mixed public schools which draw students on a voluntary basis by offering educational innovations which are attractive to parents” (p. 1). In EBRP, current elementary magnet programs include specialized curricula focusing on visual and performing arts, Montessori, academics, and foreign language immersion education. According to Dentler (1991), a magnet school must meet the following criteria: 1) specialized curriculum based on a special theme or instructional method; 2) unique district role and purpose for voluntary desegregation; 3) voluntary school choice by the student and the
parent, with variable criteria established for inclusion; and 4) enrollment not limited to neighborhood attendance zones. Blank and Archbald (1992) include racial and ethnic enrollment goals and/or controls as a criteria.

Magnet programs have been criticized for diverting scarce resources to an elite group of children rather than to school populations at large (André-Becheley, 2004; Eaton, 1996; Eaton & Crutcher, 1996; Glenn, 1991; Raywid, 1985). Many magnet programs have higher budgets, due either to start-up expenses, increased transportation costs, or special equipment and facilities (Blank, Dentler, Baltzell, & Chabotar, 1983; McMillan, 1977; Raywid, 1985). Students in magnet programs often benefit from smaller class sizes and additional federal funds and resources (provided by the ESAA) not available to non-magnet students.

For educational policymakers, magnet programs are an alternative to unpopular mandatory desegregation plans, such as forced busing (Eaton & Crutcher, 1996; Gersti-Pepin, 2002; Steel & Levine, 1999). According to the U. S. Department of Education, 53% of large urban school districts have a magnet program component in their desegregation plans (Goldring & Smrekar, 2000). Like other research reviewed here, magnet program literature focuses on either social or academic objectives: 1) the desegregation efficiency of magnet programs or 2) the effect of magnet programs on student achievement as measured by standardized test scores. Understanding the extant literature regarding the relationship between magnet programs and desegregation is important to the present study because South Boulevard is a magnet program that was established with the express goal of creating a racially-integrated student body.

**Desegregation Efficiency of Magnet Programs**

Findings in the academic literature regarding the desegregation efficiency of magnet programs have varied widely over the last three decades. One important issue debated in the
literature has been the effect of varying types of magnet plans on desegregation. Rossell (1985b) distinguished between two aspects of desegregation plans: 1) whether the plan is a voluntary plan with magnet schools (magnet-voluntary) or a mandatory reassignment plan with magnet schools (magnet-mandatory); and 2) whether the plan is board-ordered or court-ordered. A magnet-voluntary plan is one in which desegregation is accomplished through voluntary student transfers—usually White transfers to magnet schools in minority neighborhoods. Minority transfers to White schools that are not magnet programs are called majority-to-minority transfers. A magnet-mandatory plan strives to achieve desegregation by reassigning students to other-race schools. Rossell (1988) cautioned that it may be more accurate to characterize the magnet-voluntary/magnet-mandatory distinction as a continuum rather than a dichotomy, since many districts have components of both types.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the literature generally agreed that magnet-mandatory plans were more successful in desegregating than magnet-voluntary plans (Orfield, 1978; Rossell, 1979; Rossell & Hawley, 1983; Royster, Baltzell, & Simmons, 1979). In a later study, however, Rossell (1988) reversed her earlier position and instead affirmed that magnet-voluntary plans were more successful in desegregating over the long term than magnet-mandatory plans, most probably due to White flight caused by mandatory plans. Rossell (1988) attributed her previous findings to the fact that the studies were done with only one year of post-implementation data. Rossell (1988, 1990) concluded that a magnet school plan focusing primarily on voluntary transfers will produce greater long-term interracial exposure than a mandatory reassignment plan with magnet components. Current magnet programs in EBRP are considered magnet-voluntary plans because they rely on voluntary student transfers rather than mandatory student reassignment.
Another important characteristic of magnet programs is whether they are dedicated magnet programs or programs within a school (PWS). A dedicated magnet program is a school in which the entire student population participates in the magnet program. A PWS is a regular school in which only some students participate in the magnet program; the remainder—usually the majority—of the students do not participate in the magnet program. This distinction is critical, yet problematic because many districts do not publish disaggregated student data to show whether students are magnet participants or not. Furthermore, many studies fail to distinguish between dedicated and PWS magnets and between academically selective and nonselective magnet programs.

PWS magnet programs have been criticized for creating superficial desegregation in two ways (Bankston & Caldas, 2002; Caldas & Bankston, 2005; Eaton, 1996; Eaton & Crutcher, 1996). First, PWS magnet students may have little or no contact with their non-magnet peers. Second, PWS magnet classes may be racially diverse while non-magnet classes are comprised of only minority students. Thus, school-wide desegregation “may not be synonymous with desegregation at the classroom level” (Eaton & Crutcher, 1996, p. 276). Academic research is generally in agreement, however, that dedicated magnet schools are more successful than PWS magnets in desegregating student populations (Goldring & Smrekar, 2000; Rossell, 2003). Dedicated magnet programs in EBRP have likewise tended to be more racially integrated than the PWS magnets—many of which have been closed because they were unsuccessful in attracting non-Black students into the programs.

While a primary objective of magnet programs was to desegregate school populations, some have criticized them for being exclusive rather than inclusive. In a case study of the effect of magnet programs on desegregation in Kansas City, Missouri, Morantz (1996) found that they
did not achieve one of the objectives for which they were created: attracting new White students into the district. Morantz found that minority racial isolation in the district actually increased after the implementation of the magnet plan, from 73.5% minority in 1986 to 74.8% minority in 1992. Morantz (1996) noted, however, that the magnet programs in Kansas City did achieve a modest degree of success in redistributing the existing student body, slightly increasing the level of interracial exposure of most students in the district. In some cases, magnet programs have decreased the overall level of system-wide desegregation because they attract Whites away from neighborhood schools and concentrate them in magnet schools (Caldwell, 1982, March 3; Glenn, 1991; Rossell, 1979).

As a result of this study, I have some misgivings about magnet programs that I did not have before beginning the study. I feel profoundly committed to the notion, however outdated it may seem, that schools should be a means for children to learn how to be whole, human beings, capable of contributing to society in a variety of ways. Schools should not merely reproduce the status quo (Apple, 1990; Spring, 2004). Thus, within the context of the school system in Baton Rouge, what is the cost of focusing so narrowly on bringing non-Blacks back into the system? Should precious and scarce public funds be allocated to enhance the education of a select few at the expense of many? Someone in my study sample actually said that magnet schools are “essentially free private schools.” If this is true, is that a desirable outcome? After completing this study, I argue that it is not a desirable outcome, even though I believe that the immersion program at South Boulevard has much to offer its students and their families.

Few studies consider the effects of desegregation from the viewpoint of students in magnet programs. Bush, Burley, and Causey-Bush (2001) explored the ways in which magnet students in a mid-sized Southern city defined desegregation. Their four student participants felt
that the degree of desegregation should be measured by the racial composition of classrooms rather than whole schools, because the students’ classes were largely segregated in spite of the overall desegregated racial composition of the school. Bush, Burley, and Causey-Bush (2001) asserted that although desegregation methods are often evaluated using parent surveys, surveys are “inflexible and limit in-depth answers, explanations, and the examination of experiences that influence how a participant answers questions; and the voices of students or children, the most important component of the desegregation paradigm, are ignored” (p. 37).

Gersti-Pepin (2002) similarly documented what she calls “cosmetic diversity” in an Oklahoma high school which also housed a biomedical engineering magnet program (p. 52). Gersti-Pepin (2002) described a racially diverse high school which was nonetheless “bifurcated in reality,” with internal segregation occurring between magnet and non-magnet students (p. 50). Extracurricular activities were racially segregated, with White cheerleaders and Black drum majorettes. Courses were racially segregated, with college preparatory classes being almost exclusively White. She even documented physical boundaries that segregated the school, such as restrooms that only Blacks used and others that only Whites used. Thus, while the school was officially desegregated, meaning Whites and Blacks attended school together, there was very little actual integration among students. Tatum (1997) explores the same issue of racial identity and segregation in her work “Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” and Other Conversations About Race.

Fine et al. (2005) investigated the experiences of racial, ethnic, and class (in)justice of urban and suburban youth in their schools. They culled data from more than 9,000 student surveys, 24 focus groups, 32 student interviews, and participant observations in six schools. The student participants extolled the importance of multi-racial democracy in schools and in the
nation, yet acknowledged that their classrooms remain largely segregated. The students explored issues of educational finance inequities and within-school tracking by visiting and comparing suburban and urban schools. Fine et al. (2005) concluded with a plea for a “movement of youth, parents, community and educators to make good on the racial vision embodied in Brown”—a vision which Fine and their student researchers agree has not been achieved (p. 524).

**Educational Quality of Magnet Programs**

Do magnet programs provide better educational quality to magnet participants? Or do they simply have a special name? Numerous authors have explored the relationship between magnet program participation and student achievement. Most conclude that magnet programs do increase student achievement as measured by standardized test scores. Bensman (2000) attributed increased achievement in East Harlem schools to the implementation of unique magnet programs. Students in magnet programs in Montclair, New Jersey (Clewell & Joy, 1990) and Buffalo, New York (Rossell, 1987) experienced increases in achievement. In a study of 12 large urban districts, Blank (1989) found similar increases in student performance amongst magnet participants. Witte and Walsh (1990) indicated that drop-out rates were lower and test scores higher amongst students in Milwaukee magnet schools when compared to their peers in regular (non-magnet) schools.

Although most authors found that magnet programs increased student achievement (Bensman, 2000; Clewell & Joy, 1990; Crain, Heebner, & Si, 1992; Rossell, 1987; Witte & Walsh, 1990), a few found that magnet programs decreased student achievement (Chriss, Nash, & Stern, 1992) or widened the Black/White achievement gap on measures other than basic skills tests (Eaton, 1996). Others argued that the results were inconclusive (Eaton, 1996; Eaton & Crutcher, 1996; Morantz, 1996). Several authors have acknowledged that self-selection bias
may distort research findings (Goldhaber, 1999; Orfield, 1990; Rossell, 1985b). By definition, students in magnet programs are there because their parents choose to enroll them. Blank and Archbald (1992) posit that most studies do not adequately control for student background characteristics. In one of the few studies that used an experimental design, Crain, Heebner, and Si (1992) compared reading scores of students who entered magnet schools by lottery with similar students not chosen by the lottery. They found that the magnet students’ reading scores improved more than the non-magnet students. This study is noteworthy because it attempts to address the self-selection bias.

Gamoran (1996) sought to answer the question of whether schools of choice (rather than traditional attendance zone schools) increased the academic skills of students by comparing the standardized test scores of students in public magnet, public comprehensive, Catholic, and secular private high schools. Gamoran concluded that students in magnet schools had higher scores in science, reading, and social studies than students in comprehensive schools. Students in Catholic and secular private high schools scored higher on all four tests (mathematics, science, English, and social studies)—a finding which Gamoran (1996) asserted was “consistent with their sociodemographic advantages” (p. 9). Gamoran argued, therefore, that the potential positive effects of magnet programs on student achievement needed to be taken seriously.

Some studies (Eaton, 1996; Eaton & Crutcher, 1996; Morantz, 1996) reported mixed results and criticized the ways in which school districts presented data regarding increased student achievement as a result of magnet program participation. In a case study of the effect of magnet programs on student achievement in Montgomery County, Maryland, Eaton (1996) argued that magnet programs had achieved some success in increasing student achievement. Scores on basic skills tests had improved, for example. However, because these basic skills tests
were graded only according to pass/fail, differences between a student who barely passed and one who excelled were not discernible. When measures other than basic skills test scores were used, the overall achievement gap between Whites and non-Whites in Montgomery County widened. The achievement gap between Whites and non-Whites (Blacks and Hispanics) in terms of completion of ninth-grade algebra and enrollment in AP courses widened. SAT scores increased county-wide for Whites, Asians, and Blacks, but decreased for Hispanics. Furthermore, although the achievement gap between Whites and Blacks in terms of SAT scores decreased, the difference between Black and White scores was still the greatest of any group.

Rather than improving education for all students, magnet programs have also been critiqued for improving education only for an elite group of students selected either by examination or by demonstration of student interest in the educational program. Critics claim that magnet programs “skim” the best and brightest students from non-magnet schools (Goldhaber, 1999; Moore & Davenport, 1989; Rossell, 1979). Magnet programs have also been criticized for implementing screening procedures to avoid some of the more problematic students (Blank, Dentler, Baltzell, & Chabotar, 1983; Glenn, 1991).

Conducting this research study has forced me to view this body of literature in a different light. What other factors—aside from the selection process—might also be responsible for increasing student achievement? What other kinds of questions could researchers ask aside from, or at least in addition to, trying to identify the causes of differences between White and Black achievement on standardized test scores? This case study is unique because it focuses on the ways in which the immersion curriculum at South Boulevard enhances achievement of all students—both on standardized test scores and in terms of acquiring a second language.
Learning a second language through an immersion program like the one at South Boulevard is an example of one way in which schools can provide academic and social benefits to their students.

**Foreign Language Immersion Programs**

In this section, I define and distinguish between three types of elementary-level foreign language program models. I then describe the specific context and historical development of immersion programs in Louisiana. I conclude by reviewing the literature on the academic, cognitive, and socio-cultural effects of immersion education.

Lipton (1988) describes three categories of foreign language education programs in elementary schools: 1) Foreign Language Exploratory (FLEX), 2) Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools (FLES), and 3) Immersion. The goal of FLEX programs is for students to learn about language and to expose them to the target culture(s) of the language(s) studied. Curtain and Pesola (1994) refer to FLEX models as “sampler programs” (p. 35). Heining-Boynton (1998) defines FLEX goals as “language experience rather than proficiency” (p. 5). FLEX students typically learn basic words and phrases in one or more target languages. FLEX programs, which usually take place over a fixed time period, ranging from six to nine weeks to an entire semester, have been criticized for providing students with little more than superficial experiences and stereotypical images of target cultures (Met, 1998).

FLES programs provide more exposure to the target language and culture than FLEX programs. FLES programs are horizontally and vertically articulated, a characteristic that distinguishes them from FLEX programs. The primary goal of a FLES program, according to Campbell, Gray, Rhodes, and Snow (1985), is for “students to acquire a certain level of listening and speaking skills (depending on the program) and an awareness of the foreign culture” (pp. 46-47). In a typical FLES program, the teacher spends 20 to 45 minutes on second language
instruction three to five times a week. The subject of study is the target language, although FLES programs also emphasize the teaching of culture. FLES programs are designed to teach majority language students (in this case, English-speaking) an additional language.

Johnson and Swain (1997) identify five types of immersion programs. The first type is immersion in a foreign language, the type most frequently found in the United States. In this program, the target language is clearly removed from general daily life and restricted almost entirely to the classroom. The second type—immersion for majority-language students in a minority language—is common in Canada where French is used by some of the national population. In Canadian immersion programs, majority-language (Anglophone) students develop proficiency in French, the minority language. The third type—immersion for language support and for language revival—is found in communities hoping to reconnect themselves to a heritage language, such as Hawaiian language immersion programs, as well as French immersion in Louisiana. The fourth type is immersion for language support, in which the second language is more widely used in the community. The school curriculum, therefore, seeks to support that language use. Such programs are common in the Basque- and Catalan-speaking areas of Spain, where students are immersed in Basque or Catalan, with instruction in Spanish beginning in the later primary grades. The fifth type of immersion program is immersion in a language of power, which characterizes programs in Singapore and Hong Kong, where English is seen as an international language.

Immersion programs are labeled as total immersion, partial immersion, or two-way or dual immersion. The goal of immersion is for students to develop a high level of target language proficiency while mastering subject content. Immersion students learn the subject matter of the

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17 The Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) was created by the state legislature in 1968 in order to promote and support Cajun, Creole and Francophone heritage in Louisiana. For more information, see their website at www.codofil.org.
regular curriculum through instruction in a second language. In the United States, immersion students are usually monolingual English-speakers who choose to participate in an immersion program in order to acquire a second language. Immersion programs vary with respect to the objectives of the program, the percentage of instruction in the target language, the characteristics of participating students, the teachers’ primary language, the age at which second language instruction is initiated, and the language used to teach basic subjects. However, they all share several common goals: instruction in a second, non-English language, proficiency in two languages, and academic success (Caldas & Boudreaux, 1999; Thomas, Collier, & Abbott, 1993).

There is some disagreement in the academic literature regarding the definition of a total—or full—immersion program. According to the American Council on Immersion Education, in a total immersion program, all subjects in grades K-2 are taught in the target language, with instruction in English increasing gradually as students progress from third through sixth grade. However, Caldas and Boudreaux (1999) include as total immersion programs those in which all instruction is in the target language with the exception of reading in the native language. Thomas and Collier’s (1997) definition, while similar, differs slightly in the percentage of instruction in the target language. They assert that “[i]mmersion is a commitment to bilingual schooling throughout grades K-12 in which students are instructed 90 percent of the school day during kindergarten and grade 1 in the minority language . . . and 10 percent of the day in the majority language (English)” (p. 24).

Partial immersion programs are those in which less than 100 percent of instruction (usually approximately 50 percent) of the academic subjects is taught in the target language. In

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18 The American Council on Immersion Education’s website is as follows: http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/ACIE.html.
some partial immersion programs, material taught in the target language is reinforced in English. In some partial immersion programs, reading is taught in both the first and the second language; in others, reading instruction is reserved for the native language. The percentage of instruction in the target language usually remains constant throughout the elementary school years. In the U.S., students in partial immersion programs are typically native English speakers. The foreign language immersion program at South Boulevard is best defined as a partial immersion program because students spend approximately 60% of the instructional day immersed in the second language. While some immersion programs change the percentage of instruction in the second language over the course of the program, South Boulevard does not. Students at all grade levels spend 60% of the available instructional time in the second language.

Dual immersion programs place equal emphasis on English and a second, non-English language. In such programs, the class is ideally composed of a balance of native English-speakers and speakers of the non-English language. The objective of two-way immersion programs is for students from both language groups to become fluent in the other language and to succeed academically. Two-way immersion programs are designed to meet the needs of language minority and language majority students in the same classroom. Such programs can be difficult to establish, however, as they require just the right mix of students. The first two-way program in the United States began in 1963 in Florida’s Miami-Dade County schools among a large number of recent Cuban immigrants (Thomas & Collier, 1997). Florida’s dual immersion program at Coral Way Elementary inspired other programs throughout the country.

The first immersion program in the United States designed for language majority students was established in Culver City, California in 1971, with the help of professors from the University of California at Los Angeles (Cohen, 1974). This program was modeled after the
French immersion program in St. Lambert, Canada. Immersion programs in the United States have become more common since then. The Center for Applied Linguistics has an on-line directory of total or partial immersion programs in the United States that lists 242 schools in 28 states and Washington D.C. as of 2006 (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2006). Thirty-four of these schools are in Louisiana. Eleven foreign languages are represented, with Spanish (43%) and French (29%) making up the majority of available programs.

History of Louisiana Immersion Programs

Despite a poor reputation in terms of education, Louisiana actually has the highest number of immersion programs in the United States (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2006). Louisiana has a rich cultural heritage, which includes the original Native American inhabitants, as well as enslaved persons from Africa and the descendants of French, Spanish, German, and Acadian settlers. The original French colonists settled the area in 1682. Louisiana remained under French control until it was ceded to Spain in 1762. The Spaniards ruled Louisiana for 41 years, during which time much of the architecture in the French Quarter in New Orleans was built. As a result of the French and Indian War, the English gained control of the province of Acadia (now called Nova Scotia) and forced the French to leave. This forced deportation (“Le Grand Dérangement”) became an important episode in Louisiana history because many of these French-speaking Acadian farmers settled in southwestern Louisiana in the 1760s. The United States acquired Louisiana from France on December 20, 1803 as part of the Louisiana Purchase. Today, many descendants of the Acadian refugees (now known as Cajuns) live in Acadiana, an area that comprises 22 historically French-speaking parishes in southwestern Louisiana.

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19 The Center for Applied Linguistics maintains this directory at the following URL: http://www.cal.org/resources/immersion/ImmersionSearch.jsp.
20 Louisiana has the highest actual number of immersion programs—not the highest number of programs per capita. Data available at http://www.cal.org/resources/immersion/.
Louisiana’s culture has been largely influenced by its French and Spanish history. When Louisiana was a Spanish colony, the government subdivided it into parishes as geographical divisions of the Catholic church. Thus, Louisiana is divided into 64 “parishes” rather than counties. Louisiana civil laws are based on the Napoleonic Code rather than English Common Law. As evidence of that French legacy, Caldas and Boudreaux (1999) assert that as much as 50% of the population of some parishes in Acadiana still speak French, although many of these residents are over 50 years of age.

Louisiana has renewed its commitment to the revival of the French language by creating numerous immersion programs throughout the state. The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) drafted *Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators: Bulletin 741* (2002), which mandated that a foreign language be taught to all academically able students in fourth through eighth grades. *Bulletin 741* prescribes that a foreign language be taught for a minimum of 30 minutes daily during the entire school year in Grades 4, 5, and 6. In Grades 7 and 8, the foreign language must be taught for 150 minutes per week during the entire school year. This qualifies as a FLES program.

The result of this mandate has been the initiation and growth of FLES and immersion programs throughout the state. As of the 2007-2008 school year, 220 Louisiana schools had French and 112 had Spanish FLES programs. During that same school year, there were 34,938 fourth through eighth grade students enrolled in French, Spanish, and Latin FLES programs. Grades pre-K–3 had an additional 17,739 students in French and Spanish FLES programs. Twenty-six Louisiana schools had French immersion and eight had Spanish immersion programs. In Grades pre-K–8, 2,833 students participated in French immersion programs and
715 in Spanish immersion programs, for a total of 3,548 students. These numbers demonstrate Louisiana’s commitment to foreign language education.

Most of the immersion programs are located in Acadiana, where many residents desire to reconnect to their heritage language. The first French immersion program in Louisiana began in St. Martin Parish in 1971. A French and Spanish immersion program began in Baton Rouge a decade later at La Belle Aire Elementary School. The State Department of Education provided two Spanish and two French teachers who followed the children as they advanced through the grade levels. The immersion program started with 100% immersion in kindergarten and added 10% instructional time in English until reaching a 50/50 split between English and the target language. The program was enthusiastically promoted and supported by its principal and did not survive after she retired.

**Immersion Programs and Student Achievement**

What are the results of participation in an immersion program? Despite the limitations of using standardized tests to measure school success, two facts remain: 1) *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) mandates their use in evaluating schools and students; and 2) test scores are an important consideration for parents when it comes time to select schools for their children. Furthermore, these studies are pertinent to the present study because the degree of success and ensuing popularity (or lack thereof) of immersion programs is directly related to the issue of school choice as parents are unlikely to choose to send their children to schools with poor student achievement.

Numerous research studies provide compelling evidence of the academic, cognitive, and socio-cultural benefits of language learning. The academic benefits of language learning are well documented. Research shows that students can achieve high levels of proficiency in a
second language without suffering negative effects on native language proficiency or achievement in other academic subjects (Caldas & Boudreaux, 1999; Cooper, 1987; Díaz, 1985; DiPietro, 1980). A brief summary of some of the published literature concerning the academic impact of participation in early language programs follows.

Thomas, Collier and Abbott (1993) conducted a study comparing English language arts and mathematics test scores of immersion and non-immersion students in first, second, and third grades. Their sample included 719 partial-immersion students and three comparison groups: a local, non-immersion group comparable to the partial-immersion students, a district-wide group based on the typical performance of students in the district, and one national group based on the performance of students nationwide. Their results indicate that the immersion students did as well or better than the non-immersion students in mathematics, as measured by scores on the Fairfax County Public Schools Program of Studies (POS) Mathematics Test. While the difference between the immersion students’ scores in English language arts and the scores of the local control group were not statistically significant, the immersion students’ scores were more than one-third of a standard deviation higher than the district-wide mean. These scores are noteworthy because the immersion students only received half of their instruction in English, while the comparison groups received all their instruction in English.

Morantz (1996) documented that magnet students outperformed their non-magnet peers in most academic subjects and years on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), even after controlling for individual background variables such as minority and poverty status. The district tracked the performance over time of four “cohorts” of students at magnet and non-magnet schools. Morantz (1996) summarized one cohort study which focused on a 1988 kindergarten cohort in an elementary foreign language immersion school. The kindergarteners were the first
group of students enrolled full-time in an elementary foreign language program. The study results showed that while the kindergarteners’ scores fluctuated initially, by the fifth grade, the foreign language students performed better than district averages and national norms. The foreign language students scored particularly well in math.

Several authors (Caldas & Boudreaux, 1999; Lang, 1990; Rafferty, 1986; Taylor-Ward, 2003) who studied the relationship between academic achievement and elementary foreign language programs in Louisiana arrived at similar conclusions. Caldas and Boudreaux’s (1999) study of French immersion students in 13 Louisiana elementary and middle schools yielded similar results. Their sample included 1,941 immersion and non-immersion students in Grades 3, 5, and 7. Their study compared 1997 spring LEAP scores of students in French immersion programs with non-immersion students and found that immersion students performed better than non-immersion students in all three grade levels on both the English language arts and the math sections of the test. The positive correlation in these studies between foreign language immersion and mathematics test scores is particularly significant because the mathematics instruction was conducted entirely in French. Furthermore, Caldas and Boudreaux (1999) controlled for student race and school poverty level—an element often missing in extant research on immersion programs.

Haj-Broussard (2003) partially corroborated Caldas and Boudreaux’s findings of a positive effect of immersion education on Black achievement. Haj-Broussard compared achievement scores of White and Black students in regular education classes and French immersion and non-immersion students in Louisiana public schools on the fourth grade LEAP test. While French immersion students had scores that were equal to, or higher than, their non-immersion peers, the achievement gap persisted in several disciplines. There was an
achievement gap between White and Black immersion students on both the math and language arts sections of the LEAP test, and between White and Black students in language in both immersion and non-immersion educational contexts. The mean scores of Black immersion students fell between the White and Black regular education students. Thus, Haj-Broussard (2003) found that the context of French immersion education appeared to bridge the achievement gap between White regular education and Black immersion students.

Armstrong and Rogers (1997) and Taylor (2003) compared FLES students with non-FLES students to investigate whether elementary foreign language study contributes to academic achievement. Armstrong and Rogers (1997) found that while the FLES students’ scores in reading were not significantly different than the non-FLES students, their math and language scores21 were higher. One teacher in their study was particularly surprised by the higher math scores because she had taken the time for the Spanish lessons out of instructional time normally designated for mathematics. Her students had received 90 minutes less math instruction per week, yet they still outperformed their non-FLES peers. Taylor (2003) measured academic achievement by using the 5th grade ITBS and the 4th grade LEAP. She found that FLES students scored significantly higher than their non-FLES peers on every subtest of the LEAP test. They outscored their non-foreign language peers on the language portion of the ITBS test.

Schuster (2005) found no correlation between FLES participation and test scores. The students in Schuster’s study participated in a 30-minute FLES period two times per week. He compared the ITBS scores of FLES participants with non-FLES participants and found no statistical difference. These results, however, still support the benefits of early language learning, because the FLES students’ test scores were on par with the non-FLES students, in

21 The Metropolitan Achievement Test, Seventh Edition (MAT 7), which contains sections on reading comprehension, language, and mathematics concepts, was used as both the pretest and the posttest instrument. Thus, there are separate scores for “reading” and for “language.”
spite of reduced instructional time in the core content areas due to the FLES program. FLES students had one less hour of instructional time per week, yet they received similar test scores as non-FLES students. The FLES students, however, had the benefit of learning a second language.

All these studies make causal attributions regarding the link between early foreign language education and test scores. With one exception (Schuster, 2005), they all make the assertion that foreign language study causes students to do better on academic achievement tests. As a foreign language teacher and speaker myself, I wanted very much to believe that students at South Boulevard do well in other academic subjects because they are simultaneously learning a second language. However, this study does not claim to find correlations between student achievement and foreign language study. Rather, in Chapter Five, I argue that the unique culture created by the immersion curriculum contributes to South Boulevard’s high test scores.

Other studies support the cognitive benefits of multilingualism, suggesting that bilinguals often have cognitive and linguistic advantages over monolingual students when it comes to divergent thinking, pattern recognition, and problem solving (Bamford & Mizokawa, 1991; Diaz, 1983, 1985; Hakuta, 1986; Lambert, 1975). Landry (1974) compared student scores in grades one, four, and six on the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking in two pairs of schools (one FLES and one non-FLES). The Torrance Tests measure the “divergent thinking tasks of fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration” (Landry, 1974, p. 11). No statistically significant differences in divergent thinking were found in first grade, a result which supports the author’s hypothesis that there were no differences between the FLES and non-FLES students upon entering the first grade. Statistically significant differences were not found in fourth grade, either. However, the FLES students in sixth grade outperformed the non-FLES group. Landry attributes this positive change in favor of the FLES students to the fact that in this particular
FLES program, reading and writing in the target language do not begin until fourth grade. Since the test was administered in November, the students in the fourth grade sample had not had the benefit of conscious, overt instruction in reading and writing. The students in the sixth grade sample had had more than two years of such overt instruction.

Bamford and Mizokawa (1991) compared nonverbal problem-solving skills of a second grade Spanish immersion class with a similar monolingual class in the same community. They compared fall and spring administrations of *Raven’s Coloured Progressive Matrices*, a test commonly used to assess perceptual reasoning processes in children 12 years and younger (Ben-Zeev, 1977; Diaz, 1985; Hakuta & Diaz, 1985). Their results indicated that the Spanish immersion students demonstrated superior growth in nonverbal problem-solving over the course of the school year.

Another benefit of language study is socio-cultural. Learning another language allows students to broaden their horizons by learning to communicate with members of other cultures. Language study also promotes appreciation, tolerance, and respect for other cultures and peoples. Lambert and Tucker’s (1972) study provides an example of this socio-cultural benefit. In their study, immersion and non-immersion students were asked to rate themselves, English Canadians, and French Canadians on 13 bipolar adjectives such as friendly-unfriendly. The immersion students made more favorable assessments of French Canadians than the non-immersion, English-speaking control group. In another part of the study, students were asked: “Suppose you happened to be born into a French-Canadian family, would you be just as happy to be a French-Canadian person as an English-Canadian person?” Eighty-four percent of the fifth grade immersion students responded that they would be “just as happy to be French Canadian,” while only 48 percent of the non-immersion group responded in this way.
In another study, Cziko, Lambert, and Gutter (1979) asked fifth and sixth grade immersion and non-immersion students to assess the similarity or dissimilarity of pairs of concepts such as themselves as individuals, monolingual English Canadians, monolingual French Canadians, bilingual French Canadians, and bilingual English Canadians. Early immersion students in their sample perceived themselves as more similar to bilingual English Canadians and bilingual French Canadians than did the late immersion or non-immersion students, prompting the authors to conclude that “the early immersion experience seems to have reduced the social distance perceived between self and French Canadians” (Cziko, Lambert, & Gutter, 1979, p. 26).

In spite of these studies, Robinson (1981) cautions that the results of the body of research on the links between foreign language study and attitudes are inconclusive. She argues that we cannot claim that “all foreign language instruction will lead to positive attitudes” (p. 33). She argues that a positive attitude towards the target language and culture can facilitate second language (L2) acquisition. We cannot assume, however, that the causal relationship works in the other direction—that L2 acquisition necessarily contributes to the development of positive attitudes towards the target culture. This study, however, does find that the culture created by the immersion curriculum is important in promoting and enhancing relationships between students.

Notwithstanding the evidence in favor of early language learning, others argue against its efficacy. Hammerly (1987) argues that although immersion programs have been culturally and politically successful, they fail linguistically, resulting in students whose target language proficiency is poor and underdeveloped. Hammerly (1987) summarizes six research studies demonstrating that the target language linguistic competence of immersion students was rife with grammatical and syntactic errors and characterized by short, repetitive utterances. However, one
of the studies involved interviews with just six students—a very small sample size. Another study compared immersion students to same-age Francophone children. Lantolf and Frawley (1985) argue against the use of the “native-speaker yardstick,” making the case that second language learners should not be compared to native speakers (p. 339). Hammerly concludes by advocating for increased focus on form rather than communicative function.

Regarding South Boulevard’s students’ target language proficiency, no official tests have been administered to determine their language skills and/or deficiencies. The school has recently developed their own oral proficiency interview that they have conducted at the end of the last two school years to help them determine how well students’ second language skills are developing. Students are interviewed in their second language by a teacher (other than their regular classroom teacher) who assesses their speech on a scale from 1 (=needs work) to 4 (=very good) according to fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. Because of confidentiality rules and norms, I did not have access to these test scores. My academic training and professional experience as a foreign language educator combined with time spent at the school, however, lead me to conclude that the majority of students at South Boulevard have excellent listening comprehension skills, near-native pronunciation, and good speaking skills in controlled, familiar situations. Students make numerous grammatical and syntax errors in speech—particularly when they branch out to conversation topics outside the school setting—yet these mistakes do not impede communication. As with all content areas and skills, some students’ language skills are superior, while others’ are weak. Since reading and writing in the target language are not a focus of the curriculum, students’ skills in these two areas are not as strong.

Perhaps most importantly, students at South Boulevard speak their target language with confidence and ease. They are willing to take risks with the language and are not afraid of
making mistakes—a problem common with older language learners. They occasionally speak “Franglais” or “Spanglish”—as do their native-speaking teachers. For example, during one lesson I observed, a fourth grade teacher asked her class to explain what a “recurso natural” (natural resource) was. A boy immediately raised his hand and offered the following impromptu explanation: “Un recurso natural es una cosa que una persona no build; es de nature” (“A natural resource is something that a person doesn’t build; it’s from nature”). He neither stumbled nor hesitated. The teacher enthusiastically accepted his response and continued with the lesson. In sum, South Boulevard students’ target language skills are something of a mixed bag. Yes, they make mistakes in oral and written communication. But they also understand the target language, speak it fluently, and are understood by each other, their teachers, and by native speakers not part of the South Boulevard community.

Although support for early language learning is not universal, as Hammerly’s critique illustrates, the majority of research does favor it. We live in an increasingly diverse world with an increasingly diverse student population. Berliner and Biddle (1995) predict that language-minority children will account for 40 percent of the school-age population by the 2030s. Furthermore, strong language skills are increasingly important in the age of information, where international communication is commonplace. Those proficient in multiple languages will have greater, easier access to this information and will be better able to take advantage of the benefits of multilingualism.

**Conclusion**

The interactions among school choice, foreign language immersion magnet programs, and public school desegregation in Louisiana remain unexplored. In this literature review, I reviewed studies of academic and social effects of desegregation. I also reviewed literature
which explores the relationship between magnet programs and desegregation—both in terms of their desegregation efficiency and their effect on social relationships between students. I also reviewed studies that show a positive correlation between early foreign language study and academic achievement, which is an important variable related to school choice.

This review reveals a need for a context-sensitive study that merges these three research strands: school desegregation, magnet programs, and foreign language immersion education. Talbert-Johnson (2000) argued that “[d]esegregation cannot be treated as if it were a uniform program in all racially mixed schools . . . it is a complex process that needs to be studied cautiously” (p. 12). Wells (1995) concurred, asserting that researchers must “continue to move toward conducting more thoughtful studies that address the uniqueness of each desegregated school and the societal and political context that shapes its policies and practices” (p. 698). Goldring and Smrekar (2000) called for research that considers “the particular district context of any magnet school plan for evaluating the effectiveness of magnet schools in achieving racial desegregation” (p. 21). This research study aspires to be such an endeavor. Taken together, my review of these areas provides the background, context, and framework for this study of the political, socio-cultural, historical, and curricular factors related to the increasing integration of the foreign language immersion magnet program at South Boulevard in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

I conclude with a quote from Joseph T. Taylor (1956), a Black sociology professor at Dillard University, who explained why further exploration of race and education in Louisiana matters: “The destinies—the hopes of Louisiana are one with those of the nation. The weaknesses and the follies of Louisiana—by whomever demonstrated or perpetrated—are liabilities of the nation” (p. 271).
CHAPTER THREE: IMMERSING MYSELF IN SOUTH BOULEVARD

Because this study employs an ethnographically-informed case study research design, this chapter focuses on qualitative research methods, data collection, and analysis procedures. I describe several salient characteristics of qualitative research and briefly review some criticisms of this research paradigm. I offer a rationale for why a case study approach is best suited for my research questions. I then describe the types of ethnographic methods and perspectives that informed the data collection and analysis procedures. Finally, I outline the research design in detail.

Qualitative Research Methodology

Qualitative research, broadly defined, is a form of inquiry that enables the researcher to “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). The questions of the present research, which explores the relationship between a foreign language immersion magnet program, school desegregation, and educational equity, call for qualitative inquiry, which is particularly suited to reveal the “nuances and textures of real life” (Mareck, Fine, & Kidder, 1997, p. 633).

What are the defining characteristics of qualitative research? Qualitative research assumes that knowledge is socially constructed; it emerges through relationships and interactions with others. There is no one reality. Rather, there are multiple realities that should be studied holistically. The qualitative approach also assumes that “objective research” is an oxymoron. Lincoln and Guba (1985) observe that “any given inquiry will necessarily serve some value agenda” (p. 9). All data, whether qualitative or quantitative, has to be collected, analyzed, and
manipulated by human beings, who are inherently value-laden. Good qualitative researchers acknowledge their biases and minimize their potential to distort the data.

Qualitative research rests on a dialectical relationship between the researcher and the researched. Just as it is impossible for a researcher to rid himself/herself of all personal trappings, so it is impossible for a researcher to completely isolate himself/herself from the subject of study. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert, “[t]he inquirer and the ‘object’ of inquiry interact to influence one another; knower and known are inseparable” (p. 94). The object of inquiry is valued as a knower—not simply as something to be studied.

Qualitative research strives to explain and to describe, rather than to predict. For Patton (2002), the great advantage of qualitative research is that “greater attention can be given to nuance, setting, interdependencies, complexities, idiosyncrasies, and context” (p. 60). Qualitative research explores processes and experiences, rather than predicting outcomes and analyzing results. Qualitative research seeks to answer “why” and “how” questions.

Qualitative research methods, however, and ethnography in particular, are not without their critics. Feminist, post-modernist, and post-structuralist scholars (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, & Ballerino Cohen, 1989; Roman & Apple, 1990; Scheurich, 1992) argue that ethnography is part of the modernist, positivist research tradition. These critics assert that ethnography is engaged in the business of representation: the lone researcher goes out into the field, engages in participant observation, and then attempts to represent that culture to an audience. While the ethnographer strives to represent the culture from an emic, or insider’s perspective, the result is still filtered through the lens of the researcher.

Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, and Ballerino Cohen (1989) highlight the “constructed nature of cultural accounts” (p. 9). White (1978) asserts that every account “can be shown to have left
something out of the description of its object and to have put something in which others regard as nonessential” (p. 3). During participant observation, the researcher decides what to pay attention to and what to ignore. Clifford (1986) argues that ethnography is “always caught up in the invention, not the representation, of cultures” (p. 2). Traditional ethnography, like other positivist approaches, operates under the assumption that knowledge is out there, waiting to be discovered. Deconstruction, on the other hand, endows readers—not writers—with the ultimate power to judge meaning. Deconstructionists argue that language at best is imprecise and that the meaning of texts, therefore, is variable. Consequently, no statement of absolute meaning can be “final” or “correct,” and there is no such thing as “truth.” Scheurich (1992) refers to this position as the “interpretive conditionality of all representations” (p. 1).

Anthropologist Richardson (2004) argues, however, that truth does exist and that it is the task of ethnographers to tell it. Richardson (2004) makes this argument in the following poem that he includes on his syllabus for a course on ethnographic methods:

What is Ethnography?
Ethnography is a journey,
A journey to tell, to communicate,
The truth, the truth that lives
Out there, in the lives of others.

Because the truth lives, as Richardson asserts, it is constantly evolving. The difficulty of ethnography, then, lies in recording the ever-changing truths in the lives of others. Ethnography is socially constructed; that is, the truth communicated in ethnography emerges out of the interaction between the ethnographer, the informants, and the readers.

Despite their limitations, these qualitative approaches best enabled me to explore the lived experiences of the parents, teachers, and students of South Boulevard. I echo Strauss and
Corbin’s (1998) assertion that qualitative research methods are most appropriate for studies that require obtaining “intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods” (p. 11). This study is precisely such an endeavor. Pursuing an ethnographically-informed case study will allow me to take advantage of the strengths of both case study research and ethnography in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of the reasons why South Boulevard is becoming more integrated rather than re-segregated like many schools around the country.

**Research Design**

**Rationale for Case Study Approach**

Jarrett (1992) asserts that case studies are “desirable when researchers seek firsthand knowledge of real-life situations and processes within naturalistic settings and an understanding of the subjective meanings that actors give to the behaviors and events being observed and discussed” (p. 176). Thus, some research questions are not justly explored with quantitative data. I argue that case studies are particularly valuable in educational research because they offer a human face to the educational system that is often missed in discussions of test scores and demographic data. In her case study of veteran high school teachers, Cohen (1991) writes that when a situation

is presented to us, as it usually is, in terms of cold statistics, it is all too easy to ignore, or to accept it as simply a fact of life. However, when the same facts are expressed by real human beings, it is harder not to pay attention (p. 96).

Bullough (1989) defends the case study approach by arguing that case studies have a “unique pedagogical power” (p. xii). Shulman (1986) agrees, arguing that most individuals find specific cases more powerful influences on their decisions than impersonally presented empirical findings, even though the latter constitute
‘better’ evidence. Although principles are powerful, cases are memorable, and lodge in memory as the basis for later judgments (p. 32).

Case study research is a powerful tool to promote understanding of complex relationships, such as those explored in this research, between schools and families. A case study research design is the most appropriate kind for this study for several reasons.

According to Stake (1978), a case study is an investigation of a “bounded system”—a finite system enclosed by time and by place (p. 7). A case study brackets, focusing on a more minute level. A case study approach is appropriate for this study because the school, South Boulevard, is a single unit—a “specific, unique bounded system” (Stake, 2005, p. 445). I could have chosen a more narrow focus—examining perhaps the pedagogy used in the foreign language immersion program or the Foreign Associate Teachers (FATs) at the school. However, the research questions require a wider lens.

The holistic nature of the research questions demands attention to multiple groups of people, the historical context of the school and how it relates to the larger context of desegregation in Baton Rouge, and the foreign language immersion program at South Boulevard. Stake (2005) asserts that case studies are particularly suited in situations which focus on “experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political, and other contexts” (p. 444). This case study of South Boulevard requires such attention to the socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts surrounding the school. Thus, although I originally intended for the this case study to be bounded by the year during which I completed the fieldwork—2006-2007—I quickly realized that the study would be incomplete without taking into consideration the rich context in which South Boulevard has developed. Thus, I expanded the study to include the history of the school since it first opened in 1949.
A single case study design affords the depth necessary to understand the factors at play in the success South Boulevard has experienced in desegregating its student population and promoting high student achievement. Some case study researchers, such as Yin (2003), stress the importance of cross-case comparisons and multiple case design. Others, such as Stake (2005) and Wolcott (1999), favor a single case design, arguing that cross-case and multiple case studies sacrifice depth for breadth. Stake (2005) articulates this position in the following statement: “A research design featuring comparison substitutes (a) the comparison for (b) the case as the focus of study” (p. 457). For this study, focusing on the case—South Boulevard—enabled me to better explore the research questions than comparing South Boulevard to other schools or magnet programs.

Furthermore, because this case study relies heavily on ethnographic data collection methods—in particular interviewing and participant observation—I draw also on Wolcott’s (1999) assertion that “ethnography proceeds best when explicit comparison is minimized rather than maximized” (p. 86). In explaining his position, Wolcott (1994) offers the following aphorism: “Get to the heart of the matter if possible; if not, compare” (p. 183). Wolcott (1999) argues that “[i]n a day when large sample sizes remain the vogue and computer capabilities entice us to substitute breadth for depth, ethnography offers an authoritative mandate to study in units of one, the single case studied holistically” (p. 87). I assert that in this case, comparing South Boulevard to other schools would have weakened, rather than strengthened, the study.

The purpose or goal of case study research depends on the kind of case study. Stake (2005) identifies three types of cases. Intrinsic case study is an investigation of a unique situation, person, or group. The goal of an intrinsic case study is neither to discover information that can be generalized from the case at hand to other cases nor to establish a grand theory or
understand abstract phenomenon. Rather, an intrinsic case is undertaken because, “in all its particularity and ordinariness, this case itself is of interest” (Stake, 2000, p. 445). An instrumental case study is undertaken because it is assumed to represent other cases. An instrumental case study seeks to move from one specific case to other cases, generalizing information gleaned from the original case. The subject or object of study is not necessarily of interest on its own; rather, it is of interest because it will potentially lead to new knowledge or understanding about other cases. The collective case study is undertaken when a researcher simultaneously studies a number of cases in order to better understand a group, phenomenon or situation. Stake (2000) asserts that a collective case study is “instrumental study extended to several cases” (p. 437). The objective of a collective case study is generalizability, not particularity.

Stake concedes that some research studies and problems do not readily fit into one of these three categories. This case study of South Boulevard is both intrinsic and instrumental. It is an intrinsic case study because it is sufficiently unique and interesting on its own to merit further exploration. It is unique because of the composition of its student body, its location in a city that has vigorously resisted desegregation attempts, its unique instructional program, and the Foreign Associate Teachers (FATs) on the faculty. It will also be an instrumental case study. I hope that the information learned from this case study is applicable to other educational settings and that other school districts around the country will be able to learn from South Boulevard’s success in desegregating its student body and in providing students with a unique opportunity to learn another language.

How Ethnography Informs This Study

Both ethnography and case study research require rich, in-depth knowledge of the cultural context or setting, which Geertz (1973) refers to as “thick description.” Woods (1986)
asserts that ethnography is “no ordinary picture. A snapshot gives merely surface detail. The ethnographer is interested in what lies beneath” (p. 5). Similarly, Jarrett (1992) asserts that a case study must provide “a comprehensive and holistic understanding of social events within a single setting” (p. 176). Yin (2003) also argues that a case study “allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (p. 2).

In keeping with these characteristics of ethnography and case study research, this dissertation includes a holistic, contextualized description of the foreign language immersion program at South Boulevard and how it fits into the larger context of magnet programs and desegregation in EBRP. This thick description includes the school’s history, its physical facility and neighborhood setting, demographic information about the school’s student population, and descriptions of the foreign language immersion program and its teaching and administrative staff, the school’s newly-established parent-teacher organization, and daily routines at the school. Such thick description can only be provided using data collection methods common to both ethnography and case study research: participant observation, interviewing, and archival data review and analysis.

Ethnographers seek to represent another culture from an insider’s perspective. Bronislaw Malinowski (1922), often referred to as the father of social anthropology (cf. Sanjek, 1990) broke with the ethnographic tradition of his time and actually lived with his informants, the Trobriand Islanders. Rather than trying to reconstruct a past culture, as other early ethnographers had done, Malinowski studied a living, functioning culture. Calling for the need to capture the “native’s point of view,” Malinowski (1922) learned their language, asserting that this was critical to be able to “think the culture” (p. 5-6).
Learning and using the language of one’s informants is key to understanding their life experience. Woods (1986) explains that in ethnographic research, it is their meanings and interpretations that count. This means learning their language and customs with all their nuances, whether it be the crew of a fishing trawler, a group of fans on a football terrace, a gang of gravediggers, the inmates of a prison or a religious seminary, a class of five-year-olds beginning school, a particular group of deviant pupils or conforming ones (p. 4).

Throughout this study, I strove to adopt the ethnographic perspective of presenting the research from the viewpoint of and using the language of the study participants.

Many ethnographers argue that intensive fieldwork is the hallmark of ethnographic research (Firestone, 1987; Tedlock, 2000; Wolcott, 1999; Woods, 1986). Ethnographers place particular emphasis on the need to spend extended time in the field (Bernard, 1995; Wolcott, 1982, 1999). Rist (1980) criticizes what he calls “blitzkrieg ethnography” and “‘hit and run’ forays into the field” for attempting to accomplish ethnographic work without the necessary time in the field (p. 9). This study included the intensive fieldwork (including participant observation and interviews) critical to ethnographic work, as well as analysis of documents and artifacts, yet it is a case study because of the bounded nature of the subject—South Boulevard Elementary.

Data Collection Procedures

This study included three types of qualitative data collection procedures: 1) interviews, 2) observations, and 3) document analysis (Patton, 2002). Table 3.1 summarizes the data collection and analysis procedures I undertook in this study.

Interviews

I interviewed parents, school faculty, students, school board members, and pertinent district-level school administrators. Based on the size of the school (231 students from 185 families), I anticipated that I would need to conduct 15 to 18 in-depth interviews with parents of...
Table 3.1. Data collection and analysis timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Sep-06   | Authorization forms: IRB, school board and principal  
Consent forms: Parents  
Assent forms: Students  
Fieldwork:  
- all-day observations at school site for two full weeks  
- part-day observations at school for two additional weeks  
- observation during school’s Open House night  
Interviews: one current teacher, five parents |
| Oct-06   | Fieldwork:  
- participant observation during monthly PTO meeting  
- part-day observations at school 3-4 days a week for four weeks  
- observations at parish-wide Magnet Mania Event  
Interviews: two current and one former teachers, seven current and one former parents, one former school principal |
| Nov-06   | Fieldwork:  
- participant observation during school’s open house for prospective students  
- participant observation during monthly PTO meeting, school-wide “Immersion Excursion” event and Scholastic Book Fair  
Interviews: one former teacher, one current parent, two former students |
| Dec-06   | Fieldwork:  
- participant observation during monthly PTO meeting  
- part-day observations at school three days a week for three weeks  
Interviews: one school board member, two current teachers, one current administrator/teacher, one former teacher |
| Jan-Mar-07 | Preliminary Data Analysis  
Fieldwork:  
- participant observation during monthly PTO meeting, three school board meetings, and three evening fundraising events  
- follow-up observations at school site  
Interviews: five current parents, one current principal, two current teachers, one former teacher |
| Apr-May-07 | Fieldwork:  
- participant observation during monthly PTO meeting  
- select observations at school site  
Interviews: seven students, six parents, two school-level administrators, two current teachers, one school board member, one former district-level administrator |
| Aug-07   | Fieldwork:  
- all-day observation during first day of school  
- six follow-up site visits during first two weeks of school |
| Jun-Aug-07 | Data Analysis  
Participant observation 300 hours  
Interviews 60 hours |
current and possibly former South Boulevard students before reaching theoretical saturation, which Strauss and Corbin (1998) define as the “point in category development at which no new properties, dimensions, or relationships emerge during analysis” (p. 143). Due to both the content and level of redundancy, I interviewed 24 parents of current South Boulevard students and one parent of a former South Boulevard student. Table 3.2 shows the number and kinds of people I interviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>School-level administrators</th>
<th>District-level administrators</th>
<th>School board members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Former</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I began by doing a pilot interview with a parent with whom I already had a good relationship. After the pilot interview, I asked the parent for feedback regarding the interview process: did I allow enough time after each question? were there any questions that were unclear or confusing? did I use any unfamiliar terms? After the pilot interview, I used this feedback to revise some of the questions. Table 3.3 below provides important descriptive information about the parents of current South Boulevard students who I interviewed. Parents are listed in alphabetical order according to their pseudonym. In the data analysis chapters, the first time I refer to a participant in the sample, I include descriptive information about him/her. In subsequent references to the same parent, I use only his/her name.

In an effort to get a diversity of opinions and perspectives regarding the research questions, I used purposeful sampling of individuals, including opportunistic sampling and snowball or chain sampling (Patton, 2002). I asked school staff to recommend people for me to interview. On several occasions, I asked parents curious as to why I was spending so much time
Table 3.3: Current South Boulevard parents in the study sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Children at SR</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Origin (LA or other)</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>professor</td>
<td>“Christian pluralist”</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>New Orleans, LA</td>
<td>some college</td>
<td>self-employed</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>graduate student</td>
<td>Raised Catholic, not practicing</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brad</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>engineer</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>stay-at-home-mom</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camille</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>State employee / online college instructor</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>self-employed</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>some college</td>
<td>bartender / LSU student</td>
<td>Raised Catholic, not practicing</td>
<td>single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>MA, Ed.S.</td>
<td>Nationally Board Certified Teacher</td>
<td>Raised Catholic, not practicing</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>some college</td>
<td>firefighter</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>bank teller</td>
<td>evangelical</td>
<td>single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>lab tech.</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javier</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>Bible school</td>
<td>pastor</td>
<td>evangelical</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>New Orleans, LA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>estate planning</td>
<td>Methodist; wife is Catholic</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>Bible school</td>
<td>pastor</td>
<td>evangelical</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>stay-at-home-mom</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>night police dispatcher</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>some college</td>
<td>state employee</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>BS</td>
<td>engineer</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>some college</td>
<td>legal assistant</td>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanecia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Opelousas, LA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>librarian</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrence</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>some college</td>
<td>firefighter / realtor</td>
<td>Raised Catholic, not practicing</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>community college instructor</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>state employee</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>single</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

at the school if they would do an interview with me. I also asked parents in the sample for ideas regarding other parents at the school whom I might interview. I sought to include parents who represented the diversity of the student body in terms of gender, race, professional background, marital status, and religion. I felt that including voices from these distinct categories was important, particularly because extant research on school desegregation and magnet programs has found race, socioeconomic status, and marital status to be important in the school choice process (Bankston & Caldas, 2002). I also felt that it was important for my sample to include
people from distinct religious backgrounds because of the historical tradition of parochial schooling in the Baton Rouge community.

My sample also includes South Boulevard teachers, the current school principal, and the “lead magnet teacher”—a former French immersion teacher who currently helps the principal with the administration of the immersion program. I interviewed nine of the 24 teachers at South Boulevard, which is approximately 38% of the faculty. Table 3.4 provides important descriptive information about the current South Boulevard teachers and staff in the sample.

### Table 3.4. Current South Boulevard staff in study sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Position at South Blvd.</th>
<th>Total years of experience</th>
<th>Years at South Blvd.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Señora Gonzalez</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Spanish immersion</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Señora Lopez</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Spanish immersion</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Señora Cepeda</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>Spanish immersion</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madame Herbert</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>French immersion</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madame Rivet</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>French immersion</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madame Carpenter</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>French immersion</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Lawson</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>United States (Louisiana)</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Richard</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>United States (Louisiana)</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Brown</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>United States (Louisiana)</td>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Miller</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>United States (Louisiana)</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Crawford</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>United States (Louisiana)</td>
<td>Lead magnet teacher</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teacher sample was also purposive, rather than random, and included three English language arts, three Spanish immersion, and three French immersion teachers. I included two teachers who were new to South Boulevard in 2006-2007—one from France and one from Guatemala—who provided a fresh look at the school, its program, and its student body.
Because the historical context is an important part of the research questions, I interviewed four former South Boulevard teachers. Table 3.5 provides important descriptive information about the former South Boulevard teachers in the sample. Furthermore, two of the current English language arts in the sample have taught at South Boulevard for more than twenty years. The background information they provided due to their extensive experience at South Boulevard was valuable.

**Table 3.5. Former South Boulevard staff in the study sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Subject taught</th>
<th>Total yrs experience</th>
<th>Yrs at South Blvd.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Weber</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>United States (Mississippi)</td>
<td>sixth grade</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Lincoln</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>United States (Louisiana)</td>
<td>fourth grade / gifted resource</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Johnson</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>United States (Mississippi)</td>
<td>third grade</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Boyce</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>United States (Pennsylvania)</td>
<td>fifth grade</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Hill</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>United States (Louisiana)</td>
<td>principal</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I also interviewed two school board members who have extensive familiarity with South Boulevard: Ms. Patricia Haynes-Smith, former president of the EBRP School Board and the board member officially assigned to South Boulevard; and 2) Mr. Noel Hammatt, former vice-president of the school board and former parent of South Boulevard students. Finally, I interviewed several people currently in key leadership roles in the district: 1) Mr. Carlos Sam, the current Director of Magnet Programs for EBRP; and 2) Mr. Robert Stockwell, the Chief Academic Office of EBRP from 2005 to 2008. I also interviewed Dr. Margaret-Mary Sulentic Dowell, an EBRP assistant superintendent from 2002 to 2005 who supervised South Boulevard along with 64 other EBRP elementary schools. I tried to interview Ms. Charlotte Placide, the Superintendent of EBRP Schools, but was unable to get an audience with her.
The experiences of students in desegregated and magnet settings are perhaps the most critical piece of the puzzle, yet they often go unheard in research studies. I struggled with this issue in this case study. I conducted interviews with students, yet was somewhat disappointed by the quality of the interviews in terms of student responses regarding race and education. The students I interviewed were fourth- and fifth-graders—nine, ten, and eleven years old. One was visibly nervous about being interviewed; I got the feeling that another was trying to tell me what he thought I wanted to hear. Table 3.6 provides detailed information about the students in the sample.

Table 3.6. South Boulevard student interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kayley</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvester</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mixed race</td>
<td>Baton Rouge, LA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The students generally seemed to take their unique schooling experience at South Boulevard for granted. It is the only kind of school they know. When I asked them whether there was anything that made their school unique, they all identified that they learn to speak another language at South Boulevard, but they did not seem to grasp the significance of the immersion curriculum. Thus, I tried to highlight student experiences and voices whenever possible throughout this study, yet I also acknowledge that sometimes what goes unsaid or unspoken can be equally important as what is said. For students at South Boulevard, it has become normalized that one spends more than half the day at school speaking a second language. They do not question it; they do not really even consider it. “School,” quite simply, is what they do at South Boulevard.
I conducted open-ended, in-depth interviews. Interviews with adults lasted approximately one hour, while interviews with students tended to be shorter, lasting 20 to 30 minutes. I completed 60 hours of interview time. Open-ended, rather than structured, interviews were most appropriate for several reasons. In a structured interview format, the researcher asks the same series of pre-determined questions to all respondents, limits the types of possible responses, and “controls the pace of the interview as if it were a theatrical script to be followed” (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Open-ended or unstructured interviews were more appropriate for this study because they allowed me greater breadth and flexibility than structured interviews.

I made two audio recordings of all scheduled interviews—one digital and one analog—and transcribed them word-for-word afterwards. In addition to the audio recording, I also took notes during each interview, recording important phrases and words used by the informants in the form of condensed notes (Spradley, 1979). These interview notes also included details about where the interview was held, if there were particular questions that confused people or really brought out insightful responses, and information about the demeanor and attitude of the interviewees.

In addition to scheduled interviews, numerous other spontaneous interactions occurred in hallways, classrooms, meeting rooms, social gatherings, and even children’s birthday parties. These types of unplanned conversations provided an additional rich source of data. Because of the unscheduled, informal nature of these interactions, I was unable to make an audio recording of them. Therefore, in order to have a record of these types of conversations, I allowed time after each observation period to record these types of conversations in a fieldwork journal. Depending upon where the interaction occurred, sometimes these notes ended up scrawled on a blank check, a post-it note, or a scrap of paper. When this happened, I transferred these notes
into the fieldwork journal afterwards. I also used the fieldwork journal to record impressions, feelings, questions, problems, and unspoken communications and messages encountered during the study. Because this is an ethnographic work, I also served as a research instrument; therefore, this journal constitutes an additional data source.

**Observations**

In addition to interview data, I assumed the role of participant observer of daily life at South Boulevard, interacting and observing school events and procedures for one academic semester (fall 2006) and then as needed to fill in gaps in the fieldwork data during the following semester (spring 2007). According to Frake (1964),

>a description of a culture, an ethnography, is produced from an ethnographic record of the events of a society within a given period of time, the ‘events of society’ including, of course, informants’ responses to the ethnographer, his queries, tests, and apparatus (p. 111).

I spent two full weeks and then one to three half-days a week observing at the school site from September to December 2006, for a total of 15 weeks (see Table 3.1). The part-day observations lasted between two and four hours each. Students and teachers followed their normal routines and procedures during these observations. I conducted follow-up interviews and observations as needed from January to May 2007. I also did follow-up observations at the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year, including the entire first day of school in August 2007 and six additional school visits during the first two weeks of school in order to see how a school year begins at South Boulevard. I logged my time spent at the school and it totaled 300 hours.

In addition to these routine observations, I was a participant observer in the school open house night, the parish-wide Magnet Mania event, and the school’s assigned open house day for prospective parents, as well as numerous school events and meetings. I also attended several school board meetings relevant to the study. In addition to regular school-day observations, PTO
meetings, school get-togethers and fundraisers, morning assemblies, and school programs were critical in understanding what Katz, Fine and Simon (1997) refer to as the “immediacy” and “rich texture of school life” (p. 136). A complete picture of the school environment are important in understanding the factors that contribute to the increasing integration of the student body.

I kept a detailed ethnographic record of my observations in the form of condensed field notes, which I later transcribed into expanded notes. This note system allowed me, during observation, to note key words and phrases and then fill in the gaps of information in the expanded notes after leaving the study site, thereby optimizing my time spent in the field doing observation. In addition to these two types of field notes, I completed contact summary sheets (Miles & Huberman, 1984) in which I summarized each site visit on a single sheet, recording information about people and events involved, research questions addressed, and new questions or issues that arose during the visit.

Documents and Other Artifacts

I collected and analyzed documents pertaining to EBRP school desegregation, magnet programs, the history of South Boulevard, and the foreign language immersion program at South Boulevard from 1949 to 2008. The process of collecting these documents and artifacts was ongoing during the data collection phase of the study. Regarding archival data collection, Wolcott (1999) argues that in ethnographic work, “any document that proves valuable as a source of information can rightfully be considered an archive” (p. 59). The difficult task, then, is determining the importance of written materials. Wolcott further asserts that whereas a biographer or a historian is most interested in the particularly noteworthy or significant, an ethnographer is most concerned with “the ordinary and everyday” (p. 59).
Lincoln and Guba (1985) distinguish between documents and records based on whether the text was originally prepared to attest to a formal transaction. Thus, records include such items as marriage certificates, drivers’ licenses, bank statements, census data, and other officially archived materials. Documents, on the other hand, include items that were originally prepared for personal reasons, such as diaries, letters, and personal photographs. For the purposes of this study, I collected and analyzed official records such as newspaper articles, parish school documents and recruiting brochures, school report cards, published school board meeting minutes, PTO meeting minutes, and census data. I also collected multiple articles and advertisements published in local magazines, such as the *Baton Rouge Business Report*, *Town Favorites*, 225, and *Baton Rouge Parents’ Magazine*. Although the earliest records included in this study are newspaper articles from 1949, the focus of the document analysis began with 1996, the year the immersion program at South Boulevard was first implemented.

I collected documents, such as school newsletters, parent/school contracts, web page information on the school, and notes sent home to parents from the school administration and faculty. I made photocopies of pictures which several teachers loaned me. In addition, I took numerous photographs of the school building itself, as well as photographs during school events and activities. I used these pictures during the data analysis phase to help me recall the atmosphere and texture of the events. These documents helped me compile a historical description of the school and enabled me to better understand the current school culture.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

The data collection and data analysis phases of this study were not easily separated. Rather, it was a recursive, ongoing process of collecting data, analysis, and then returning to data collection. Miles and Huberman (1984) assert that data reduction is “not something separate
from analysis. It is a part of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified” (p. 23-24). Data analysis was an inductive process wherein themes, patterns, and categories emerged based on the raw data (interview transcripts and fieldnotes), as opposed to deductive analysis, in which data are analyzed and made to fit a pre-existing framework.

I performed a content analysis of the data (field notes, interview transcripts, and documents), which Patton defines as “analyzing the core content of interviews and observations to determine what’s significant” (p. 463). According to Patton (2002), this process includes identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the patterns and themes which emerge from the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the term unitizing to refer to the process of breaking the data down into “the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself” (p. 345). I created units that represented chunks of meaning and printed every distinct unit of meaning on a 5 X 7 note card. This process is similar to what Strauss and Corbin (1998) define as open coding, “the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (p. 101). The goal of open coding is to organize the data into discrete categories that represent or stand for events, ideas, or themes that emerge from the data.

Rather than using sophisticated computer software, I sorted my note cards following the old-fashioned process described by Becker (1986). I stood in front of several tables and literally put my cards into piles according to initial categories. I followed Wolcott’s (1990b) recommendation to begin by “finding a few categories sufficiently comprehensive to allow you to sort all your data” (p. 33). Thus, when I began analyzing the parent interview data, for example, I started with very broad categories: 1) comments about themselves, 2) comments
about choosing South Boulevard, 3) comments about South Boulevard students, and 4) comments about magnet programs. I then took each of those huge stacks and subdivided them into smaller stacks which represented more specific categories. I coded the parent interview data into the ten emergent categories listed in Table 3.7 (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Each of these ten categories was then divided further into two to six subcategories.

Table 3.7. Open emergent categories in parent interview data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ background and biographical information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments about the process of choosing a school for their children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments about foreign language immersion education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments about South Boulevard students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments about South Boulevard parents/families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments about the quality of education available at South Boulevard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments about school desegregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments about magnet programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments about South Boulevard school staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments about schooling in Baton Rouge and in Louisiana</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These categories were then compared with one another through a process that Glaser and Strauss (1967) call the constant comparative method. Using Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) constant comparative method, I compared codes “with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category” (p. 106). Events, ideas, themes, processes, or happenings that shared common characteristics were placed into the same code. The constant comparative method is a recursive process that requires continual revision and amendment until all new units can be placed in the most appropriate category. The goal of this process, assert Strauss and Corbin (1998), is to “see new possibilities in phenomena and classify them in ways
that others might not have thought of before (or, if considered previously, were not systematically developed in terms of their properties and dimensions)” (p. 105).

I then began to look for unifying phrases and themes that emerged across categories. This process of connecting categories and sub-categories is referred to as axial coding because “coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). I made numerous tables, such as Table 3.3, that enabled me to look for similarities and differences between parents by sorting their responses according to race, gender, religious affiliation, educational background, home state, and the type of primary and secondary schools they attended. I followed similar procedures for the interviews with students, teachers, school-level administrators, and district-level administrators. After coding the interview data, I integrated themes or patterns noted in the contact summary sheets and in my fieldwork journal with the codes that emerged from the data analysis process. These codes or categories serve as the basis of the data analysis.

**Trustworthiness**

In any study, researchers must persuade audiences that their findings are trustworthy, that they are worthy of attention. The terms traditionally used to determine the degree to which one’s findings are trustworthy are internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. The use of these terms to describe qualitative studies, however, is controversial. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), these terms, as well as the traditional criteria for judging the quality of a research study, are inappropriate to the naturalistic paradigm. Rather than the terms validity, reliability, and objectivity, which are associated with testing, measurement, and quantitative data, some qualitative researchers (Gilgun, 1992; Janesick, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984) use other terms that are more appropriate to the nature of qualitative research.
Instead of judging the internal validity of a research study, for example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) use the term credibility to describe the degree to which the interpretations arrived at by a qualitative researcher are “credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities” (p. 296). Likewise, Lincoln and Guba prefer the term transferability to the traditional external validity, the term dependability to the more traditional reliability, and confirmability to the more traditional objectivity.

Some qualitative researchers, such as educational ethnographer Wolcott (1990a), are reluctant to use these terms at all. Wolcott (1990a) catalogue[s] the numerous types and definitions of validity and reliability in the literature and argues that the phrase “strengthen the validity” is “something of a redundancy” (p. 121). Regarding his own research, Wolcott takes a “validity-rejecting” stance—asserting that “validity neither guides nor informs my work. What I seek is not unrelated to validity, but ‘validity’ does not capture its essence and is not the right term” (p. 136).

Following these recommendations, I use the terms credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability because they more closely correspond to the qualitative paradigm that undergirds this research. In order to enhance the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of my findings, I implemented a number of strategies. I spent sufficient time at the study site to learn the important components of the school culture and with key informants to ensure that I built trust and rapport (i.e. prolonged engagement). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “[n]o single item of information (unless coming from an elite and unimpeachable source) should ever be given serious consideration unless it can be triangulated” (p. 283). I engaged in data triangulation, which enhances credibility through the use of multiple sources (for instance, a follow-up interview) and multiple methods (for instance, observation,
interviews, and archival research). Patton (2002) also recommends triangulation through employing more than one researcher. Although I did solicit peer feedback, I was the sole researcher.

I conclude with a final word regarding transferability or applicability (or the more traditional term, generalizability). In any research, there is a trade-off between breadth and depth. Quantitative researchers privilege the former, while qualitative researchers emphasize the latter. This study relies on a relatively small number of subjects and was therefore able to probe more deeply than a quantitative approach. Although small sample sizes generally limit the generalizability of qualitative studies, this research has a high level of transferability and applicability. The problem of the re-segregation of public schools is not unique to Baton Rouge. Rather, it is a nationwide problem. Therefore, the findings of this research should be applicable to other geographical areas and educational contexts and should be of interest to multiple groups who have an interest in the success of public education: parents, teachers, administrators, politicians, policymakers, and concerned citizens and community members.

Ethics

According to Magolda and Robinson (1993), researchers must exercise caution not only during the fieldwork phase, but also during the writing phase, when participants can be unintentionally harmed by the researcher’s interpretations and representation of the participants’ culture. Van Maanen (1983) even asserts that when fieldworkers write their reports, they “inevitably betray the trust and confidence some informants have placed in them” (p. 281). Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong (2000) argue that it is our responsibility as qualitative researchers to interrogate in our writings who we are as we coproduce the narratives we presume to “collect” . . . and interrogate what we do, what we choose not to report, how we frame our data, on whom we shed our scholarly gaze, who is protected and not protected as we do our work (p. 123).
I made efforts to protect the individual rights to privacy and confidentiality of my informants and other people with whom I came in contact throughout the duration of the study. Yin (2003) argues that when dealing with case identities, disclosure is the most desirable method for several reasons. It allows the reader to draw upon previous information he or she may have learned about the same case when interpreting and analyzing the case. Yin also argues that changing information in order to maintain anonymity eliminates potentially important background information and also makes composing the case difficult, as the researcher must continually convert real identities to fictitious ones.

Yin (2003) does advise, however, that when sensitive or controversial topics are addressed in the case research, partial disclosure only is advisable. Choices must be made in order to maintain confidentiality without sacrificing critical contextual information or details. Because I asked for potentially sensitive information regarding race relations and desegregation, I used pseudonyms instead of the real names of the study participants in an effort to obtain more candid responses. I gave consent forms to each participant in the study, informing them of the potential benefits and risks of the study. I used the real names of individuals who are public figures, such as the district administrators and school-board members, as they are part of the public record. Before agreeing to participate in the interviews, they were advised that their responses would not be confidential. Ms. Miller is the only person whose identity could not be easily obscured, as there is only one South Boulevard principal. I discussed this with her in depth before beginning the study and she consented to participate in the study, knowing that it would be impossible for me to conceal her identity.

I argue that the historical significance of the geographical location of the school demands the use of the real name of the school and the city. Thus, I disclose both the school’s name—
South Boulevard Foreign Language Academic Immersion Magnet—and the name of the city in which the school is located—Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The street South Boulevard is historically significant, as it was the southern boundary of Beauregard Town, one of the oldest neighborhoods in Baton Rouge. In addition, the location of the school is also significant because when it was built in 1949, it was a mere two blocks away from the all-Black Reddy Street School, which was built in 1917. Black and immigrant children who lived in Beauregard Town—and whose families had lived in Beauregard Town for decades—were unable to attend this new facility. Because this study focuses on school desegregation, it would be unethical and inauthentic to substitute a pseudonym for the name of the school. The city of Baton Rouge is also historically significant because of its long history of desegregation litigation. Therefore, I disclose the names of both the school and the city in order to maintain the authenticity of the case and the findings.

**Role of Researcher**

In ethnographic writing, no attempt is made to hide the researcher. On the contrary, ethnographers are encouraged to make their identity transparent—to reveal their hidden biases and personal motivations for being interested and involved in the research. These “interconnections and mutual influence between the researcher and those being ‘researched’” are called reflexivity (Heyl, 2001, p. 377). Practicing reflexivity, according to Myerhoff and Ruby (1982), means that

the producer deliberately, intentionally reveals to an audience the underlying epistemological assumptions that caused the formulation of a set of questions in a particular way, the seeking of answers to those questions in a particular way, and finally the presentation of the findings in a particular way” (p. 6).

Jamison (1995), a renowned psychiatry professor, speaks eloquently of this issue in a memoir of her personal struggles with manic-depressive illness:
It is an awful prospect, giving up one’s cloak of academic objectivity. But, of course, my work has been tremendously colored by my emotions and my experiences. They have deeply affected my teaching, my advocacy work, my clinical practice, and what I have chosen to study (p. 203).

A good qualitative researcher lays bare his or her personal biases and interests in the research and then takes steps to minimize those biases throughout the research process.

My personal and professional experiences played an important role in the research process. I grew up in a family where everyone spoke or was learning to speak a second language, and in several cases, multiple languages. I grew up in Texas, surrounded by large numbers of Spanish-speaking immigrants and citizens. My mother taught adult English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual education classes to teacher candidates who were preparing to teach Spanish-speaking immigrant children. My life experiences have cultivated within me a profound sense of the importance of valuing diversity, appreciating difference, and learning additional languages. Furthermore, as a product of the American public education system and as a parent of two children currently enrolled in public schools, I believe deeply in the importance of public education for the promotion of a more democratic citizenry.

My experience as a classroom teacher helped me to establish rapport with teachers and to be a more perceptive observer. I am also a Spanish-speaker, which I believe helped me interact with the native Spanish-speaking teachers at the South Boulevard—many of whom spoke Spanish to me consistently throughout my fieldwork even though their English is better than my Spanish. During interviews, I told them I wanted to conduct the interviews in English because they would be transcribed by a third party. They all consented, but unconsciously switched into Spanish throughout the interviews. Sometimes they stopped me in the hallways and whispered things to me in Spanish. My previous experience as a high school Spanish teacher and as a

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22 Bilingual education refers to programs in which students with limited English proficiency (LEP) are taught in their native language while simultaneously acquiring English.
university-level Spanish instructor has also influenced my belief in the importance of second language study and my belief that the United States education system does a grave disservice to its students by failing to emphasize foreign language study. These aspects of my personal and professional background provided a strong foundation from which to begin my role as researcher in this case study.

In addition to acknowledging biases that may influence the research process, reflexivity also refers to the need for a researcher to monitor the interactions between himself/herself as researcher and the participants and to acknowledge the ways in which relationships between researcher and participants emerged. My role as participant observer (Spradley, 1980; Yin, 2003) provided me with a unique vantage point. As a researcher, I was an observer. However, because I am a parent of two South Boulevard students, I was also a participant. The participant observer experiences being both insider and outsider simultaneously, as well as alternating between both roles (Spradley, 1980). I wish to draw a distinction, however, between an ordinary participant and a participant observer. To aid me in navigating this distinction, I consider several major differences that Spradley (1980) identifies between these roles. First, an ordinary participant has only one purpose: to participate in the events appropriate to the social situation. A participant observer also observes and records the people, activities, and interactions occurring in the social situation, as well as noting details of the physical setting. Second, a participant observer seeks to heighten his/her awareness of details and events, whereas the “complexity of social life requires that the ordinary participant exclude much from conscious awareness” (Spradley, 1980, p. 55). Lastly, the participant observer keeps detailed records (sometimes recorded in the field and other times recorded later), whereas ordinary participants do not.
These distinctions between ordinary participant and participant observer were important in this study because of my unique position as both researcher and participant (parent). I experienced being at South Boulevard differently from others who are not researchers and differently from when I was just a participant. I took several steps to distinguish between my role as researcher and my role as participant. When I went to the school as a researcher, I dressed professionally. When I went as a parent, I wore my “mom” uniform: jeans, t-shirt, and tennis shoes. After having to get a new visitor’s sticker every time I went, I finally made my own official badge that I wore around my neck every time I went to the school as a researcher.

I experienced tension several times between these two roles. For instance, I once wanted to complain to the principal because my first-grade daughter’s entire class had had their recess and P.E. taken away repeatedly for class-wide misbehavior. I struggled with how to handle the situation—not wanting to risk jeopardizing the trusting relationships I had with school faculty, but also not wanting to sacrifice my own children’s educational experiences. Thus, I scheduled an appointment with the principal, just as I would have done as a parent. When I went in to her office, I was not wearing my badge (which I always wore when I was there as a researcher) and told her that I was there “as a mom—not as a researcher.” We had a productive meeting and our rapport remained intact. Similar situations occurred during the year; I usually favored the researcher role, ignoring concerns that I otherwise might have raised with school staff.

Although it was difficult at times to play both roles, that of participant and participant observer, I believe it allowed me unique opportunities to obtain data that I may have been otherwise unable to obtain. For instance, it was not difficult for me to establish trust or rapport with teachers or parents. Many of them already knew me. Before I began fieldwork, I wrote a letter to all the school staff explaining what I was doing and reassuring them not to worry if they
saw me in the back of a classroom or in a corner furiously taking notes in a notebook. Almost all of the teachers were very cooperative and welcomed me into their classrooms at any point. Others—particularly some of the new immersion teachers—asked me to notify them beforehand if I wanted to observe their classes. I tried to be sensitive to their concerns and did not want them to feel that I was there in an evaluative capacity. One teacher allowed me to observe her class, but declined my request to interview her, explaining that she is a “very private person” who doesn’t like to talk about her feelings to people outside of her family. The rest of the teachers that I interviewed were open and inviting—meeting with me during their planning time or after school and talking with me during their too-short lunch breaks and in the hallways.

Parents were similarly cooperative—even surprisingly eager—to talk about their experiences at the school with me. I had anticipated that some parents would be reluctant to sacrifice their time to talk with me, but few were. One parent—but only one—made two appointments with me, but canceled one about an hour before the appointed time and did not show up for the other one. I made cold calls to numerous parents I had never met before. Some seemed initially suspicious or skeptical—afraid I was selling something perhaps—but introducing myself and telling them that I was also a South Boulevard parent gave me automatic entrée. One parent, however, did confess that after I called her on the phone to schedule an interview, she called the school secretary to ask who I was. The school secretary, an older Black woman who has been the school secretary for almost thirty years, told her: “Mrs. Beal’s all right.” She said that was all the information she needed to feel comfortable inviting me in to her home. Parents frequently acknowledged my status as a parent during interviews, saying such things as: “Well, you know what I mean” and “Do you remember when . . . ?” My status as an
“insider” enabled parents and teachers to feel comfortable interacting with me when I was in researcher-mode.

Students also noticed my dual roles as participant/parent and researcher, since many of them know me as either “Kennedy’s mom” or “Marin’s mom.” Though my presence did not disturb classroom instruction, it was definitely noticed when I went to lunch and especially to recess. The students clamored for my attention, asking me to help them tie their shoes, picking weeds (“flowers”) for me during recess, and just sitting beside me on the playground and chatting. One afternoon, I sat on a log on the outer edge of the monkey bars. A first-grade girl sat down beside me and began to ask all sorts of personal questions: my name, how old I was, where I was from, what I was doing there, etc. I explained to her that I was working on a school project for a class I was taking at LSU. She looked at me quizzically and said: “You mean, you don’t even have a job? And you’re 34 years old?” Although this comment made me laugh out loud, it also made me acutely aware of my role as researcher and of the privilege that it was to be at the school as a participant observer. Thus, it was impossible to go unnoticed—particularly with the younger students.

I acknowledge the role that my personal experience played in this study. My experiences in navigating these issues of school choice and school desegregation have been critical in leading me to this subject of study. Furthermore, the experiences of my own children in attending this school cannot be ignored. Rather than eschewing personal experience, I argue that personal experience can contribute to our interpretations of social life and human behavior. Fine (1984) asserts that rather than treating personal experience as a “forbidden pool of data,” researchers may draw upon it as a source of data.
Hertz (1996) addresses the issue of whether we should study “familiar territory or unfamiliar turf” (p. 6). For me, South Boulevard is “familiar territory.” My oldest daughter attended South Boulevard for six years and my middle daughter attended for three. Rather than casting this debate as familiar versus unfamiliar, however, I concur with Naples (1996), who calls for a reconceptualization of the insider/outsider dichotomy as “ever-shifting and permeable social locations” that are differentially experienced and expressed by community members (p. 83). Throughout the process, my insider status was an asset, yet I also strove to see South Boulevard as an outsider might see it. As Richardson (2004) frequently urges, I tried to approach fieldwork with “an open mind, not an empty head.” I believe that my insider status helped me establish trust and rapport with the participants while my researcher status allowed me to observe the school in ways distinct from a casual participant and lends credibility to the study.
CHAPTER FOUR: DYNAMICS OF RACE AND EDUCATION

[Although] the memory of inequality is thus not inaccurate . . . to remember segregated schools largely by recalling only their poor resources presents a historically incomplete picture (Siddle Walker, 1996, p. 13).

Narratives regarding the educational history of the South dominate White mainstream thought. One such commonly-held misconception is that because enslaved Africans were forbidden to learn to read, they remained illiterate, when in fact, many were literate. Another such narrative is that segregated schools that Blacks attended after the Civil War and during Reconstruction were inferior to White schools in terms of facilities, resources, and funding. Another narrative is that schools were integrated after the Supreme Court handed down the Brown decision (1954), when in actuality, many school districts avoided and desisted desegregation for years. I grew up and attended public schools in the South during the 1970s. I remember seeing the picture in my American history textbook of the Black woman and her daughter sitting on the courthouse steps, holding a newspaper announcing that the courts had banned segregated schools. It seemed like a symbol of the triumph of good over evil. Of course schools had to be integrated to make up for the ravages of slavery and Jim Crow segregation and the consequences of the inferior schools Blacks had been made to attend.

These narratives present, as Siddle Walker (1996) suggests, a historically incomplete picture. Contemporary conversations regarding race and education are often framed in binary fashion: pre-Brown versus post-Brown (1954), integrated versus segregated schools, and Black versus White. Americans tend to talk about the struggle for school desegregation and educational equity as if these efforts began with Brown (1954), whereas Black activists and intellectuals such as W. E. B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, and Mary McLeod Bethune had been pursuing these goals long before 1954. Numerous scholars
have focused on efforts of Black leaders and scholars to provide education for Blacks before the Civil War and after Reconstruction (Ambrose, 1999; Anderson, 1988; Culver, 1954; Hendry & Edwards, in press; Tyack, 1974). Others have highlighted stories of high quality, all-Black education that occurred before Brown (Jones-Wilson, 1981; Siddle Walker, 1996). Perry (2003) provides counternarratives from Black history that demonstrate that Blacks have had a strong commitment to schooling borne out of a philosophy of education that included “freedom for literacy and literacy for freedom, racial uplift, citizenship, and leadership” (Perry, 2003, p. 6).

I was never taught or exposed to any of the complexities surrounding desegregation in school. I was in college before I first heard of the Little Rock Nine. I was in my 30s and had three children before I read that in 1963—nearly ten years after Brown (1954)—Louisiana Governor Jimmie Davis had “vowed to prevent any African American student from ever attending school with a white child” (in Hendry & Edwards, in press, p. 101). I was certainly never taught about the Southern Manifesto—a document written in 1956 by legislators in the U.S. Congress in which they demonstrated their opposition to racial integration in public places. It was not until I began my doctoral studies that I first read that before Brown (1954), there were segregated Black schools that were not only high quality, but were a source of pride and played a vital role in their communities (Perry, 2003). I never knew that there were Black parents, teachers and students who fought for the right to maintain their segregated schools after Brown (Cecelski, 1994; Kluger, 1975/2004). I never knew that there were Black lawyers and activists who actually opposed and criticized Brown (1954). Derrick Bell (2004), for instance, an NAACP attorney who supervised the litigation of more than 300 segregation lawsuits in the 1960s, argues that focusing on the “equal” part of the Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) “separate but
equal” decision would have eventually led to more equal schools than the ones we have now, which are not only unequal, but are still largely segregated according to race.

I struggle to reconcile these discrepancies in my mind. How could I not have heard these things? How could I not have known that there was more to the history of race and education? I was a diligent, straight-A student who read everything I was ever asked to read and paid attention in class, even as a middle and high school student. The answer to the question “How could I not have known?” is simple: it wasn’t there. It wasn’t in the textbooks. My teachers either didn’t know that there was more to the story, or they chose not to share it with us.

The issues associated with race and education in the United States are complex and represent a tension, both historical and current, between the promise of democracy and the disappointment of unfulfilled promises. We have a romanticized ideal of schools as incubators of democracy wherein students of all races, creeds, religions, and tongues can attend school together, grow intellectually, and learn how to be active participants in a democratic society. In reality, however, schools have segregated, tracked, and differentiated between students and thus have not delivered on either the promise of educational equity or the promise of racial and socioeconomic diversity.

The objective of this chapter is to illustrate the ways in which South Boulevard, both currently and throughout its history, reflects the central role of race in education and illustrates the ways in which educational reforms—in this case, school desegregation policies—influence the schooling experiences of children, families, teachers, and communities. To that end, this chapter draws on the following data sources: on-site observation, archival document analysis (including newspaper and magazine articles, brochures, flyers, and maps printed by the EBRP
school system, the Louisiana School Directory,\textsuperscript{23} and Louisiana State Department of Education demographic data\textsuperscript{24}) and interviews with current and former members of the South Boulevard community.

I first provide a brief description of the present-day physical facility of the school to set the scene for the rest of the chapter, which explores the following themes pursuant to race and education that are visible throughout the history of the school: 1) pride in community schools, 2) the importance of a rigorous curriculum, and 3) perseverance and self-determination in pursuing public education. I briefly summarize the history of education in Baton Rouge beginning in the 1800s to provide a socio-historical context. I then focus on the history of South Boulevard over the following time periods, each of which begins with a critical juncture in the history of the desegregation struggle in EBRP (Davis et al. v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, 1961):

1. 1949-1954: A new, all-White school
2. 1954-1969: Desisting and delaying desegregation
3. 1970-1980: Staff integration
5. 1996-2002: Magnets as the primary desegregation tool

I conclude with an analysis of the ways in which the experiences of current South Boulevard families reflect the three emergent themes.

\textsuperscript{23} Louisiana School Directories are archived at the State Library of Louisiana in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Hill Memorial Library and Middleton Library—both of which are located on the main campus of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
\textsuperscript{24} Annual Financial and Statistical Reports (AFSR) of the Louisiana State Department of Education are archived online at www.louisianaschools.net from 1979 to the present. Prior to 1979, the AFSR’s are archived at the State Library of Louisiana and Hill Memorial Library at Louisiana State University.
**Present-day South Boulevard**

Bridget: “I thought the building looked like something from a third world country.”

Although South Boulevard Foreign Language Academic Immersion Magnet is its official name, some veteran South Boulevard teachers and staff members refer to it affectionately as “The Boulevard.” Most current students and parents simply call it “South Boulevard”—for ease, I suppose. Located on the corner of Mayflower and Maximilian Streets in the historic Beauregard Town neighborhood, South Boulevard is off the beaten path. Few people—either during my year of fieldwork or during the previous five years I was a parent of a South Boulevard student—have ever heard of or seen the school. In addition to being in an obscure location, South Boulevard is also one of the smallest public elementary schools in EBRP, with only 211 students enrolled during the 2006-2007 school year. Other elementary schools have more than 400 students. Many parents and teachers during my fieldwork identified its relatively small size as a positive characteristic of the school.

The physical facility of South Boulevard, like many schools in EBRP, is dilapidated and deteriorated by years of neglect and failed property tax renewals. South Boulevard, originally built in 1949 by renowned local architect A. Hayes Town, is comprised of multiple buildings laid out on a sloping piece of property near downtown Baton Rouge. The students and teachers of South Boulevard refer to the two main parts of the school as “upstairs” and “downstairs,” which are connected by two staircases on either side of the main building. “Upstairs,” the largest building in the school, houses the front office and entryway, the cramped teachers’ lounge (in which no more than five teachers can comfortably sit) and eight classrooms. “Downstairs” includes four classrooms in two separate buildings, the gymnasium, the cafeteria, the library, and three portable, t-buildings. All the original buildings are made of red brick and have a completely flat roofline, resulting in buildings that resemble shoeboxes.
The windows of the school building are original. On the outside, they are covered with several layers of peeling paint. The inside staircase in the upstairs building was re-painted during summer 2006. Before that, enormous paint chunks—some several feet long in length—that resembled stalactites hung down from the ceiling. The boys’ restroom—located at the bottom of that same staircase—reeks of urine. The brick wall between the upstairs and downstairs building boasts a faded mural about protecting the environment that was painted by a parent approximately 16 years ago. Huge rust stains and mildew streak down the bricks all over the school. Rusted barbed wire tops the fence around the perimeter of the building.

The most salient characteristic of the school gym, which was built in 1949 and never updated, is its lack of air conditioning. Many tiles on the gym floor are broken, cracked, or missing completely. Old equipment, such as a rope ladder, hangs from the ceilings, along with years-old gymnastics equipment (such as a pommel horse) that has not been used in years. Students regularly use the gym for P.E., as well as for daily morning assemblies. All school-wide meetings and programs are held in the gym, where parents come and sweat in the often-sweltering south Louisiana heat.

The poor condition of the playground rivals that of the gym. Original playground equipment includes an old set of climbing equipment with peeling red paint, a low balance beam, and an old spider-type climber. The playground also has a swing set made to hold six swings. However, prior to the 2006-2007 school year, the swing set only had four serviceable swings. One of the six was missing, the rusted chain hanging from the top without a swing seat, and another was missing the plastic covering, leaving only the rusted piece of metal from the seat bottom. In the words of a South Boulevard student: “You can use that one, but not when it’s hot, because it burns your bum.” Beyond the playground, the school has two tetherball poles and
four basketball posts. The tetherball poles do not have tetherballs and the basketball hoops do
not have nets. Both Ms. Miller and the P.E. coach explained to me that when they put up
tetherballs or basketball hoops, neighborhood kids come on the weekends and tear them down,
and therefore, it’s not worth the money, time, or energy to replace them.

The year before I began my fieldwork (2005-2006), the newly-organized PTO formed a
Playground Committee—comprised of two mothers—to raise money for new playground
equipment. They raised $2,379.46 through a catalog sale, clipping BoxTops for Education and
Community Coffee UPCs and receipts, and three sparsely-attended fundraising nights at Chuck
E. Cheese, Chick-fil-A, and Bouncing Tigers. That summer, the PTO purchased six sparkling
new swings, a $1,600 “Tarantula Climber,” a set of parallel bars, and a new set of monkey bars.
ARAMARK, the facilities management group in charge of playground maintenance for EBRP,
kindly assembled and installed the playground equipment, put new chains on all the swings, and
installed fall surfaces around all the new equipment at no cost. Those improvements were the
first done to the playground at South Boulevard in more than twenty years.

The cafeteria, which is part of the “downstairs,” is small and accommodates 128 students.
It can get quite hot in the cafeteria, despite two big rusty wall-mount air conditioning units
attached to the windows on one side and two floor fans that run continuously to try to keep the
temperature down. The speech teacher’s “office,” comprised of a teacher’s desk and a student
desk hidden behind a wall divider, is crammed into one corner.

The library, also part of the “downstairs,” is a small red brick building that sits in
between the basketball court and the playground. Despite its small size, the library is something
of a school hub. There are three stone patio tables and benches that sit under a tin roof outside
the library. Students, particularly the fourth- and fifth-grade girls, sit at the tables during recess
when the weather is really hot and talk and gossip. The view from those tables is the expansive interstate (I-10) that extends from Texas all the way to Florida. Students and teachers quickly become accustomed to the noise from the interstate, which is resounding if you try to carry on a sustained conversation with someone, but not noticeable or distracting to the kids as they run around and play during recess. Ms. Belford, the librarian, is very popular amongst the students—some of whom come in the library during recess to check out books and sometimes just to chat with her. The library has wall-to-wall bookshelves full of books and has student tables in the center of the room where the students sit during their weekly library time. It also has three computers that the students use to take Accelerated Reader (AR) tests\textsuperscript{25} and is used to store an expensive projector and several rolling carts with laptops.

The interior of the “upstairs” is not much better than the exterior—with the small exception of the entryway, which was re-done and updated in 2002. A large, colorful rug with a world map greets visitors as they enter the door. Welcoming phrases, such as “Bonjour” and “Bienvenidos” are painted on the walls in the entryway in multiple languages and colors. There is a desk right inside the door with a student check-in/check-out log written in French, Spanish, and English. A plaque on the wall explains that the school was built in 1949 and was named Beauregard Elementary at the time. A large framed poster of EBRP’s “Magnet Progression” chart shows visitors the track South Boulevard students are on to eventually attend the coveted Baton Rouge Magnet High, the only dedicated magnet high school and the district’s only five-star school according to the state’s accountability system.

Each wall in the main entryway boasts student work. One contains lists of students, by grade level and language, who make it on the Principal’s List (all As in every subject), A/B

\textsuperscript{25} Accelerated Reader is a commonly-used software assessment in which students read books, take comprehension tests, and receive a percentage of points associated with the book depending on their achievement on the quiz.
Honor Roll, Beary Best Bears (for good conduct and work habits), and Perfect Attendance. The wall next to this bulletin board is covered with little bears decorated by all the students who are recognized with the Beary Best Bear award—each with the student’s name on the bear’s t-shirt. Across from the Bear Wall of Fame is a bulletin board that displays student work throughout the school year. Teachers rotate throughout the year so that visitors might see French, Spanish, or English/Language Arts work from students of various grade levels. During my year of fieldwork, for example, the front bulletin board displayed acrostics written about “Maman” ("Mom") by the second grade French students for Mother’s Day. In December, the bulletin board displayed letters to Santa on Santa-shaped paper, written by third grade Spanish students.

After these first twenty feet, visitors to the school will see the building in its original form. Although the building is occasionally painted over the summer, years of disrepair and neglect cannot make up for a yearly summer cleaning by the custodial staff. Inside the classrooms, entire walls of windows are covered by broken, tattered Venetian blinds. Some teachers have given up on ever opening the blinds and have simply covered the blinds with instructional posters. The classrooms have multiple layers of paint on the walls. Huge air conditioning units hang precariously from the ceilings. On a recent visit to the school, one teacher was re-arranging her entire classroom because she had grown tired of “black chunks falling out of the air conditioner” onto her desk.

The air conditioning units sometimes do not work: either everyone in the room suffers in the heat or the units work too well and the students freeze. I experienced both during fieldwork. In the newest t-building on campus, temperatures fluctuate wildly within the same day: for 10 to 15 minutes, one is comfortable. Then the temperature drops and one becomes uncomfortably cold. Then the air conditioner—which is so loud, it makes it difficult to hear someone talking in
the same room—cuts off and after another 10 to 15 minutes, one begins to get uncomfortably hot. This cycle continues all day long. Students are instructed at the beginning of the year to leave a sweater or jacket at the school because the teachers have no on-site control over the thermostats.

The physical facility of South Boulevard stands as a monument of sorts to the consequences of lack of community support in terms of tax dollars allocated for education. Indeed, the EBRP community voted down every tax proposal that would have provided for construction of new schools and maintenance of old ones between 1964 and 1998 (Jacobs, 2008, January 15). Unfortunately, numerous schools in EBRP are in even more deplorable condition than South Boulevard. In the remainder of this chapter, I explore the history of education in Baton Rouge to better understand the socio-political conditions present in order for South Boulevard to be in its current condition.

**History of Education in Baton Rouge**

The history of the struggle for educational equity on the part of minority groups in Louisiana is complex. French-speaking Acadian refugees in Acadiana suffered linguistic and social problems in schools when the Louisiana constitution of 1921 mandated the use of English in schools. The Isleños (“islanders”), descendants of Spanish-speaking Canary Islanders who settled St. Bernard Parish (outside New Orleans) between 1778 and 1783, were monolingual Spanish speakers who also experienced linguistic and social problems upon attending English-only schools (Din, 1988; Lipski, 1987). The United Houma Nation was denied access to systems of public education during the 1900s in Louisiana (Ng-A-Fook, 2007). Houma children were forced to kneel on raw grains of rice for speaking French in school. Thus, the intersections between race and education in Louisiana history began long before the *Brown* decision in 1954.
However, because the population of this case study site is majority-Black, the historical context provided herein focuses on the desegregation struggle through the Black/non-Black lens.

Anderson (1988) identifies two contradictory traditions regarding education in the antebellum South: a campaign to repress and even criminalize literacy among Blacks and a campaign for free public education for Whites. Baton Rouge was somewhat unique, however, because of its long history of private and parochial education. Before the Civil War, in fact, there was no public education in Baton Rouge (Carleton, 1981; Frazier, 1937). The belief that public schools were primarily for poor children was prevalent (Stone, 1992; Suarez, 2004). Children of wealthy White planters and some free people of color attended private schools known as “academies” or “seminaries” and parochial schools or had private tutors in their homes (Carleton, 1981). There were several private schools in Baton Rouge in the 1830s: St. Mary’s, a Catholic school for girls; the College of Baton Rouge, a semipublic high school; and the Baton Rouge Female Institute or Mrs. Fisher’s Academy, a private academy for girls. Many free people of color in Louisiana sent their children to parochial schools in New Orleans, where private schools for free people of color had existed since 1822 (Crouch, 2000). Others established their own schools or sent their children to be educated in France (Frazier, 1937).

Although Whites and free people of color could be educated by tutors or in private schools, it was a felony in antebellum Louisiana to teach slaves to read and write, punishable by one to 12 months in prison (Middleton, 1984). Many slaves risked life and limb to become literate. They learned to read and write in informal settings, secret meetings, and churches—filing petitions protesting slavery and forging passes for themselves and others. For many enslaved Blacks, literacy meant survival, progress, self-worth, and emancipation—the “freedom to become a person” (Cornelius, 1991, p. 2). Perry (2003) writes that for the slaves, “literacy
was more than a symbol of freedom; it was freedom” (p. 13). Despite the dangers, by 1860, approximately 5 to 10% of adult slaves in the South were able to read (Anderson, 1988; Frazier, 1937).

After Robert E. Lee’s surrender at Appomattox in 1865, Blacks exulted in the potential of their newly-acquired freedom, particularly the opportunities to strengthen their families, secure their civil rights, and educate their children—in short, to acquire real agency in their lives. They turned first to shoring up their families. Many former slaves, as soon as they learned of their emancipation, embarked on a search to reunite families split by the slave auctions of the past and to reestablish relationships with separated spouses, children, and parents. Many spent years traveling the country roads and the towns and cities of the South trying to act on clues and rumors concerning the whereabouts of loved ones. Many took out ads in newspapers. Former slaves also clamored to county courthouses to register their marriages and record the birth dates and names of their children (Ripley, 1976). In reuniting and securing a legal foundation for their families, they saw an opportunity to exercise more control over their destinies.

A close second to strengthening their families was securing the civil rights for which the Civil War had been fought. Congress followed up the Union victory, in rapid succession, with the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which formally ended slavery throughout the United States; the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which entitled emancipated slaves to full civil liberties under the law; the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which declared them citizens of the United States and applied the Bill of Rights to state and local governments as well as to the federal government; and the Fifteenth Amendment, which awarded Black people the right to vote. Guaranteeing those protections in Louisiana in the late 1860s and 1870s was the presence of the Union Army, which protected Republican Party operatives actively registering
Black voters. The Republican Party intended to build for itself a political base in the South with Black voters. The former slaves, who attributed their liberation to President Lincoln, were only too happy to declare loyalty to the Republican Party.

Northern churches and missionaries helped establish schools for emancipated slaves. Wealthy Whites continued to send their children to private schools or to hire private tutors. Many children, both Black and White, received little or no education. The Freedmen’s Bureau, a federal agency created by Congress to provide medical, educational, and employment opportunities for recently emancipated slaves, reached Louisiana in 1864, and by 1865 operated 121 schools for Black children with a total enrollment of 13,462. Four of the schools were in EBRP, with a total of 902 students (Ripley, 1976). In addition to these schools, there were also sixty Sunday schools and twenty night schools in southern Louisiana (Crouch, 2000). George T. Ruby, a traveling agent for the Freedmen’s Bureau, described the commitment to education of the Black community during this time period when he wrote that “people are alive here about their schools” and that “sacrifices of personal comforts will be made if need be to keep every child at school” (Crouch, 2000, p. 265). For Blacks in Louisiana, civil rights and equal educational opportunity had become synonymous.

The consequences of widespread Black voting were dramatic. In the elections of 1868, forty-two Black men were elected to the state legislature, thirty-five to the House and seven to the Senate. Although they were outnumbered 120 to 35 in the House and 31 to 7 in the Senate, they managed to secure influential committee assignments in education, civil rights, and internal improvements (Vincent, 1976). In the area of civil rights, the state legislature ratified the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. They viewed public education as a
civil right. In 1870, the state legislature passed legislation prohibiting segregation in public schools. Black state representative Robert H. Isabelle said:

I want to see the children of the state educated together. I want to see them play together; study together and when they grow up to be men they will love each other, and be ready . . . to take up arms and defend . . .the United States (in Vincent, 1976, p. 91).

However, according to James M. Frazier, Sr. (1937), the supervising principal of Black schools in Baton Rouge who later authored a master’s thesis in which he documented the history of Black public education in EBRP, there is no evidence that Whites and Blacks in Louisiana attended schools together. Rather, Frazier (1937) asserts,

It appears there was a sort of ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ between the white and Negro patrons that where schools were maintained at all, there should be no mingling of the races. This step was taken by both sides in the interest of peace and harmony (p. 32).

The legislature also granted all public school students, Black and White, free use of all ferries and bridges on school days during school hours. The legislators did not want rivers, bayous, and swamps to keep children out of school (Vincent, 1976).

In 1877, however, the short era of Black political empowerment dissipated. As part of the political compromise to end the disputed presidential election of 1877 between Samuel J. Tilden and Rutherford Hayes, all Union soldiers were withdrawn from Louisiana, and the former White planter elite of the Democratic Party returned to power. The Ku Klux Klan surged, and Black voters soon found themselves the victims of poll taxes, literacy tests, grandfather clauses, and the White primary, all of which succeeded in stealing their franchise. Blacks were chased from the state legislature, and the “Jim Crow” system of segregated schools and segregated public facilities gradually descended on Louisiana. Thus the legislative gains made for and by Blacks during Reconstruction were undermined in Louisiana after Reconstruction.
Despite racial and socio-political tensions, tremendous growth in private and public education for Blacks in Baton Rouge occurred during the post-Reconstruction period. Across the South, Black schools were established and supported largely through collective action from the Black community (Anderson, 1988). In Baton Rouge, Black churches created a system of private “academies” that were the “chief source for the education of Negro children in the South” (Frazier, 1937, p. 54). In Baton Rouge, the Hamilton Academy was established in the late 1800s by two Black Methodist churches (Frazier, 1937). The Baton Rouge Academy, a private school founded in 1875 by the Black Baptist churches in the parish, provided both primary and secondary education for Blacks, as well as the only teacher-training programs outside of New Orleans (Frazier, 1937). When its building burned down, it was replaced by a new, modern three-story building and was renamed Baton Rouge College (Carleton, 1981; Middleton, 1984). The Holy Family Academy was a Catholic school for Blacks founded in 1895 in downtown Baton Rouge by the Sisters of the Holy Family, an all-Black order of nuns founded by Henriette Delille in New Orleans in 1842 (Porche-Frilot, 2006). The Holy Family Academy later moved to the newly-built St. Xavier Church in Old South Baton Rouge in 1916 and became known as St. Francis Xavier Academy. Live Oak School, established in 1906 by Mrs. Ada C. Pollock-Blendon, a White missionary from New York, was another elementary and secondary school for Blacks (Frazier, 1937). These private schools were vital in the Black community because public education for Blacks in Baton Rouge was scarce before 1900.

In EBRP, two public schools for Black children were established by 1877; both operated in existing buildings, such as churches or residences. In approximately 1891, the two schools were consolidated into one building which was called the Hickory Street School. Frazier (1937) described the school as a “very unattractive, painted building with two rooms on each floor, with
space enough for the small number of children in attendance, but ill adapted in every way to the purpose intended” (p. 68). According to Frazier (1937), Blacks in Baton Rouge did not look favorably upon the Hickory Street School, the only public school available to them, because of its inferior resources and facilities and the superior private schools available to them. Blacks, wrote Frazier (1937),

preferred to pay tuition and send their children to these attractive private schools, notwithstanding the fact that they were taxed to help support modern public schools for the white children of the city as well as this make-shift school for Negro children (p. 69-70).

This system of double taxation was common across the South. Blacks paid taxes to local governments, which diverted funds collected from school taxes to the development of White education. Blacks then either paid tuition to send their children to private schools or made voluntary donations of money, labor, or property to help finance public schools for Blacks (Anderson, 1988).

In 1892, the Louisiana state legislature passed a law requiring racial segregation in railroad car seating and in doing so poured the legal foundation for racial segregation in the United States. Homer Plessy, a Louisiana citizen of mixed racial ancestry, tested the constitutionality of the law in the federal courts. In the infamous decision of Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court found against Plessy and issued its “separate but equal” doctrine, which upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation throughout the nation. A new state constitution was ratified in 1898 requiring that voters own property, be literate, and pay a poll tax. These restrictions disfranchised thousands of former slaves who had been able to vote between 1868 and 1898.

In Baton Rouge, Black enrollment at the Hickory Street School continued to grow under the new leadership of James M. Frazier. Overcrowding was a real problem. By the end of 1907-
1908, a record 176 Black students attended the Hickory Street School. Some public funds were earmarked for Black education at the end of that year and the Hickory Street School building was expanded to accommodate the growth. By 1912, 1,045 Black students were attending the Hickory Street School. In 1914, the first modern school building for Blacks in the state of Louisiana was built with $25,000 from a bond issue. Frazier (1937) says the construction of this new building had an “electric effect upon the general attitude of Negroes in Baton Rouge in respect to public education” (p. 77). Enrollment at the Hickory Street School increased such that the city had to build the Reddy Street School in 1916 and the Scott Street School in 1920 to accommodate the growth. According to Frazier (1937), the compulsory attendance law of 1922 was never enforced for Blacks—nor could it have been due to overcrowding. The Black community found ways to provide education for their children despite overcrowding, however: some EBRP Black schools held half-day sessions in the lower elementary grades to accommodate all the students.

McKinley High School, the first Black public high school in EBRP, was built in 1926 on the corner of East Boulevard and Louise Street to accommodate increased enrollment at the secondary level. At the time, there were only three other public high schools for Blacks in Louisiana (Hendry & Edwards, in press). Black students from the greater Baton Rouge area flocked to McKinley to receive a high school education. Headed by Frazier, McKinley High School was a “showplace for Negro schools in the state, and people from Louisiana and the surrounding states came to observe the new school” (Gaston, 1971, p. 82). McKinley High School was a first-rate, all-Black institution and the centerpiece of the Black community in Baton Rouge.
The growth of the public school system in the early 1900s led to the steady decline of local private schools for Blacks, with the exception of St. Francis Xavier Academy, which is still open today and is the only predominantly Black Catholic school in the Baton Rouge area. Three new schools were built for Black students between 1914 and 1926. Despite the strides made in terms of public education for Blacks, Table 4.1 below illustrates the inequities between the two systems (Frazier, 1937).

**Table 4.1. Comparison of Black and White schooling in EBRP, 1934-35**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1934-35</th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th>Whites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average daily attendance</td>
<td>5,361</td>
<td>8,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Pupil ratio</td>
<td>1:61</td>
<td>1:27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual elementary teacher salary</td>
<td>$479.62</td>
<td>$1,002.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual high school teacher salary</td>
<td>$824.34</td>
<td>$1,179.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per pupil expenditures</td>
<td>$10.01</td>
<td>$60.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of total enrollment</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total school budget</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The period between Reconstruction and the *Brown* decision (1954) illustrates some of the ways in which Baton Rouge, as Davis (1999) noted, “can be seen historically as the battleground of the most powerful forces for and against desegregation.” (p. 21). White parish school boards controlled public education and strove to limit education for Blacks. The Black community in Baton Rouge, however, showed dogged determination and tenacity in their efforts to educate their children. They took pride in the progress they had made in establishing schools for their

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26 Data obtained from the thesis of J. M. Frazier, Sr. (1937).
children despite the inequities and obstacles they faced from the White community. The Louisiana chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was established in 1919. During the 1930s, all members of the East Baton Rouge Teachers’ Association, a group composed largely of Black women, were active members of the NAACP (Sartain, 2007). Black lawyers and activists, including J. K. Haynes, president of the Louisiana Colored Teachers Association, and A. P. Tureaud, began traveling the state initiating lawsuits to test the constitutionality of racial segregation and to overturn *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896). Led by such leaders, the Black community in Baton Rouge demonstrated perseverance and dedication, as step by step they worked toward more equal education throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

**A History of South Boulevard**

**1949-1954: A New, All-White School**

This separate and unequal school system—one for Whites and one for Blacks—is the educational context that existed in EBRP when Beauregard Elementary (now South Boulevard Elementary) was first built in 1949. South Boulevard Elementary is located near downtown Baton Rouge in Beauregard Town, one of the city’s oldest subdivisions (established in 1806). Beauregard Town’s founder, Captain Elias Beauregard, envisioned the area as becoming the center of commerce and fashion in the city, modeled after the Garden District in New Orleans (Carleton, 1981; Gleason, 1991). According to the Baton Rouge city directory, Beauregard Town was a racially integrated neighborhood (Hendry & Edwards, in press). Indeed, the Turnbulls, a family of free people of color, owned a home in Beauregard Town from the mid-1800s until the mid-1970s.
In 1949, the EBRP school board embarked upon a five-year building expansion program that included construction of nine White and seven Black elementary schools ("Huge expansion program set by EBR Parish School Board", 1949, January 1). Total public school enrollment for 1949 was 10,860 White (63%) and 6,393 Black students (37%) ("More that [sic] 18,000 school children enrolled in EBR", 1949, September 7). Beauregard Elementary was first built in 1949 as an all-White facility. A 1949 *Morning Advocate* article announced its completion along with three other White schools (Hinch, 1949, August 17). EBRP school superintendent Dr. Clarke L. Barrow proudly described these new facilities in the following statement:

> These buildings are modern in every respect. They provide for ample space for the educational program, and the classrooms are designed for visual comfort with an abundance of natural light, supplemented by artificial light . . . The quality of construction makes for easy maintenance and upkeep (Hinch, 1949, August 17).

There were grave disparities between White and Black schools in terms of resources, facilities, and teachers. Black and immigrant children whose families had lived in Beauregard Town for decades were unable to attend this new facility, but instead attended the all-Black Reddy Street School, located one-half mile from Beauregard Elementary. Figure 4.1 is a current map that illustrates the location of both school buildings. The interstate that cuts between the two schools was not built until 1965, an event which divided and led to the decline of the communities surrounding the schools (Hendry & Edwards, in press).

While overcrowding was a system-wide problem, it affected Black schools more than White schools. According to a *State Times* article, “The negro school system is very badly overcrowded, the facilities for negro high school students being sufficient for only 630 students while there should be accommodation for approximately 2,750” ("Huge expansion program set by EBR Parish School Board", 1949, January 1). This article also noted that Black elementary
schools were in particularly poor condition and in need of replacement ("Huge expansion program set by EBR Parish School Board", 1949, January 1).

Figure 4.1. Map of Beauregard Elementary and Reddy Street School

The inequality becomes clearer when comparing the total enrollment numbers for Beauregard Elementary, the neighborhood White school, and Reddy Street School, the neighborhood Black school. In 1949, Beauregard Elementary enrolled 158 White students while Reddy Street Elementary enrolled 1,091 Black students ("More that [sic] 18,000 school children enrolled in EBR", 1949, September 7). Table 4.2 illustrates some of the disparities between Black and White schools in EBRP at this time.

Table 4.2. Comparison of Black and White schools in EBRP, 1949

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1949</th>
<th>EBRP Black Schools</th>
<th>EBRP White Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average daily</td>
<td>6.393</td>
<td>10.860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Pupil ratio</td>
<td>1:33</td>
<td>1:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per pupil expenditures</td>
<td>$44.87</td>
<td>$141.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27 Data obtained from the Louisiana Department of Education Annual and Statistical Report for 1945 and from an Advocate article ("Public school registration in parish continues to increase", 1949, September 11).
The inequity between White and Black schooling in Baton Rouge demonstrates that attitudes regarding segregation and White supremacy were deeply entrenched in Baton Rouge, as in other parts of the South. Education was seen as a primary site in which those prevailing attitudes were enacted and enforced (Anderson, 1988; Reynolds & Schramm, 2002).

1954-1969: Desisting and Delaying Desegregation

The forces for and against desegregation (Davis, 1999) became even more visible after the Supreme Court ruled in 1954 that the maintenance of segregated schools was unconstitutional and that schools should desegregate their school populations “with all deliberate speed.” Despite this landmark Supreme Court ruling, Whites resisted desegregation across the state as school districts chose to simply look the other way, maintaining segregation as they had always done (Brown, 2004; Cremin, 1988). In 1958-1959, in a foreshadowing of legislative proposals that would transpire again in June 2007 and in March 2008 (Scott, 2008, March 9), state legislators proposed a statute that would give tuition grants to students who attended private, non-sectarian private schools. The statute found widespread public support and was approved by voters by a 3-to-1 margin (151,929 votes cast in favor, 55,408 against) (Stone, 1992).

Two years after Brown (1954), Louisiana schools were still completely segregated. Joseph Taylor (1956) documented pervasive resistance to integration in Louisiana, including public recreational facilities, commercial sports teams, public transportation, and higher education. He asserted that while the letter of the law was perhaps being obeyed and visible signs of desegregation were removed, intimidation was often used to enforce de facto segregation as the law of the land. He quoted all five 1956 gubernatorial candidates—all of
whom actively opposed integration. Taylor (1956) concluded with a sobering statement which is still applicable today:

> [C]andor dictates the conclusion that far less progress has been made toward desegregation than one might have expected in a state with such a rich and varied past, such a variety of peoples and cultures in the present, not to mention an abundance of resources both natural and human, so necessary to a promising future” (p. 271).

In New Orleans, public and parochial school systems resisted desegregation. Manning and Rogers (2002) chronicle the process of desegregating New Orleans parochial schools. Although Archbishop Joseph Rummel came out in favor of the integration of New Orleans parochial schools in 1949, other church leaders were silent and the process was delayed. Local parishioners were divided on the issue: some supported church leaders who called for the integration of parochial schools and church services, while others demonstrated outside the New Orleans Archdiocesan offices. Church leaders threatened to excommunicate public critics of integration. Despite some delays, New Orleans parochial schools were integrated on September 4, 1962.

Baker (1996) details the legal battles and delay tactics of the local and state governments regarding public school desegregation in New Orleans during the late 1950s and early 1960s. She relates the stories of two lesser-known Southern activists: federal district judge J. Skelly Wright, a self-professed “Southern boy” who grew up accepting segregation, but overcame his social origins and upheld the law, and Creole attorney A. P. Tureaud, who argued the New Orleans school desegregation case against the school board in front of Judge Wright in 1960. Baker describes “D-Day” (desegregation-day) in New Orleans, November 14, 1960, when six-year-old Ruby Bridges was the first Black to integrate William Frantz Elementary School. Similar delay tactics and legal battles occurred in Rapides Parish in central Louisiana (Marcase, 1993) and in Lafayette Parish in southeastern Louisiana (Caldas & Bankston, 2003).
Schools in EBRP were no exception to this rule. In keeping with their tradition of fighting for education for their children, however, the Black community attempted to demand compliance with the court mandate. In September 1954, nine Black adults attempted to register 39 Black children at the Gilmer Wright Elementary School ("Negroes try to enroll in white school", 1954, September 3). The Black students and their parents were turned down. Alex Pitcher, the local NAACP attorney who accompanied the parents that morning, called their efforts a “test case.” Daniel Byrd, Secretary of the Louisiana Chapter of the NAACP, explained how schools were selected for desegregation attempts: “We pick places where the parents are ready” ("Negroes try to enroll in white school", 1954, September 3). This kind of legal action was part of a pattern in which Black community members in Baton Rouge fought for equality in public spaces. The little-known Baton Rouge Bus Boycott of 1953 was a precursor to the famous Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955 (Hebert, 1999; Hendry & Edwards, in press). Blacks in Baton Rouge also fought to integrate City Hall and local parks, eventually raising funds and constructing the Brooks Park Pool because Black children were denied access to the City Park swimming pool.

According to G. A. Smalling, assistant superintendent of EBRP schools, this was the first time in Baton Rouge history that Blacks had sought to attend White schools. Principals of EBRP schools were told at a school meeting to “continue to operate as usual, white schools for white students and Negro schools for Negro students” ("Negroes try to enroll in white school", 1954, September 3). In fact, the state of Louisiana embarked upon a policy of “massive legislation and litigation” to avoid compliance with the Supreme Court’s Brown mandate (1954), passing at least 135 statutes and resolutions aimed at maintaining legalized discrimination based on race (McCall, 1973). In 1954, a Louisiana Legislature “adopted a proposed constitutional amendment
and two acts designed to assure continuance of public school segregation despite the Supreme Court ruling May 17” ("Negroes try to enroll in white school", 1954, September 3). The amendment was put before the voters in a general election in November 1954. The amendment mandating separate schools for Black and White students in Louisiana passed by a vote of 217,992 to 46,929 (Stone, 1992).

Once again, the Black community (in conjunction with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) showed their support for public education for their children, challenging the constitutionality of EBRP’s de facto segregated school system in 1956 on behalf of 37 North Baton Rouge Black students (Davis et al. v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, 1961). In 1956, EBRP schools were entirely segregated. A map in a Baton Rouge City-Parish Planning Commission document in 1955-56 shows separate symbols for White schools and Negro schools. There were 22,185 White students (61% of total enrollment) and 13,566 Black students (39%) enrolled in 37 White and 20 Black schools.28

Beauregard Elementary was an all-White school until 1959. EBRP school board minutes29 show that a resolution was passed on September 25, 1958 that “Beauregard Elementary School be converted to a Negro elementary school for the 1959-60 school session with a four-classroom addition.” On December 4, 1958, school board minutes document that it was “resolved, that, effective July 1, 1959, the name of the Beauregard Elementary School be, and is, hereby changed to the South Boulevard Elementary School.” No explanations are offered as to why Beauregard Elementary was selected to be changed from a White to a Black school or why South Boulevard was chosen as the new name. The school does not even open onto the street South Boulevard; rather, the back field and parking lot of the school is on South

28 Data obtained from the Louisiana State Department of Education Annual and Statistical Report, 1955-56.
29 EBRP school board minutes are archived at the EBRP School Board office in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
Boulevard. The current EBRP school board secretary explained that school board minutes from that time period do not include supporting materials, such as work accomplished by committees, that may have been used to justify changes like these.

On March 5, 1959, the school board authorized local contractors Buquet and LeBlanc to complete the four-classroom addition for the amount of $144,383.00. They would need the additional classroom space to accommodate the staggering enrollment increases that occurred after it became a Black school. Figure 4.2 below shows the impact of this change on student enrollment, which increased dramatically from 195 White students in 1958 to 341 Black students in 1960. Enrollment reached its peak in 1966, when 539 Black students attended South Boulevard—an incredibly high number of students for such a small school building.

![Figure 4.2. Enrollment numbers for Beauregard Elementary and South Boulevard Elementary, 1949-1969](image)

Data obtained from the Louisiana School Directories from 1949-1969.
On November 2, 1959, Mr. John R. Sheppard, an EBRP school board member, proposed a resolution to maintain the system of segregated public schools. The resolution claimed that the community had “enjoyed progressive and peaceful relations between the White and colored races in the Parish of East Baton Rouge under a segregated school system for over seventy-five years” and that the NAACP’s lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of segregated schools sought to “destroy the excellent school system now available to both races” in EBRP. The resolution plainly states the position of the EBRP school system towards school integration:

Now therefore be it resolved, That this Board does hereby declare its resolution to maintain its public segregated school system, the NAACP to the contrary notwithstanding . . . Be it further resolved, That it is the intention of this Board to go on record as being unequivocally opposed to the integration of the races in any segment of our school system.

The resolution was seconded by board member Winston N. McVea and unanimously adopted.

The Black community in Baton Rouge continued to fight for integration. In 1962, the NAACP filed a motion claiming that the EBRP school board had done nothing to desegregate its schools and demanding that a plan be drawn up to desegregate the schools “with all deliberate speed” (Stone, 1992). Federal Judge E. Gordon West responded by imposing a “cooling-off period” and said that he would not make a ruling on the motion until the close of the 1964-65 school year (McCall, 1973).

Louisiana schools were still completely segregated and unequally funded ten years after the \emph{Brown} decision (1954). In 1964, out of 1,442 public schools in Louisiana, 510 were Black and 932 were White (Stone, 1992). In 1966-67, the per pupil inventory value of school facilities was $1,303.74 for White schools and $1,090.95 for Black schools (Davis, 1999). Rather than forcibly desegregate the schools, the EBRP school board initiated a “freedom of choice” plan which allowed students to voluntarily integrate. Although Black and White students were theoretically “free” to integrate any school they wanted, most continued to attend single-race
schools in their neighborhoods and communities. Thus, in the words of Fairclough (1995), the “burden of integration remained on the shoulders of Black parents” (p. 437). In 1963, plans were set in motion for Black high school seniors to integrate four White high schools in Baton Rouge: Baton Rouge High, Glen Oaks High, Istrouma High, and Lee High. The students chosen to integrate were selected based upon recommendations from Black principals and home visits made by NAACP representatives. On September 3, 1963, 28 Black high school seniors integrated the selected White high schools; in 1964-65, 57 more Black students joined them (McGuire, 2006).

In 1968, in the *Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, Virginia* decision (1968), the Supreme Court ruled freedom of choice plans unconstitutional because they had not been successful in integrating single-race schools. Freedom of choice desegregation in Virginia had not resulted in even one White student choosing to attend a Black school and was similarly unsuccessful in Baton Rouge (Marcase, 1993). In the 1968-69 school year, 70 out of 101 EBRP schools were less than one percent integrated (Davis, 1999). In the 1969-1970 school year, fifteen years after *Brown* (1954), only three thousand out of twenty-three thousand Black children in EBRP attended school with White children (Davis, 1999).

**1970-1980: Staff Integration and Early Use of Magnet Programs**

In 1970-71, EBRP officially desegregated school personnel, buses, and extra-curricular activities. This event, known as the “cross-over,” significantly changed the racial composition of EBRP schools, where more than six-hundred teachers were reassigned by court order to schools in which students were predominantly of a different race (Davis, 1999). The crossover had a much greater impact on Black teachers, since 65% of them were reassigned, but only 35% of White teachers. Nationwide, staff integration had devastating consequences for Black teachers
and administrators, many of whom were transferred to all-White schools and replaced with less-qualified and/or novice White teachers or lost their jobs entirely (Karpinski, 2006). In Louisiana, the number of Black teachers actually increased between 1966 and 1971, but only by 345 teachers whereas the number of White teachers increased by 3,770 (Butler, 1974). Many Black administrators lost their jobs. In 1966, there were 512 Black principals in Louisiana; by 1971, there were only 363. White principalships increased from 940 in 1969 to 1,043 in 1971 (Butler, 1974). Other Southern states experienced even more devastating losses (Karpinski, 2006).

Numerous authors have studied the impact of teacher integration on Black teachers (Karpinski, 2006). In an early piece, Doddy and Edwards (1955) studied the apprehensions of Black teachers in South Carolina regarding the effect of desegregation on their professional status, job security, and the preparation of future Black teachers. Causey (1999) explored the process of school desegregation in Columbus, Georgia from 1968 to 1975. Based on archival research and interview data, Causey concluded that Black teachers experienced a loss of leadership and school ownership; many underwent professional crises because they were perceived to be inferior and less capable. None of the teachers in the study recalled any in-service opportunities to help them prepare for and adjust to desegregated settings, a problem documented elsewhere (Henderson, von Euler, & Schneider, 1981; Rosenbaum & Presser, 1978; Schofield & Sagar, 1979).

Davis (1999) explored Baton Rouge school desegregation through the lens of two cross-over teachers—one White female and one Black male—whose experiences varied widely. The White teacher indicated that her experiences as a cross-over teacher were largely positive. She felt accepted by the Black community and participated in extracurricular activities. Black administrators were supportive of the White teachers. Despite some resentment she sensed
because one of the Black teachers had had to leave in order for her to be there, friendships
developed between the Black and White teachers. In contrast, the Black teacher said they felt
like outsiders. They felt they had to be careful with everything they did—particularly the type of
language they used. White students questioned their authority and professional knowledge. The
Black teachers experienced a sense of loss of community when schools were integrated.
Regarding these unintended consequences of school desegregation, Siddle-Walker (1996)
laments that the culture of Black teaching died with *Brown* (1954).

Cross-over teachers at South Boulevard had similar experiences. I interviewed two
teachers: Ms. Weber, a White crossover teacher who came to South Boulevard in 1971 and
taught there for 5 years and Ms. Lincoln, another White teacher who taught at South Boulevard
from 1979 to 1998. Differences between their descriptions of the school itself and particularly,
the students at South Boulevard, could not be clearer.

Several Black teachers at South Boulevard were replaced with between five and eight
inexperienced White teachers, one of whom was Ms. Weber, who confessed that when she first
got to South Boulevard, “it was a total shock. I don’t even know if I had ever spoken to a Black
child or had any knowledge of them before. And there I was in school with all Black children.”
The principal of South Boulevard, however, a Black woman named Thelma Griffin, retained her
position. Ms. Weber described it as a difficult transition: “We [the White cross over teachers]
kind of tended to huddle together a little bit. And they didn’t know what to do with us. And we
didn’t know exactly how to fit in with them.” She described the Black teachers as “very
guarded. You know, here are these White teachers coming in and looking at us, watching what
we’re doing and those kinds of things.”
Like many other Black schools during that time period, Ms. Weber described South Boulevard as a neighborhood school with all the Black students and Black teachers. They all knew each other. They were very close. They knew their relatives and all of this. It was pretty much a closed community just as much as the White schools were in our neighborhoods.

Some of this sense of community was no doubt lost when the Black teachers were displaced by White teachers from outside the community. Black teachers and principals had long served as role models and had occupied leadership positions in the community. Baton Rouge Black educator and activist J. K. Haynes spoke of the consequences of the teacher crossover for the Black community:

The black school in many instances has historically been a prestigious institution in the black community . . . In the absence of this institution [black schools] and the black educator, there is created a void in the black community and, as a consequence, the black youngsters will be emasculated of all motivation, aspiration and hope” (Wright, 1968).

Not surprisingly, perhaps, Ms. Weber’s assessment and memories of the students at South Boulevard were largely negative and, at times, even accusatory in nature. She described the students as “Very poor. Almost all of them, if not every one of them, ate free lunch. Whether they deserved it or not was questionable.” She went on to explain that:

This one kid came back in the sixth grade and told us about his vacation that summer. He had been to the Bahamas and came back and ate free lunch. So that’s the kind of thing that went on. And if they didn’t qualify, they found a way to qualify.

She described her teaching style in the following quote: “You couldn’t smile. You had to be strict. You had to have eyes all over your head because they were tricky. They just did things. And you had to be so sharp and guarded all the time.” She described the students as unmotivated and prone to “a lot of mischief and misbehavior.” She described the Black teachers
at South Boulevard as having “dubious qualifications from bogus or nonexistent schools” and said that they “weren’t doing their jobs.”

In contrast, the other White teacher, Ms. Lincoln, who was a gifted resource teacher at South Boulevard (which means she taught gifted students who were in the regular program over 60% of the day) described herself as a “South Boulevaridian.” Ms. Lincoln gave me a copy of the South Boulevard alma mater that she had saved from so many years before. She described the students as “all neighborhood children, so there was an awful lot of free lunches. Quite possibly a very, very, very high percentage.” She also said they were “academically average for an inner-city school at that time” and that they were average socially and behaviorally as well. Regarding their behavior, she said: “Nothing stands out in my mind.”

When asked to compare South Boulevard to other EBRP schools, Ms. Lincoln said:

We held our own. We prided ourselves in getting as much as we could out of the children. I’m not gonna say that my children were to be compared at all with the Shenandoahs [a majority-White, suburban school] of the day. But certainly, we did a lot and had a lot for our children. We had a student council. We had crossing guards. We had Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts that serviced the school.

She said: “I think that South Boulevard served as an excellent inner-city school for the community when it was a neighborhood school. When the children just walked to school.”

Lastly, Ms. Lincoln said: “I loved South Boulevard; I hated to leave it. South Boulevard got into my blood. And it got into my blood when I first got there on day one.” Clearly, these vastly different descriptions of the same school cannot be reconciled, nor is it within the scope of this dissertation to attempt to do so. These two stories are additional reminders of the ways in which powerful forces both for and against school desegregation have been present in the history of education in Baton Rouge.

Interviews with two Black sisters who attended South Boulevard during the same time period add to the history of South Boulevard. Jeannette and Margie lived in Beauregard Town
across the street from South Boulevard. Margie described Beauregard Town as “a great neighborhood. All the kids played together, all the families knew each other.” Jeannette concurred, explaining that it was an

an extended neighborhood of families very similar to ours. Primarily Black, working class. Everybody knew everybody for blocks. We were within walking distance to my grandparents’ house, church, school, the neighborhood grocery, drug and shoe stores as well as a doctor and dentist.

Jeannette also remembered that her “very best friend was a White girl. She lived just up the street from us, so we interacted outside of school as well. I had a Vietnamese friend, too.” The fact that Jeannette had two non-Black neighborhood friends confirms the historical, residential integration in Beauregard Town. Jeannette described the other students at South Boulevard as being:

very much like me. We all lived in the same general area, in two-parent families, usually with older and younger siblings. Apparently, our families were in the same general earnings range because no one seemed more affluent than anyone else did. I don’t remember any fancy cars or clothes nor any other sign of someone having lots of money. Yet, I do recall a couple of kids who sometimes wore shabby shoes or coats, which I’m sure someone else might have thought about my hand-me-downs at some point.

Jeannette remembered many of the teachers’ names. She recalled that the music teacher was “awesome” and that she had piano lessons after school.

In addition to staff integration, the EBRP school board and community also began to discuss the possibilities and limitations of magnet programs as desegregation tools. The federal government passed the Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA) in 1972, which marked the beginning of the use of magnet programs to desegregate schools. In 1975, the EBRP school board created a committee to study the concept of magnet schools and present recommendations to the board (Norris, 1975). Although there was significant community support for magnet programs, there was also resistance to the idea. Eva Legard, a Black member of the EBRP
School Board and a graduate of McKinley High School, said: “The magnet school concept is discriminatory, not only because of race but it is discriminatory to the masses of children in Baton Rouge . . . when are we going to help everybody?” ("Inner-city council pushes magnet school concept", 1975, December 9). Legard argued that quality education means that every school in the parish should be a magnet school.

Despite opposition to the creation of a magnet school, the proposal was approved and the first magnet program in EBRP, an academic and arts magnet at Baton Rouge High, opened in 1976. Although the magnet program was not intended to be a special school for gifted students, it was “geared to the college bound and the talented in the visual and performing arts” ("Committee passes Baton Rouge High magnet school plan", 1975). The criteria for admission included: a minimum 2.5 grade average, ability to read on grade-level, interest and motivation in the program, and parental consent. A middle school magnet program was also created at Glasgow Middle School in 1979 ("First magnet middle school to open", 1979). The school received nearly 1,900 applications—465 from Blacks and 1,421 from Whites—for only 750 seats in the program.

1981-1995: Magnet Programs, Busing, and White Flight

In May 1981, Federal District Court Judge John Parker implemented a desegregation plan, closing 15 EBRP schools to achieve more racially-balanced school populations. Judge Parker’s plan clustered or paired formerly White and formerly Black schools and used computers to assign students to schools based on racial quotas. Baton Rouge parents were given the opportunity to indicate their first, second, third, and fourth choice of schools, but students were assigned by computers and about 30 percent did not get either their first or second choice of schools (McClain, 1981, August 5). *Morning Advocate* staff writer McClain reported that “[i]n
In most cases, families received their first or second choice of school but in other instances children were arbitrarily sent to a certain school to achieve a balance of black and white students” (McClain, 1981, August 4). According to Bankston and Caldas (2002), the public’s reaction to Parker’s plan was “massive resistance and an immediate hemorrhaging of white students from the public school system” (p. 86). In 1981, the first year of court-ordered busing, approximately 7,000 non-Black students left the EBRP public school system. This figure represented 19% of the non-Black students in the system and 11% of the total school system enrollment.31

In the context of these system-wide changes in school assignment for desegregation purposes, South Boulevard became one of two proposed citywide dedicated extended day magnet schools (along with Northdale Elementary). The federal magnet program had begun in 1972 as a way to create racially balanced student populations without forced busing or re-drawing attendance zones. The Consent Decree defined a dedicated magnet school as a “magnet school which has no students automatically assigned to it because of their residence in the attendance zone of that school” (U. S. District Court Middle District of Louisiana, 1996, p. 3). Designed for working parents, the extended day magnet programs were to be open daily from 7:00 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. and provide tutoring and enrichment activities for students. Judge Parker approved the creation of these two new magnet programs with target student enrollments of 60 percent White and 40 percent Black (McClain, 1981, August 15). However, in early August 1981, Judge Parker almost did not allow the programs to begin operation because Northdale’s student body was 85 percent Black and South Boulevard’s was 75 percent Black (McClain, 1981, August 4)—a far cry from the envisioned student enrollments. One perhaps unintended consequence of the implementation of the extended day program at South Boulevard

31 Data obtained from the Louisiana State Department of Education Annual Financial and Statistical Report.
was the loss of more of its Black teachers who either did not want to teach in the extended day program or were not permitted to stay.

I interviewed a number of people who worked at South Boulevard during this period, including four teachers and one administrator as well as a parent of a South Boulevard student in the mid-90s before it became an immersion magnet program. Interview and test score data reveal a successful school that met the needs of its parents by providing before- and after-school care and met the needs of its students by providing quality enrichment programs and a rigorous academic program, as evidenced by standardized test scores (admittedly only one measure of success among many).

Linda, the former South Boulevard parent in the sample, identified the extended day magnet program as the main appeal of the school and recalled that “there was always a waiting list to get into the school. So you had to apply and hope that you would be one of the ones that got in.” Remarkably, there was no cost associated with the child care before and after school. The costs were paid for by the school system. Linda recalled that she really liked the principal and that “the kids all loved her. Everybody liked her. She just gave you that feeling of warmth and openness.” She said that the school was “fairly well integrated—comparatively speaking” and that the students there were “pretty much typical kids.” She said the school had “a lot of parental support,” but did not recall a formal parent-teacher organization. Like numerous current South Boulevard parents, Linda chose South Boulevard because she “wanted [her son] to have diversity. We don’t live in a single race world. We’re a mixture and the earlier you can learn to appreciate and get along with someone that’s different than you, the better.”

Teachers in the sample corroborated Linda’s assessment of the school in terms of the attractiveness of the program, the diversity of the student body, and the success of the school.
They agreed that the program was highly valued by the families it served. Ms. Brown noted that the students “treated each other just like siblings because they came early in the morning, at 7:30, and we kept them until 5:30. We did everything but bathe ‘em and put ‘em to bed, almost.” Several teachers recalled a high level of parental involvement. Because no bus transportation was provided, parents had to drop off their children every morning and pick them up every afternoon. Ms. Lawson recalled: “You met the parents face-to-face daily. So if there was a problem, you had that communication on a daily basis.” Ms. Johnson, a Black teacher who taught at South Boulevard from 1981 until she retired in 1999, said that the greatest strength of South Boulevard during this time period was the “cohesiveness of the faculty and their willingness to put in the extra time for the benefit of the children.”

None of the staff members interviewed from this time period recalled what the racial ratios were, although they did remember that they were required to fulfill a race-based quota. Ms. Brown explained:

You’ll have to check with [another teacher] because I never did pay much attention to that [racial composition]. I was just here to teach. I know there was a ratio that they were shooting for here, but I couldn’t tell you that ratio—honestly.

Ms. Lawson, a somewhat younger teacher, remembered that the “ratio was pretty close to 50/50 [50 percent Black, 50 percent non-Black] the first four to five years I was here.” She elaborated:

The purpose of the court order was to desegregate, and we did. It was effective. You had kids who came from all walks of life. We had kids who were neighborhood kids who walked to school, and we had kids from the Country Club of Louisiana. You had children coming from all over.

She noted that the student body then was similar to the student body now in terms of its diversity.

All the teachers interviewed who worked at South Boulevard when it was an extended day program agreed that there was a range of ability levels among the students during that time.
Ms. Brown noted: “There was a range. I would say it ran the gamut. We basically had average and above-average children, with maybe a few below average, I guess.” Ms. Lawson agreed, noting that “We had children who were working below grade level, but we had kids who were working well above grade level.” Ms. Johnson said that the students who were there in the 1980s had a “zest and a desire to learn and progress.” She also said that there was a “long waiting list” to get into the program and that parents “wanted their children there because of the high academic achievement that the students experienced.” Thus, South Boulevard has a long history of high expectations and student achievement.

Did the extended day magnet program at South Boulevard achieve its primary objective: creating a racially-diverse student population? Table 4.3 indicates that it was indeed successful in creating a racially diverse student population. Enrollment data for 1981 is shown in bold print to emphasize the change in the racial composition of the school in the first year of implementation of the extended day magnet program. When the extended day program began, it was successful in terms of student integration, but the percentage of non-Blacks began to decrease after 1988, which reflects the trend in the overall student population of EBRP schools during the same time period.

According to the teacher-participants, the quality of the extended day program declined in the late 1980s and early 1990s as the school system became less generous in its funding of the program in order to answer complaints of inequity from ancillary teachers at other schools (such as coaches) who were being paid less for their after-school time commitments. The extended day program teachers’ additional pay went from an hourly rate based on their level of education and years of experience to a flat rate of $12 per hour, which was not enough for some teachers to keep doing extended day. Outside employees were thus hired to fill in the gaps, which led to a
decline in program quality that may also partially explain the demographic shift that occurred between 1988 and 1996.

Table 4.3. Student enrollment at South Boulevard, 1980-1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>Non-Black</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The extended day magnet program at South Boulevard was successful between 1981 and 1988 in terms of desegregation and in providing a quality program valued by its students and parents.

1996-2002: Magnet Programs as the Primary Desegregation Tool

In 1996, the EBRP school board brought in desegregation consultant Christine Rossell to create a desegregation plan that would satisfy Judge Parker, who agreed with the plaintiffs that Baton Rouge was operating dual school systems. The result was a court-approved Consent Decree (U. S. District Court Middle District of Louisiana, 1996)—a ruling by the court to which all parties agreed. The Consent Decree did away with Judge Parker’s clustered or paired single-race elementary schools, favoring instead community-based attendance zones that allowed most

32 Enrollment data obtained from yearly Louisiana School Directories.
students to attend schools near their homes. The Consent Decree also created 24 new magnet programs to try to attract White students to attend majority-Black schools in an effort to achieve racial balance. The Consent Decree states that magnet programs are “the primary tool for desegregating the predominantly Black schools in the inner city and, with only a few exceptions, that is where they are placed” (U. S. District Court Middle District of Louisiana, 1996, p. 2).

Table 4.4 displays the evolution of elementary-level magnet program offerings from 1996 to 2007: from 14 in the 1996 Consent Decree down to only six in the 2003 Final Settlement Agreement and six current programs. All but one of the new magnet programs established in 1996 were programs-within-a-school (PWS). The new elementary magnet programs included the following specialized curricula or foci: visual and performing arts, math/science, computer science/technology, composition/writing and communications technology, Montessori, and foreign language immersion.

Many of these magnet programs were later closed because they were unsuccessful either in drawing non-Black students into their programs, in raising student achievement or both. According to Bankston and Caldas (2002), half of the magnet programs established by the Consent Decree failed to attract even ten White students. They argue, furthermore, that their failure was not due to lack of sufficient funds: the school board spent $6.8 million between 1996 and 1999 on special programs designed to attract White students back to EBRP schools. In spite of the creation of these innovative programs and significant financial investment, however, non-Black enrollment in EBRP during those years continued to decline. In 1975, non-Blacks represented 60% of the total student enrollment. By 1995, non-Black students comprised only 39% of the total EBRP student enrollment.

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33 Table 4.4 does not include Gifted/Talented and Scholastic Academy programs, which are sufficiently distinct from magnet offerings to warrant their exclusion.
34 Baton Rouge Center for Visual and Performing Arts
One of the new magnet programs specifically named in the Consent Decree was the foreign language immersion program at South Boulevard. South Boulevard became a dedicated magnet school operating three distinct magnet programs: extended day, international studies, and foreign language immersion. South Boulevard’s anticipated school enrollment was 69% Black, 31% White. South Boulevard’s immersion magnet program officially started in the fall of 1996 with one Spanish immersion kindergarten class. Its official name was South Boulevard Foreign Languages and International Studies Magnet. The Consent Decree describes South Boulevard’s immersion program as one which “offers every child the opportunity to learn about international studies while developing a strong foundation in the basic subjects and proficiency

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35 Data obtained from the Consent Decree (1996) and the Final Settlement Agreement (2003).
36 The Consent Decree also called for the creation of a French immersion magnet program at Winbourne Elementary School. Winbourne’s program, however, was a program within a school (PWS), meaning that the school population was comprised of a combination of students automatically assigned to that school because they reside in that school’s attendance zone and students who volunteered to attend the school because of the magnet program available there. The French immersion program at Winbourne began in the fall of 1998—a year after South Boulevard’s Spanish immersion program began.
in a foreign language (with the option of a full immersion program)” (U. S. District Court Middle District of Louisiana, 1996, Exhibit 5). The total school enrollment in 1996 was 277 students. Of those 277 students, 187 were Black (68%) and 90 were non-Black (32%). At this time, the school was not a dedicated immersion magnet. Students who attended South Boulevard chose to participate either in the Spanish immersion program or to participate in daily FLES (foreign language in the elementary school) lessons in Spanish. Each year, there were two kindergarten classes: one Spanish immersion kindergarten and one regular, non-immersion kindergarten.

Implementation of foreign language education in a majority-Black school is significant in terms of the history of race and education. Before the Civil War, many free people of color (“gens de couleur libre”) in Louisiana who were fluent in French sent their children to Europe to be educated. Many French-speaking Catholic Creoles lived in New Orleans. French was an integral part of the curriculum at the Holy Family Academy in Baton Rouge. Despite this historical tradition of French speakers in the Black community in Louisiana, in more recent history, foreign language study has been reserved as a privilege of the elite, which has meant that it has been the domain of White, college-bound students presumed to have superior mental abilities. Black and underprivileged students have historically been excluded from foreign language study (Gaarder, 1976; Hubbard, 1968, 1980). The eugenics movement and intelligence testing at the turn of the century made popular and reinforced the notion that Blacks had inferior intelligence; school counselors and foreign language teachers discouraged Black students from studying foreign languages and other “college-prep” courses (Hubbard, 1968). Of the inferior intelligence of “disadvantaged” children, psychologist David Ausubel (1963) wrote:

In many urban high schools today, pupils who cannot read at a fifth grade level, and who cannot speak or write grammatically or do simple arithmetical calculations, are subject to irregular French verbs, Shakespearean drama, and geometrical theorems.
Nothing more educationally futile or better calculated to destroy educational morale could be imagined! (p. 133).

Gaarder (1976) called for the foreign language field to enable foreign language students to “see themselves as a largely self-selected group of very special people (a kind of elite not better than others but different in a most desirable and rewarding way)” (p. 152). These quotes illustrate how foreign language study has functioned historically as a sorting mechanism and how Black and lower socioeconomic status students have been excluded from it. Language and power are inextricably linked. None of the Black parents in the study sample spoke a second language, and they wanted their children to have the power associated with bilingualism. They wanted their children to learn a second language because they felt it would provide enhanced employment and global travel opportunities for them in the future.

The academic year 2002-2003 was an important one for South Boulevard for two reasons. First, the French immersion program moved from Winbourne Elementary to South Boulevard, making it the only public school in Louisiana with both French and Spanish immersion programs. Second, that school year initiated the beginning of South Boulevard’s transition to becoming a dedicated magnet. That year, there were two kindergarten classes: one Spanish immersion and one French immersion. This was the first year there was no regular, non-immersion kindergarten. The non-immersion students were grandfathered in—that is, they were allowed to stay at the school through fifth grade even though they did not participate in the immersion program. Enrollment during the 2002-2003 school year was 242 total students: 79% Black, 22% non-Black. Table 4.5 shows the student enrollment at South Boulevard from 1996 to 2007. Overall school enrollment decreased at the school as the regular (non-magnet) program

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37 In EBRP, the terms “non-magnet,” “neighborhood,” “regular,” and “traditional” are interchangeable and refer to all schools that are not magnets. Although some parents use the terms “neighborhood school” or “regular school,” I use the phrase “regular (non-magnet) schools” for clarity.
was phased out. The kindergarten immersion classes were capped at 20 students to allow the teachers to divide their attention among fewer students as they began their immersion education.

**Table 4.5. South Boulevard student enrollment 1996-2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total K-5</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>Non-Black</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>Free/Red Lunch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Implementation of the immersion program also brought about notable shifts in the racial composition of the teaching staff. As the immersion program grew, many of the regular classroom teachers were replaced by native-speaking immersion teachers who taught math, science, and social studies. Some of the American teachers—many of whom were Black—chose to leave because they wanted to be able to continue teaching all the content areas (including math, science, and social studies) rather than just English Language Arts. In 1991, there were eight White teachers and seven Black teachers. In 1995, there were 10 White teachers and 11 Black teachers. Of the current 18 teachers\(^{39}\) in levels K-5, only two are Black, six are Hispanic, and ten are White (including six from France and Belgium). Thus, one consequence of the

\(^{38}\) Data obtained from the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board office.
\(^{39}\) Each grade level has one Spanish, one French, and one English Language Arts teachers.
implementation of the immersion program has been a decrease in Black teachers, which mirrors patterns across the country (Karpinski, 2006).

**2003-2007: The Final Settlement Agreement**

After operating under the Consent Decree for seven years, the parties involved in the desegregation suit agreed to a Final Settlement Agreement in 2003 (FSA) (U. S. District Court Middle District of Louisiana, 2003). The FSA pared down the number of magnet programs to 13—a significant decrease from the 33 special programs created by the 1996 Consent Decree. The FSA included only six elementary magnet offerings. According to the four-year term of the FSA, the parish would continue to operate three dedicated elementary magnet schools: Baton Rouge Magnet High School, Baton Rouge Center for Visual and Performing Arts (BRCVPA), and South Boulevard Elementary School. In addition to these dedicated magnet programs, the school board agreed to operate an “academic theme ‘strand’” of dedicated magnet schools, which included South Boulevard Elementary. Addition of the “academic” label meant that all students admitted into the program would be screened to ensure that they were at least on grade level.

The prescribed enrollment target for these dedicated magnet schools was 55% Black, 45% non-Black. The FSA stated that during the first two school years of the four-year term of the agreement, if there were insufficient applications from either Black or non-Black students to fulfill these quotas, “the magnet school shall be operated with empty seats notwithstanding the existence of a waiting list” (U. S. District Court Middle District of Louisiana, 2003, p. 3-4).

Beginning with the third year of the FSA, the Board would be allowed to admit students from the waiting list regardless of their race and the subsequent effect on the target ratio.

I refer again to Table 4.5 for South Boulevard’s student population data. In the first year of the four-year term of the FSA (2003-2004), South Boulevard’s student population was 80%
Black and 20% non-Black—not particularly close to the 69% Black, 31% non-Black ratio targeted in the Consent Decree and a far cry from the 55% Black, 45% non-Black ratio targeted in the FSA. These numbers are for the entire school, however, which prior to 2003 included a non-immersion class at each grade level. Current enrollment (2007-2008 school year) is 204 students: 59% Black, 41% non-Black. These numbers approximate the racial quota of 60% Black, 40% non-Black originally envisioned by Judge Parker for South Boulevard’s extended day magnet program, exceed the 69% Black, 31% non-Black quota of the 1996 Consent Decree, and almost fulfill the 55% Black, 45% non-Black racial quota established by the 2003 Final Settlement Agreement. This level of racial diversity is noteworthy considering that it has occurred in the same time period during which the overall student population of EBRP schools has become increasingly Black. Figure 4.3 illustrates the trend towards increasing integration at South Boulevard while the overall parish has been consistently trending towards re-segregation since 1981.

Two other EBRP magnet programs have achieved similar levels of racial integration: Westdale Heights Academic Magnet and BRCVPA. Both schools have fewer students who qualify for the free and reduced lunch program (see Figures 4.4 and 4.5 below). Both schools have histories which differ from South Boulevard’s in important ways. BRCVPA has been a dedicated magnet program since 1996, whereas South Boulevard only became a fully dedicated magnet program in fall 2007-2008. Furthermore, the entire student body of Westdale Heights was emptied in 2004 and replaced with students who had met the academic magnet requirements for admissions, whereas non-magnet students at South Boulevard were grandfathered in and allowed to complete their elementary education there, a process which took six years to
Figure 4.3. Percentage of non-Black enrollment at South Boulevard and in the EBRP district, 1949-2007.

Figure 4.4. Percentage of socioeconomically-disadvantaged students at dedicated magnet elementary schools.

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40 Data obtained from Louisiana School Directories and Louisiana State Department of Education Annual Financial and Statistical Reports.

41 Data obtained from the EBRP Child Nutrition Program office.
complete. Thus, drawing comparisons between South Boulevard and other magnet programs is difficult because they are dissimilar in significant ways.

![Figure 4.5. Percentage of non-Black students at dedicated magnet elementary schools](image)

**Contemporary Perspectives that Reflect Historical Themes**

Current South Boulevard parents, students, and teachers shared experiences reflective of three themes of race and the history of education: 1) pride in community schools, 2) the importance of a rigorous education, and 3) perseverance in obtaining quality education for their children.

South Boulevard parents in the study sample expressed pride in their school and are highly involved in their children’s education, in both formal and informal ways. Teachers and administrators said parental involvement at South Boulevard is excellent. Dr. Sulentic Dowell, a former EBRP associate superintendent, said that South Boulevard “had wonderful parent involvement. Much more noticeable than some of my other sites. You could go there any day

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42 Data obtained from the EBRP Office of Magnet Programs.
during lunch and see a number of parents eating lunch with their children.” Ms. Richard, one of only two Black teachers at South Boulevard, similarly said: “All I have to do is make one phone call in my room and I get parents in there.” Tracy, a Black mother and adjunct community college instructor, said: “Whenever you’re at the school, there’s always another parent there doing something.” Donald, a divorced Black father and firefighter, visits his son’s classroom frequently: “I like you can come in any time you want and pop in the classroom. I stop by all the time and just sit in the classroom for one or two hours.” Richard, a White father of three biracial children who attend South Boulevard, said that “one of the reasons private schools seem to be better is the parents are more involved. And we seem to have very involved parents at South Boulevard.”

Several parents described their efforts at home to be involved with their children’s education. Anthony, a Black father and full-time graduate student, explained what he does when his fifth-grader comes home from school:

We crack open his book sack. I want to see what’s in his folders. I want to know what’s for homework. When he does his homework, I’ll check it. I want it all correct. I’m not just gonna have him do it and then pack it up and go back to school the next day. I’m gonna check it and if it’s not correct, he’s gonna have to correct it. Misspelled words. I mean, basically just staying on top of him. Making sure he does it. Making sure it’s correct. Making sure it’s of good quality. And just knowing what’s going on at school. Being caught up. Things like that.

Parents have become increasingly involved since the creation of the formal PTO in fall 2005, when a group of five to seven mothers decided that the creation of an official parent-school organization was important to ensure the longevity of the program. After much discussion between themselves and with Ms. Miller, the group decided to organize a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) rather than a Parent Teacher Association (PTA), which requires parents to pay dues in order to become a member. According to Bridget, a White Canadian mother who volunteered to lead the organization, the group made that decision in an effort to
include all parents and families. Thus, all parents are automatically members of the school PTO. Furthermore, the group did not want mandatory annual dues to discourage anyone from participating in the organization.

In spring 2007, the PTO successfully lobbied the EBRP central administrative personnel to continue the immersion program at the middle school level. Prior to this move, the immersion program did not continue after students completed fifth grade. They simply went to middle school and enrolled in the same foreign language classes as other beginning second language students. The PTO drafted and conducted a survey in March 2006 in which they asked parents numerous questions about the future of the immersion program at South Boulevard. Survey results indicated overwhelming interest in a middle school immersion program: 144 out of 166 respondents responded that they were “interested” or “very interested.” The following school year (2006-2007), the PTO encouraged parents to write letters, send e-mails, and call central office administration and school board members to express their desire for the program to continue at the middle school level. The PTO even furnished a sample letter that parents could use as-is, as well as a digital copy parents could modify as they wished. The PTO also collected signatures from parents who said they wanted the program to continue and delivered them to the central office administration. In March 2007, the school board approved a proposal which continued the immersion program at a selected middle school. Four PTO representatives and four school staff members attended the meeting.

Since its formal creation in 2005, the PTO has raised funds that were used to buy additional books for the library, equipment for a new computer lab that was set up in fall 2006, new playground and exercise equipment, and miscellaneous items for the classroom teachers and the music teacher. Money was also used to pay a local theater company to do a production at the
school in May 2007 and to pay for costs associated with printing more than 1000 color recruiting flyers that were made jointly between the school and the PTO in fall 2007. These kinds of fundraising efforts, although they included Black and White parents, are reminiscent of the ways in which Black Southerners financed early Black schools with private contributions despite paying taxes that were supposed to fund public schools (Anderson, 1988).

South Boulevard feels like a community school despite the fact that families reside all over the parish. Parents are proud of their school; they make sacrifices to get their children to school; they volunteer at the school; they raise money to support the school. During interviews, I asked parents what they tell other people about South Boulevard. Tracy said: “I tell people it’s a great, great program. It’s wonderful. They’re not going anywhere. It’s a great school. And we love it.” When I asked Donald that question, he laughed and said: “I tell them that they’re paying for something [private school tuition] that our kids get for free that’s better.” Although South Boulevard families live significant distances from the school, I argue that the sense of community that pervades the school is something of a surrogate for the sense of community present in former neighborhood schools and in all-Black schools prior to desegregation. Like McKinley High School in Baton Rouge (Hendry & Edwards, in press), the Caswell County Training School in North Carolina (Siddle Walker, 1996), and Dunbar High School in Arkansas (Jones-Wilson, 1981), South Boulevard is a source of pride for its parents and teachers.

Despite the fact that Black and non-Black parents in the study sample were similarly proud of South Boulevard, differences emerged in the way South Boulevard is perceived in Black and non-Black communities. During fieldwork, I encountered numerous members of the Black community who spoke positively of South Boulevard. During fall 2007, the PTO asked current South Boulevard parents to provide names and addresses of daycares and pre-schools.
where recruiting brochures might be delivered. Over a period of several days, I hand-delivered recruiting brochures to primarily Black day care centers and pre-schools located in historically Black areas of Baton Rouge. The Black director at one pre-school welcomed me in when I told her I was from South Boulevard. When I asked her what she knew about South Boulevard, she smiled and said: “Oh, I’ve never been there, but I just know it’s a good school. I’ve been here in Baton Rouge for a long time.” Denise, a White mother and French teacher in the study sample, told me that an older Black woman who worked in the cafeteria of her daughter’s pre-school had attended South Boulevard as a child and was “so happy when she heard that Allison was going to South Boulevard.” A young Black man who came to my home to repair a computer asked me where our children attended school. When I told him they went to South Boulevard, he likewise said: “I’ve heard good things about that school. Charlotte Provenza went there, I think.” Charlotte Provenza, a well-known local Black leader and child advocate, did not attend South Boulevard, but the fact that this young Black man thought she did is illustrative of the point I am trying to make about the perception of South Boulevard in the Black community. South Boulevard was all-Black between 1959 and 1981 and, like most EBRP schools, has been majority-Black since then. South Boulevard has a reputation in the Black community as being an excellent school. Former EBRP school board member Patricia Haynes-Smith confirmed this reputation when she said that South Boulevard “was a good school when it was a neighborhood school. People who live around there now want to know why they can’t go to that school. It’s a tradition.” South Boulevard does not enjoy a similar reputation in the White community, however, which explains why the current South Boulevard PTO is striving to promote the school in the community at-large. Many Blacks know that South Boulevard is a good school, but many
Whites outside the public school system still need to be convinced that an excellent education can be attained in an EBRP public school.

A second historical theme discussed by current South Boulevard parents is the importance of a rigorous education. Black and non-Black parents in the study sample stressed the importance of a rigorous curriculum in their decision to send their children to South Boulevard. Ken, a Black father who is an estate planner, posited that educational quality is more important to parents than the racial composition of the student body: “People get over the racial issue when the degree of excellence is way up there. When you create institutions of excellence, everybody wants to go to that watering hole.” On a personal level, Ken suggested the following: “My primary concern is the quality of education for my kids. The [EBRP] school system has some issues. But my children won’t be sacrificed to desegregation.” He concluded by telling me that in his opinion, “The only way you are going to desegregate, today, is . . . quality. Go for excellence at all levels. And people will get past their getups.”

Although Black and non-Black parents in the sample indicated that the quality of education offered at South Boulevard was of paramount importance, the Black parents in particular noted that South Boulevard has a rigorous academic curriculum. Mona, a single Black mother of six children who have attended multiple EBRP schools at all levels, noted: “At South Boulevard, they just do more academically.” Yolanda, a single Black mother who works as an administrator of a state agency, compared the quality of resources offered at South Boulevard to her older son’s regular (non-magnet) public school: “If I were to compare where my older son in elementary school was compared to where Sylvester was [at South Boulevard], Sylvester probably has gotten ten times more the advantages.” Camille, a Black mother of three who works full-time as an administrator for a state agency and part-time as an on-line adjunct college
professor, recalled concerns about her oldest daughter’s kindergarten language arts teacher. She explained:

Now, I had issues with her. I went to Ms. Miller and I think a bunch of us did. And I said, ‘Ms. Miller, she’s teaching these students at the level that she would teach the students from the previous school that she had come from. She’s not teaching them on a magnet, academic level.’ She wasn’t pushing them hard enough. She was teaching ABCs and stuff and I was like, ‘No, they’re past that. Nuh huh. You need to step up your game. You’re shorting our kids. We put them in this school to be at a particular level. And I want them to excel at that level, if not surpass it.’ I guess that’s why she only lasted that year.

South Boulevard teachers concurred that academic rigor was particularly important to Black parents. When I asked Ms. Richard why she thought parents chose South Boulevard, she said “Because they know that they’ll get the best education possible here.” Ms. Miller similarly told me: “My young Black families know about South Boulevard. And they know about the immersion program. And they want their kids in it.”

Black and non-Black parents alike observed that the immersion program enhances the level of academic rigor at South Boulevard. Tracy, for example, explained: “Well, especially with foreign language. It’s the only one of its kind around here. So that was a big plus. More academics. More challenging. More opportunities there.” Camille likewise explained that the immersion program was the main thing that drew her to the program: “I was just hyped about [my kids] learning Spanish. That was it for me.” Shannon, a White mother who works as an engineer, was confident that the foreign language component enhanced the rigor of the education at South Boulevard, noting that she and her husband thought that “even if the curriculum was not hard, then learning it in a new language would add another dimension to the education.” Andrea, a White mother with two daughters who have completed the immersion program at South Boulevard and two children currently in the program, is confident that her daughters “are more advanced because of South.”
The level of academic rigor was more important to parents than the location or condition of the physical facility. I asked Ken, who had been paying $30,000 in private school tuition before he moved his children to South Boulevard, what he thought of South Boulevard’s physical facility. He said: “We can donate our time and some money. We can come paint the bathroom. If the principal says, ‘We need to have a clean-up weekend,’ we’ll be there. With paintbrushes in hand.” Parents’ attitudes towards the physical facility represent an important theme that recurs throughout the history of South Boulevard: valuing the educational quality of the school over its location, its condition and appearance, and its resources. Like many poorly funded Black schools prior to Brown (1954), South Boulevard has managed to provide quality education in spite of its poor physical condition and to be a school of which members of the community are proud.

A third theme that reflects the history of race and education is parents’ perseverance in providing education for their children. Differences emerged between Black and non-Black parents in terms of the degree of perseverance they demonstrated in getting their children into South Boulevard. Like Black parents during the Jim Crow era who were determined to educate their children despite a legal system that was set against them, Black parents at South Boulevard show similar dedication to getting their children into good schools despite a system they feel treats them unfairly.

Numerous Black parents in this study identified the admissions process to get into an EBRP magnet program as a source of frustration and resentment. Metz (1994) has suggested that registration for magnet programs, usually on a “first-come, first-serve” basis, caters to middle-class, professional families who either have a non-working parent or a parent who can take off work to wait in line to register for these programs. In EBRP, student race was a factor in
magnet program admissions between 1981 and 2006, when the magnet programs were obligated to comply with the 55% Black, 45% non-Black quotas outlined in the Final Settlement Agreement (2003). Students fell into one of only two categories: Black and non-Black.

Beginning with the 2007-2008 school year, a socioeconomic status quota (55% full-pay lunch, 45% free-reduced lunch) replaced the racial quota. The EBRP and central office administration made this change because they anticipated that legal problems would result from their continued use of a racial quota for magnet admission.

Black parents in the sample complained about the unfairness of racial quotas and the lottery. Camille complained that the quota makes it harder for Black students to get in to the magnet programs because more Blacks apply than Whites. She said:

> From firsthand knowledge, I know that because of deseg, you now have this lottery pick to get into the schools. So if you don’t have a sibling already in that school, you play hell trying to get in. My coworker here has applied for visual arts [magnet] three years in a row and has not been able to get her Black male son in. Because they don’t have any openings for Black male children.

Anthony felt it was unfair to use race as a means to exclude people: “I don’t think that there should be schools that exclude anyone because of race.” Ken also asserted that racial quotas are unfair—even unconstitutional. He explained:

> If I wanted my children to get in a particular magnet program and I was told in 2007 that they couldn’t get in because the quota of Black students was already met, it’d be a lawsuit. And I would win. And I would make a lot of noise. I am so adamantly opposed to quotas on either side. That is unconstitutional. But going back to what I said earlier, you create academic environments that are conducive to excellence and you will recruit everybody. And you got a big waiting list, you got a big waiting list. But you can’t tell me, as a tax paying citizen in 2007, that my child can’t get into this program if they’re qualified because we met the quota.

Ken’s argument, like Blacks during the Jim Crow era who complained of double taxation, is that because he pays taxes in the EBRP community, his children cannot be excluded from attending EBRP schools that use those public tax dollars.
Non-Black parents did not have similar complaints or misgivings about the way the application process works. This is not surprising since for years, non-Blacks have been allowed to occupy 45% of the spaces in magnet programs—which is significantly more than the 13% of the total school enrollment they currently represent. Liz, a White mother with a Master’s degree in mathematics, agreed with Camille that the quotas favor non-Black students. She explained:

Because there are more Blacks in the public school system, they get shut out of better programs. There’s only a certain number of slots in the magnet schools, so there’s more competition among the Black people for those slots. White people have an easier chance of getting into a magnet school, which is unfair to Black people.

Some White parents in the study sample seemed somewhat sheepish about the fact that it was easier for them to get their children in to the program. Andrea, for instance, explained that the racial quotas were good for me, but for others? Not so good. Because if you want to go to South, your chances of going there are better if you’re White. If you’re White, it’s almost like a step right on into the door. Next year, that may not be true because it’s becoming closer and closer to 50/50, but that’s the rule of the magnets.

Magnet programs generally have many more Black applicants than non-Black applicants. At South Boulevard, for instance, the waiting list for the 2006-2007 school year had 51 Black students and 0 non-Black students. Because the quotas privilege non-Black children, all the non-Black students who applied got in. For the 2007-2008 school year, South Boulevard received 170 applications for 48 kindergarten spots. Thus, parents rightfully feel that they are competing for very limited seats in these magnet programs.

In addition to frustration regarding the racial quota, several Black parents expressed confusion and even skepticism regarding the lottery for admission into EBRP magnet programs. Terrence, a Black firefighter and real estate agent, and Camille spoke most extensively about the lottery. Terrence scoffed and said that the “supposed waiting list and a lottery” were “a bunch of
bull.” He laughed sarcastically and said: “The lottery! Nobody knows how it works.” When I asked him why he was skeptical about the lottery, he said: “They just say: ‘We’re gonna put your name in the lottery and if you get chosen, you’ll get a letter.’ Why can’t they explain how it works?” When I asked him how he thought his daughter got in, he said, in a somewhat humorous tone: “I don’t know. I was real sweet to the lady at the East Baton Rouge School office.” He then recounted the following story:

My daughter plays soccer. We had this lady from Tennessee—really nice. She’s a White lady. Came straight in from Tennessee and got her kids into the magnet program. No waiting list, no anything! And my wife was like, ‘Wow, we’ve been fighting this lottery crap and all that, it’s just probably all a façade.’

Camille also had a friend whose Black son had not been able to get in to a magnet program, but had a friend with four children who all got in to a magnet program when the private school they had been attending closed. She sighed and said:

And I really did not think that that was fair. They always have slots available for the Whites. But the Black is just running over. The schools that we’ve called, it’s always a waiting list for the Black female or the Black male. But they always have a non-Black spot available. And I don’t understand why. If you have that available, why couldn’t it be made open to whomever that wants to get in?

Black parents in the sample expressed frustrations regarding the race-based admissions quotas and skepticism regarding the way the lottery works. These frustrations, I argue, are reminiscent of charges made by the Black community regarding the unequal distribution of resources in segregated schools. While all parents in the study sample agreed that diversity in schools is a good goal, some Black parents had a sense of unfairness and a distrust of the school system. Camille summarized their sentiments when she said: “You ought to be able to get into a public school because that’s what the word means: ‘public.’ It should be open to everyone regardless of race.”
Like members of the Black community since emancipation, however, Black parents in the study sample exercised agency and self-determination in getting their children into South Boulevard, where they were confident their children would receive a quality education, despite institutional practices (like the quotas and the lottery) that sought to exclude them from participation. Several Black parents at South Boulevard do not technically live in EBRP. The family of a fifth-grade boy lived in Baton Rouge when he was in kindergarten, but moved to Port Allen (a neighboring community officially outside of EBRP) when he was in first grade—a move which makes him ineligible to attend an EBRP school. Because they wanted him to be able to continue to attend South Boulevard, they used a friend’s address for all the school paperwork so that it looked like they were still eligible for him to attend. Another Black family lives in Baker—also outside of the EBRP school system. I don’t know what kinds of arrangements they have made for their son to still be at an EBRP school. During our interview, Mona explained to me if her children could not attend South Boulevard, “I would probably use somebody else’s address or something. And bring my kids to school.” She said she had several friends who did that with their children. She knows someone who uses the address of a friend who lives in Zachary so that her children can attend the number one school district in the state: “[She] gets up every morning and takes her kids to Zachary and gets up every afternoon and picks them up” because the Zachary school system obviously does not provide transportation to students who live in Baton Rouge.

Tanecia’s story of how she manipulated the system so that her son could get into South Boulevard is illustrative of the complexity of race when it collides with quotas and school policy. Richard, a computer programmer for the state of Louisiana, is White, and Tanecia, a librarian at an EBRP branch library, is Black. Regarding their son, Richard explained: “Thomas is a mixed
race child. My wife is Black. I don’t know how people categorize my children most of the
time.” Tanecia explained her distaste of labels when she said that she doesn’t like to call herself
either “Black” or “African-American: “I’m Haitian-Native American-Spanish, duh, duh, duh,
duh, duh. Why can’t I just say I’m American, or Creole?” Tanecia explained her experience
dealing with this binary construction of race when she applied for her oldest son to get into South
Boulevard:

When I first applied for Thomas to get in, I guess they have to have a certain quota
of Blacks and non-Blacks. Since I filled out the application, I put that he was
Black, because I’m the mom and I’m writing the application. Now I don’t know
what Richard puts whenever he fills out stuff for the kids, but I put “Black,”
because I don’t have Creole to choose. It’s just Black and non-Black. And he was
denied, and I was upset. So I called the school and said: ‘Why can’t he be in the
program?’, and they said: ‘We’ve reached our quota for Black students. And I said:
Well, his father is White. Can I put White?’ And they said: ‘Sure.’ So I put White
and he was accepted. It bothered me that I had to do that, but I did it, because it
was my child and you’re not gonna screw my child over, but I was just like, what is
this thing? Here I am wanting my child in a good program because I’ve heard such
good things about you guys and the stupid quota thing has come in and just, by
chance, I got lucky because I’m married to a White guy. What if I wasn’t married
to a White guy? I didn’t make an issue of it because there’s no point, really, but it
bothered me.

Thus Tanecia sacrificed part of her own identity—on paper, at least—in order to get her son into
South Boulevard. It bothered her, but she did it nonetheless because she wanted him to get into
the immersion program.

Terrence likewise explained that during the application process, he and his wife filled out
an application for every elementary magnet program and hand-delivered them to each school.
This is patently against the rules: parents are supposed to fill out one application and take it to
their first choice magnet program. Terrence explained their strategy:

We didn’t think she was gonna get in. What we did is, we applied her in more than
one. The rule is you can only apply to one. So once they find the two applications,
that makes the application null and void. So they called and said you need to fill
out an application to the school you want your daughter to go to or both of these
applications are null and void.
Terrence and his wife got caught, but this tactic may have worked in the past for others. His wife thus filled out a new application, turned it in at South Boulevard, and their daughter was accepted. These are examples of ways in which Black parents exercised determination and perseverance and found ways to circumvent the system. Ms. Belford told me one day that the school administration knows that several Black families shouldn’t technically be allowed to attend South Boulevard because of where their families live. She said: “I mean, we know about that. But we just look the other way.”

This kind of perseverance and improvisation was not necessary among the non-Black parents in the study sample—none of whom mentioned being frustrated by the admissions process. None of the non-Black parents told stories of friends or family members unable to get their children into magnet programs. In fact, during fieldwork, I met numerous White parents with children in multiple magnet programs. The school system does allow preferential admission to siblings of students currently in an EBRP magnet program, but these are parents with children in different magnet programs. I met a White mother at Magnet Mania, for instance, who had one child in the Montessori magnet program at Belfair and two other daughters in the academic magnet at Forest Heights. Another White family has a son in the French immersion program at South Boulevard and a daughter in the Montessori magnet at Belfair. Thus, Black and non-Black parents experience the magnet admissions process differently. Black parents feel that the system tries to cheat their children out of coveted spots in magnet programs, while non-Black parents almost take it for granted that their children will be able to get in to one of these programs.
Conclusion

Tyack and Cuban (1995) suggest that the “evolution of schools is in part the story of the interactions between . . . layers of change” (p. 76). School desegregation in Baton Rouge and at South Boulevard has indeed been a complex, multilayered process. While this research focuses on the implementation of the foreign language immersion magnet program as a desegregation tool, South Boulevard has been at the intersection of race and education since it first opened its doors in 1949. The South Boulevard community has undergone numerous layers of change, which include but are not limited to demographic changes, changes in teaching staff, and changes in the school curriculum.

Despite these changes, the history of South Boulevard illustrates several themes central to the history of race and education. Although some differences emerged in the ways that Black and non-Black parents perceived South Boulevard and the EBRP magnet admissions process, all parents in the study sample exhibit behaviors and sentiments that have been important to parents throughout history. First, Black and non-Black parents in the study sample take pride in their children’s school and support it with their time, energy, and resources. Second, all parents in the study sample are more concerned with the level of educational rigor their children experience than they are with the location or condition of the physical facility. They want their children to experience the additional challenge of learning a second language and they are satisfied that their children are pushed academically at South Boulevard. Third, Black and non-Black parents demonstrated perseverance and determination in making sure their children receive a quality education. All parents in the study sample were proactive in choosing what they determined to be the best school for their children and found ways to make the system work for them and for their children.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE IMMERSION CULTURE AT SOUTH BOULEVARD

Learning to speak another’s language means taking one’s place in the human community. It means reaching out to others across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Language is far more than a system to be explained. It is our most important link to the world around us” (Savignon, 1983, p. 187).

Because the immersion curriculum is the most unique aspect of South Boulevard, a discussion of the impact of the immersion curriculum and pedagogy on student learning is in order. How does the immersion program at South Boulevard work? What is the immersion pedagogy like? What are the immersion teachers like? What kind of a school culture is created by the immersion curriculum? How does a typical day at South Boulevard unfold? What’s it like to be a student at South Boulevard? Popular narratives regarding race, class, and achievement would likely predict that students at South Boulevard would not be successful academically. It is a taken-for-granted belief that socioeconomically-disadvantaged and minority children do not do well in school. We expect these children whom we call “at-risk” to do poorly. At-risk for what? Failure? Dropping out? Becoming discipline problems?

The majority of the students at South Boulevard are socioeconomically-disadvantaged and Black. As of the 2007-2008 school year, South Boulevard is 58% Black and 59% of its students qualify for free or reduced lunch.43 Of the total number who qualifies for free lunch, 91% are Black; 81% of students who qualify for reduced lunch are Black. Only four White students currently qualify for free or reduced lunch. Thus, the majority of Black students at South Boulevard are socioeconomically-disadvantaged while the majority of the non-Black students are socioeconomically-advantaged. While there is a screening required for admission into the program, it only checks to ensure that incoming kindergarteners are on-grade level.

There is a selection process, but South Boulevard students are not gifted students—at least not

43 Data obtained from the EBRP Child Nutrition Program office.
according to EBRP definitions of “gifted.” This chapter presents a counternarrative to others that suggest that schools with majority Black and socioeconomically-disadvantaged student populations are not successful. Contrary to dominant narratives regarding the impact of race and class on academic achievement, test scores at South Boulevard have been consistently higher than both the district and the state for the last ten years. In fact, test scores are higher at South Boulevard than all but three or four other elementary schools (out of 56 total) in EBRP. And perhaps most importantly, they are higher despite the fact that the standardized tests are administered and written in English, yet South Boulevard students receive the majority of their instruction in either French or Spanish.

What kinds of explanations are there for their higher test scores? Is it the foreign language immersion curriculum? Does foreign language study make South Boulevard students smarter? Does it make them better test-takers? Numerous studies have found a positive correlation between participation in immersion and FLES programs and academic achievement. (Armstrong & Rogers, 1997; Caldas & Boudreaux, 1999; Haj-Broussard, 2003; Taylor-Ward, 2003; Thomas, Collier, & Abbott, 1993). Or is it the selection process? Does the foreign language immersion curriculum attract a pool of students that would perform well on standardized tests regardless of the curriculum? Magnet programs have been criticized for skimming or creaming the best and brightest students from non-magnet schools (Goldhaber, 1999; Moore & Davenport, 1989; Rossell, 1979).

This study neither refutes nor corroborates these explanations, but instead, suggests an additional explanation for test scores at South Boulevard. This study finds that the foreign language immersion curriculum is responsible for creating a unique culture that positively influences student learning. What is the role of culture in the learning process? Numerous
scholars from a wide array of disciplinary orientations have proposed definitions of culture. Some focus on group behavior and unconscious norms and value systems. Bowers (1992), for instance, refers to culture as “multi-leveled . . . group memory,” “an agglomeration of common knowledge, perceptions, values and traditions” (p. 32). Some define culture as information needed to function in society. For example, linguist Saville-Troike (1993) asserts that culture is “what the individual needs to know to be a functional member of the community” (p. 7). Others focus on culture as a form of communication. For Novinger (2001),

[c]ulture gives humans their identity. It is the total communication framework for words, actions, body language, emblems (gestures), intonation, facial expressions, for the way one handles time, space, and materials, and for the way one works, makes love, plays, and so on (p. 15).

Hall (1959) writes that “culture is communication and communication is culture” (p. 217).

What is the culture of South Boulevard like? What do South Boulevard students, teachers, and parents need to know to be functional members of the school community? What knowledge, norms, behaviors, and perceptions make up this culture and how do they impact learning? In a foreign language immersion program like the one at South Boulevard, language is particularly significant to the school culture. The language we speak, which is inextricably connected to identity and culture, communicates more than just information. Through language, powerful messages are communicated about who has status and power and who does not. Unfortunately, schools tend to empower children whose language has status and marginalize those whose language and culture do not. What kind of culture is present in a school like South Boulevard where three languages are spoken—English, French, and Spanish? Even more importantly, what kind of culture is created when the dominant language (English) is replaced by two foreign languages that become the languages of power?
This chapter provides a description of a typical day at South Boulevard to provide a picture of the way the immersion program works. I review teaching methods and strategies commonly used in immersion programs and then analyze several lessons at South Boulevard that exemplify some of those teaching strategies. I then describe three aspects of the immersion culture at South Boulevard that positively influence student learning: 1) the international teaching staff, 2) a common curricular theme which unifies members of the school community, and 3) the second language as a force that equalizes linguistic and cultural differences among students that may lead to achievement differentials in other settings. I conclude with a discussion of standardized test scores at South Boulevard, since they are the most commonly-used marker of scholastic success in today’s educational system.

**A Typical School Day**

The first official school bell at South Boulevard rings at 8:00, although 20 to 30 kids get dropped off between 7:00 and 8:00 for before-school care that takes place at the school, but is operated by an area YMCA. The one school bus that brings South Boulevard students to the school from the bus transfer park on the other side of town usually arrives to the school at around 8:10. A steady flow of carpoolers trickles in between 8:00 and 8:30. Parents have to check in students who arrive after 8:30 and give a reason for their lateness—a custom that several parents in the sample said made them feel uncomfortable or derelict as a parent. The secretary at the front writes the stated reason down on a tardy slip and gives it to the student, who is supposed to give it to his/her teacher.

The students arrive at school dressed in the uniforms required by the parish: burgundy polo shirts and navy blue bottoms with a belt. Although some of the boys, in particular, arrive with shirts askew and the occasional student arrives with a shirt already dirtied by his/her
breakfast, the students generally look neat and clean. The parish supposedly requires navy sweaters and jackets, but the South Boulevard teachers and administrators look the other away on that point, so students wear sweatshirts and jackets of various colors. During the year of my fieldwork, they even allowed a group of five to seven first grade girls (one of whom was my daughter) to wear bright, multi-colored, crocheted ponchos over their uniforms nearly every day of the school year. On Fridays, students are allowed to wear any number of South Boulevard t-shirts. There is one style that has a little jump-roping bear in the corner because the school’s mascot is a bear. The school sells these shirts at the beginning of every school year for a small profit. One can tell how long a student has been at the school and whether he/she may have had older siblings who attended the school according to the color of bear shirt they wear: the navy blue shirts are the oldest, followed by burgundy, and the yellow shirts are the ones the school has sold most recently. Several times a year, students can earn a “Free Dress Day” for good behavior or for turning in paperwork on time. Free Dress Days can be chaotic because the students are so excited to get to wear whatever they want to school.

    Students are allowed to begin eating breakfast in the cafeteria at 8:00. Thanks to a USDA Breakfast Grant, breakfast is free to all students who attend an EBRP school. A typical breakfast includes milk (chocolate, strawberry, or plain), a fruit, and a main dish. Most of the time, the fruit is a “fruit cup”—canned peaches or pears in a little square-shaped plastic dish. The main dishes include cereal, biscuits, sausage pancake on a stick, grits, and scrambled eggs.

    As soon as the students finish eating breakfast, they move into the gym for “morning assembly.” During the daily morning assembly, students sit on the floor of the gym in straight lines, organized by class and language, in the order in which they arrive at school. They are not allowed to choose by whom they sit, nor are they allowed to talk during the morning assembly
time. Although other things are accomplished during this assembly time, the primary objective seems to be simply occupying the children until the tardy bell rings at 8:30, signaling the official start of school. Attendance at the morning assemblies is not mandatory, since it is technically before the official school day begins. At about 8:15, Ms. Miller stands up and greets the children. She makes announcements about upcoming events and sometimes uses that time to chastise students for poor behavior or to remind them about emergent behavioral problems. At the beginning of each month, she recognizes every student who has a birthday during that month. Then a student does “El pensamiento del día” or “La pensée du jour” (“Thought of the Day”) in either Spanish or French, which is like a mini civics lesson, a little tidbit of wisdom, or a saying or proverb. The student then announces what the lunch menu of the day is and then directs the students to please stand for the pledge of allegiance. The students stand up, dutifully put their hands over their hearts, face the flag at the front of the gym, and recite the pledge of allegiance (in English) in monotone voices, after which Ms. Miller loudly chants “1, 2, 3!” and they all begin singing “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee” with significantly more spirit than that with which they said the pledge. Another bell rings at 8:25 that signals five more minutes until school officially begins. At this point, give or take a few minutes, students file out of the gym, line by line, either led by or followed by their morning teacher, until the gym is emptied out.

There are two classes per grade (one French immersion, one Spanish immersion) that share three teachers: one French, one Spanish, and one English Language Arts (ELA). The immersion classroom is like home base; the immersion teacher is the “homeroom” teacher. The ELA teacher comes into the immersion classroom to teach one 90-minute ELA block to one immersion class in the morning and the same 90-minute block to the other immersion class in the afternoon. After the morning assembly, students go to their homeroom classrooms from 8:30-
9:00. There the French and Spanish teachers typically do calendar math, during which they review calendar skills such as the days of the week, the months, the weather and seasons, holidays, and determine how many days into the school year they are (because they have a celebration on the 100th day of school). Teachers call on students to come up to the front of the classroom and answer questions about the calendar. Teachers use this time to ask simple math questions (such as “How many days are in two weeks?” or “How many months are there in five years?”), as well as target language vocabulary lessons (such as “If today is Monday, what was yesterday?”). They also discuss pattern recognition because the dates they put on the calendar come in different shapes and colors.

At approximately 9:00, students either begin their ELA block or they begin math, science, or social studies with their immersion teacher. Students have a 90-minute English Language Arts (ELA) block each day that is taught in English by an American teacher. Four out of the six ELA teachers have more than 20 years of experience. Two of the ELA teachers have spent at least 20 years as teachers at South Boulevard. From 9:00 until 11:00, the school settles into relative quiet. All the students are in class, and only minimal noise sounds in the hallways as students go to the restroom or to the water fountain and teachers chat in the hallways, by the copying machine, or in the workroom. In addition to their regular classes, South Boulevard students have a 30-minute music lesson either once or twice a week and a 30-minute physical education class two, three, or four times a week (depending on the grade level). Fourth and fifth graders are allowed to participate in a string instruments program—a teacher comes to the school twice a week for 45-minute lessons in violin, viola, cello, or bass. Very few students take advantage of this opportunity. In 2006-2007, there were only three fifth grade and four fourth grade students—all of whom were learning to play the violin. There is no art teacher at South
Boulevard. Students also have a 30-minute library lesson each week in which they learn how to find books, how to use a card catalog, and about different genres of literature.

The first group (the kindergarteners) begins lunch at 11:00 and the last group begins lunch at 12:00. Because of the number of students who have to eat in a short period of time in a small facility, students have 20 minutes to eat lunch, which goes by very quickly. This includes waiting in line to receive their food, walking to the table, eating, and one or two minutes at the end to throw away their trash and line up again to go back to the classroom. During my fieldwork, I witnessed many children—particularly the younger ones—unable to finish their lunch during the allotted time. I sat next to a first grade girl one day who didn’t eat a single bite of her lunch. When I asked her why, she shrugged her shoulders and said: “I don’t like it. I like McDonald’s.”

Students are not allowed to talk at all during lunch. During six years of experience at South Boulevard, this rule has been sacrosanct until the year of my fieldwork, when the school purchased the Yacker-Tracker, a stoplight device designed to help students know when they were getting too loud. In an interview, Ms. Miller indicated that the teachers had voted in summer 2006 to make this purchase and to give students the opportunity to socialize during lunch as long as two conditions were met: 1) they did not get unreasonably loud and 2) they had to speak only in the target language (either French or Spanish).

Although students were initially thrilled to be able to talk during lunch, use of the stoplight ceased after a few months and students and teachers fell back into the routine of silent lunches. Most of the students seem to accept the silent lunch time; eating lunch in silence has become normalized. When I asked some first graders about the “no-talking-during-lunch” rule, a kindergarten girl explained: “If we talk, we can’t finish our food.” She shrugged her shoulders
and moved on. Some children, however, complain that they are unable to finish their lunch during the appointed time, which is highly probable—particularly if they are at the end of the line to get their food.

From my perspective, the expectation that students converse solely in the second language was unrealistic for several reasons. First, few students possess target language skills sophisticated enough to allow them to converse spontaneously and creatively in the target language. If another linguistically competent adult (such as a teacher or other adult) is there to help them along when they get stuck, they do remarkably well. However, absent that more competent speaker, conversation was extremely limited. Second, French and Spanish students are seated at the same table. One optimistic teacher encouraged her French students to speak in French to their Spanish classmates and suggested that the Spanish students could respond in Spanish. This arrangement was both awkward and absurd for both parties, since students neither speak nor understand the third language.

School lunches are not prepared at South Boulevard; rather, they are shipped in from an off-site facility. There is a kitchen, but it is only used to keep the food heated and/or cooled. Therefore, the food is far from fresh and actually tastes remarkably bad. School lunches include such things as: nachos, beefy tacos, ham-n-cheese poboy, BBQ ribette on bun, and soggy fishsticks—without ketchup. Students are offered a choice of a fruit or vegetable, but are not required to take either, and a choice of skim milk or chocolate milk. The milk is packaged in clear plastic bags that resemble Ziploc bags minus the seal. In order to drink the milk, the students have to poke the baggie in the middle with a straw. Each lunch also includes a dessert, such as jello, chocolate cake, graham crackers, and very hard cookies. During one visit to the school, a fourth grade girl bit into one of the cafeteria cookies and her tooth fell out. The
students joked about that crunchy cookie for days afterwards, claiming that “The cookie was so hard, it made Shelby’s tooth fall out!” Despite the poor food quality, most students eat the school lunch; probably only one or two students per class bring a lunch from home. After the students are done eating (or after their time is up, whichever comes first), they line up to throw away their trash and hand their trays to one of the cafeteria workers. Each teacher calls on one student to wipe off the tables. A big pot of murky dishwater with rags in it sits on a table in the corner. When I asked the students how the teachers decide who gets to clean off the table, one explained: “The teacher picks someone to do it. And you just do it.”

After lunch, the students go back to class and the immersion teachers squeeze in whatever lesson they can before recess begins at 12:10. Students have a twenty-minute daily recess during which certain grade levels are assigned to particular areas of the school playground. Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students have recess apart from other grades. First and second graders have recess together, third graders by themselves, and fourth and fifth graders together. The older students tend to divide themselves primarily by gender: the fourth and fifth grade boys get together and play kickball, football, or basketball. The girls tend to play jump rope in groups of four or five, climb on the monkey bars, and sit around tables outside the library and gossip, work on homework, play clapping games, and exchange e-mail addresses. Occasionally a girl will join in a kickball or basketball game, but it is rare. I never once saw a boy join the girls at the tables or get in on the jump rope sessions, unless it was to tease or try to mess the girls up. Some students—more girls than boys—also go into the library to return or check out books and to take Accelerated Reader (AR) tests. Two girls explained to me that they sometimes go to the library “when it’s hot out because it’s air conditioned in there.” Some students sit at the table to complete unfinished homework before they can participate in recess.
Other students stand against the wall of the library if part or all of their recess time gets taken away due to misbehavior.

Younger students are more likely to run around on the playground with two friends and to suddenly switch gears and begin swinging on the swings and then to begin playing tag, for instance, with another group of students. The younger students are also more likely to play in mixed-gender groups, although there are definitely clusters of girls and clusters of boys. The younger students play on the rusty playground equipment, play tag and games like Duck Duck Goose, and dig around in the dirt, often finding and collecting rocks and shards of glass from broken bottles thrown over the school fence. At exactly 12:29, a bell rings and the students immediately stop whatever they are doing and freeze. The on-duty teacher directs them to line up with their class and then walks them back inside to the classrooms.

The older students have lunch and recess after the kindergarteners, so from about 1:00-3:00, the school settles back into relative quiet. In the afternoon, the students either continue the immersion instruction they started before lunch, have their 90-minute language arts block, or go to library, P.E., or music. At about 3:00, teachers start wrapping up their lessons. Older students get out homework planners (purchased by the school with $20 supply fees collected at the beginning of the year in addition to all the required school supplies) and write down their daily homework assignments. At 3:15, the bus riders are called up to the front of the school, where they line up in the foyer and get ready to board the bus that takes them first to the bus transfer point, where they get on another bus that takes them home. During 2006-2007, there were 68 students who rode the bus, or approximately one-quarter of the students. At 3:20, about 25 to 35 students who stay for after-care with the YMCA program leave their classrooms and head to one
of the portable buildings in the back of the school, where they have a snack, begin work on their homework, and wait for their parents to pick them up anytime before 6:00.

The carpoolers, who make up by far the majority of the students, are dismissed last. They go outside and wait in front of the school in assigned places with the rest of their class. Ms. Miller sits on a bench in front of the school with the carpoolers every day. The students happily sit outside, laughing and talking with their friends until their parents pull into the driveway in the front of the school to pick them up. Some parents park along the street and walk up to get their kids. There are always groups of parents chatting and touching base with teachers. Students go home to finish homework assignments, attend dance, karate, piano, and art lessons, weekly church activities, and practices or games for team sports.

**Immersion Teaching Strategies**

Much of the research related to elementary immersion programs focuses on student outcomes, either as measured by standardized test scores or target language proficiency exam scores. Less research has been done on teaching methods used to facilitate learning a second language through immersion. Research that focuses on teaching strategies used in successful immersion programs points to the fact that immersion teachers use a wide variety of instructional approaches (Akcan, 2004; Curtain & Pesola, 1994; Genesee, 1985; Johnson & Swain, 1997; Met, 1991). The pedagogy of the immersion teachers at South Boulevard reflects this trend.

One of the most significant strategies of immersion teaching is content-based instruction, an approach which Stryker & Leaver (1997) call “the methodological cornerstone of second language ‘immersion’ programs for K-12 students” (p. 15). Content-based instruction involves the use of authentic language and texts, rather than artificial or contrived texts written to

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44 Content-based instruction is also referred to as sheltered instruction, although that term is usually associated with the education of language minority students.
teach grammatical structures or vocabulary, to teach such content areas as mathematics, social
studies, and science. Johnson and Swain (1997) assert that a core feature of immersion programs
is that the immersion curriculum parallels the local native language curriculum. Immersion
programs do not have a special curriculum; they simply use the target language to teach the same
content taught in non-immersion classrooms. Curtain and Pesola (1994) also advocate integrated
language and content instruction, as do Genesee (1994) and Met (1991). The immersion teachers
at South Boulevard use this approach, since there is no special immersion curriculum. They
follow the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum as they are required to do, just like the rest of
schools in EBRP. In Spanish classes, they use the same textbooks that are used across the parish
because they are available in Spanish. They are not available in French, however, so the French
teachers have to create their own materials or adapt previously-made materials to fit the
Comprehensive Curriculum.

Another teaching strategy frequently used in immersion programs is project-based or
activity-based instruction (Genesee, 1987; LaVan, 2001; Stryker & Leaver, 1997). Nunan
(2004) advocates the use of what he calls “a needs-based approach to content selection,” because
such activities focus student attention on meaning rather than form—a goal of the immersion
philosophy (p. 1). Skehan (1996) defines tasks as “activities which have meaning as their
primary focus. Success in tasks is evaluated in terms of achievement of an outcome, and tasks
generally bear some resemblance to real-life language use” (p. 20). With the teacher acting as
facilitator, students engage in hands-on activities which allow them to accomplish
communicative functions—or tasks—in the target language. During fieldwork, I once overheard
a group of Spanish students talking about a science experiment in which they had tested potatoes
for starch content by inserting them with iodine. They were whispering about their “papas
moradas” (purple potatoes) and “yodo” (iodine) all afternoon. These kinds of activities provide additional motivation and incentive to learn (Bernhardt, 1992; Christian, 1996; Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000; Harley, 1993).

Another strategy of particular importance in immersion instruction is the use of linguistic modeling (Akcan, 2004; Dagenais & Day, 1998; Tardif & Weber, 1987). Such controlled use of the target language by the teacher provides scaffolds which facilitate understanding. Immersion teachers should serve as good models of target language use (Curtain & Pesola, 1994; Vesterbacka, 1991). They should also work to establish target language routines and to teach students functional chunks of language, which Curtain and Dahlberg (2004) define as “memorized and unanalyzed phrases of high frequency” (p. 48). This type of language is also referred to in the literature as “prefabricated patterns” (Akcan, 2004; Hakuta, 1974), “formulaic speech” (Ellis, 1984), and “conventionalized language” (Yorio, 1989). Functional chunks of language include the kinds of phrases and questions students need to make their needs known (i.e. “Can I go to the bathroom?”) as well as vocabulary needed for turn-taking, asking for clarification, and other classroom routines. They also include vocabulary and phrases specific to content areas. For example, immersion teachers might teach their students the kinds of vocabulary and sentence patterns needed to talk about mathematical concepts, such as number facts, computation, and how to talk about word problems in the second language. This kind of language provides consistency and predictability, which can make students confident and more willing to express themselves in the second language.

Another common immersion strategy is the use of planned creative expression in the target language, including songs, plays, games, dialogues, dance, and role plays (Boutin, 1993; LaVan, 2001). Curtain and Pesola (1994) advocate the use of games, songs, and fingerplays to
provide motivation and to link language with action. Wilburn’s (1992) ethnographic study of
three Spanish immersion classrooms indicated that the use of drama provided opportunities for
the students to use the target language in more authentic, real-life situations than ordinary
classroom speech. Drama is also effective in content-based instruction because it requires
students to focus on the problem set in the drama and whatever vocabulary and grammar the
problem set necessitates, rather than the language itself.

**Immersion Pedagogy in Action at South Boulevard**

The immersion program at South Boulevard is best defined as partial immersion because
less than 100 percent of instruction of the academic subjects is taught in the target language.
South Boulevard students spend the majority of their day with their French or Spanish immersion
teacher, who teaches math, science, and social studies in the target language. The instructional
day at South Boulevard begins at 8:30 and ends at 3:30. Thus, there are 420 minutes (seven
hours) during a school day. During fieldwork, I observed that students spend approximately
58% of the day with their Spanish or French teacher, 25% with their ELA teacher, and 17% at
lunch, recess, and P.E., music, or library (all of which occur one to three times a week and, with
the exception of lunch and recess, are supervised by English-speaking teachers).

During fieldwork, I observed math, science, social studies, and reading lessons during
which immersion teachers employed many of the common immersion teaching strategies
outlined in the previous section. For example, I observed a second grade Spanish math class
during which students were learning to make predictions, collect data, and display the results of
their data in a bar graph. Ms. Grady, who has been teaching at South Boulevard for eight years,
first explained to the students, completely in Spanish, that they were going to learn about making
predictions and reporting data. She showed them some examples of bar graphs and explained
that bar graphs could use horizontal or vertical lines. She used big, exaggerated hand motions to explain the meaning of “horizontal” and “vertical” and also drew examples on the chalkboard. She asked them to identify all the M & M colors, so the students excitedly shouted out various colors in Spanish. She then asked them to predict which color would have the most M & M’s. Two or three students offered their predictions and then Ms. Grady handed out small piles of miniature M & M’s to each student. Ms. Grady assigned the students to work with partners and directed them to put their M & M’s in piles according to their color and then count the number of M & M’s in each pile, making tally marks on their papers for each color. She then gave them graph paper and explained that they should make a bar graph, coloring in one square per tally mark that would represent one M & M of that color. The students began working. I could hear them counting aloud in Spanish with their partners and then coloring in the squares on the bar graph. Ms. Grady only had to remind one pair to stay on task; the rest of the students worked animatedly until they completed their graphs, at which point they all excitedly raised their hands to get her approval.

Ms. Grady demonstrated several common immersion teaching strategies. First, Ms. Grady used content-based instruction to teach both math principles and language concepts. The students learned about prediction and bar graphs and also practiced counting and color vocabulary in Spanish. Ms. Grady also used the occasion to point out that there are two words for “orange” in Spanish—“anaranjado” and “naranja”—whose use depends on the geographical origin of the speaker. She pointed this out and then said: “Es lo mismo” (“It’s the same thing”) and moved on. Some students used “anaranjado” and some used “naranja,” which is significantly easier to pronounce. Second, this lesson is also an example of activity-based instruction, in which the students engaged in a hands-on activity (using M & M’s to collect and
Furthermore, the language used in the activity was dictated by the content. For instance, Ms. Grady had to use “predecir” (“to predict”), a verb that many teachers might avoid because of its irregular conjugation. She also used such phrases as “gráfica de barros” and “horizontal” and “vertical”—all of which she told me afterwards were new to the students. Lastly, Ms. Grady used linguistic modeling and scaffolded language to facilitate understanding. For example, when she first told the students “Prediga” (“Predict”), none of the students responded. So she then said “Predicción,” which is a cognate for the English word “prediction” and then explained, via circumlocution, what it means to predict. Seven or eight hands immediately flew into the air. Before she organized the students into pairs to begin work, she and the students engaged in a sort of question and answer session that they had obviously done before. She asked them, in Spanish, “¿Cómo van a hablar con tu pareja?” (“How are you going to talk with your partner?”) and several students said: “Con voz baja” (“Quietly”). She asked them several similar questions about appropriate behavior for pair work and then the students got to work. This is an example of a target language routine that is predictable to the students and therefore facilitates understanding.

A lesson taught by Madame Freeland, the French first grade teacher, exemplifies linguistic modeling and the use of music in the classroom to teach both content and the language. The focus of the lesson was subtraction. Madame Freeland began the lesson by asking students to indicate their favorite fruit. The class then reviewed the words for pear, banana, apple, and orange, as well as their colors in French. She then quickly sketched a chart on an overhead transparency in which she tallied the results of the class survey. She then asked the students a series of word problems having to do with adding and subtracting apples. The students figured out the answers and volunteered the answers out loud; the teacher wrote their responses on the
overhead transparency. After completing the practice exercises, Madame Freeland asked the students to stand up and then led them in the following nursery rhyme about picking cherries.

1 Un, deux, trois, je m’en vais au bois (I’m going to the forest).
2 Quatre, cinq, six, cueillir des cerises (Picking out cherries)
3 Sept, huit, neuf, dans mon panier neuf (In my new basket)
4 Dix, onze, douze, elles seront toutes rouges (They will all be red)

Students stood up and marched in place while they chanted the first line. On the second line, they reached up tall, pretending to be picking cherries. On the third line, they made a circle with arms to represent a basket. On the fourth line, they rubbed their tummies and made big grins as if they were about to eat something delicious. The students did the nursery rhyme numerous times—first in really loud voices, then in a whisper, then in really low voices, then in high-pitched, squeaky voices, then with crying voices, and lastly, with really happy, excited voices. The students clearly enjoyed the song and the movement. The song had vocabulary that related to fruit (cherries), which had been previously discussed in the subtraction lesson, as well as target language vocabulary, pronunciation, and structures.

Use of linguistic modeling and scaffolded language is most evident in language used by the kindergarten teachers, because their students are true beginners. I observed a lesson in the kindergarten French class that took place less than two months into the school year. Madame Herbert, a young teacher from France, was leading a class discussion about the parts of a book. All the students sat on the floor in rows, legs crossed, on a multi-colored alphabet carpet facing Madame Herbert, who sat in a chair at the front of the classroom. Madame Herbert held up an over-sized book made of pieces of poster board tied together with string. The title page of the book was not labeled. Inside were large pieces of paper displaying the words to French nursery rhymes and songs the students had already learned during that school year. Madame Herbert had
made an audiotape of all the nursery rhymes and songs they had learned and had given a copy to each student. She opened up the big book and began to tell the students what was in it. Then she asked, in French, what the book was about. One student immediately shouted in English, “Our songs on the tape!” and Madame Herbert replied, “Oui, ce sont les chansons de ta cassette” (“Yes, these are the songs on your tape”). She then went through the book and taught the students about the parts of a book, including the title page, the author and illustrator, and the table of contents and how it corresponds with the page numbers in the book. She then told the students that they were going to play a game with the book and handed each student a copy of the table of contents. She gave the students a name of a nursery rhyme or song, for example, “Toc, toc, toc,” and then asked them to tell her what page the song was on by asking, simply, “Quelle page?” Numerous students raised their hands to participate. Madame Herbert called on one little girl, who said “Page trois,” after which the teacher responded “Magnifique!” The teacher then invited all the students to do the nursery rhyme together. They followed this pattern until they had recited four or five of the nursery rhymes and chants in the big book.

Madame Herbert then tried to open the book backwards and a student corrected her and said, in English, “No! It’s the wrong way!” Madame Herbert responded “Eh bien, pourquoi ce n’est pas bien? (“Ah! Well, why is it the wrong way?”) and the girl responded: “Because it doesn’t have a title.” Madame Herbert then recast the student answer in French. Madame Herbert asked students to volunteer possible titles for their book. Many students raised their hands and volunteered a title, in English. Madame Herbert translated their suggestions into French and wrote them on the board. They discussed the merits of several titles and then agreed to call the book “Chansons françaises de notre classe” (“French Songs in our Class”). She asked the students where she should write the title and then called on a little girl, who walked up to the
book and pointed out the title page. Madame Herbert then asked, in French, whether she should write the title in big letters or small letters, gesturing exaggeratedly to demonstrate the meanings of her French words. All the students then shouted in French: “GRAND!” (“BIG!”). She then showed them the pages of the book again and asked the students what was missing. A student volunteered, in French: “Portraits!” (“Pictures!”), so she sent them back to their desks where they set about illustrating one of the nursery rhymes in the book.

This lesson is a good example of content-based instruction and scaffolded language. The content was learning about the parts of a book. Madame Herbert did the lesson entirely in the second language, relying on gestures, body language, repetition, and circumlocution to fill in the gaps that arose in students’ ability to understand the second language input. Madame Herbert also used this lesson to practice target language structures, such as the numbers, and all the language in the nursery rhymes the students sang and chanted. The students modeled their language after hers: I heard several students praising each other in teacherly voices, saying “Magnifique!” and “Très bien!”

In summary, the immersion pedagogy at South Boulevard reflects much of the research outlined previously. Teachers speak the target language freely and fluently and, for the most part, do not slow down their speech. They scaffold or shelter the language in a way that makes it more comprehensible to the students. They frequently use repetition, body language, gestures, facial expressions, and visuals to communicate unfamiliar content. They frequently recast student answers offered in English in the target language—particularly in the lower grades when students are true beginners. They also engage in linguistic modeling and recasting errors made by students with correct target-language utterances.
The Immersion Culture

Yolanda: “Something has happened with these kids learning a different language in school. I think it’s a best practice. They should require this of all kids.”

International Teaching Staff

Ten of the current twelve immersion teachers at South Boulevard were originally hired as Foreign Associate Teachers (FATs) who are recruited from their native countries by the Louisiana State Department of Education to teach in the state’s foreign language programs on three-year work visas. Some of them have since obtained permanent resident status, have married U.S. citizens, or have become U.S. citizens themselves—thereby allowing them to continue teaching at South Boulevard. Sometimes the FATs return to their native countries after a year or two. On average, South Boulevard replaces two to three immersion teachers each year. The immersion teachers currently teaching at South Boulevard represent the following countries: France, Belgium, Mexico, Venezuela, Guatemala, and Colombia. Although not currently, there is usually at least one teacher from Spain.

The immersion teachers play a critical role in the creation of a culture that contributes to student learning. While they are experienced educators, they are unfamiliar with the American “grammar” of schooling (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Thus, they approach the school, the curriculum, and the students with an open mind—expecting that it will be different than that with which they are accustomed. They do not come to the school with negative attitudes about urban schools, Black students, socioeconomically-disadvantaged students, and Louisiana public schools. Delpit (1995/2006), for instance, warned of the educational consequences of stereotypes nurtured by daily media reports of the “young black male as monster” and constant reminders that “one out of four black men . . . is involved with the prison system” (p. xxiii). Ladson-Billings (1994) identified several common stereotypes or perceptions about Black
students: 1) they must be controlled in order to be taught, 2) they are not as capable as White students, and 3) they are unmotivated and undisciplined. In classrooms across the country, many White and middle-class teachers internalize these negative stereotypes, which are translated into low expectations of socioeconomically-disadvantaged and minority students.

The immersion teachers at South Boulevard do not have these same preconceived notions about race and education. They may have preconceived notions of their own, but they are unique to their particular country of origin. Furthermore, they are from so many countries and cultures that no one culture or viewpoint is dominant at the school. One morning, I talked with Señora Cepeda while she made copies and asked her whether she thought racism was an issue at the school. She responded negatively and then said: “In my country, we don’t have this. We don’t have racism.” Madame Hebert, a French teacher, noted:

it’s very, very different in France. The school where I was last year, there were Black people, White people, Arabic people, but we never talk about that [race] in France, ever. It’s kind of taboo. Never, ever. And in France, we never fill papers with writing our race. We’re never asked to do that. You don’t have to know; it’s not important. And more than that, it’s incorrect to talk about that.

She did acknowledge that there is tension in France due both to socioeconomic status and religious background, however. During discussions with several immersion teachers, I actually had to explain what “desegregation” meant because they did not understand. When I asked Madame Carpenter about the value of school desegregation, she said: “This thing you’re saying about desegregation, it has to do with color?” David, a single White father who is a part-time student and bartender, explained that the fact that his son is biracial is not “a big deal at South Boulevard because half the teachers are from another country. And 90% of those countries don’t care about that. At least not like south Louisiana does.”

Rather than maintaining negative attitudes and stereotypes about socioeconomically-disadvantaged, urban, and Black students, the immersion teachers at South Boulevard have high
expectations of all students. Many have written about the important role of high expectations in student achievement (Conchas & Rodríguez, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Meier, 2002; Perry, 2003). Rather than believing that some students are incapable of learning a second language, the immersion teachers at South Boulevard have an almost missionary zeal for teaching their native language to their students. Just as they learned English, they believe that all of their students can learn an additional language and are immensely proud to watch their students’ target language proficiency develop. All the immersion teachers in the sample told me how much they enjoy teaching the language. Madame Rivet explained:

> I teach them that if they don’t know a word in French, they cannot say it in English. They have to find a way to explain the word, which they do. And then sometimes, there’s mistakes that come over and over again. And I don’t even have to correct them anymore. Another student will say, ‘No, that’s not how you say it.’ It just makes my day when that happens.

Señora Lopez explained that “It’s a very rewarding experience for all the teachers. Teaching the language here is a great deal.” Señora Cepeda offered ebullient praise of the school and the immersion program. She said the immersion program is a dream. I never see something like that in my country. Never. In order for you to learn English in my country, you need to go to a private place, pay for it, and you have to pay a lot of money to learn a second language. It’s amazing to see this program, how these kids are able to take the LEAP test—a test that determines if they are going to be in the next grade—in English, when they were prepared for the whole year in a different language. It’s amazing, I mean, this is a miracle. How? It’s difficult to believe.

Señora Cepeda also told me that she had promised her relatives back in Venezuela that she would make a video of her students speaking Spanish because they can’t believe it. They told her: “We have to see that.”

Positive teacher-student and student-student relationships like the ones found at South Boulevard are crucial to the learning process. Teachers at South Boulevard are generally warm and often praise individual students and entire classes. Walking down the halls of the school,
visitors can frequently hear teachers exclaiming: “¡Perfecto!,” “¡Muy bien!” and “Magnifique!” Señora Grady rewards her students for good behavior and work habits by allowing them to stand by their desks and dance the Macarena, which always ends in a conga line that goes round and round the classroom. Students’ comments about their teachers largely reflect the teachers’ positive descriptions of their students. Daniel, a Black French fourth-grader, said South Boulevard teachers were “really fun, and they give us lots of fun activities to do.” Jonathan, a biracial Spanish fourth-grader, said if he were a parent, he would want his children to come to South Boulevard because “some teachers make it fun when you learn.” Taylor, a White, Spanish fourth-grader, explained that her teachers are “fun because they always have a different view of things because they’re from a different country. We think what they do is strange and they might think what we do is strange. So you learn new things.”

Second language acquisition research adds to this discussion of the ways in which language and culture may impact learning. Krashen (1982) identified what he called an affective filter that affects second language acquisition. As he explained, “when affective conditions are not optimal, when the student is not motivated, does not identify with the speakers of the second language, or is overanxious about his performance,” the affective filter creates “a mental block . . . [which] will prevent the input from reaching those parts of the brain responsible for language acquisition” (p. 193). Students are able to acquire a second language more quickly and efficiently when the classroom culture causes them to experience less stress and anxiety. Thus, the positive environment at South Boulevard may prohibit the affective filter from disrupting the learning process and enable students to learn not only a second language, but also other content areas.
According to sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986), the learning process does not begin in the individual mind. Rather, it is the result of complex connections between interpersonal, cultural-historical, and individual factors. In other words, “[w]e grow into the intellectual world of those around us” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 88). Learning is a social process that takes place as learners are guided by more capable peers or teachers (“scaffolding”) to new levels of competence. Conchas and Rodríguez (2008) similarly assert that “pedagogical and curricular approaches that enhance and promote human interaction” are important to promoting student achievement. The immersion curriculum is such an approach. It requires significant interaction, both between teachers and students and between students. In order for immersion to work, students must be exposed to as much target language input as possible. Thus, talking and working together in small groups is a necessary part of the program.

Students are generally extremely anxious to participate in class, wildly raising their hands to participate. One morning, I observed a math lesson in Señora Grady’s second grade classroom in which students had to list as many ways as they could to arrive mathematically at an appointed number. After about five minutes, Señora Grady asked for volunteers to write their equations on the board. All the students wanted to share their answers! Two volunteers went to the board and wrote their equations on the board and then Señora Grady led the class in reading the equations aloud in Spanish. Most of the student equations were like $21 + 1 + 2 + 4 = 28$. A Vietnamese boy, however, had written equations like this: $9000 - 8972 = 28$, so the class had to review the Spanish vocabulary words for hundreds and thousands in order to read his equations aloud. After about 20 minutes, Señora Grady announced that it was time for lunch. The class groaned in disappointment. Señora Grady threw up her hands, laughing and said: “They want to keep doing this all day long. They don’t even want to eat lunch!”
Several immersion teachers told me how much they enjoy the work environment at South Boulevard. Señora Lopez explained: “We have a great, great, great staff. We have excellent teachers and that makes the school very, very special.” Madame Carpenter described her working relationship with Señora Cepeda: “I get along so beautifully with her. We’re working as a team together, it’s fantastic.” Señora Gonzalez said: “I am very happy here. I hope to continue here.” They are dedicated and committed to teaching at South Boulevard. In spring 2008, Señora Cepeda was put on leave without pay because of a problem with her immigration status. Teachers at the school took up a collection and gave her monetary donations to help her cover the temporary loss of income. A long-term substitute teacher was brought in to teach her classes. Señora Cepeda continued coming to school, teaching her classes as always—for more than a month—until the problem was resolved. When Ms. Miller shared this story with me, she shook her head incredulously and said: “She’s been here every day, even though she’s not getting paid.”

Thus, the immersion teachers exhibit several characteristics important to establishing a positive learning culture at the school. Rather than mediocrity or failure, they expect excellence from all their students. Shannon explained that she felt teachers had “exceedingly high expectations” of the students. The immersion teachers love teaching their native language to students. They enjoy working at South Boulevard. They develop positive, nurturing relationships with their students. Many of the teachers have taught multiple siblings in a family. Several of the long-time teachers, in fact, have taught the parents of some of their current students. Thus, they know their students and their families well. These kinds of positive relationships can positively impact learning.
Common Curricular Theme

Commitment to the common curricular theme of immersion education is another aspect of the immersion culture that promotes learning. Others have likewise written about the ways in which a sense of group identity and community membership may positively impact student achievement (Conchas & Rodríguez, 2008; Meier, 2002). In their research on small schools, Conchas and Rodríguez (2008) wrote of how a “close sense of community” was important to creating an environment that validated doing well in school. Teachers and parents in my study identified a sense of community at South Boulevard. Tracy, for instance, said the school feels “like a big family.” Ms. Brown similarly noted: “The physical plant is atrocious, but it’s a nice little community inside.” Several parents in the sample believe that students at South Boulevard push each other to achieve in school. Ken, for instance, spoke of a link between competition and achievement: “Competition on every level builds. Whether it’s academic or athletic. And that’s my biggest thing is that my children are in an environment that is conducive to their learning and that they can learn from each other.” Terrence similarly noted that one of the things he liked the most about South Boulevard was the learning environment: “If you’re in an environment where everybody is striving to achieve, it’s gonna make you step your game up.”

Good schools, according to Meier (2002) “feel special to those who belong to them” (p. 158). The immersion culture at South Boulevard is just such a “culture of specialness” (Meier, 2002, p. 158). Over the last two years, the PTO has rallied around the immersion curriculum and has sought ways to highlight it around the community. The PTO worked for more than a year to get the school board to allow them to change the name of the school from “South Boulevard Extended Day Elementary” to a name—any name—that would include “foreign language immersion” in its title. The school board denied their request, citing a vague preference for
names that honored historical places in Baton Rouge. In response, the PTO incorporated itself and began to use its own name: “South Boulevard Foreign Language Academic Immersion Magnet” (FLAIM). The PTO then designed, printed, and sold 40 yard signs and 94 bumper magnets to the approximately 180 school families that highlighted the immersion part of the curriculum (see samples below). Parents honk at each other around town whenever they see a South Boulevard bumper magnet.

South Boulevard students and families attended two community events during fall 2007 in order to spread the word about the school. In September 2007, more than sixty South Boulevard students, their families, and teachers met on a very hot Sunday afternoon to march in the Baton Rouge International Heritage Celebration parade. Students dressed in bright yellow t-shirts held a big banner bordered by flags from around the world that said: “South Boulevard Foreign Language Academic Immersion Magnet.” In December 2007, more than 100 students came and sang French and Spanish Christmas songs at the Magnolia Mound Plantation Christmas celebration. Parents stood in the rain and listened to their children sing in French or
Spanish, feverishly snapping pictures and videotaping. The students were visibly proud of themselves.

During fall 2007, the PTO created a Marketing and Recruiting Committee to promote the school in the community. Two members of that committee created a snazzy logo that would, again, showcase the immersion aspect of the program. The PTO sold approximately 100 t-shirts to parents, students, and teachers and urged everyone to wear their t-shirts around town to help get the word out about the school.

The unique nature of the immersion curriculum engenders loyalty and pride among the teachers, students, and parents. Parents and students want to be a part of the immersion culture. This kind of communal commitment to the curriculum helps create a culture that is conducive to learning.

Second Language as an Equalizing Force

Language is an important part of human identity and as such, plays a critical role in schooling. Many have written about the links between language and identity. In the early part of the twentieth century, linguists and anthropologists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf (1956) posited that there are powerful links between the language one speaks and the way one makes sense of the world. Giroux and McLaren (1989) argue the powerful link between language and
schooling when they write that “language functions to both position and constitute the way that
teachers and students define, mediate, and understand their relation to each other, school
knowledge, the institution of schooling, and the larger society” (p. 143).

Many have written about how school cultures typically privilege students who come from
White, middle-class homes (Delpit, 1995/2006; Epstein, 2001; Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings,
1994; Lareau, 1989). White students’ ways of knowing and being are more congruent with the
culture of schools as currently constituted. White ways of speaking are privileged in schools by
White teachers and by test questions that favor “Standard Edited English” (SEE). Delpit
(1995/2006) writes of a “culture of power” in classrooms that involves “linguistic forms,
communicative strategies, and presentation of self” (p. 25). Language equals power, and those
who speak the language of power in schools are more likely to experience success in schools
than those who do not.

In his autobiography, *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*,
Rodriguez (1983) provides a poignant example of the power dynamics involving language use in
schools. Rodriguez, a Mexican-American, began his schooling in Sacramento, California, able
to understand “some fifty stray English words” (p. 11). All his classmates were White, and
English was the language of the school, while Spanish was the language of his family. After
months of struggling to learn English, three nuns from the school visited his home one Saturday
morning and asked his parents if they would please speak English at home so that Richard and
his siblings could learn English. Richard describes the scene in the following quote: “I noted the
incongruity—the clash of two worlds, the faces and voices of school intruding upon the familiar
setting of home” (p. 20). Richard’s parents agreed to sacrifice their family’s language—the
language that held them together—to help their children succeed. Rodriguez did learn English,
of course, and unlearned Spanish, only relearning it as an adult. However, of this household change, Rodriguez writes that “the special feeling of closeness at home was diminished by then. Gone was the desperate, urgent, intense feeling of being at home . . . No longer so close; no longer bound tight” (p. 23).

Richard’s childhood and family life were harshly disrupted by the link between schools and language. Richard did not speak the language of the school, which made him lesser in the eyes of the school. He learned English and went on to earn degrees in English from Stanford, philosophy from Columbia, and English Renaissance literature from Berkeley—an academic “success” by any definition. However, his achievements were not without costs. His public identity was forged only by what he describes as a painful separation from his past, his family, his language, and his culture. Rodriguez argues that the price he paid was worth it—that he sacrificed his private individuality to achieve public individuality.

Our system of schooling exacted this cost from Rodriguez, just as it has done and continues to do from countless others. According to our monolingual educational system, being bilingual is not valued. “Standard” Edited English (SEE) is best. It’s the right language to speak. Therefore, children who do not speak English must learn it, even if it means sacrificing their native tongue. Our societal disinterest in multilingualism influences educational practices. Rather than viewing bilingual children as particularly knowledgeable or talented, our educational system has historically treated them as problematic children in need of remediation. Maceri (2001) asserts that half of the special education students in New York City in 1921 were Italian immigrants. Maceri (2001) asks “Why?,” and then answers: “They were tested in English, a language they did not know very well.” This educational labeling led society at large to believe that Italians weren’t smart—a cultural assumption based on an educational practice.
The complex issue of language and schooling includes not only whether one speaks the dominant language of society—English—but also the issue of how one speaks it. There are many different Englishes, after all—the English spoken by New Yorkers, the twangy drawl of the south, and the Spanglish of the border states, just to name a few. The language of schools, however, is not just “English.” It’s middle-class, White English, which means that many more schoolchildren are excluded than just those who don’t actually speak English as a native language.

The furor caused by the Oakland, California School Board’s 1996 decision to take Ebonics into consideration in teaching SEE to African American (and other) students provides a compelling example of this issue. The Oakland School Board was prompted to make this move after considering research showing that students who speak non-standard or vernacular varieties of SEE tend to underperform students who speak SEE, especially in reading and writing. This decision got significant coverage by the national media, bringing to light that while existing methods of teaching English are successful with White and middle-class children, they may not be not successful in teaching working class African-American children.

According to Collins (1988), “middle-class modes of conduct and communication are more congruent with the ways of acquiring and displaying knowledge typically found in institutions of formal education, while the modes characteristic of working-class and minority communities diverge from those of the school” (p. 311). Schools try to force minority children into the mold of White middle-class American cultural values, including the way White, middle-class Americans speak. It must be a delicate balancing act for those who figure out a way to do it. The rest, I imagine, might relate to Richard Rodriguez (1983), who writes that he “does not

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straddle, cannot reconcile, the two great opposing cultures of his life”—that of his family and that of the school (p. 66).

Language, identity, and culture are inextricably intertwined. Bruner (1996) wrote that “education does not stand alone, and it cannot be designed as if it did. It exists in a culture. And culture, whatever else it is, is also about power, distinctions, and rewards” (p. 28). Delpit and Dowdy’s (2002) book about language and culture in the classroom is titled *The Skin that We Speak*. In terms of this case study of South Boulevard, what happens when children come to school and learn to speak a different skin—a new language? I argue that learning to speak a new language fundamentally changes the power dynamics at play in most schools in which the language of power is SEE. The school culture created by the immersion curriculum at South Boulevard does not privilege either White or Black culture and language. Instead, the immersion curriculum creates a new culture in which the languages of power are French and Spanish rather than either SEE or African American Vernacular (AAV). Students are required to speak French or Spanish in the classrooms, as well as during lunch. They are, in fact, punished for speaking English. Some teachers are stricter about enforcing the target-language-only rule, but the school actually has policies drawn up that include target dates by which students should be able to communicate strictly in the target language. Incorrect student speech in the target language is corrected, although somewhat haphazardly. Students do have the 90-minute ELA block every day in which they speak and write in English, but this is a small fraction of their day. School programs at the school highlight student target language use. Students sing songs in French or Spanish at the Christmas program and at the International Day Program. Fourth and fifth grade students conduct tours of the school for prospective parents in their target language. On rainy
days when the students have to have “indoor recess,” they are sometimes allowed to watch movies, but only if they are in either French or Spanish.

English is neither the language of power nor is it the default language; it is almost seen as a pesky nuisance—like something that gets in the way of second language acquisition. Several English Language Arts teachers complained to me in interviews about the way in which their instructional time had continued to decline over the years to the point where, as Ms. Lawson, a 20-year South Boulevard veteran ELA teacher, noted: “Our time keeps getting lopped off and lopped off. Our joke is, every day it’s like: ‘Okay, what am I not gonna teach today?’” The immersion teachers also complain that they do not have enough time, but they cannot complain about having reduced instructional time because over the years, Ms. Miller has protected and even increased the amount of instructional time conducted in the second language.

Theresa Perry (in Meier, 2002) noted that “there are things about a school that tell you whom it belongs to from the moment you walk into the lobby” (p. 90). At South Boulevard, this new immersion culture makes it significantly more difficult to tell to whom the school belongs. When you walk in the entryway, signs are posted everywhere in French and in Spanish. Some include English as well, but Ms. Miller told me that it is her goal to ultimately eliminate all English signage in favor of French and Spanish. Student work in French and Spanish is displayed on bulletin boards. Teachers in hallways speak to each other and to the students in French and/or Spanish.

The immersion curriculum, with its focus on French or Spanish, diminishes linguistic and cultural differences that may lead to achievement gaps in other school settings. Delpit (2002) explains that in mainstream schools, students must learn the rules of the culture of power in order to achieve success. At South Boulevard, however, all the students are in the process of learning
a new culture of power predicated upon Spanish and French rather than English. No group of students comes to South Boulevard already bestowed with knowledge of the language of power while other groups of students are forced to acquire it or are left behind. The immersion curriculum creates a culture in which all students begin at the same point: they are all novice foreign language learners. This equalizing aspect of the immersion curriculum may positively impact student test scores. Student learning is promoted and enhanced by a culture at South Boulevard in which all students are equally able, at least in terms of their second language knowledge.

**Testing at South Boulevard**

There are many ways to judge the success of South Boulevard. One could judge students’ target language proficiency. One could evaluate students’ or parents’ satisfaction with the school. One could find a way to measure students’ self-esteem. Haj-Broussard (2003), for instance, found that African-American elementary students who participated in French immersion programs had a higher collective self-esteem, particularly in regards to how they viewed their schools, than African-American non-immersion participants. Standardized test scores, however, are currently the most widely-accepted measure used to evaluate students and schools and thus warrant attention here.

Test scores are important at South Boulevard. Besides the threat of what *NCLB* (2001) calls “corrective action,” schools receive accolades and monetary awards according to their test scores. Ms. Miller announced at a PTO meeting in Fall 2007 that the school had received approximately $5000 from the state Department of Education for their test scores. The school is allowed to spend these monies at its discretion, which is not insignificant considering that the school sells juice boxes, chips, and candy every Friday to raise funds to pay for the lease on the
copying machine—an event that school administrators, teachers, parents, and students refer to as “treat recess.” Although Ms. Miller acknowledged to me several times during discussions that there is too much emphasis on standardized testing, analysis of data (including participant observation at school and PTO meetings and analysis of letters sent home to parents) revealed a marked emphasis on standardized testing throughout the school year.

In October 2006, parents of fourth graders (for whom the LEAP test is “high-stakes”) were invited to the school at 3:30 for an informational meeting about the LEAP test. During the meeting, Ms. Miller explained to parents the importance of the test—both to individual students (who must receive a score of Basic or above on the Math and English Language Arts portions of the test in order to be promoted to fifth grade) and to the school (because the test scores are a big component of the school performance score and monetary awards are given for performance). The fourth grade teachers then described the kinds of questions the students could expect and explained how student answers are graded. Parents were also told at this meeting that students would begin coming home with a “LEAP packet” every Monday that needed to be completed and brought back to school every Friday. The packet contained sample test questions for the students to practice. Each packet was 15-20 pages long and included math and language arts practice questions as well as a practice writing sample prompt. The first packet that came home was 21 pages long and contained 87 test questions. Although the LEAP packets were not graded, students were expected to complete them in addition to their regular daily homework assignments.

The school hosts what they call “LEAP camp” every spring for the fourth graders for whom the test is “high-stakes” (meaning that they cannot be promoted to fifth grade if they fail it). LEAP camp begins in approximately mid-January and continues until the week before LEAP
testing, which is usually in mid-March. LEAP camp occurs every day from 3:30-4:30 and is an hour of straight test-prep. The school does not require students to attend LEAP camp, but during the year of my fieldwork, all the fourth graders attended. Parents had to change carpool and work schedules in order to be able to pick their children up an hour later. The school pays the teachers for that additional hour and provides snacks for the students, so there is no cost passed along to the parents. Students are divided into groups according to their scores on a LEAP practice test taken before Christmas and scored by the state Department of Education. Students spend that hour doing practice test questions, talking about test-taking strategies and skills, reviewing tricky material, and practicing their writing samples.

The week before LEAP week, the school had a LEAP Pep Rally to encourage the students and to supposedly relieve pressure regarding the test. During the pep rally, Ms. Miller and several teachers gave pep talks and told the students that they shouldn’t worry and reminded them to “just do your best.” Ms. Miller and the teachers led the students in a chant to the tune of the Queen song “We will rock you.” Everyone in the audience stomped their feet twice to the beat, clapped once, and shouted: “We will, we will beat this test, do our best.” One day before LEAP week, my fourth grade daughter told me that she was afraid she was going to fail. I was shocked to hear her say this, since she did extremely well on the practice tests and gets straight A’s in all her school subjects. I told this story to Ms. Miller, fully expecting her to likewise be surprised to hear that she was worried. Instead, she surprised me by saying: “Well, they all know how important it is.”

The week before the LEAP test, Ms. Miller sent a letter home to parents of the fourth graders (who would take the LEAP), as well as the parents of third and fifth graders (who would take the i-LEAP), with a list of things to do during LEAP week. The list included typical test-
taking strategies like “Make sure to be on time,” “Don’t rush your children in the morning,”
“Make sure your children get a good breakfast,” along with more interesting pieces of wisdom
like “Don’t fuss at your children” and “Give them big hugs and tell them you love them.” The
Sunday night before LEAP testing week, as a parent of EBRP schoolchildren, I received three
pre-recorded phone messages: one from Superintendent Charlotte Placide, one from Ms. Miller,
and one from the principal of my son’s elementary school. All three messages were similar in
content, reminding us of the importance of the LEAP test and urging us to get our children to
school on time and give them a healthy breakfast.

Thus, although during interviews, Ms. Miller discussed other dimensions of success in
addition to standardized tests, events at the school revealed that the LEAP test is indeed
emphasized. During discussions and interviews, students confirmed the importance of the test
scores. When I asked Kayley, a White French fourth-grader, to explain why South Boulevard is
a good school, she said immediately: “We get good test scores.” She also said: “Last year, we
did so good we got a flag that said ‘School of Exemplary Growth.’” I overheard another student
at the school likewise telling a friend that “some kind of senator gave us a flag last year that said
we got good test scores.”

What are test scores like at South Boulevard? This discussion of test scores at South
Boulevard focuses on overall trends and patterns for three primary reasons. First, South
Boulevard has had three different kinds of students for the last ten years: a) non-magnet students
who were grandfathered in and allowed to stay at the school after the immersion program began,
b) immersion students who were screened with a home-grown developmental skills test, and c)
immersion students who had to score at least 85 on the Brigance kindergarten screening46 to gain

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46 The Brigance is one of the most widely used kindergarten screenings. The screening, which most students finish
in about 15 minutes, provides teachers with a broad sampling of a student’s skills.
admission into the program, which was significantly more difficult than the previous screening. While the district disaggregates testing data according to race, socioeconomic status, special education status, and limited-English proficiency (LEP) status, it does not disaggregate data to report test scores of students who participate in magnet programs and those who do not. Thus, it is difficult to draw definitive correlations between participation in the immersion program and test scores. Second, the relationship between magnet schools and educational quality is complex because of the self-selection process involved in magnet admissions, which has the potential to distort research findings (Blank & Archbald, 1992; Goldhaber, 1999; Orfield, 1990; Rossell, 1985b). Third, the numbers of students who take the fourth grade LEAP test at South Boulevard is small enough that making comparisons may be unwise. For instance, during spring 2007 testing, South Boulevard only tested 23 fourth graders, whereas other elementary schools tested as many as 134. The average number of fourth graders tested on a given EBRP school campus was 75. Although test scores may be an imperfect and/or incomplete measure of student learning, they are the currently most important measure used to determine school success.

Considering that students receive 60% of their instruction in a second language that they did not speak before starting kindergarten and that the tests are in English, one might expect the immersion students to underperform similar peers on the standardized tests. Instead, analysis of School Report Cards from 1998-2007 reveals that fourth grade students at South Boulevard have consistently scored better on the LEAP than other students in EBRP and in the state of Louisiana. Figure 5.3 below illustrates trends in English Language Arts (ELA) test scores at South Boulevard compared to the district and the state.

47 1998-1999 was the first school year during which the LEAP for Mathematics and English Language Arts was administered to all Louisiana public school students in grades 4 and 8.
During some years, fourth grade ELA scores at South Boulevard were significantly higher than the district and the state. For example, the 2002-2003 School Report Card indicates that 81% of fourth graders at South Boulevard received a score of Basic, Mastery, or Advanced on the English Language Arts portion of the LEAP. In contrast, only 55% of students parish-wide and 59% of students state-wide received similar scores. The score differential was even greater during spring 2007 testing when 91% of South Boulevard students scored proficient in ELA whereas only 59% of students parish-wide and 69% of students state-wide scored proficient.

Figure 5.4 illustrates similar trends in math scores at South Boulevard compared to the district and the state, although math scores are lower across the board than ELA scores.

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48 Data obtained from annual School Report Cards issued by the Louisiana State Department of Education and are available on-line at www.louisianaschools.net from 1996 to the present.
On the math portion of the LEAP in 2002-2003, 76% of South Boulevard fourth graders received a score of Basic, Mastery, or Advanced compared to only 52% of students parish-wide and 58% of students state-wide received similar scores. Similar gaps between South Boulevard and the rest of the district and the state occurred during spring 2007, when 91% of South Boulevard students scored proficient in Math whereas only 48% of students parish-wide and 64% of students state-wide scored proficient. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about these test scores is that most of these students received all of their math instruction in a foreign language.

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49 Data obtained from annual School Report Cards issued by the Louisiana State Department of Education and are available on-line at www.louisianaschools.net from 1996 to the present.

50 Not all fourth graders at South Boulevard during 2002-2003 were immersion participants. At this time, there were two fourth grade classes: one Spanish immersion class and one non-immersion class.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought to describe the immersion curriculum at South Boulevard and to explore several ways in which it influences student learning. Three aspects of the immersion curriculum contribute to a unique culture that enhances student learning and may lead to increased academic achievement. First, the immersion teachers have high expectations of all students. They do not have negative perceptions of minority, socioeconomically-disadvantaged, and urban children that can have devastating consequences on student achievement. They are dedicated to teaching students their native language. They work to establish positive relationships with their students and use teaching strategies commonly found in immersion education which promote significant interaction between students that enhances learning.

Second, focus on a common theme—the immersion curriculum—creates a sense of group membership. Parents, students, and teachers are like a family or a community working toward a common goal. Their membership in the South Boulevard immersion culture makes them unique. This kind of collective identity may also positively impact student achievement. There is a sense of pride in the students’ second language abilities that promotes advocacy: parents help recruit students to the school; they promote the school in the community; they make their needs and wants known to the school board and expect to be heard. In short, the immersion curriculum helps create a culture of success that inspires parents and students to want to be part of the South Boulevard school community—a community that works together toward common goals and that promotes diversity through studying second languages and cultures.

Lastly, the focus on Spanish and French creates a culture of power new to all students. Rather than some students coming to the school already possessing more linguistic and cultural capital than others, all students are just beginning to learn the rules and codes of a new language.
The immersion curriculum acts as an equalizer, essentially leveling some of the differences that can cause achievement differentials in other settings. Thus, it is not necessarily the *content* (Spanish or French) that increases student achievement. Rather, this study suggests that the unique culture created by the immersion curriculum positively influences student learning.
CHAPTER SIX: A CULTURE OF INTEGRATION

Education . . . exists in a cultural context. [The] cultural contexts of educational institutions both limit and shape the ways in which change can occur within them (Fishman, 1988, p. x).

This chapter explores the culture of integration at South Boulevard and its impact on social relationships among members of the school community. What is the ethos of South Boulevard? What is its “organizational character” (Selznick, 1957)? What is its cultural fabric? Metz (1986) asserts in her research that the “atmosphere” of magnet schools was expressed through “relationships between persons and the feelings which give a tone to those relationships,” “formally planned activities, but also in spontaneous but repetitive practices,” and “in what participants consider salient in the setting, what they pass over briefly or fail to notice at all, and what they think and talk about at length” (p. 3). What kind of atmosphere or culture is present at South Boulevard? How does that culture influence relationships between students and between students and teachers? What role does the foreign language immersion curriculum play in the culture of the school?

Although creating a desegregated student population was the primary objective for which the foreign language immersion magnet program at South Boulevard was created, school desegregation is much more complex than just counting the number of Black and non-Black students who attend school together. Pettigrew, Useem, Normand, and Smith (1973) distinguished between “merely desegregated” schools and “genuinely integrated” schools. They asserted that “[d]esegregation is achieved by simply ending segregation and bringing blacks and whites together,” while integration refers to the “quality of interracial interaction” (p. 92-93). Henderson, von Euler and Schneider (1981) defined desegregation as “the ending of segregation,” and integration as “cross-racial acceptance, equal access to high status academic and social positions in schools . . . and inclusion of elements of minority as well as majority
subcultures in curriculum and activities” (p. 70). Talbert-Johnson (2000) concurred, asserting that desegregation should be regarded as a “process that goes beyond merely creating racially mixed schools to creating environments that produce both academic and social gains for students” (p. 9-10).

In this chapter, I adopt Pettigrew, Useem, Normand, and Smith’s (1973) distinction between “merely desegregated” schools and “genuinely integrated” schools. I first describe the degree to which the foreign language immersion magnet program at South Boulevard has achieved the objective of attracting a racially integrated student population. I then turn to the even more important question of the degree to which South Boulevard has succeeded in creating a culture of integration in which diverse relationships can flourish.

Is South Boulevard “Merely Desegregated”?

Although findings in academic literature regarding the desegregation efficiency of magnet programs have varied widely over the last three decades, two major critiques have been emphasized. First, many studies criticize magnet programs for desegregating schools only superficially (Bankston & Caldas, 2002; Caldas & Bankston, 2005; Eaton, 1996; Eaton & Crutcher, 1996). This criticism applies primarily to programs-within-a-school (PWS) magnets, wherein magnet students have little or no contact with non-magnet students. The result, then, is a racially-integrated magnet program housed in an otherwise single-race school.

In the case of South Boulevard, most of the non-Black students at South Boulevard since 1996 have been immersion program participants. In fact, the graduating fifth grade class of spring 2007 had 33 students from three classes (one French immersion, one Spanish immersion, one non-immersion): 28 Black, two Hispanic, two Vietnamese, and one White. All five non-Black students were immersion participants. The non-immersion class was 100% Black. Thus,
before the school became a dedicated magnet (with all students participating in the immersion program), the school had racially integrated immersion classes and all-Black non-immersion classes. The foreign language immersion program has successfully attracted non-Black students who would otherwise not have attended the school.

A second critique is that magnet programs may actually decrease the overall level of system-wide desegregation because they attract Whites away from neighborhood schools and concentrate them in magnet schools (Caldwell, 1982, March 3; Glenn, 1991; Rossell, 1979). In EBRP, non-Black students are definitely concentrated in magnet programs. EBRP currently operates 59 elementary, 16 middle, and 18 high schools. Of these 59 elementary schools, four are dedicated magnet schools,\(^5\) which means that all the students in the school participate in the specialized magnet offering, and two are magnet programs-within-a-school (PWS).\(^5\) There are seven gifted and talented elementary sites—all of which are located within non-magnet (regular) schools. Of 16 middle schools, two are dedicated magnet schools\(^5\) and one is a PWS.\(^5\) There are three gifted and talented middle school sites\(^5\)--two of which are also the dedicated magnet sites. Of 18 high schools, one is a dedicated magnet school\(^5\) that also houses a talented program, and one is a gifted site.\(^5\) In addition to these two high schools, there are also three PWS\(^5\) at the high school level. As Figure 6.1 indicates, the number of participants in special

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5 These schools are: South Boulevard Foreign Language Academic Immersion Magnet, Baton Rouge Center for Visual and Performing Arts (BRCVPA), Westdale Heights Academic Magnet, and Forest Heights Academy of Excellence.
5 These two programs are Montessori programs offered at Belfair Elementary and Dufrocq Elementary. Both schools house the Montessori programs in the same building as the traditional program.
5 McKinley Middle School and Sherwood Middle School.
5 Crestworth Middle has a Math, Science, & Emerging Technologies Magnet program.
5 Glasgow Middle School, Westdale Middle School, and Sherwood Middle Magnet.
5 Baton Rouge High.
5 McKinley High School.
5 Glen Oaks High has three magnet programs: Architectural Design, Medical, and Construction Trades and Management. Istrouma High has an Emerging Technologies magnet program. Scotlandville High has three magnet programs: Business, Government Affairs, and Academic/Engineering.
programs is a fraction of the total number of students in EBRP. Approximately 11% of EBRP students attend a magnet school. Of these, 66% are Black and 34% are non-Black.

In 2007-2008, there were 49,371 students enrolled in EBRP schools. Out of the 39,219 Black students, 3,158 (8.1% of the total Black population) attend a magnet school. Of the 10,152 non-Black students, 1,619 (15.9% of the total non-Black population) attend a magnet school. During that same year, approximately 1,532 students received Gifted and/or Talented Program Services. 688 of the 1,532 gifted and talented students were Black, which represents 1.8% of the total Black student population (39,219). 844 were non-Black, which represents 8.3% of the total non-Black student population (10,152). Finally, there are three non-magnet elementary schools\textsuperscript{60} that have a non-Black population greater than 40%. The rest of the non-Black students in EBRP are sprinkled out over the remaining 75 to 80 schools.

\textsuperscript{59} Data obtained from the EBRP Office of Gifted and Talented Programs and the EBRP Office of Magnet Programs.

\textsuperscript{60} Shenandoah – 48% non-Black; Parkview – 46% non-Black; Cedarcrest – 42% non-Black
There is a concentration of non-Black students in special programs, including magnet and gifted and talented programs. Implementation of magnet programs has accomplished little as far as system-wide desegregation. As indicated by other research findings (Caldwell, 1982, March 3; Glenn, 1991; Rossell, 1979), the non-Black population in the EBRP system is concentrated in a small number of magnet and gifted and talented programs. When examined as a single unit, however, the foreign language immersion magnet program at South Boulevard has successfully achieved a racially desegregated student population. It is significantly more integrated (58% Black, 42% non-Black) than the school district of which it is a part (83% Black, 17% non-Black).

Is South Boulevard “Genuinely Integrated”?

Beneath the numbers is what I consider to be the even more pressing issue as far as educational reform: the degree to which South Boulevard has been successful in creating a culture of integration in which social relationships, both within and across racial and ethnic identities, can thrive. Schofield and Sagar (1979) posited nearly thirty years ago that “simply putting black and White children in the same classrooms . . . is not sufficient to ensure positive social learning” (p. 196). Numerous scholars have discussed the important role school culture plays in both the academic achievement and the social development of students (Conchas & Rodríguez, 2008; Delpit, 1995/2006; Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Heath, 1983; Meier, 2002). Much of this research is pertinent to this research on the culture and community at South Boulevard. Meier (2002), for example, writes of the importance of school cultures that create communities in which teachers, students, and parents trust each other. She writes that “schools work best if we think of them as the marketplaces in small communities—where gossip is exchanged, work displayed, birthdays taken note of; where clusters of kids and adults gather to talk, read, and
exchange ideas” (p. 30). In their research on small schools, Conchas and Rodriguez (2008) write of intimate school communities that create “a spirit of camaraderie among students and teachers” (p. 25) and “a sense of social belonging“ (p. 112), and about how having a common curricular theme enables those kinds of positive relationships.

Several scholars have studied the characteristics of social relationships specifically in urban magnet schools. In a qualitative study of the sources of social relationships in an urban magnet school, Metz (1983) posited that the school’s positive social relationships were its most distinctive characteristic and “became one of the bases of its attractiveness to parents” (p. 202). Metz (1983) identified several aspects of the school culture that contributed to the positive social relationships: a) people of different races had equal status, b) the effect of cooperative versus competitive activities, c) the school’s downtown location in a neighborhood that “could be claimed as home territory by no one” (p. 214), d) the diverse ethnic composition of the school staff, and e) a small school building which allowed for more personal contact and relationships. This study confirms several of these aspects and suggests others. Like the school that Metz studied, South Boulevard is a magnet school that has no neighborhood attendance zone, which means that all of its students come from other parts of the city. South Boulevard, thus, is the domain of no particular group of students or teachers in the school. South Boulevard is also a small school with a racially diverse staff.

In a mixed method study that included the quantitative results of a survey given to parents and teachers at 20 school sites (10 magnet and 10 non-magnet) in St. Louis and Cincinnati and the qualitative results of four case studies of magnet programs, Goldring and Smrekar (2000) found widespread belief in the value of school integration amongst the teachers and parents. Participants mentioned the importance of children being exposed to other cultures
and establishing cross-racial friendships. One parent in their sample was “convinced that the social values represented in the magnet school model are as vital as the academic opportunities” (Goldring & Smrekar, 2000, p. 31-32). This study similarly finds that social relationships at South Boulevard are a key aspect of its attractiveness to parents and of the overall success of the school as judged by parents, teachers, and administrators. Several parents in this study sample commented that they like the diversity in which their children are immersed at South Boulevard and identified that diversity as one factor that motivated them to choose the school. David, for example, explained that he doesn’t think race impacts social relationships at South Boulevard and described his son’s three best friends in the following quote: “Michael is Asian, James is White, and Anthony is Black.” Susan, the single mother of a White fifth-grade immersion student, said her daughter’s best friend at school is Black. Ms. Brown, a veteran of South Boulevard, explained that “for years there have been friendships across racial lines” and said the students are “very accepting of one another.” Tracy said the students “seem to be like a big family.”

In the following pages, I explore the culture of integration found at South Boulevard in terms of three dimensions identified by Henderson, von Euler and Schneider (1981): 1) cross-racial acceptance, 2) equal access to high status academic and social positions in schools, and 3) inclusion of elements of minority as well as majority subcultures in curriculum and activities” (p. 70).

Cross-Racial Acceptance

Conclusions regarding the quality of relationships between students at South Boulevard emerged from fieldwork data, including observations of students during class, student assemblies and programs, recess, lunch, and before and after the formal school day, as well as interviews
with parents, teachers, and students. Observations of student-to-student interactions focused on recess because this is really the only time when students are given free rein regarding with whom they interact. In class and during lunch, students have assigned seats. For purposes of this discussion, I have organized student-student interactions according to the following dimensions: 1) interactions during class time, 2) interactions during recess, and 3) interactions during other school events or outside the regular school day. I then analyze the nature of student relationships present at South Boulevard.

During Class Time

Classroom observations confirmed the positive nature of relationships and interactions between students at South Boulevard. The classrooms at South Boulevard are arranged in traditional arrangements—a teacher desk in the back, a chalkboard in front, and student desks in rows facing the chalkboard. Each room also has an area in front of the chalkboard where the students—particularly the younger ones—can all gather around and sit on the floor. On the first day of school, students are assigned to sit in particular seats, although the seating arrangements typically get tweaked in those first few days as teachers figure out that it’s better for particular students not to sit near each other because they talk to and distract each other too much. South Boulevard teachers generally engage in three different types of instruction: a) teacher to whole class, b) pair and group work, and c) individualized work.

Because many of the classes are small (10 to 20 students), students frequently engage in pair and small group work. Teachers intentionally assign students to work with a variety of classmates in paired and small group work and students generally accept these assignments with little, if any, complaint. Ms. Gonzalez, for instance, explained that she tells her students at the beginning of the year: “When I say ‘Play with your friends,’ you choose your friend. But when I
say ‘You are going to work . . .’ then I decide.’” She elaborated, explaining that sometimes the students complain, but “then two minutes later, they are like they are the best friends of the world. They are laughing and they prepare a play or a game and I say: ‘You see? You can work with everybody.’” While observing a second grade Spanish classroom, the teacher divided students randomly into partners to do pair work. She assigned an Asian boy and a Black girl to work together. The students were so excited to get to work together that they gave each other a big, spontaneous hug. In a fourth grade class, the only two White boys in the French class actually did not want to work together; each preferred to work with another student, but quickly adjusted and went about completing their assignment. Thus, students have many opportunities to interact with each other in the classroom.

During interviews and conservations with teachers about relationships between students, the general consensus was that cross-racial friendships were common. Ms. Lawson, a South Boulevard veteran, said: “I think our kids get along really well. I don’t think our kids see any kind of color. I don’t. I don’t. I don’t.” Ms. Richard said she did not think race played a factor in any kinds of relationships at the school. She explained: “I just feel like they are all together. We’re just one group.” Madame Rivet compared South Boulevard to another EBRP public school where she had previously taught and said: “Here [South Boulevard], I have never known of a problem where it was a White student and a Black student having problems.”

**During Recess**

During their daily 20-minute recess time, the older students tend to interact in fixed, predictable groups, whereas the younger students tend to run back and forth between shifting groups. There was no discernable pattern of students dividing themselves according to race. Rather, they tend to play both within and across racial lines. I observed, for instance, a group of
four Black girls and two White girls jumping rope one afternoon. I saw a group of two Black girls and two White girls sitting around the table practicing a clapping game and chant. I saw a group of twelve Black boys and one White boy playing soccer one afternoon, which seems lopsided until you realize that there are only two White boys in that grade. Richard, a parent, offered an explanation as to why the students tend to all play together:

There’s ten kids in fourth grade French. So if they actually want to play any games, they can’t start dividing themselves up by race or it’s gonna be two kids throwing a ball to each other. So they can’t really do that. And I observe the girls and I notice that this doesn’t seem to be a factor with the girls at all, either.

The majority of on-site observations revealed positive, cross-racial social interactions during recess. I never witnessed any racially-motivated incidents or heard any derogatory racial remarks or slurs. However, two incidences in which race played a prominent role stand out. During a site visit, I once heard Ms. Miller ask the secretary to call a Black female student’s parents and ask them to come pick her up because “she’s being suspended. I haven’t decided for how long.” Though curious to find out why the student was being suspended, I did not think it was appropriate or legal for me to ask. That night, however, I ran into a White South Boulevard mother at a party with mutual friends and found out what had happened—at least from the perspective of the White student. According to the mother, her daughter approached a group of girls who were playing soccer during recess and asked if she could join in the game. A Black girl in the group told her no and the White girl persisted, at which point the Black girl said: “Don’t mess with my niggers or I’m gonna f*** you up.” The White girl told the teacher, several witnesses corroborated her story, the teacher wrote up the Black girl, and the principal suspended her.

Terrence shared another incident that occurred with his daughter during recess. He explained that Ms. Miller called him to tell him that his daughter was going to be punished at
school because she had bitten a boy during recess. He explained that he asked for more details about what had happened because “my daughter is real quiet and reserved, so if she bit you, you did her somethin’.” Ms. Miller told him that the little boy “gently pulled her to the ground” and in response, his daughter bit the little boy. Terrence did not have a problem with his daughter being punished for biting another child, but he did ask Ms. Miller whether the little boy was going to be punished for pushing his daughter. According to Ms. Miller, the little boy was just “playing with her” and was not going to be punished. Terrence explained to me: “I was concerned about that, because usually when a little boy pulls a little girl to the ground, the little boy gets punished, but it was a little White kid.” When I asked him how he knew that the little boy was White, he said:

Well, I guessed he was White when he didn’t get punished. But I know if Shakwan [a fictitious name] would have threw her down, Shakwan would’ve been punished. But that’s not a problem that surfaces all the time. It wasn’t a big deal. I felt like it was just a misunderstanding and we got it squared away.

**Interactions during School Events and Outside the Regular School Day**

Other events beyond recess and the classroom revealed a similar pattern of interracial friendships. For instance, a group of second- and third-grade boys and their fathers started a “South Boulevard Flames” soccer team during the year of my fieldwork. The team had three Black, one Asian, one biracial, and eight White boys. On multiple occasions, I saw pairs of students of different races going home with each other to play after having successfully lobbied their parents during carpool. During the end-of-the-year talent show, multiple groups of students of different races performed together. Two first graders—a White girl with long curly ringlets and a shy Black boy—sang an entire song from the wildly popular High School Musical soundtrack together. Both their moms told me that they had printed out the lyrics to the song and memorized them and practiced during recess. Two second graders—an East Indian girl and a
White girl—performed a dance they had choreographed together during recess and at multiple
sleepovers leading up to the event. Two fourth grade boys—one White and one Black—showed
off basketball dunking maneuvers.

In addition, I also observed several school activities that occurred outside the regular
classroom setting. These included the school carnival, a Mardi Gras Parade, and a Movie Night
organized by the PTO and held in the school gym. Once again, I did not discern any patterns of
student interactions defined or limited by race. Rather, students played with their classmates
irrespective of their race. At the carnival, for instance, I observed three first graders—two Black
and one White—having their picture taken at a photo booth and a group of five fifth grade girls:
two Vietnamese, one Black, and two Hispanic, arms interlocked, helping clean up trash after the
event was over. At the Mardi Gras parade, students forced themselves, with great difficulty, to
stand behind a line on the basketball court while they shouted: “Throw me something!” to the
pre-k and kindergarteners who slowly snaked around the basketball court on their bikes with
training wheels and in wagons pulled by their parents. One group of first grade girls comprised
of three Whites, two Blacks, and one Hispanic was particularly enthusiastic and begged me
repeatedly to take their picture. These kinds of interactions are commonplace at South
Boulevard.

One type of social event where race did seem to play a role was attendance at
children’s birthday parties. I confess that I only attended parties to which my children were
invited. During the year of my fieldwork, I attended seven birthday parties for members of the
first grade Spanish class. These parties were given by the parents of four White girls, two Black
girls, and one Hispanic girl. All the students in the class, or at least all the girls, were invited.
Interestingly, all the parties were attended primarily by the same group of non-Black children
and one or two Black children. In fact, several parents commented on birthday party attendance during interviews. Brad, a White father with a Ph.D. in engineering, commented:

I know that Morgan plays with White children. She plays with Hispanic children. I don’t know about her relationships with Black children. I think one came to her birthday party. But that’s another thing . . . Black students tend not to attend the birthday parties.

When I asked him why he thought this was the case, he paused briefly and then spoke: “Umm, I’m gonna guess why . . . because there possibly could be an economic component associated with the need to dole out the $10 every party for a present.” I asked him if there were any other explanations and he said: “It could be that the parents don’t feel comfortable going to environments where the non-Blacks are living. They may not want to go out to the non-Black portions of the city and go out to a party in Riverbend.”

Alicia, a Black university professor, also pointed out differences between birthday parties of South Boulevard children and birthday parties of children at the private school her daughters previously attended. She explained:

It’s been a learning experience. For example, birthday parties at BRIS61 [laughing], you’re going to go to a place, like Jump-n-Jive or, you know, somewhere. Birthday parties at South Boulevard are more . . . cultural. It’s gonna be at a house. So we went to the first class birthday party and, umm, [laughing] . . . it was just interesting. It was her first time seeing a lot of adults at the party, like older cousins and stuff like that, and a lot of gold teeth [laughing] . . . I can’t believe I’m talking about this. Or beer, at a kid’s party—even though they’re kind of off to the side a bit.

I attended one such party for one of my daughter’s Black classmates. It took me 40 minutes to get to their home in a neighborhood in north Baton Rouge. Five of her school classmates (four White and one Black) attended, but the rest of the guests were friends and extended family members. The party was outside in the back yard and in the carport. The family had rented a big

61 BRIS, which stands for Baton Rouge International School, is an expensive private school that offers immersion in both French and Spanish.
inflatable jumping structure, as well as a cotton candy machine, and also had a huge piñata for the children to break. There were all kinds of food and drinks—nachos, hot dogs, cake, candy, chips. The party started at 2:00. Although we had to leave at 4:30, the party was nowhere near coming to an end. All the family members seemed, quite frankly, shocked that we were leaving so early.

Other events outside school hours revealed similar interactions and friendships across racial lines. Throughout the year, the PTO organized small family “FUNdraising” nights every month. The purpose of these events, according to Liz, the PTO president, was community-building rather than fundraising. Because of the magnet status of the school, students cannot easily play with their school friends after school or on the weekends because most students live significant distances from each other. Approximately 30 students typically attended these events, which were held at area businesses that agreed to donate a small percentage of sales to the school. During 2006-2007, these events were held at Chick-fil-A, Bouncing Tigers, Chuck E. Cheese, and CiCi’s Pizza. At these events, students happily played and interacted with their friends from school, jumping on indoor inflatables at Bouncing Tigers and eating pizza and playing videogames at CiCi’s Pizza and Chuck E. Cheese. Parents milled around, alternating between monitoring their children and talking with other South Boulevard parents, for whom these events provided a rare opportunity to interact with each other. The PTO also encouraged students and families to meet at an indoor ice skating rink over the Christmas break at an appointed time. I did not observe any student groupings divided along racial lines, with the exception of the fact that many of the younger children clung to their parents the entire time because they had not ice skated before!
The Role of Race in School Culture

When explicitly asked about the ways in which race influences relationships at South Boulevard, parents, teachers, and administrators all indicated that race is not important. When I asked Bridget about the role of race in social relationships at South Boulevard, she quickly said: “I try really not to see the color. It’s irrelevant to me. It just doesn’t matter to me.” When I asked Donald about the role of race in social relationships at the school, he similarly explained: “To be honest, it never even came to my mind over here. I haven’t experienced any racism whatsoever.” Hong noted that her children do talk about the color of people’s skin, but do not make judgments about people according to their skin color. She explained: “My son describes . . . ‘Okay, they’re brown’ or ‘They’re yellow.’ That’s just how he describes.” Terrence echoed others’ assessments, commenting that his daughter:

doesn’t hang out with people based on their color. We go to birthday parties and we don’t even know whose birthday party we’re going to. We just go and they could be Asian or Arabian, White, whatever. She doesn’t care. And I like that.

Tracy said that her kids “don’t see any [racial] difference. I asked my son who the prettiest girl was in his class and it’s a little White girl. And she is the prettiest one.” Anthony similarly explained that

kids don’t really look at that. My opinion is that they’re not put together to really look at that kind of stuff. Like race. It comes from outside influences. They’re taught, not necessarily by their parents but maybe by the environment, things they might see or hear. That’s where it begins, I think, their tendency to focus on racial factors and things like that. But as kids, they just get along.

At times other than formal interviews, however, participants described incidents or made comments in which race was indeed an important category. During a phone conversation, Susan explained her rationale for wanting to find a middle school with a greater White population for her daughter to attend:

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Not to sound racist or bigoted or anything, but it makes a difference. She has got to be able to have some kind of pool from which to take friends out of. And especially going into middle school, there’ll be dances and you meet boys and that makes a difference.

During an interview with Susan’s daughter, we also talked about the available middle school options. Summer, a White French student, explained that they were originally going to go to McKinley Middle School,

but then we found out that they had a higher ratio of Black people at McKinley. I think it was 94%, so that leaves 6% White. And as my mom said, when I grow older, it’s not like I’m gonna take one of them to the prom or anything. I don’t think that would work.

Señora Reyes recalled an incident in which she asked students to come up and point out particular features on a big wall map. A Black, male student volunteered to point out a river. He pointed to the Niger River in Africa, after which Señora Reyes stepped closer to the map to read the name of the river more carefully and then said aloud, questioning herself: “What’s it called? The Nigger River?” According to Señora Reyes, two Black girls jumped out of their seats and started shouting and calling her a racist. Taken aback, Señora Reyes quieted the class and explained to them that she had made an honest mistake because she was a non-native speaker of English. She expressed to me later that she had been very afraid that parents would call the school to complain that she had used that word in class. She reported, however, that no parents had called to complain. Before switching gears and moving on to another topic, Señora Reyes summarized: “But in general, I never see in this school these things or problems because you are White and I am Latin, never, I never see it. In five years that I’ve been here, never.” These incidents indicate that race does matter.

Participants’ responses regarding the lack of importance of race in social relationships at South Boulevard reflect what Tatum (1994) refers to as “the pressure to ignore racism” (p. 467). Many, in fact, have written about the reluctance of Americans—particularly White Americans—
to discuss race in public settings (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Tatum, 1994, 1997). Tatum (1994) asserts that openly addressing the issue of racism generates “powerful emotional responses in both White students and students of color . . . These feelings are uncomfortable and can lead White students to resist learning about race and racism” (p. 463). Williams (2000) likewise asserts that in a college class on race relations, “one of the biggest problems with the class was getting the students, especially the White students, to talk about race” (p. 61). She elaborates, suggesting that White students were reluctant to talk about race for fear they would appear racist or insensitive to their Black classmates (Williams, 2000). Although my participants were promised anonymity in the final written dissertation, they still may have felt like they were “on the record.” After all, I tape recorded all the formal interviews with two tape recorders (one analog, one digital). And I took notes during many of the interviews. Thus, participants may have felt like they were under a microscope and may not have revealed their true feelings.

Several participants also suggested that the immersion curriculum may play a role in positive cross-racial interactions and friendship. Regarding the impact of race on social relationships at the school, Ms. Miller said: “I think because we’re working with diverse cultures, it opens up the acceptance of diversity more than a standard ‘I’m White, you’re Black’ type thing.” Madame Crawford, the lead magnet teacher and a former French immersion teacher, agreed that race does not impact social relationships:

I don’t see it with teachers. I don’t see it with children. I don’t have as much exposure to parents other than the first groups coming in or things that pop up along the way. But I don’t see it there, either. I really don’t. And I think that’s a big plus of the program.

Tanecia acknowledged the role of race, but hoped that participation in the immersion program would diminish its importance:
I know the kids see race, I know they see the colors, but this process of them learning and mixing cultures will teach them a little bit more tolerance and it [race] won’t be so much of a big issue, I hope, in their future.

While many strides have been made at South Boulevard in terms of the promotion and development of positive social relationships between students and between students and teachers, some of my interactions during fieldwork indicated that there are still deep-seated social norms and tensions regarding cross-racial relationships. At South Boulevard, the culture created by the immersion program mitigates some of the racial tensions and misunderstandings that may occur in more traditional school settings, but there is still much work to be done in terms of re-framing attitudes and cultural beliefs regarding race.

**Equal Access to High Status Academic and Social Positions in Schools**

**Academic Status and Positions**

Numerous scholars have identified equal status as key to developing constructive social relationships (Allport, 1954; Metz, 1983). Do all South Boulevard students, regardless of their race or socioeconomic status, have equal access to high status academic positions at school? There are several kinds of high status academic awards and privileges available at South Boulevard. At the end of every nine week grading period, students who receive all A’s are put on what is called the “Principal’s List.” Those who receive a combination of A’s and B’s are put on the Honor Roll. These students’ names are posted, by grade level and language, on the bulletin board in the front entryway of the school every nine weeks.

In addition to these periodic awards, there are also two awards ceremonies at the end of each school year: one for Grades K-2 and one for Grades 3-5. At these ceremonies, usually held the last week in May, all students in each class march to the front of the swelteringly hot gymnasium and stand in a straight line. Their teachers then announce the names of all students receiving particular awards, at which point each of those students takes two steps forward and
waits until everyone in the class receiving that kind of award has stepped forward. Everyone applauds and then the students step back into place. Students are recognized for the following awards: year-long Principal’s List, year-long A/B Honor Roll, and Outstanding Athlete awards given by the P.E. coach. In addition to these awards, each teacher recognizes one outstanding student in the following categories: Outstanding Spanish Immersion Student, Outstanding French Immersion Student, Outstanding ELA Student, Outstanding Math Student, Most Improved Math, Science and Social Studies Student, and Most Improved ELA Student. Finally, Ms. Belford awards trophies for students who have accumulated the highest numbers of Accelerated Reader (AR) Points. All students who have more than 75 points get a trophy. The student with the most points in the school gets a bigger trophy.

Analysis of the first through fourth grade students recognized at the award ceremony for being on the Principal’s List and the A/B Honor Roll all year reveals that more non-Black children received this academic distinction than Black children. There were only 16 students total on the Principal’s List all year: six were Black and ten were non-Black. While this sample is perhaps too small from which to generalize, it is still worrisome in light of the student population of the school, which is 58% Black and 42% non-Black.

Awards for Outstanding French and Outstanding Spanish Immersion Student were more balanced, with five Black students and five non-Black students receiving this award. Awards for Outstanding ELA Student were lopsided, with three Black girls and five non-Black girls receiving the award. No boys received this award. Four Black and three non-Black students received awards for being the Most Improved ELA Student. Two of these “non-Black” students actually have one Black and one White parent, but they count as “non-Black” for purposes of the racial quota for admission. Awards for Outstanding Math Student paralleled the racial
composition of the school the most closely, with five Black and three non-Black students receiving the award. Six Black and one non-Black students received awards for being the Most Improved Math, Science, and Social Studies student. Also at this final awards ceremony, Ms. Miller announced that for the “first time in South Boulevard history,” two fourth grade students received Advanced scores on both the Math and the ELA portions of the LEAP test: one White girl and one biracial boy (who counts in the “non-Black” category).

Two other kinds of academic awards were given: AR trophies and Outstanding Athlete awards. Ms. Belford awarded five trophies (four girls and one boy) to students for having accumulated the highest number of AR points: one Hispanic girl, one Black girl, two White girls, and one biracial (“non-Black”) boy. The physical education teacher also gave awards for Outstanding Athlete to one boy and one girl in each class. In kindergarten through second grade, 8 Black and 4 White students received this distinction. While physical education may not seem like an academic subject, students do receive a grade on their report card for their performance and participation in P.E.

Because this represents only one year of data at a small school, it is difficult and probably unwise to draw conclusions from this data. However, it does reveal, although on a perhaps limited level, that there are areas in which Black and non-Black students may not have equal access to high status academic positions. The two areas that were the most unequal are: the year-long Principal’s List recipients and the Outstanding ELA Student awards—both of which had more non-Black than Black recipients. There was, however, one award in which Black students were overrepresented: Most Improved Math, Science, and Social Studies Student. Only one non-Black student received this distinction. Black students were also much more likely to receive the award for Outstanding Athlete in their class.
Social Status and Positions

Do all South Boulevard students, regardless of their race or socioeconomic status, have equal access to high status social positions at school? Because South Boulevard is an elementary school, there are no social positions for which elections are held, such as student council, student government, or cheerleaders. There are, however, several kinds of social positions or activities in which students participate. The primary one, I argue, is called Beary Best Bears, which is a distinction given to all students who receive A’s on their weekly conduct sheets for both good conduct and work habits. Every week, each student has a blue sheet in which teachers keep track of his/her conduct and work habits. When students misbehave, they receive an X on their conduct sheet on that particular day of the week next to the corresponding rule they broke. If students get off task or fail to complete class work or homework, they receive an X on their sheet on the work habits section. Students can receive three X’s on their sheets and still receive a grade of A for conduct and work habits. They bring the conduct sheet home every Friday, have to get it signed by a parent, and return it on Monday. At the end of each nine week grading period, all students who have gotten A’s in conduct and work habits receive the “Beary Best Bears” award. They get to color a White paper bear, write their name on it, and post it on the wall outside Ms. Miller’s office, which she calls “The Bear Wall of Fame.” Students also get a small reward, like a sticker or a miniature eraser, or sometimes a popsicle or lollipop.

During my fieldwork, I discovered that many students receive the Beary Best Bear award. During one nine week period in 2006-2007, for instance, 110 students received Beary Best Bears award, which is 59% of the total student population. When I sat in a morning assembly and watched Ms. Miller recognize all the students who were Beary Best Bears for that nine weeks, it looked like there were equal numbers of Black and non-Black students who
received the award. I asked Ms. Miller for a list of the recipients so I could double check. After closer examination, I discovered that my assumption was correct: there were roughly equal numbers of Black and White Beary Best Bears. There were 57 Black and 53 non-Black students who were recognized. According to the total percentage of student enrollment, however, non-Black students are overrepresented in this award. The 57 Black students who received this distinction represented 45% of the total Black student enrollment. The 53 non-Black students represented 85% of the total non-Black student enrollment. These numbers represent an area that warrants further exploration in order to be able explain the differences in the numbers of students who receive this distinction, which is based on conduct and work habits. Do fewer Black students receive this award because of their behavior, or because of their work habits? Students get X’s on their conduct sheets if they do not complete their daily homework. Do more Black than non-Black students get X’s for incomplete homework? Was that particular nine weeks the norm, or was it an outlier? These questions demand further attention.

The unequal distribution between Black and non-Black recipients of the Beary Best Bear award are curious in light of another type of social distinction—the Citizenship or Courtesy Award, which is given to one boy and one girl in each class at the end of the year awards ceremony. At the 2007 awards ceremonies, Citizenship Awards were given to first through fifth graders: eleven Black and eight non-Black, a number which matches the racial breakdown of the student population of the school. Although nothing was offered by way of explanation when these awards were given, one might anticipate that similar behaviors are expected and required of students who receive the Citizenship Award as well as the Beary Best Bear award.

Another type of social distinction, new for the 2007-2008 school year, was the Magnet Student Ambassadors. The EBRP Magnet Program office asked each magnet program to invite
six students (three boys and three girls) to act as Magnet Student Ambassadors who would “serve as peer leaders and liaisons for each magnet program.” Ms. Miller and Madame Crawford chose three from the French fifth grade and three from the Spanish fifth grade class. Of these six, two were White, two were Black, and two were biracial. The student ambassadors received special polo shirts with lapel pins from the Magnet Program office that they were to wear on designated days. They were also asked to attend Magnet Mania and help promote the magnet program they attended, hopefully “creating a positive first and lasting impression on other students, parents, visitors, and the community.”

The last type of social event or distinction is the ability to attend “Point Parties.” Approximately every two weeks, Ms. Belford hosts what she calls a “Point Party” for all the students who have accumulated enough AR points. In order to attend their first Point Party, students must earn at least 10 AR points. In order to attend subsequent parties, students must accumulate an additional four points per party. Tests range from 0.5 points for short picture books all the way up to 44 points for the seventh Harry Potter book. Most students, particularly at the lower elementary levels, read early chapter books that are worth one to two points each. Students can take tests during recess and during class, if time permits.

The Point Parties are a major social event. Participation in the AR program is strictly voluntary and is not part of students’ academic grade. Students clamor to earn their four additional points so that they can attend the parties, which are usually held in the library. The day before a point party, Ms. Belford posts a list of the students who will be able to attend the party. Students rush up to the list, checking for their name.

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62 This quote comes from a letter from the Director of Innovative and Specialized Programs (formerly known as Magnet Programs) to parents of students who were invited to serve in this capacity.
During point parties, students let their hair down. They sit around tables in the library talking, cracking jokes, and giggling. Ms. Belford always provides treats, sometimes according to the season, like King Cake for Mardi Gras, Christmas cookies in December, and conversation hearts in February. She usually gives a special treat bag to the student with the most points. Sometimes, if there are less than ten students who qualify, she buys Happy Meals for all of them. Students who qualify are sometimes allowed to have free dress on point party days, so everyone can tell whether a student qualified to attend the point party or not.

Approximately 10 to 20 students accumulate enough points to attend the point parties. Considering their percentage of the overall student body, non-Black students are overrepresented at the point parties. For example, sixteen students attended the Dr. Seuss Day party: nine non-Black students and seven Black students, 10 girls and six boys. After attending that party, I asked Ms. Belford if that particular party had been representative of other point parties in terms of the race and gender of the students who attended. She looked somewhat surprised and then said: “I don’t even look at color. I just see a sea of kids. I don’t even notice that.” After going through a mental list of students who had attended that party, she conceded: “There aren’t more Whites than Blacks, but percentage-wise, maybe.” On another occasion, Ms. Belford told me that she is the one responsible for taking pictures of the students at school events and posting them on two bulletin boards in the school. She told me that she is always careful to make sure that she has pictures of both Black and White students to display and that if she does not, she waits until she has pictures that represent diverse groups of students before displaying them. After our discussion about the race of students who typically attend point parties, she seemed to withdraw somewhat and I left the library worried that she felt that I had judged her unfairly, which was certainly not my intent.
Inclusion of Minority and Majority Subcultures in Curriculum and Activities

The third aspect of “integration” as defined by Henderson, von Euler and Schneider (1981) is the degree to which minority as well as majority subcultures are included in curriculum and activities. In terms of curriculum, South Boulevard uses the same curriculum used across the state of Louisiana: the “Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum.” The Comprehensive Curriculum was written by committees of “Louisiana teachers, nationally recognized content area consultants and the Louisiana Department of Education staff.” The Louisiana State Department of Education allowed districts to develop their own curriculum, use the state curriculum as a framework to develop a local curriculum, or adopt the state’s Comprehensive Curriculum. Ninety-five percent of the districts opted to adopt the Comprehensive Curriculum in 2005. State educational policymakers indicated that the standardized curriculum was written and adopted to address the problem of student mobility and to more closely align what students are taught and what they are tested on standardized tests each spring.63

According to Charles Lussier, education reporter for The Advocate, EBRP mandates that schools and teachers follow the new curriculum more stringently than other districts. He explains that

The phrase comprehensive curriculum appears 18 times in the strategic plan the School Board adopted in June. The system has developed guides to help teachers pace themselves. It has hired 14 content trainers to help schools use the curriculum. It has established five-member Instructional Management Teams at every school to implement the new curriculum (Lussier, 2005, December 18).

Furthermore, at the end of each unit, EBRP students take a district-developed test which is formatted and graded similarly to the LEAP and the i-LEAP. During my fieldwork, a French teacher showed me a copy of the comprehensive curriculum. She rolled her eyes, heaved a huge

63 Information regarding the Comprehensive Curriculum was copied directly from the actual curriculum itself.
sigh, and then pointed out a description of precisely what lesson and activities she was supposed to be doing on that particular day in math.

Many national textbooks document the ways in which their textbooks are correlated with the Comprehensive Curriculum. Venezky (1992) posits that textbooks function as a “surrogate curriculum” and explores the ways in which federal and state government, the textbook publishers, and citizen action groups control the textbook content. It is not within the scope of this dissertation to analyze the comprehensive curriculum for elements of majority as well as minority subcultures. However, in addition to the Comprehensive Curriculum, which represents the traditional, Eurocentric curriculum, I will point out several aspects of schooling at South Boulevard that include minority subcultures.

Minority subcultures are included in the curriculum through the implementation of the immersion curriculum. Several research studies (Goldring & Smrekar, 2000; Metz, 1983; Rosenbaum & Presser, 1978) have explored the interrelationships between magnet programs, desegregation, and social relationships. Rosenbaum and Presser (1978) and Metz (1983) focused on the ways in which the unique curricular offerings at magnet school sites affected social relationships between students. Results from this study likewise indicate that the foreign language immersion curriculum influences social relationships at South Boulevard. The immersion curriculum, with its focus on second language acquisition, privileges neither the majority (White) nor the minority (Black) culture. Rather, it represents a third culture—one that is new to virtually all the students at South Boulevard.

Multicultural education advocates have proposed three curriculum models that emphasize cultural understanding, cultural competence, or cultural emancipation (McCarthy, 1993). The cultural understanding model emphasizes sensitivity to ethnic, cultural, and religious differences
in the classroom. Troyna and Williams (1986) refer to this attitude as a “benign stance” towards racial inequality that focuses on sameness and consensus. The cultural competence model (Banks, 1981) focuses on enabling minority students to preserve their own language and culture while at the same time developing competence for the public sphere, which is synonymous with White, middle-class America. Cultural emancipation, the most transformative model, focuses on the development of a positive self-concept for minority students and calls for the inclusion of aspects of minority cultures in the school curriculum. This model assumes that schools reproduce social inequality because they privilege White middle-class values and marginalize minority cultures.

Aspects of all three models are present at South Boulevard. Evidence of the cultural understanding model at South Boulevard can be found, for example, in Señora Reyes’ story of how she tells each new class on the first day of school: “Everybody here is the same. Everybody here is a human being, so we don’t have differences.” This attitude essentially erases cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences that may be self-affirming, particularly to minority students. Some, such as Ladson-Billings (1994) and Paley (1979), have cautioned against this tendency to negate cultural differences by failing to acknowledge their importance—both in terms of the child’s identity and in terms of lesson planning and instruction. Ladson-Billings (1994) asserts that the tendency of American teachers to equate equity with sameness actually impairs their ability to meet the educational needs of their students. King (1991) refers to this “uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given” as “dysconscious racism” (p. 135).

While the immersion curriculum does not explicitly include multicultural education, it does promote diversity according to the cultural understanding framework. Teachers in the
sample believe that participation in the immersion program makes students more accepting and more aware of difference. Madame Crawford explained that the immersion curriculum exposes students to diversity to a greater degree than a traditional curriculum:

> I do think it makes them more culturally aware. We have Vietnamese children here. We have Hispanic children here. We have East Indian children here. So we have a mixed culture of students and parent population that they get to be exposed to and see that we’re all people. I really think they get a much better sense of that.

Madame Rivet, a native of Belgium, noted that being in the immersion program “opens the mind of the children that there is not just their country, that not everyone is the same.” When I asked Madame Rivet whether it was important to try to have diverse school populations, she explained that learning a foreign language necessarily involves promotion of tolerance and acceptance: “Of course, we’re in foreign language. So it’s already . . . try to get along with more people.” Ms. Gonzalez also commented that the immersion curriculum, by definition, promotes respect, explaining: “This is the idea. You are in immersion, and immersion means that you need to know other cultures. You have to respect.”

In terms of the cultural competence model, South Boulevard is unique because whereas traditional schools require only minority students to develop competence in the dominant language of schools—Standard Edited English (SEE)—the immersion curriculum requires all students to demonstrate competence in a language other than their native language. While some students may come to school with linguistic capital more congruent with the school than others, learning to negotiate in a new language diminishes linguistic and cultural advantages or disadvantages some students may have. At South Boulevard, White students do not get to rely on the linguistic capital they bring to school as speakers of the dominant language of the school while minority students struggle to maintain their language and culture and learn to negotiate the dominant language and culture of the school. Students demonstrate competence in their new
language in multiple ways, including listening, speaking, writing, and reading. They sing songs, they converse with each other and with teachers, they write word problems in math, they discuss landforms and natural resources in social studies, they draw and label parts of the atom in science—and all in French or Spanish. They actually don’t do any of these things in English, the native tongue of all but one or two South Boulevard students.

Unlike the cultural understanding and cultural competence models, the cultural emancipation model does not encourage assimilation; rather, it “allows for the possibility that the scope of current school knowledge will be ‘enlarged’ to include the radical diversity of knowledge, histories, and experiences of marginalized ethnic groups” (McCarthy, 1993, p. 240). Despite the use of the standardized Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum, I argue that the immersion curriculum at South Boulevard has transformative potential because it enlarges the current school knowledge and includes study and exploration of minority groups. At South Boulevard, grade level teachers choose a French-speaking and a Spanish-speaking country on which to focus throughout the year. During International Week in mid-April, the school highlights those countries. During the International Program, held Friday morning during International Week, students sing folk songs, perform dances, and wear traditional dress from that country (where possible). In April 2007, a Guatemalan woman from the community loaned elaborate, traditional Guatemalan dresses (polleras) to two South Boulevard fifth-graders—one Black and one White—to wear for the program. She came to the school at 7:30 a.m. to fix the girls’ hair in accordance with the customary dress. With help from families, teachers and students make displays of artifacts, maps, books, and postcards from those countries. Student artwork, including maps and such things as travel brochures and pictures of landmarks from the chosen countries, are displayed in the hallways.
The teachers rotate through a master list of all the Spanish- and French-speaking countries. For the 2007-2008 school year, the French-speaking countries are Vietnam, Belgium, and Cameroon; the Spanish-speaking countries are El Salvador, Puerto Rico, and Costa Rica. Thus, by the end of fifth grade, students will have learned about six countries where their target language is spoken, as well as being exposed to the six countries of the other target language. In addition to the Comprehensive Curriculum, then, South Boulevard students are also exposed throughout the year to content about another country. For the French students, many of these countries are part of Africa. When I asked Kayley whether they learned about French-speaking countries in school, she said “For the international program, we have to learn about a French country. And we do a lot of research on it and stuff.” She told me that this year, they were learning about Tunisia. When I asked her if she knew where Tunisia was, she said: “It’s in Africa next to Algeria and Libya.” She said they had learned about the Cote d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast) in third grade and Canada in second grade. Sylvester, a black French fifth grader, told me that they had learned about Nouvelle Calédonie (New Caledonia) one year. I feel comfortable asserting that Tunisia and the Ivory Coast are countries unfamiliar to most American fourth-graders and perhaps even many American adults. Thus, while it is not part of the official curriculum (the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum), study of these French- and Spanish-speaking countries is an important part of the curriculum. Inclusion of these elements can be considered either part of the minority subculture or part of a third subculture—a subculture that is the domain of neither the Black nor the non-Black students.

**The Immersion Subculture**

The immersion curriculum creates a unique subculture in which students participate. Some teachers allow their students to choose a French or Spanish name at the beginning of the
school year by which they are known throughout the year. Other teachers pronounce the
students’ American names the way they would be pronounced in either French or Spanish, which
makes them take on a new quality. Students refer to the French teachers with the titles of
“Madame,” “Mademoiselle,” or “Monsieur” and the Spanish teachers as “Señora” or “Señorita.”
Administrators and parents likewise use these titles when talking about the teachers. Students
adopt an identity pertaining to the immersion subculture, referring to each other as “French kids”
or “Spanish kids,” rather than referring to themselves and others as White, Black, Mexican, or
Asian.

While I do not mean to imply that the “French” or “Spanish” identity at South Boulevard
becomes more important than students’ original identity, albeit racial, linguistic, religious, or
cultural, I do feel comfortable asserting that it becomes one of many identities students possess.
They perceive themselves as French- and Spanish-speakers and are proud of themselves. Kayley
explained: “I feel proud that I speak French.” Taylor similarly said: “You feel like you’re
different because you speak a different language all day.” A mother of a first-grade Spanish
student told me during fieldwork that her son “is so proud of himself that he speaks Spanish. He
tells everyone he knows that he speaks Spanish.” Furthermore, they know that most other
American children their age do not speak a second language. Kayley also explained that South
Boulevard is “cool because you learn a different language.” I then asked her: “You don’t think
that happens at other schools?” and she responded: “Well, that you learn a different language
fluently. They learn, like, phrases, or they learn how to write a few words.”

South Boulevard parents—very few of whom speak a second language themselves—are
also proud of their children’s second language abilities. Yolanda recalled walking in to an open
house
and the kids were in there talking to each other. And all the parents are in the corner—just standing there glazed over. Cause we were like: ‘They’re speaking French!’ Didn’t understand a word they were saying, but it was just so matter of fact. It was very impressive.

Señora Lopez similarly told me: “I just saw two parents in the supermarket and they started telling their children: ‘Speak to her in Spanish. Speak to her in Spanish.’ And they feel very proud of them.” Hong, a native speaker of Vietnamese, similarly told me that she loves hearing her children speak the second language: “I love listening to them talk. You know when the teachers talk and they reply? I love hearing that.” Hong also commented several times that she thought it was important for students to learn a second language when they are young because they can “speak it very well. Without that American accent.” Thus, speaking Spanish or French becomes a new aspect of students’ identities of which parents and students are proud.

There is very little interaction—particularly in the younger grades—between French and Spanish students. Students tend to stick with their particular class, which includes students studying their same language, although they sometimes play with same-language students of a different grade. They tend to not even know the names of students in the other second language classes. Instead, they are more likely to know the names of students in higher or lower grades that learn their same language. Because of the smaller size of the older grades (due to attrition), the older students do interact with other-language students in the same-grade. During the 2007-2008 school year, for instance, there are only five fourth-grade French students and five fifth-grade Spanish students. Thus, while the fourth and fifth grade students do tend to interact across languages, “French” and “Spanish” are still the most frequently-invoked labels used to identify each other.

Both teachers and parents agreed that students tend to interact primarily with students learning their same language. The school encourages this division, I argue, by suggesting
competitions between the French and the Spanish students, such as offering a reward to whichever language group brings the most canned goods to a food drive. Teachers unwittingly encourage this division by encouraging competitions on tests to see whether the French or the Spanish students perform better. Ms. Lawson said that she does see the students divide themselves along these lines, but explained that “It’s just what they’re used to. And it’s even more so here, because they’ve been together year after year after year. There’s never any scrambling.”

Richard added that he thinks students tend to divide themselves this way because French classes tend to interact with other French classes and because French teachers tend to interact and speak more frequently with other French teachers. Thus, students are simply exposed more often to other students from same-language classes. Furthermore, Richard explained, “They have brothers and sisters in French. Thomas’s brother is in French. Kayley’s brother is in French. Josh and Bobby are both in French. Peter’s older sister was in French.” Students are more familiar with their siblings’ friends, who also tend to be in the same language. This familiarity includes the parents as well, who tend to see each other at class parties, field trips, and birthday parties. Parents of same language students tend to chat more after school at pick-up time because their children are in the same classes. Thus, because of the small size of the school, the division between French and Spanish includes everyone in the school community. The language of study is a major way in which students, teachers, and parents divide and categorize themselves.

I posit that these language labels encourage cross-racial friendships common at South Boulevard. Students do not label students as “Black,” “White,” or “Hispanic;” for instance, but rather, “French” or “Spanish”—terms that do not have any direct link to the students themselves.
Few South Boulevard students are native speakers of either language: there is one native Spanish-speaking girl in the first grade this year and one Hispanic fifth-grader whose parents are native Spanish-speakers. Thus, the “French” and “Spanish” labels are new to virtually all of the students and are unique to their identities at the school. Ms. Lawson shared a funny anecdote with me regarding these labels: “I laugh and say that they’re all gonna be in therapy, because when they fill out a job form that says: ‘Please specify your ethnic origin,’ they’re gonna say ‘French’ or ‘Spanish.’” While perhaps amusing, this comment speaks to a much larger issue: the value of having another kind of label—a third category that is separate from the students’ race, gender, class, and religion. I argue that the focus on and participation in the immersion subculture encourages the development of genuine cross-racial friendships.

The current school knowledge is also enlarged by the international teaching staff, through whom students are exposed to diverse perspectives linked neither to the majority nor the minority subcultures. I argue that the international teaching staff necessarily highlights difference in ways that White, American teachers are either unable or unlikely to authentically do. Ms. Miller explained that students

learn to accept and see the differences among themselves, I think because their teachers are from other countries. I mean, the teacher is not from the same culture that most of them are from. So there’s an acceptance there and that just leads to looking at how other people do things.

She explained further that “because we’re working with diverse cultures, it opens up the acceptance of diversity more than a standard, you know, I’m White, you’re Black, type thing.” On the way home from school once, I overheard a conversation between my two daughters and one of their classmates. My daughter was talking about how her teacher had said something incorrectly during class. Her friend responded: “But that’s okay because English isn’t her first language.” Taylor recalled that one day during a class lesson on expansionism, a student pointed
on a map to where their teacher was from and then the teacher “told a story and talked about her country and how it was different from here. And how it was the same in some ways.” Thus, the fact that so many of the teachers are from countries outside the United States opens up opportunities for discussion regarding the life experiences of the teachers and how they differ and are the same as those of the American students.

**Conclusion**

Members of the South Boulevard school community—including parents, teachers, administrators, and students—value the quality of social integration found at South Boulevard. According to the three dimensions identified by Henderson, von Euler and Schneider (1981), South Boulevard is “genuinely integrated” with a few exceptions that warrant further study, such as differences in interactions between students outside the regular school day (i.e. birthday parties) and differences in the degree to which students have equal access to particular high status academic and social positions. For example, the higher participation of White students in the AR program warrants further exploration into attitudes towards literacy that may explain differences in participation. In addition, the overrepresentation of non-Black students who receive the Beary Best Bear award also raises questions about the classroom behavior of South Boulevard students and the classroom management styles of the teachers.

Much of the culture of integration at South Boulevard is attributable to the immersion subculture. The immersion curriculum includes elements of minority subcultures, as well as the immersion subculture, which grants all students new and equal identities at school. While South Boulevard uses the same curriculum used across the state of Louisiana, teachers add to it by studying a French- or Spanish-speaking country every year. The immersion curriculum also necessitates an international teaching staff. Rather than having either mostly Black or mostly
White teachers, the teaching staff at South Boulevard is quite diverse, with teachers from European, Caribbean, and South American countries. Relationships between students and between students and teachers are characterized, for the most part, by cross-racial acceptance. Although participants in the sample were reluctant to discuss the race issue, they did recall several incidences where race played a prominent role in social relationships. These incidents, however, were overshadowed by many more descriptions of cross-racial friendships and by fieldwork observations that revealed similar patterns.

Thus, I conclude that the foreign language immersion magnet program at South Boulevard has successfully achieved one of the primary objectives for which it was created: attracting a racially diverse student population. Even more importantly, the foreign language immersion curriculum and the international teaching staff help to create a culture of integration in which healthy social relationships, both within and across racial lines, flourish.
CHAPTER SEVEN: A CULTURE OF CHOICE

Bridget: “When you’ve heard nothing but bad things about the public school system and then you find there’s a tiered system, we want our kids to have the better opportunity.”

Shannon: “We felt like this community was very closed to racial issues and it is still very divided, so we wanted to make sure that our children were exposed to different socioeconomic backgrounds and different racial backgrounds.”

Attending Magnet Mania, the yearly recruiting event for EBRP Magnet Programs, is like shopping for the perfect Christmas gift the day before Christmas. In the weeks leading up to it, Magnet Mania is advertised all over town: on electronic and old-style billboards, in movie theaters, on city buses, and in local magazines and newspapers. It’s like a social event. In the hallways of the Cortana Mall in north Baton Rouge, each magnet program sets up a booth that showcases their program. Magnet teachers and administrators in matching t-shirts stand by the booths and offer sales pitches. The product? Their unique magnet program. Teachers display their best student work, play video montages of their students in action, and answer questions from prospective parents.

Parent volunteers rave about the programs and brag about their children’s musical or second language or science knowledge as a result of being in the magnet program. Parent volunteers stand around the booth exchanging pleasantries with teachers and chatting with each other when there’s a lull in the foot traffic by their booth. Only the best students are invited to come to the event to show off their prowess or intellect. Students sing, dance, play their instruments, play games in a second language, and demonstrate science experiments at scheduled intervals. Volunteering at Magnet Mania is like being a part of the “in-crowd” or like joining Amway or perhaps a sorority.
Like last-minute Christmas shoppers, everyone hurries around, searching for the right program, trying to find the perfect fit for the unique needs of their child. Potential customers weave in and out and between crowds of people just to get around, sometimes elbowing their way around and jostling for position at a particular booth. Like perfume salespeople that interrupt shoppers to give their sales pitches, parent and student volunteers vie for their attention, giving away freebies, like pens printed with their school’s name and coupons for free food and 20% off purchases in mall stores. They ply prospective parents with expensive, full-color invitations to Open Houses the following week to see the programs first-hand. Prospective parents ask questions about the application process: how hard is it to get in? when will we know? how many spots are available? Despite assurances from magnet office personnel that all applications received by the deadline will be processed together, one parent tells another that she is going to arrive at the magnet program she chooses first thing in the morning—the first day of the application period—to ensure that her application will be processed first. The EBRP magnet office has their own table set up in a central location where they are giving out applications. At the magnet office table, parents can fill out a ticket for a raffle. The prize? A seat in the magnet program of your choice.

Magnet Mania, thus, aptly describes the “mania” associated with the school selection process in EBRP. Parents feel competitive—even guilty, plagued with thoughts that if their White son gets in to a particular program, their best friend’s White son or daughter may not. Moms run out to their mailboxes every day as soon as the application period ends to see if an acceptance (or rejection) letter is in the box. This event speaks volumes about the encroachment of the market into the educational sphere (Apple, 2006). There is something unsettling about schools, supposedly the “great equalizers,” raffling off seats in special programs with limited
availability. That’s what businesses do. But education is becoming more and more like business. And just like businesses behave in ways that reinforce capitalism and the inequalities inherent in the market system, schools are likewise beginning to behave in ways that reinforce those same inequalities. Magnet Mania, with all its business-related paraphernalia and advertising, symbolizes this trend towards the increasing corporatization and marketization of schooling. Parents behave like customers—frantically shopping around, trying to choose the perfect Christmas gift: a school for their children.

**School Choice**

Public education in the United States has long been considered a public good, although its role has been frequently contested as it has often served different members of the public inequitably. As Apple (2006) states, “Education is a site of struggle and compromise [that serves] as a proxy . . . for larger battles over what our institutions should do, whom they should serve, and who should make these decisions” (p. 30). The purpose of public schooling was challenged by the landmark *Brown* (1954) decision, which placed the onus of creating an equitable society on schools. Many southern schools actually closed down rather than desegregate. The first school choice program emerged in Virginia to provide public funds to White students to enable them to attend private academies and thereby avoid having to attend school with Black students (Friedman, 1955). School choice as an educational reform became popular in the 1980s in response to criticisms that the United States was losing its competitive edge in the global economy because schools were not adequately preparing schoolchildren. Since then, school choice has gained support in many urban school districts. There are many different varieties of school choice, including magnet programs, charter schools, inter- and intra-district transfers, voucher plans, privatization of public schools, and for-profit schools.
School choice advocates argue that school choice can potentially improve public education in four primary ways. First, school choice gives low-income and/or minority students access to higher quality schools to which they might otherwise not have access (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Fuller, 2002). This argument lies behind the school choice element of NCLB (2001) legislation, which allows parents with children at failing schools to send their children to higher-performing schools. Second, choice forces schools to improve their quality of education in order to be able to compete for students in a competitive school market (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Friedman, 1955; Glenn, 1991). Choice will allow students to abandon bad schools in favor of good ones. Third, school choice opens up opportunities for parents to become more involved in their children’s education (Fuller, 2002). Fourth, school choice is an effective tool to achieve racial desegregation (Rossell, 1990).

A major assumption behind school choice as an urban education reform is that parents are most satisfied with their children’s education when they are allowed to choose the kind of schools their children attend (Goldring & Shapira, 1993; Raywid, 1980; Teske & Schneider, 2001). The theory of family sovereignty, for instance, suggests that parents have the right to choose a school for their children and that they will make the best decision because they have the most intimate knowledge of their children’s needs (Coons & Sugarman, 1978). Rational choice theory suggests that individuals act in their own self-interest and choose alternatives they think “will provide the highest net benefit as weighed by [their] own preferences” (Ostrom & Ostrom, 1971, p. 205). Although many might dispute their argument, Bankston and Caldas (2002) rely on rational choice theory when they claim that White flight from public schools in Louisiana is not attributable to racism, as some might argue, but simply to rational choice decision-making. Parents, they assert, “seek educational environments that will maximize the opportunities of their
own children” (Bankston & Caldas, 2002, p. 72). Thus, school choice advocates argue that allowing parents to participate in school choice actually enhances democracy by engaging parents in the educational process and by giving all parents equal opportunity to get their children into the best schools.

School choice opponents (Apple, 2006; Kozol, 1991; Metz, 1990; Moore & Davenport, 1989) argue that school choice will damage democratic, public education in three primary ways. First, they argue that education is a public good that should be funded by public funds. Choice programs, however, rather than leveling the playing field by allowing socioeconomically-disadvantaged and minority children to attend higher quality schools, essentially subsidize private education for wealthy families by diverting funds formerly earmarked for public education to private schools. School choice opponents caution against distributing public funds (in the form of vouchers or tax credits for private school tuition) to private entities which are not held accountable by the public for the way they spend those dollars (Moe, 2002).

Second, school choice exacerbates inequalities in education because lower income parents have less access to information about school options and therefore are less able to navigate school choice systems. School choice, then, actually increases social stratification (Apple, 2006; Bastian, 1992; Kozol, 1991; Metz, 1990; Moore & Davenport, 1989). Bastian (1992) asserts that school choice models actually “accelerate the growing gap between educational ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’” (p. 97) and Moore (1990) refers to them as “the new improved sorting machine.”

Third, by forcing public schools to compete in a market system, parents and students become consumers of a product—schooling—and all parents will naturally seek the best product (education) for their own children (Apple, 2006). Self-interested decision-making by parents
may lead to outcomes that are less desirable from a broader societal perspective. Parents may choose to send their children to school with other children of the same racial, cultural, and/or religious background, resulting in segregated, homogeneous student populations. Affluent parents may choose to send their children to schools with other affluent children, resulting in socioeconomically-stratified schools. School choice thus jeopardizes a primary mission of public education—educating all students to become socially responsible citizens of an egalitarian, democratic society.

In Baton Rouge, forced desegregation has resulted in dual school systems—a private system that is 86% White and a public system that is 83% Black—in which choice plays an important role. It is no longer a matter of simply registering your child at the school nearest your home. The growing private school population makes it clear that many parents in EBRP are opting out of the public school system—a choice which threatens the mission of public schooling to promote democratic, civically-minded citizens.

In this chapter, I describe the educational decision-making context in EBRP in order to situate South Boulevard within a larger social context. Because EBRP relies heavily on magnet schools, a type of school choice program, and because South Boulevard is a magnet school, I review school choice literature that identifies school characteristics that make White and middle-class parents unwilling to choose particular magnet schools. Finally, I explore the factors that motivated parents to choose South Boulevard over numerous alternatives in a highly competitive school choice market. South Boulevard is a public magnet school, which means two things: 1) it has a distinctive educational offering—a foreign language immersion program, and 2) it draws students from all over the parish. Thus, all the parents in this study overlooked public and private schools near their homes and instead chose a public school far from their homes, in many
cases. They chose a dilapidated public school located in an inner-city neighborhood. They chose a public school in which two-thirds of the student population was minority and approximately the same percentage eligible for free and reduced meals. In other words, despite research (Bankston & Caldas, 2002; Rossell, 1985a; Rossell, Armor, & Walberg, 2002) that suggests that White parents will not voluntarily choose to send their children to deteriorated, inner-city schools far from their homes and attended by mostly socioeconomically-disadvantaged and minority children, these parents did and are satisfied with their decision.

**School Choice in East Baton Rouge Parish**

For many parents in Baton Rouge, registering children for school is a difficult decision that in the past involved simply registering at the nearest neighborhood school. In the current socio-political climate of school choice, however, many factors must be weighed. How good is the school? How does one judge the success of a school? Where is the school located? Is transportation to and from the school provided by the system? What kind of curriculum is taught? What kinds of special programs or services are available? What kinds of teachers work at the school? Are they “highly-qualified” according to NCLB (2001)? What kinds of children attend the school? These kinds of questions weigh heavily on the minds of parents in EBRP.

Among parent participants in this study sample, there was a range in the degree of deliberation involved in choosing to enroll their children at South Boulevard. For some parents, it was a laborious, time-consuming process that involved visiting many schools—both public and private—before choosing South Boulevard. For others, the process was much less complicated; learning of the school’s foreign language immersion program was all the information they needed to choose South Boulevard. For some parents, knowing that it was a magnet school was enough. During the decision-making process, South Boulevard parents in the study sample
grouped their available school choice options into three categories: private schools, regular (non-magnet) public schools, and magnet schools.

**Private Schools**

Many parents in Baton Rouge begin the process of choosing a school for their children early—even before birth. I know a mother who moved into a particular neighborhood when she became pregnant and began attending the parish Catholic church to ensure her child’s admission into the parish parochial school. Moms of pre-schoolers frequently chat about which school their child/ren will attend. Family socioeconomic status weighs heavily into this equation since many parents cannot afford private school tuition, which ranges from approximately $3000 to $12,000 a year in EBRP ("Private and parochial 2008 school guide", 2008). Private schools host elaborate open houses in which they give tours and offer refreshments to recruit new families. Private schools advertise in local magazines, such as *Baton Rouge Parents Magazine*, 225, and the *Greater Baton Rouge Business Report*. *Baton Rouge Parents Magazine* has an annual issue focusing on private schools and another highlighting public school options.

A survey conducted in March 2006 by the recently-established parent-teacher organization at South Boulevard indicated that more than half of respondents (94 out of 166) considered sending their child/ren to a private or parochial school before learning about South Boulevard’s program. Many (11 out of 24) parents in the study sample visited private schools. Six of those eleven parents had children who had attended those private schools either as preschoolers or in kindergarten before enrolling at South Boulevard. Eleven parents, however, indicated that they could not afford private school tuition. Terrence, for instance, said that he and his wife felt that South Boulevard was “the best alternative other than paying for private schools.” For David, paying private school tuition was “just out of our league.” Denise and
Christian both mentioned affordability as well. As Denise explained, “You can’t afford that [private school tuition] on a teacher’s salary.” Susan had a daughter who had attended private school for kindergarten and first grade, but when the tuition increased significantly at second grade, she became unable to afford the tuition and chose South Boulevard because of the immersion program. When I asked Susan whether she would have kept her daughter in the private school if she could have afforded the tuition, she quickly responded: “Oh, absolutely! No doubt in my mind, I would have kept her where she was—private school.”

**Regular (Non-Magnet) Public Schools**

One problem in comparing the public and private school systems in Baton Rouge is that there is no single entity or organization that evaluates private schools. Private schools are not held to the same requirements as public schools are under the *NCLB* (2001) legislation. Private school students are not required to take standardized tests. And even if they do take these kinds of tests, they are not required to report their students’ scores. Private schools are not required to report student demographic data, qualifications of their teaching staff, average class sizes, or per-pupil expenditures. Thus, it is impossible to objectively compare the private and public school systems in Baton Rouge, or anywhere else, for that matter. The only measure useful for comparing these two school systems is public opinion—however subjective it may be. And according to public opinion, private schools are excellent and public schools are awful. In spite of the difficulties in comparing the public and private systems, data regarding the accountability ratings provided by the Louisiana Department of Education does provide us with information regarding the public school system.

EBRP is the largest public school system in Louisiana and one of the 100 largest school districts in the U.S. according to student enrollment. Louisiana consistently ranks near the
bottom educationally when compared to other states. Louisiana’s average ACT composite score in 2007 (20.1) gives it a ranking of 47th out of 51 states and the District of Columbia (ACT, 2007). In 2006, Louisiana public school fourth-graders ranked 49th in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test; eighth-graders ranked 46th in math on the NAEP. Louisiana ranks 50th in terms of parental education level, with only 32% of Louisiana children having at least one parent with a post-secondary degree and 51st in terms of parental employment, with only 61.5% of Louisiana children having at least one parent working full time and year-round (Editorial Projects in Education, 2008). Louisiana ranks 47th among the states in family income, with 50.3% of Louisiana schoolchildren coming from families with incomes at least 200% of the poverty level (Editorial Projects in Education, 2008). Furthermore, student achievement in EBRP, as measured by standardized test scores, is abysmally low. According to 2006-2007 Louisiana state accountability ratings, the EBRP system ranked 51st out of 61 districts in the state. At the school level, 25 EBRP public schools (30%) received a school performance label of Academically Unacceptable (see Table 1.1).

Parents in the Baton Rouge area, then, are justifiably worried about the quality of education available at EBRP public schools. For many—particularly Baton Rouge natives who either have a family history of private education or who lived through tumultuous years of ever-shifting attendance zones and long bus rides across the city—public school is simply not an acceptable alternative. In this regard, parents in this sample are similar to many others in the Baton Rouge area. Despite their ultimate choice of a public school, many parents in the study sample had very negative attitudes and perceptions about EBRP public schools and actively sought to avoid them. In fact, almost all the parents in the sample (18/24) considered their regular (non-magnet), public school to be an entirely unacceptable choice. When I asked parents

64 Data obtained from the Louisiana Department of Education.
what their neighborhood school was, six parents could not even tell me its name or location. Two parents actually laughed. During interviews, PTO meetings, and impromptu conversations during carpool and at school events, South Boulevard parents explained that their negative perceptions of the regular (non-magnet) schools were based on two primary concerns: the quality of education and the kinds of students at those schools.

**Quality of Education in EBRP Public Schools**

Andrea, a White parent in the study sample who does bookkeeping for her husband’s law practice, never really considered her neighborhood school, although it was very close to her home, because she thought student achievement there was too low: “The test scores and all that stuff based off the school. I just wasn’t fully comfortable with it.” Shannon and her husband also looked at test scores across the district and found only two regular (non-magnet schools) with test scores they deemed sufficiently high, both of which were outside their neighborhood attendance zone. Thus, their daughters “couldn’t get into them, and I didn’t really wanna mess with going to a neighborhood school.”

Parents used labels that revealed some of their thought processes. Two parents distinguished between “magnet schools” and “public schools” (by which they actually meant non-magnet, public schools). When I asked Terrence how he would describe public schools in Baton Rouge to an outsider, he said: “I would tell ‘em they suck. They’re garbage.” When I asked him to elaborate, he said: “The public schools, I mean, it’s basically a big daycare facility. They’re just raisin’ them to work at McDonald’s.” Mona commented that she was happy with the education that her daughter got in the French immersion program, but only “because they weren’t in the regular program.”
Types of Students in EBRP Public Schools

Parents worried about the kinds of students at the regular (non-magnet) schools. Some worried about the racial composition of their neighborhood schools. For instance, Liz knew that her neighborhood school was “almost entirely minority and poor, and I didn’t want Morgan to be one of only possibly three White children.” Susan matter-of-factly explained that she looked at her neighborhood school at the time and “there was just absolutely no way. It was like 94 percent free lunch and almost entirely of one race. I actually looked at moving out of parish first before I would have put her there.”

Some parents worried about the behavior of students in the regular (non-magnet) schools. Tracy, for example, explained that after “seeing some of the kids in my neighborhood, I just didn’t want my kids in that environment.” Anthony had similar observations to make about regular (non-magnet) students:

There’s this little park over here where they have some basketball goals. We’ll go and play and the way those kids act, I’m sure they’re terrible at school. The language and the way they go back and forth at each other verbally and physically. And I don’t think that kind of stuff goes on at South Boulevard with those kids.

Media articles highlight dangerous and unfortunate events in EBRP schools. For instance, fights at two public high schools throughout September and October 2006 were featured on the front page of the local newspaper (*The Advocate*) and on a local TV channel as “Tonight’s Top Stories.” In November 2006, a man was arrested and accused of fondling a student in the boy’s restroom at a public elementary school. In March 2007, a 14-year-old middle school student alleged that she was sexually assaulted in the front seat of an EBRP school bus. Throughout March 2007, newspaper articles called attention to violent outbursts and discipline problems at an EBRP disciplinary center. All these stories ran as front-page material accompanied by large color photos.
Parents used special words to distinguish between the kinds of students in EBRP schools: several parents referred to students in regular (non-magnet) schools as the “regular kids” or “other kids” while referring to South Boulevard students as “our kids.” Felicia, a single Black high school graduate who works as a bank teller, noted that she doesn’t want her twins “to mix up with the other kids.” Susan used the term “regular” with disdain as she explained her reservations about having her daughter attend the newly-created middle school immersion program which was set up to be housed in a non-magnet school:

That’s the one [bad] thing about Westdale: they do have a regular group there. But Summer won’t be exposed to them except for possibly PE. So that would be the only possible class that she would be exposed to the general population. And that makes a difference to me.

Susan’s desire to keep her daughter isolated from the “general population” is an example of her and other parents’ desire to avoid EBRP neighborhood schools and their students. Critical theorists such as Giroux (2005) have criticized this societal tendency to view socioeconomically-disadvantaged youth of color as “a generation of suspects” (p. 59).

While some parents identified specific reasons for avoiding the neighborhood school, others offered abstract justifications. For instance, when I asked Donald why he didn’t consider their regular (non-magnet) school, he casually shrugged his shoulders and said “I think it was scratched out just because it was the neighborhood school. I don’t know, ‘cause it’s right in front of my house.” The 18 parents who rejected their regular (non-magnet) public schools represent all walks of life: White and Black, engineers and bank tellers, highly religious and non-religious, married and single, and Baton Rouge natives and out-of-staters. Parents in this sample simply were not willing to send their children to a regular (non-magnet), EBRP public school. In spite of racial, educational, professional, and socioeconomic differences, they shared a resolve to avoid the regular (non-magnet) public schools.
Magnet Schools

Within the public system, EBRP currently operates 59 elementary, 16 middle, and 18 high schools. The majority of schools are regular (non-magnet) schools attended by students who live within the neighborhood attendance zone. In addition to these neighborhood schools, there are dedicated magnet schools, magnet programs within regular schools (PWS), and gifted and talented programs, also housed in regular (non-magnet) schools. Approximately 12% of EBRP students attend a dedicated magnet, a PWS, or a gifted and talented program.

For parents in this study sample, EBRP magnet schools represent a third option—a space somewhere in between the regular (non-magnet) schools and the private schools. At the elementary level, EBRP offers the following magnet choices: two Montessori PWS, two dedicated academic magnets, one visual and performing arts magnet, the foreign language immersion program at South Boulevard, and the gifted and talented programs. Five parents mentioned the possibility of trying to get their children into an EBRP gifted program—but only if their children had not gotten into South Boulevard. Because the EBRP gifted and talented program did not figure prominently into parents’ decision-making processes and because the case study site is a magnet program, this study does not include further discussion of the EBRP gifted and talented program.

Parents in this study sample unanimously considered EBRP magnet schools to be superior to the regular (non-magnet) schools. In fact, half the parents in the sample, both Black and White, indicated that if the magnet programs had not been available, they would have enrolled their children in a private school. Denise explained: “If I hadn’t been able to get her into a magnet program, she would not have gone to a regular public ed school.” Donald likewise indicated that his son was “either gonna need to be in a magnet school or a private school.”
According to Terrence, a black father in the study sample, if the magnet programs were not available, “I would put ‘em into private school. Any private school, I didn’t care. Whoever has a private school. It didn’t matter.”

Three parents actually talked about what they would do to be able to afford private school tuition if their children had not gotten in to a magnet program. Terrence, who holds down two jobs—one as a firefighter and one as a realtor—said: “If my baby girl didn’t get accepted to a magnet school, I thought about taking some money out of my house and putting her in private school. I don’t want my kid to be a idiot.” Felicia said that if her daughters had not gotten into a magnet program, she would have sent them to a parochial school near her house: “It would have been expensive for me because I’m a single parent, so I just would have had to make the sacrifice. And my mom would have helped me pay for it.” Thus, for parents in the study sample, getting their children into an EBRP magnet program was a serious matter.

Academic literature on school choice has tended to focus on identifying characteristics of schools that make White and middle-class parents unwilling to choose particular magnet programs rather than identifying characteristics of schools that actually motivate parents to choose them. In the following section, I discuss three liabilities or concerns identified by extant school choice literature that keep many White and/or middle-class parents from choosing particular magnet programs: 1) the location of a given school and the consequent duration of the bus ride to get there, 2) the condition of the physical facility, and 3) the concentration of minority and socioeconomically-disadvantaged students (as defined by participation in the federal school lunch program). I then discuss how findings from this case study confirm or disconfirm previous conclusions.
Location

One liability frequently identified in magnet school and school choice research that makes White and/or middle-class parents unwilling to choose a particular magnet program is its location (Bridge & Blackman, 1978; Rossell, 1985b; Rossell & Armor, 1996). Desegregation consultant Rossell (1985b) notes: “If one were to rank the issues discussed in the order of their importance to parents, they might be the three factors said to be most important in real estate purchases: location, location, location” (p. 18). Rossell (1985b), who was intimately involved as a consultant in the EBRP desegregation litigation, elaborated on the importance of location in EBRP magnet programs:

A recent survey in the East Baton Rouge Parish school district . . . found that although parents were asked to identify what special programs might interest them, nearly 2/3 responded that the most important factor in their decision to enroll their child in a magnet program was its location (p. 18).

This survey was conducted in 1985, however, before the foreign language immersion program at South Boulevard began. Carlos Sam, the director of EBRP Magnet Programs, corroborated these studies that suggest that the location of magnet programs is critical to their success in attracting students to the programs. He said: “It’s like buying a house, you know, it’s location. South Boulevard is kind of in a nook. And so you don’t know about it unless you just happen to drive upon it.”

Furthermore, Rossell and Armor (1996) found that when the busing distance to attend a magnet program is 45 minutes or longer, only 5% of White parents indicated that they would definitely be willing to send their children to that program. South Boulevard is located on the far western boundary of EBRP, and most of the students thus live a considerable distance from the school. South Boulevard does not have direct bus service from any point in the parish to the school. All students who attend South Boulevard are picked up from a point near their homes.
and taken to a central transfer point, where they then get on another bus that takes them to South Boulevard. This makes the busing take significantly longer. In fact, all the parents in this sample whose children ride the bus spend more than 45 minutes on the bus.

Thus, many South Boulevard parents arrange their work schedules and make carpool arrangements to avoid making their children endure long bus rides. Indeed, more than half of the PTO survey respondents (96 out of 166) indicated that they drive their children directly to school. Transportation concerns and inconveniences did not deter them from choosing the school. Terrence, for instance, explained that his seven-year-old daughter has to catch the bus at 7:00 a.m. even though school does not begin until 8:30: “She’s on the bus a little longer, but that’s a sacrifice we have to make.” Shannon, whose daughters spend an hour on the bus to get to South Boulevard every morning, said:

I’d like my child to go to school around the corner from my house or close to my home to where she doesn’t have to ride the bus for an hour in the morning to get to school. But I still have them there in spite of that.

This finding differs from Rossell and Armor’s (1996) in that the school’s distance from their homes and, therefore, a long bus ride, did not dissuade parents in the sample from choosing South Boulevard. It may have dissuaded many parents from using the bus transportation provided by the parish, but was ultimately a liability they were willing to overlook.

Some parents were concerned about the neighborhood in which the school is located. Beauregard Town, an integrated neighborhood when it was first established in the 1800s, is unique in that single-family residences, multi-unit housing, and businesses are all allowed in the neighborhood. There are renovated houses in Beauregard Town that would be considered very expensive by Baton Rouge standards alongside ramshackle, shotgun homes. Parent comments about the neighborhood ranged widely from being concerned by the poor condition of the neighborhood to being assuaged by the fact that the city police station is located next door to the
school. Interestingly, three parents who said that the neighborhood concerned them were White and were not from Louisiana. Liz, for instance, said: “The neighborhood of the school was a small concern. It’s a run-down neighborhood.” Shannon likewise commented that the location concerned them because “it’s downtown, near a very low-income area.” Both Liz and Shannon indicated, however, that after spending time at and near the school, the neighborhood no longer concerned them. Shannon explained: “We drive through that area every day when we go to pick them up, and they’ve actually gone to the Thomas Delpit YMCA,\(^6\) so I’m comfortable there.”

Responses from parents originally from Baton Rouge differed from those not from Louisiana. Both Tracy and Richard identified the school’s location across the street from the city police station as a positive. Richard actually said: “They’re right next to the police station, so they’re safe. It’s not like there couldn’t be a billion cops there in a second.” The city police station, in fact, is across the street and fully visible from the South Boulevard playground, field, and basketball court. Donald described the diversity at the school in terms of its location, noting that there is

\(^6\) Thomas Delpit was a famous black leader and business owner from Baton Rouge. The Thomas Delpit YMCA is located in a majority-black neighborhood near South Boulevard.

Thus, the location of the school was a concern for some parents, while others considered it an advantage because of its proximity to the city police station. The parents who were concerned about the neighborhood surrounding the school or the distance between the school and their residences, however, wanted their children to be able to participate in the immersion program enough to overlook its location.
The Physical Facility

Christian: “But a building doesn’t make a classroom.”

Another liability frequently cited in academic research as a factor that makes parents unwilling to enroll their children in inner-city magnet programs is the condition of the physical facility. State-of-the-art facilities are cited as important to the success of magnet programs in New Haven, Connecticut (Perkins, Sullivan-DeCarlo, & Linehan, 2003). Stanley (1982) reports that in Houston, Texas, 48% of magnet school parents agreed that the physical appearance of the school would influence their decision to select that particular school. Levine and Eubanks (1980) studied three successful minority neighborhood magnets and found that one characteristic they all shared was an attractive building, even though perhaps old and remodeled. While many parents in this study sample did mention the condition of the physical facility as a negative characteristic of the school, all indicated that it was ultimately unimportant to them in their decision-making process.

The public school facilities in EBRP are notably poor. The community has not been supportive of levying taxes to pay for improvement of the facilities. The school board unsuccessfully attempted to levy taxes between 1964 and 1996 in order to fund new construction and repairs. The school board proposed a massive $2.2 billion tax and bond plan in 1996 that would have funded the construction of several new schools and the rebuilding of many others. However, the community voted against the proposal by a two-to-one margin (Jacobs, 2008, January 15). Regarding the state of EBRP school buildings, Christine Rossell, a nationally recognized desegregation consultant, noted: “I do not believe I have ever been in a school system where the schools were in such poor condition as a result of taxpayer non-support” (in Bankston & Caldas, 2002, p. 255). A more modest tax was successfully passed in 1998 and was renewed
in 2003. Five new schools have been built since 2002 and several more have been renovated and upgraded.

The physical facility of South Boulevard, originally built in 1949 by renowned local architect A. Hayes Town, is most definitely not in good physical condition, although the school district did pay to have new windows installed in the inside entryway in 2002. A group of auditors who assessed the condition of all the school buildings in EBRP in 1997 reported that South Boulevard was in “very poor condition” and in need of immediate renovation ("Building scorecard", 1997, April 17). The school, in fact, is scheduled to be demolished in 2009 because the school board has deemed that it would be too costly to bring the building up to current ADA standards. In spite of its poor physical condition, however, parents in the sample still chose it.

During interviews, I asked parents to recall the first time they visited the school and to describe their first impressions. In general, non-Louisianans (all of whom are non-Black) lamented the condition of the physical facility. For example, Shannon, a native of Indiana, commented: “We were highly disappointed. It was scary. The school is run-down. It’s decrepit. It’s awful-looking.” During a discussion at a PTO meeting about recruiting new students, another non-Louisianan mother told the group: “I mean, let’s face it. When I first saw the school, it turned my stomach.” Yet perhaps the strongest condemnation of the physical facility came from Bridget, a Canadian immigrant:

The building is in decay. I think it’s an embarrassment to the state, an embarrassment to the city, and quite frankly, an embarrassment to America. I think it’s appalling, the conditions that the kids are being taught in. It does not leave a good first impression. How can it? Peeling paint. Inadequately supplied rooms. The crowding is terrible.

Beyond their initial surprise by the condition of the physical facility, however, all the non-Louisianans had favorable impressions after touring the school. Both Javier and Laura, Hispanic evangelical pastors from Texas, said they were pleased that the school counselor
attended to them immediately (even though they arrived unannounced), took them on a tour of
the school, and showed them some Spanish classes. Laura recalled: “We were just real
impressed, because we went from the lower grades to the higher grades, with how well their
language had gotten in fourth grade. They were speaking. And speaking well—better than me!”
Javier echoed his wife’s positive impressions, commenting that “the teacher could communicate
with the kids in Spanish and they understood what she was saying. And they could do whatever
she was saying in Spanish.” Bridget responded similarly: “I sat in a class and observed. My
husband observed a class another day. I saw Señora Walker teaching third grade math. And we
really liked what we saw.”

In contrast, several Louisianans agreed that the facility was in poor physical condition
after I asked them about it, but most did not even mention it. The majority of these Louisianans
(13 out of 16) for whom the condition of the physical facility of South Boulevard was a non-
issue are from Baton Rouge. All but one of these 13 attended EBRP public schools in the 70s
and 80s. The condition of the school buildings then, as now, was poor. It is reasonable to
assume, then, that these parents attended schools in a similar condition as South Boulevard.

For example, Felicia, who actually attended South Boulevard more than twenty years
ago, said: “It looked the same and I just wish it would have been different, like they would have
fixed it up more. Because the bathroom, everything the same. It was like that when I went there.
The exact same.” However, she repeatedly noted during our interview: “But I knew I had fun at
that school” and “I had good days at South Boulevard.” Her childhood memories of South
Boulevard do not include the physical condition of the building. Denise and Christian, both
graduates of EBRP public schools, were not surprised by the condition of the building. Denise
said: “It’s what is expected,” and Christian said: “We’ve experienced it.” Denise echoed: “Baton
Rouge High School was the flagship school and yet when we were there, there were tiles falling off the auditorium.” When I asked them about the first time they saw South Boulevard, Denise remembered thinking: “It looks like every other run-down Baton Rouge school. So I just walked up and went: ‘Oh yeah, here’s another one of those.’” Tracy said: “I thought it was okay. The school—the building, the structure—was rather old.” Donald said his first thought was: “Wow. This is a old school. It wasn’t taken care of. It has not been. But looks are deceiving.” Thus, when the time came for these parents to choose a school for their children, their own experiences enabled them either to look beyond the condition of the physical facility or to expect decrepitude.

In contrast to the non-Louisianans who immediately recalled their negative impressions regarding the poor condition of the building during our interviews, the Louisiana natives (11 Black, six White) were more likely to comment on the school atmosphere, the teachers, and the principal. For instance, Tanecia remembered:

I liked walking in and seeing the kids’ classwork on the wall. I liked to see that it was on display and it’s in a different language. And I really liked seeing the ‘Bienvenido,’ ‘Bonjour’ signs. It just felt like this is a place where everyone’s welcome. Even though they just teach Spanish and French, I feel that everyone is welcome no matter. You could be from Japan and you’re welcome there.

Yolanda described a “very friendly, very warm atmosphere walking through.” Several Black, Louisiana natives recalled noticing the teachers and the principal. Yolanda, for example, said:

“All along the hallway, from the teachers to the janitor, everybody was just nice.” Terrence, perhaps the most vociferous critic of the EBRP school system, said:

Every school in Baton Rouge is raggedy to me. It’s old; they need to be rebuilding; they need better computers; they need everything. So when I go to a school here in Baton Rouge, I really don’t look at the structural. I try to get a feel for the administration and the teachers.

Camille recalled that she was very impressed and then elaborated: “I’ve always liked Ms. Miller and her straight forth attitude and concern that she has as it relates to parents. And making sure
that we are satisfied with the instruction of our kids.” Tracy noted: “I really admire Ms. Miller for the simple fact that she knows everybody’s names. I could see that she had a very good hold on the school and she was a very good leader.”

In conclusion, non-Louisianans were surprised—even shocked—by the condition of the actual school building whereas Louisiana natives either did not mention it or seemed almost indifferent. Louisianans more often recalled the inviting atmosphere of the school and positive impressions of the school staff. In spite of differences between what initially got their attention the first time they visited the school, however, all the parents agreed that the physical facility, while in poor condition, was not as important as what goes on inside the building.

Student Demographics

Another oft-cited barrier to choosing magnet programs is the concentration of minority and socioeconomically-disadvantaged students. This program provides free or reduced meals to schoolchildren whose families meet certain income requirements. Because this is a federal program, cost-of-living is not factored into the equation. For the 2007-2008 school year, children qualified to receive reduced-price school lunches if their family income was $38,203 for a family of four and free lunches if their family income was $26,845 for a family of four.66

Metz (1990) argues that “ambitious parents of every class and color know where the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ schools are” and that parents “use social class as a proxy measure of school quality” (p. 113). Bankston and Caldas (2002) argue that Whites will not choose to send their children to schools with students who are Black, socioeconomically-disadvantaged, from single-parent households, and/or that have lower average student achievement. They use the term “threshold effect” to refer to what happens once a school reaches a certain threshold of minority

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66 Data obtained from the Louisiana State Department of Education website and can be found at the following URL: http://cnp.doe.state.la.us/DNAMemos/Memos.asp#ancResults.
concentration (40%): White parents will no longer send their children to that particular school. Rather, they choose schools with a lower concentration of minority students because they think that will maximize their children’s educational opportunities. Former EBRP school board member Patricia Haynes-Smith agreed that the school board had done research and found that all White parents will not send their children to a school that is more than 50% Black. So that’s an issue for some [White] parents. But they don’t understand that if the school is doing well, they shouldn’t care what color the kids are.

Bankston and Caldas (2002) illustrate that once EBRP schools passed the 40% mark as far as Black representation in schools, White flight increased “almost tenfold” (p. 121).

Rossell and Armor (1996) similarly demonstrate that as the minority concentration in magnet program increases, White parents become less likely to choose those magnet programs. Results from national surveys of 10 school districts collected over a decade indicate that when a magnet program is 50% White and 50% minority, 21% of White parents indicate willingness to enroll their children in that program. When the minority concentration increases to 75% minority, only 13% of White parents indicate that they would be “definitely willing” to enroll their children in said program.

In contrast, the majority of the parents in this study sample indicated that the level of racial diversity at South Boulevard was ultimately not important to them. Many parents, in fact, were not aware of the racial composition of the school before registration; only nine actually visited the school before registration. Tracy, for example, told me:

I didn’t know what the racial composition was, as far as numbers go. But I did have an idea from visiting there before. And, yeah, that’s important to me. I want my kids to know how to deal with all kinds of people, because that’s important.

Thus, while some parents indicated that the student demographics of the regular (non-magnet) schools concerned them, none expressed similar concerns about the racial composition of South
Boulevard. Javier similarly noted: “I enjoy the diversity. I like the fact that she’s exposed to more cultures. But I don’t think it was really a deciding factor in choosing South Boulevard. I think it was just kind of a nice plus.”

Although race did not emerge as an important category, several parents did remark that socioeconomic status was important—perhaps even more than race. Terrence suggested that a lot of discrimination

doesn’t have anything to do with color. It could be economical, you know? ‘Cause that’s what it’s more about today than race. Years and years and years ago, I thought it was about race. Maybe when I was a kid. But now, I think it’s more economical than racial. If a rich, affluent Black family tries to get their kid into South Boulevard, and then the poor White couple comes, the rich Black kid’s probably gonna get in. You understand what I’m sayin’? So I don’t think race is such an issue as it was 20-30 years ago. I think it’s more about rich/poor now.

When I asked him whether that change was an improvement, he said: “It’s the same thing; it’s just a different name for it.”

Other parents similarly commented that when exploring various schools, the overall socioeconomic status of the students was important. Brad, for instance, indicated that one thing that concerned him when they were still weighing their options was what he called the “perceived ability of the peer group” at South Boulevard, which he deemed to be lesser than the private schools they had considered. Brad formed that perception based on what he saw when visiting South Boulevard and explained that

when you’re looking at a large group, I feel that there’s probably enough data out there that supports that if there’s a significant disparity in socioeconomic standing, there is a higher level of ability in those that come from a wealthier socioeconomic background.

Yolanda was also concerned with the socioeconomic status of the students at her children’s schools because she believed, like Brad, that students from lower socioeconomic status families attend schools with fewer resources, which can negatively impact their academic achievement.
When the time came for her oldest son to take the LEAP test in the fourth grade at their neighborhood school, she worried:

I was like, ‘Okay, now he’s gonna take the standardized test that he probably will fail because he didn’t have the tools in the first place?’ You’ve got to be kidding. In this zip code, where you have much more poverty? If I had to look at it across zip codes, we should have been in Shenandoah [a middle-class Baton Rouge neighborhood]. But I do think it’s more along personal income [than race].

Andrea likewise acknowledged the importance of socioeconomic status in the Baton Rouge educational market when she said: “Just because we’re White doesn’t mean that we have a lot of money and we can go anywhere we want. There’s a lot of people out there that doesn’t have the income. Just as much as any race.”

Parents’ responses about the race-based quota used for admission into magnet programs and their concerns about the socioeconomic status of their children’s school peers lead me to conclude that in this case, race is less of a consideration than other research has indicated. Findings from this case study suggest that there is a threshold (Bankston & Caldas, 2002) of minority concentration that, if high enough, may dissuade some parents from choosing the school. However, in this case, that threshold is significantly higher than 40% minority concentration. After all, several parents in the sample chose South Boulevard in 2002 when it was 80% Black, 20% non-Black. At the same time, both Black and non-Black parents in the sample indicated that they did not want their children to attend a single-race school. For example, Donald commented that his son would “never go to an all-Black school. I want him to experience more things than just that.” Parents in the study sample wanted their children to attend a diverse school.

Choosing South Boulevard

Having discussed the numerous school choices available to parents in the Baton Rouge area and some of the issues that concerned them during their decision-making process, I turn...
now to an exploration of what factors actually motivated parents in the sample to choose South Boulevard. Why did these parents choose South Boulevard? What enabled them to overlook the peeling paint hanging down from the stairwells like stalactites, the long bus ride or drive across town to get there, the rust and mildew stains dripping down the outside walls of the school, the ramshackle playground, the transients wandering around the neighborhood, and the broken beer bottles that are, unfortunately, a permanent fixture on the school grounds? The following five themes emerged from interview and fieldwork data regarding the primary factors that motivated parents to ultimately choose South Boulevard: 1) the foreign language immersion curriculum, 2) high standards and student achievement, 3) multi-dimensional diversity they either hoped to find or knew they would find at the school, 4) their profiles of typical magnet students and their parents, and 5) recommendations from people within their social networks.

Commitment to the Immersion Curriculum

When asked directly about the main thing that attracted them to South Boulevard, almost all (19 of 24) of the parents in the study sample immediately responded that the foreign language immersion program was their primary motivation in choosing South Boulevard. Richard commented: “Once we learned about the language thing, we were just excited about that.” Tracy similarly responded: “The foreign language program. Number one.” Tanecia echoed their responses, noting that the main thing that attracted their family to South Boulevard was “just the program itself and the fact that it’s full immersion.”

Parents identified four primary reasons for their interest in immersion education. First, parents believed that acquiring a second language would enhance their children’s employment opportunities in the future. Although Apple (2006) laments the increasing connections between education, competition, and the international economy, these parents wanted a school that would
prepare their children for participation in that global economy. Ken, for example, explained that bilingualism would give his children “a competitive advantage.” For Bridget and her husband, bilingualism is the norm; anything less is unacceptable. She explained:

We want our kids bilingual. We never thought we’d be living outside of Canada. And when my daughter was still in utero, it was just a given that she would be in French immersion. So we were shocked when we ended up getting transferred here and then being in the predicament of, ‘Oh my God, we’re gonna be really giving our kids a disadvantage of not having bilingualism.’

Richard also explained that being bilingual would open up “extra worlds of opportunity [for his children] that they wouldn’t get otherwise.” And finally, Camille noted that “it’s almost becoming required that you know a second language. And I want to have my children in a place where they will have that option to them. And not be closed from it.”

Several parents observed that bilingualism is essential in a global economy. Bridget commented that being bilingual is “totally essential. It’s a global marketplace, a global economy. The world’s shrunk considerably.” Javier explained that “With the way things are today, the globalness of the economy, I think it’s really important to be able to function the way the world functions.” Alicia explained that she wanted her children to speak a second language because “I want them to have world experiences—global experiences. And I think that when you begin connecting globally and with other cultures and countries, it’s great to know the language. Otherwise, your communication is limited.” Finally, Susan predicted that her daughter would be traveling in the future: “She’ll be traveling, doing something somewhere else. Her wish right now is to go to Paris. And she’ll get there.”

Many parents expressed a desire for their children to learn Spanish because of the growing Hispanic population in the United States. Javier explained: “The truth is, the Spanish community’s growing in the United States. And I think that it’s gonna be very important as she gets older and starts looking for a job that she be as bilingual as possible.” Ken also noted the
changing demographics of the country and explained that “as a parent, my job is to give my children the tools to be as successful as possible. I cannot help but think that someone who doesn’t speak Spanish in today’s United States will be at a disadvantage.” Lastly, Terrence, who has a third-grader in French (because there were no open seats in Spanish that year) and a kindergartener in Spanish, explained that they "wanted Spanish because the Spanish population is booming.” Thus, parents were interested in the immersion curriculum because they believed it would increase their children’s future marketability.

Second, parents believed that foreign language study would enhance their children’s academic achievement in other content areas. Richard, for example, talked about reading studies that show “how the brain develops. I think learning other languages helps create extra neural paths that literally make you smarter.” Christian also noted that “by learning another language, you’re enhancing your cognitive ability.” Andrea echoed these parents and elaborated in the following passage:

I researched it first and found the studies were just incredible, how advanced these kids were showing in their test scores. It was the fact that they were learning the subjects—math, for example—in a foreign language. It makes them use two parts of their brains at the same time. To prove it, my oldest scored 98% in math on the Iowa [ITBS] and she learned it all in French and the testing is in English.

When Yolanda compared the immersion curriculum at South Boulevard with her older son’s experience in their neighborhood school, she concluded that the “skill level [at South Boulevard] is much different because of the immersion program. There doesn’t seem to be any limit as far as what they will pick up on.” Much academic research confirms the cognitive benefits of multilingualism, suggesting that bilinguals often have cognitive and linguistic advantages over monolingual students when it comes to divergent thinking, pattern recognition, and problem solving (Bamford & Mizokawa, 1991; Díaz, 1983, 1985; Hakuta, 1986; Lambert, 1975; Landry, 1974). Many studies also confirm the positive benefits of foreign language study.

Third, parents wanted their children to learn the language connected to their family heritage. Two families in my sample wanted their children to learn Spanish because it is part of their heritage and because they have Spanish-speaking relatives. Although Javier and Laura, who are both Hispanic, did not learn Spanish as children, they wanted their daughter to learn it “because it’s a part of our culture.” Javier and Laura now speak Spanish in their jobs as pastors of a Spanish-speaking evangelical church. Therefore, they wanted their daughter to learn it so that she could be a part of their church family. Ken also wants his children to speak Spanish because they travel yearly to visit his parents and extended family who are from Honduras. Therefore, for Ken and his wife: “It was gonna be BRIS or South Boulevard magnet. The Spanish immersion was that important to us.” Ken’s children actually attended BRIS for several years and switched to South Boulevard in January 2007 because Ken felt they could get a comparable education at South Boulevard for free. Of their decision to move their children from BRIS to South Boulevard, Ken explained:

We made a choice to take resources to support their education in a different way. So they’ll still get a quality education. So we’ll give them the immersion. We’ll still give them the curriculum that we want. They’ll get the mastery of the language which is so important to us. And they’ll get a more diverse environment [than they had at BRIS].

Ken’s comments demonstrate the high priority of both the immersion curriculum and the desire to have their children in a diverse environment.

Five parents wanted their children to learn French because it is part of their family heritage. Andrea, for instance, explained that both she and her husband have Cajun roots. Her husband is “from Mamou, which is Cajun, and his parents speak French.” And on her side, she explained that her “grandma wasn’t even allowed to speak French when she came here. But that
was all she spoke. So I just felt it [choosing the French immersion program] was the right thing to do.” Tanecia echoed her sentiments, explaining that

Since I have a French background and my family’s French, it’s like a respect thing. I just want them to continue their heritage. I wanted something to make them realize that we’re Creole and this is what we do: we learn French. This is our culture.

Fourth, several parents articulated their belief that second language study broadens minds and promotes tolerance and acceptance of diversity. This was an important part of their rationale in choosing an immersion program. Tanecia, for example, said that second language study is important because “as Americans, we’re all made up of so many different cultures, and we should learn some respect and appreciation for different cultures.” Denise explained that “the fact that we live in this monolingual society isolates us,” and Christian, whose European father speaks eleven languages, explained that “learning multiple languages broadens your perspective on things.” While some academic research confirms the assumptions of these parents that language study promotes appreciation and respect for other cultures and peoples (Lambert & Tucker, 1972), others warn of the danger of assuming that language study necessarily contributes to the development of positive attitudes (Robinson, 1981).

**High Standards and Student Achievement**

Parents uniformly agreed that because South Boulevard was a magnet school, student achievement (which they equated mostly with standardized test scores) was therefore superior to the regular (non-magnet) schools. Brad, for example, explained that magnet programs are “small pockets of higher performance in the public school system.” Only five parents actually researched South Boulevard’s test scores and compared them with other magnet and regular (non-magnet) EBRP schools. Richard looked up test scores for his neighborhood school, which are available on-line from the Louisiana State Department of Education and printed annually in
the local newspaper, and concluded that they were “pretty good, so we might have allowed them
to go there. Now if I lived somewhere else with different scores, we might have pushed them
into private school.” Shannon and her husband also researched test scores. She explained: “We
looked at the test scores for all the public schools.” Their evaluation of South Boulevard
according to its test scores was as follows:

The test scores were not that great, but they looked better than other [public] schools. And to me, the selling point is that even if the program wasn’t necessarily academically challenging, having the foreign language in there makes the program more challenging, so I was okay with that.

For Shannon and her husband, publicly reported test scores were a reason to choose a public
school. They felt that standardized test scores were one way to hold schools accountable, and
therefore felt that private schools offered a “questionable quality” of education because they
either do not administer or do not publish results of their students’ standardized scores. She said:
“If they went to a private school, we would have had no way to ascertain how well they were
doing, because we did not see regular evaluations against national testing norms.”

Regarding test scores, Camille explained,

Actually, I do read the performance accountability reports to keep up with what the other schools are doing. And I basically use the other two main comparatives, which are the visual arts and Westdale. And we’re third when it comes to them.

BRCVPA (the visual and performing arts magnet) and Westdale are two other dedicated magnet
programs. Thus, Camille only compares South Boulevard’s test scores to other magnet
programs—and does not even include all the magnet programs. She did not mention either of
the two Montessori PWS magnets or Forest Heights, the other academic magnet that is neither as
centrally-located or as highly regarded in the community as Westdale.

Other parents did not have information regarding South Boulevard students’ test scores,
but relied instead on gut instinct or hearsay. Javier and Laura, for example, moved their
daughter to South Boulevard from their neighborhood public school because they felt that because it was a magnet school, academic achievement would be stressed more there. Laura explained: “Academically, that’s why we moved her. We heard a great story on their LEAP scores [at South Boulevard]. We heard all of them passed except for two.” Tracy acknowledged her reliance on personal impressions when she answered my question about student achievement at South Boulevard: “I do believe it is higher. I haven’t really done the research to clarify that. But I do believe that it is.”

Parents in the sample believe that because South Boulevard is a magnet school, it has higher standards and expectations which lead to higher student achievement. Some parents attributed the higher achievement of magnet students to the fact that they screen students for admission into the program. In order to gain admission into the magnet program at South Boulevard, all applicants are tested to ensure that they are at least on grade level. Students have to score 85% on the test in order to be admitted into the program. Parents thus perceive that the admissions test creams off the most capable applicants. Tracy explained matter-of-factly that she didn’t visit the regular (non-magnet) public school near their neighborhood “because I wanted them to go to a magnet program. And my boys did well on the test [screening].”

In addition to the admission screening tests, higher standards are applied in terms of staying in the program. Parents and students sign a magnet contract each year in which they acknowledge that they are aware that students must make a 2.5 GPA in order to stay in the program. Several parents mentioned this as partial explanation for why student achievement at South Boulevard is better than regular (non-magnet), public schools. According to Laura, “magnet programs are better. I mean, you have to make grades to stay there.” Javier echoed Laura’s sentiments, commenting that: “I know they expect more of you [at magnet schools].
They raise the bar, whereas a regular school, you don’t necessarily have that bar raised. So some people are always gonna do the minimum thing expected of them.”

Parents, in fact, are correct in their assumptions that student achievement in EBRP magnet programs is significantly higher than the regular (non-magnet) programs. The most important measure of success—at least according to NCLB (2001)—is standardized test scores. While I acknowledge the limitations of the use of standardized test scores to measure school success, they are nonetheless used for accountability purposes. Therefore, analysis of South Boulevard students’ test scores is in order. Analysis of School Report Cards from 1997-2004 revealed that fourth grade students at South Boulevard have consistently scored better on both the LEAP and the ITBS than other students in EBRP and in the state of Louisiana with only rare exceptions.67

During spring 2007 LEAP testing, South Boulevard fourth graders ranked fifth out of 55 EBRP elementary schools on English/Language Arts and fourth on Mathematics (in terms of percentage of students passing). The other three dedicated magnet schools and one non-magnet school were the only schools with higher passage rates. These magnet schools also have significantly lower percentages of socioeconomic-disadvantaged students than the regular (non-magnet) schools. Other regular (non-magnet) schools had significantly lower passage rates. In one school,68 for example, only 31% of students passed the English Language Arts portion and 18% passed the mathematics portion of the LEAP test. The average across elementary schools in the district was a 59% passage rate for English Language Arts and a 48% passage rate for Mathematics. Thus, if parents buy in to the value system established by the federal government, as well as state and district educational agencies, then they are right to judge the

67 School report cards between 1996 to the present for all Louisiana schools are available on-line through the Louisiana Department of Education at the following URL: http://www.louisianaschools.net/lde/saa/1639.html.
68 Lanier Elementary
success of their children’s potential elementary schools using those schools’ standardized test scores. Achievement in EBRP magnet programs is superior to the regular (non-magnet) schools.

**Commitment to Multidimensional Diversity**

Parents identified multiple dimensions of diversity which they valued, including race, socioeconomic status, and religious background. Seven parents, both Black and non-Black, expressed a strong desire to find a school in which their children would be exposed to a diverse student population. Shannon, for example, explained that besides their interest in the foreign language program,

> the other reason why we probably would’ve sent them there is because they would be exposed to a more diverse group of people in Baton Rouge public schools, more diverse culturally, racially, economically, than they would have been in Baton Rouge private schools.

She then added that

> the world is a very diverse place and if you only ever interact with one socioeconomic group of people, then where do you learn to get along across cultures, races? We felt like this community was very closed to racial issues and it is still very divided, so we wanted to make sure that, if nothing else, our children were exposed to different socioeconomic backgrounds and different racial backgrounds, and then we would be forced to have a conversation about other cultures and other groups.

For Denise and Christian, the desire to provide their children with the opportunity to be in a diverse population was important when selecting a school. Denise said “I think the things that you learn in a public school, you’re learning how to interact with our society. And this is a cross section of our city.” Christian concurred, noting that “that’s why the immersion program is very appealing because there’d be a diverse environment.”

Liz and Brad, who visited several other magnet schools and private schools before selecting South Boulevard, also included both racial and socioeconomic diversity in their responses. Liz explained: “When I visited St. James Episcopal, it was mostly White kids that I
saw. I wanted Morgan to know that there were other kids with different color skin and who
didn’t have as much money as she did.” Liz’s husband, Brad, explained his rationale for wanting
his daughter to be exposed to socioeconomic diversity:

From an economic side of things, it’s good for her to see that not everyone lives like
we do. Morgan’s got some friends that she’s visited that . . . I’m not entirely in
touch with where all the socioeconomic lines are drawn, it really to a large extent
depends where you are, as to whether you’re wealthy or upper middle class or
middle class, but probably I would call them lower middle class, to see what that’s
like, because we are in the minority in our country, the quality of life that our
daughter is getting. So it’s good for her to be exposed to that and understand that
not everyone is as fortunate as us. We want her to have some of that sink in for her
and become part of who she is and what she knows.

Another dimension of diversity that factored into some parents’ decision to enroll their
children at South Boulevard is religious background. Ten parents in the sample identified
themselves as members of a Christian denomination. The remaining 12 have more complex
religious backgrounds or affiliations: some are atheist or agnostic; some were raised in a certain
religion, but no longer practice it; two are Muslim; still others are members of a particular
denomination, but have a spouse who either participates in a different religion or is not religious.
These parents have complicated perspectives regarding the connections between religion and
schooling (cf. Apple, 2006). Thus, choosing South Boulevard was a way for them to avoid
immersing their children in a parochial school associated with a religion with which they were
not entirely comfortable.

Bridget, for instance, explained: “We’re not religious. We were very concerned about
putting them in something that wasn’t secular. I have friends of all faiths, but I don’t believe that
there should be any religion as part of education at all.” Several parents indicated that they did
not want their children to be pushed into a particular religion as part of their schooling
experiences. David, who attended local parochial schools as a child, observed:
I think religion class is lost on little kids because they’re not ready to make those kinds of decisions. And they’re not enough there mentally to comprehend what that’s all about. I think they need to be learning how to grow up and be kids.

Anthony also attended parochial school at the elementary level, but said that he “wouldn’t particularly care for” sending his children to a private school “if you have to necessarily subscribe to the religion that’s affiliated with the school.”

Other parents consider themselves to be religious, but do not identify with a particular denomination. Alicia, for instance, called herself a “Christian pluralist,” noting that she is “very non-traditional because, though I hold these principles for myself, I don’t think that other people are misguided because they don’t.” Terrence said he was raised Catholic, but became more “open-minded” and “was seeking more than what the Catholic church was giving me.” Thus, he now attends a nondenominational church, in part because he “wanted an equal mix of people. Because my [Catholic] church was all Black. I go to Bethany, where there’s Black, White, green, yellow, purple.” Thus, these families are different from many south Louisiana families who have either attended Catholic schools for generations or who have children attending a private school affiliated with their church.

Profiles of Typical Magnet Students and Their Parents

The idea that magnet programs skim or cream the better students was prevalent among parents in the sample (Goldhaber, 1999; Metz, 1994; Moore & Davenport, 1989; Rossell, 1979). Parents seemed to have similar, subconscious “profiles” of magnet students, including generalizations about their behavior, academic abilities, and parents. For instance, Alicia explained that magnet programs “pull the best, the brightest, out of the mainstream.” Terrence similarly noted that

in magnet schools, you got the brightest kids all together, clumped up, so they rub off on each other. If you take a bright kid and you put him in a school with a bunch of little thuggish kids, pretty soon that little bright kid is gonna turn into a dumb,
thuggish kid, too. Because they’re kids. They wanna fit in. If you’re in an environment where everybody is striving to do other things, it’s gonna make you step your game up.

He summarized his rationale for wanting his daughter to be in a magnet program—*any* magnet program—by saying: “That’s what I *really* like about the magnets. They hand-pick the students for the magnet programs. And if they don’t meet the criteria, [snap], they’re out! And that’s behavioral and academic. And that’s what I *really* like.” Terrence’s comment is not necessarily unique; Rossell (1985b) has suggested that there is some evidence that the “perceived selectivity of magnet schools is more important to many parents than the specific magnet theme” (p. 12).

Parents also made generalizations about the type of parents whose children attend magnet programs, which Ken referred to a “profile” of a typical magnet parent. Some parents assumed that magnet parents were more educated, professional, and involved in their children’s education. Ken explained that “if I’m gonna have my children in public education, I want the best. And there are parents who think like me at most of the magnet schools.” Tracy also explained: “Most of your parents at these magnet schools, especially South Boulevard, are educated, professional people. Makes a difference. They take better interest in their children’s education sometimes.”

Parents in the sample noted that magnet parents are more involved than non-magnet parents and that this involvement has a positive impact on student achievement. Laura explained that magnet parents “have to be involved to help [students] in their studies.” Anthony noted that “children who are in [magnet] programs probably have parents who want to be more involved” and that parents of children in regular (non-magnet) schools “just send the kid to school to get them out of the house.” According to Terrence, “the majority of kids at a regular [non-magnet] public school? Their parents don’t care.” Richard similarly commented that “public schools have a lot of parents who just drop their kids off. They kind of expect the school to do everything.” Some scholars, such as Heath (1983) and Lareau (1989), have suggested another
explanation for differing styles and levels of parental involvement in schooling that does not pass judgment on working-class parents: some parents simply trust schools to do their jobs.

Several parents also noted that the fact that parents have to apply to magnet programs necessarily makes them more involved parents. Laura noted: “Their parents have to fill out certain stuff so that they could be there. Their parents have to go for the interview for them to be there. It’s not like this is the neighborhood school and this is the bus that’s gonna pick you up.” Anthony also commented that the application process made it more likely that magnet parents were more involved in their children’s education (André-Becheley, 2004; Blank & Archbald, 1992; Eaton, 1996; Metz, 1986, 1990).

Social Networks

Ken: Visiting South Boulevard for the first time was “just rekindling old relationships.”

One criticism of school choice programs is that minority parents and socioeconomically-disadvantaged parents do not have the same access to the kinds of social networks that would allow them to get information about the school choice process. Goldring and Rowley (2006), for example, claim that school choice programs lead to social class “creaming” because they tend to attract parents with wider social networks with more access to information. Wells and Crain (1997) similarly assert that higher status groups have greater cultural capital and thus participate more frequently and easily in the kinds of networks that have information regarding schools. Access to these social networks, they assert, gives them an advantage in school choice markets. Schneider and colleagues (1997) observe that “higher status individuals are embedded in better networks that can act as more efficient sources for information about schools” (pp. 1219-1220). Lastly, Taylor and Yu (1997) argue that higher income parents have “access to people
knowledgeable about schools either through their social networks or contacts at the workplace” which gives them “a basis for choice not available to those less well-off” (p. 70).

This study confirms existing research which finds that informal social networks are important in gathering information about and in ultimately choosing particular magnet programs. Almost all (18 out of 24) parents in the study sample had heard positive things about the immersion program at South Boulevard from friends, neighbors, relatives, or coworkers that motivated them to further investigate the school. Only four parents first heard about South Boulevard through official recruiting documents and events; eight attended Magnet Mania, the annual parish-wide recruiting event for magnet programs. Goldring and Rowley (2006) and Schneider, Teske, Roch, and Marschall (1997) similarly conclude that formal information sources are less important to parents when selecting a school than informal social networks.

This study is unique, however, because it finds that Black parents in the sample had access to an important source of information that White parents did not have: historical knowledge of the reputation of South Boulevard gained from attending the school themselves or from social contacts through church, work, neighborhoods, or extended family members who attended the school. Felicia, for instance, attended South Boulevard as a child when it was an extended day magnet program, and explained that she had told herself a long time ago, “Whenever I have kids, I want them to go to South Boulevard.” I met a woman at Magnet Mania who was visiting the South Boulevard booth with her daughter and her grandchildren who had actually attended South Boulevard in the 1970s when it was an all-Black, regular (non-magnet) school. She said: “It was a real good school then, so I know it’s a good school now.”

South Boulevard was officially an all-Black school from 1959 until it became an extended day magnet program in 1981. Thus, there were no White students at South Boulevard
for more than twenty years. In 1981, the first year it became an extended day magnet program, the student body was 34% non-Black. Thus, the extended day program was successful in attracting some non-Blacks to the school, although it was still majority Black (see Table 4.3).

Many Black parents in the sample identified family members, friends, and coworkers who had attended South Boulevard and upon whose recommendation they based, at least in part, their decision to choose South Boulevard. Several mentioned that they had attended school with parents of other South Boulevard students. I first met Ken, whose children were attending BRIS, at the South Boulevard Christmas program in December 2006. Ken was attending the program on what he called a “reconnaissance mission”—gathering information about the school before deciding to move them to South Boulevard. He was pleased, he recalled, to see that he “knew probably ten other families who were there.” He wandered around the gym after the program, shaking hands and visiting with people he knew from church and the business community. Thus, when he decided to move his children to South Boulevard, he felt like he was “just rekindling old relationships.” None of the non-Black parents in the sample described anything similar to Ken’s experience at the Christmas program.

Both Anthony and Donald had nieces who had previously attended South Boulevard. One had participated in the immersion program; the other had been in the regular program. Donald also told me that when he came to the before-school ice cream social for the first time, he recognized other firemen whose children were there. He also noted that he saw that “a couple of my classmates I went to high school with, they take their kids there.” Terrence also mentioned that he knew Donald because they are both firefighters. Another parent (not part of the official sample) likewise mentioned that her neighbor’s children attend South Boulevard.
From the perspective of these Black parents, South Boulevard has had a good reputation for many years—including when it was a regular (non-magnet) program as well as when it was an extended day magnet program. Three Black parents indicated that they would have chosen South Boulevard, immersion program notwithstanding. For them, the success of South Boulevard lies as much in its history as it does in the foreign language immersion magnet program. Yolanda, for example, had heard about South Boulevard from coworkers before it even had an immersion program and had wanted her children to go there ever since. She explained that “so many people that I work with, their kids went to South Boulevard, and I would hear them talk about their school. And they were all very pleased with it.” She tried unsuccessfully for many years to get her oldest son in, “but it was just so competitive to get in. I just always thought it was a good school.” Her second son actually began the French immersion program at Winbourne Elementary, their neighborhood public school. Yolanda was thus pleased when the French program moved over to South Boulevard, since that is the school into which she had tried so hard to get her older son.

Black parents, in this case, have access to a powerful source of information—informal social networks that include people who have second- and even first-hand knowledge of the school—to which White parents in the sample do not. This kind of information—the larger socio-political, historical context in which magnet programs are embedded—is an important factor that remains as yet untapped in school choice literature.

Conclusion

Contemporary educational discourse often frames discussions about school choice in limiting ways, focusing either on achieving diverse student bodies or on increasing student achievement. For parents in this study sample, however, choosing a school for their children was
more complex. Parents took into account a wide range of considerations, including the peers their children would have at South Boulevard, the quality of the education, and the advantages of the immersion curriculum. They almost uniformly refused to consider the EBRP regular (non-magnet) schools—primarily because of what they judged to be unsatisfactory student achievement. Furthermore, many parents in the study sample chose South Boulevard over available private school options, where even many of them assumed the quality of education was superior. Some were willing to accept a potentially lesser quality of education in order to provide their children with opportunities to interact with a diverse group of students. Discussion of this kind of parental decision-making that values diversity along with academic achievement is virtually absent in educational research, where parents are usually viewed as motivated only by self-interest and providing their individual children with maximum educational benefits and opportunities.

The case of South Boulevard represented a third option for parents—a space in between the regular (non-magnet) schools and the increasingly popular private schools. South Boulevard is not an elite private school with expensive tuition and a mostly homogenous student population. South Boulevard is also not a “failing school” or a single-race public school where all the students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Bridget explained: “When you’ve heard nothing but bad things about the public school system and then you find there’s a tiered system, we want our kids to have the better opportunity.” Ken likewise said that magnet schools are “a system within a system. And it’s the system that we prefer.”

Brad explained that EBRP regular (non-magnet) schools were not in consideration whatsoever. In fact, we paid the $300-something dollar deposit at St. James to ensure that an acceptable alternative was available. Magnet programs definitely succeeded in allowing us to choose public school in Baton Rouge. Without it, we certainly would have been in private school.
Ken likewise noted: “I know what the neighborhood school is. It’s two blocks from my house. It was never an option. I’ll be blunt: if my children will be in the public system, it’s gonna be gifted and talented or magnet.” Thus, South Boulevard’s foreign language immersion program provided a way for parents to support the public school system while still providing their children with good educational opportunities.

The primary characteristic of South Boulevard that allowed parents to make that decision was the foreign language immersion curriculum. Parents in the sample ultimately rejected the binary nature of the school choice conversation and instead chose a school based on its unique curriculum. None of the parents in the sample mentioned a desire to desegregate the EBRP school system as a motivation in choosing South Boulevard. However, they did not object to the goal of integration. Many embraced it—as long as the quality of education was high and their children would have the unique opportunity to learn a second language. Choosing South Boulevard allowed parents in the sample to reclaim a voice in public schooling which had been largely lost during years of federally-mandated desegregation efforts. As Denise eloquently stated: “I think magnet programs are working to pull families together by choice.” Parents chose South Boulevard in the spirit of democracy in action—not solely in the spirit of guaranteeing their own children a privileged place in schools and in society.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUDING REMARKS

God knows, there is a lot wrong with our schools . . . but the scope and sweep of the negative public talk is what concerns me, for it excludes the powerful, challenging work done in schools day by day across the country, and it limits profoundly the vocabulary and imagery available to us, constrains the way we frame problems, [and] blinkers our imagination (Rose, 1997, pp. 20-21).

In the post-\textit{Brown} era, both public and academic conversations regarding the purpose of schooling have been framed in binary fashion: schools should either strive to achieve the social goal of integration or the academic goal of increased student achievement. The result of this narrow-minded focus has been schools that have largely failed on both fronts. Despite the historical, romanticized ideal of public schools as the great equalizers, as Horace Mann envisioned they could be, our public schools have acted instead as sorting machines (Spring, 2004)—separating students according to language, race, intellectual ability, and gender. Guajardo and Guajardo (2004) assert that “the historic and ennobling promise of \textit{Brown} is profound, but it remains unmet in many communities and for many children” (p. 523). Many of our schools are still both separate and unequal.

This case study of South Boulevard provides a rationale for why framing educational conversations, debates, and research around common binary constructions, such as private versus public, Black versus White, and integration versus academic achievement, limits the potential of public schools to be sites of democratic education and intellectual growth. South Boulevard provides a counternarrative that defies many of the negative conversations about public schools that we seem to accept as normative. Schools do not have to sacrifice diversity in order to increase student achievement—nor do they have to sacrifice student achievement in order to achieve diversity. South Boulevard provides a high quality education that includes the benefit of
second language acquisition within a culture of integration in which cross-racial and cross-cultural relationships thrive.

**The Importance of School Culture**

The overarching finding that emerged from this research is that school culture—more than class size, condition of the physical facility, standardized curricula, or glitzy technology—has the potential to help create schools better able to achieve democratic education and intellectual growth. Schools that succeed in achieving only one of these goals are not the kinds of schools we need to fulfill the promise of an equal and excellent education for all students that will prepare them to participate as adults in a more democratic society. Rather than seeking to fill schools with certain numbers of Black and White kids or rich and poor kids, we should focus our energies and resources into creating school cultures like the one at South Boulevard that provide an excellent education to all students in a diverse school environment. In this conclusion, I highlight three aspects of the school culture at South Boulevard that counter several common narratives that focus our attention on the failures and shortcomings of public schools and ultimately limit our ability to imagine schools as anything other than what they already are: 1) a culture of academic rigor, 2) a culture of multiplicity, and 3) a culture of community.

**A Culture of Academic Rigor**

Our public schools have all too often used standardized tests to differentiate between students. Intelligence testing in the United States began as a way to prove that intelligence is biologically-determined and that Whites were more intelligent than non-Whites (Gould, 1981; Meier, 2002). Contemporary arguments in favor of test-driven accountability suggest that standardized tests are the most objective and accurate way to assess students’ knowledge and skills. Thus, when disadvantaged students perform poorly on these tests, these students and their
parents can use the test scores to hold the schools accountable for their poor performance. The subtext underlying the focus on the achievement gap between Whites and Blacks, however, is a narrative of White intellectual superiority over Blacks. In addition to the raced and classed assumptions behind standardized testing, the focus on standardized testing has also created a culture of mediocrity in our schools. The goal is not for all students to attain their highest academic potential. Curriculum and textbooks are aligned with test objectives and are written to help students get the right answers on standardized tests. Students who do not achieve a basic level of proficiency on high-stakes tests are not promoted to the next grade level. Too many minority and socioeconomically-disadvantaged children do not achieve this basic level of proficiency. Thus, schools reproduce many of the societal inequities they should be working to eliminate.

South Boulevard counters this narrative of differentiation and mediocrity and replaces it with a powerful culture of academic rigor in which all students are assumed to be capable of learning. This culture is created by three aspects of the school: 1) the foreign language immersion teachers, 2) the common curricular theme (immersion education), and 3) the second language as a force that equalizes linguistic and cultural differences that may lead to differences in student achievement in other settings.

First, the foreign language teachers necessitated by the immersion curriculum represent a diversity of countries, dialects, and perspectives. They have high expectations of all students. They believe their students can learn a second language—just like they all did when they learned English. They do not have many of the negative perceptions and stereotypes regarding urban and minority children that can lead to low teacher expectations and underperformance in schools.
Furthermore, they have a zest for teaching their native language to students, which leads them to want to be excellent teachers rather than just mediocre ones.

Second, the common curricular theme unifies parents, students and teachers around the common cause of learning content knowledge through immersion in a second language. This study finds that the foreign language immersion curriculum was parents’ primary motivation in choosing South Boulevard. Parents identified multiple reasons for wanting their children to learn a second language: enhanced employment opportunities, the potential of foreign language study to enhance academic achievement in other content areas, a desire to reconnect to their family heritage language, and the notion that bilingualism promotes a more global outlook and an acceptance of diversity. South Boulevard parents have high expectations for their children and feel that bilingualism will help them achieve their life and career aspirations. The immersion curriculum allows parents to feel confident that their children are being challenged, which was important to all parents in the study sample.

Third, the second language acts as an equalizer—diminishing linguistic and cultural differences that may lead to differences in achievement in other kinds of schools. French and Spanish—both of which are new to all the students—are the languages of power at South Boulevard. Thus, all students have to learn how to negotiate in a new language and culture that is unfamiliar to them. Rather than privileging either Black or White language and culture, the immersion subculture creates a new space which equalizes and enhances the learning environment for all students. The foreign language immersion curriculum is more than just a means of delivering instructional content. The presence of a third, dominant language levels the playing field and enables students to excel in other content areas.
A Culture of Multiplicity

Our schools have been plagued by a framework which portrays minority and socioeconomically-disadvantaged students as coming from a culture of deprivation or a culture of poverty. Payne (2005) defines poverty as “the extent to which an individual does without resources,” which include: financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships and role models, and knowledge of hidden rules. According to this line of reasoning, poor and minority children do not achieve at the same levels as socioeconomically-advantaged and White children in schools because they lack money, health, friends, and role models. This kind of orientation focuses on deficits; it assumes that something is wrong with poor and minority children and that if schools and teachers could just fix what ails them, they would attain higher levels of academic achievement. The phrase “achievement gap” is an apt metaphor for this kind of deficit thinking. White achievement is assumed to be the norm. Thus, the goal is not for poor and minority children to achieve excellence in schools; the goal is for them to simply catch up to White children (Hilliard III, 2003). All too often, the goal is not even eliminating the gap; the goal is simply decreasing the gap.

South Boulevard counters this narrative of deprivation with a culture of multiplicity and of richness that emerges from three aspects of South Boulevard. First, South Boulevard has a racially diverse student population. South Boulevard also has other dimensions of diversity in addition to race. South Boulevard has students from multiple religions—including Baptists, Catholics, Muslims, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, and non-denominational religions—as well as non-religious families and families with parents from different religious persuasions. South Boulevard students also represent a wide range of family socioeconomic statuses. Although a majority of the student population at South Boulevard (59%) qualifies for
free or reduced lunch, 41% of students do not. South Boulevard students have parents who are university professors, firefighters, mail carriers, sno-ball stand operators, realtors, police officers, nurses, engineers, bank tellers, telemarketers, and bartenders, just to name a few. Many parents in the study sample wanted their children to experience the kind of culture of multiplicity present at South Boulevard. They are open to diverse perspectives; they are aware of the importance of being able to negotiate in multiple cultures, languages, and contexts. And they believe that learning a second language will help their children accomplish this important objective.

Second, the immersion curriculum includes elements of multiple subcultures. As part of the immersion program, students at South Boulevard study the languages and cultures of French- and Spanish-speaking countries. They not only study them; they learn to speak the language of the people of those countries. They also learn to interact with their teachers, who currently come from Mexico, Venezuela, Guatemala, Colombia, Belgium, France, and the United States. Out of sixteen teachers, six are Hispanic, six are French or Belgian, four are White Americans, and two are Black. Although the number of Black teachers is small, the teaching faculty is still significantly more diverse than the national average, where the overwhelming majority of teachers are White. Thus, the teachers at South Boulevard bring a wide range of perspectives and life experiences to the school that help create a culture in which no one race, culture, or language is privileged over others. Instead, multiple languages, cultures, and nationalities are embraced.

Students learn to be tolerant and accepting of their teachers’ sometimes-limited English-speaking abilities, just as their teachers are accepting of their developing second language proficiency. In the words of Joseph J. Rodgers (in Hubbard, 1980)

The study of a foreign language by Americans, even if it stops short of functional mastery, can still be of great symbolic value, for it can represent a touch of
humility, a touch of humanity, a reaching out toward other cultures in the hope of achieving some measure of understanding. Eventually, developing these attitudes may prove to be even more important than producing a few more specialists (p. 75).

Foreign language study is valuable both as an end in itself and as a means to promoting positive cross-racial and cross-cultural relationships.

Third, the immersion curriculum creates a unique subculture that adds to the cultures and identities the students bring with them to school and creates what I referred to as a culture of integration that nurtures positive social relationships. When students at South Boulevard start the immersion program, the immersion curriculum causes them to expand upon or multiply their identities to include an identity of themselves as French or Spanish speakers. They either adopt a new name in Spanish or French or their teachers pronounce their English names with Spanish or French pronunciation. Students refer to their teachers with Spanish and French titles. They refer to each other as “Spanish kids” and “French kids” rather than by their race or some other identifying marker. Thus, they develop a new facet of their identity that is unique to their role as South Boulevard students. This new role allows students to see themselves as members of a unique community of learners in which all students are equal. The immersion curriculum is like a third or an in-between space that belongs equally to all the students because it is new and unrelated to students’ race, language, family socioeconomic status, or gender.

A Culture of Community

U.S. public schools tend to focus on the individual student rather than community. Before Brown (1954), school attendance zones were tied to geographic locations. A “neighborhood” school was located within a community near residences, businesses, and churches. Students attended school with other children who lived near them. In Baton Rouge, as in other school districts across the country, many neighborhood schools were eliminated when desegregation attempted to create integrated schools by redistributing students away from their
home neighborhoods, which tended to be racially segregated. Many argue that the dismantling of neighborhood schools was a negative consequence of desegregation (Bankston & Caldas, 2002; Meier, 2002; Siddle Walker, 1996). Meier (2002), for instance, argues that neighborhood schools with staff that look and sound like students and their families are important in building relationships of trusts between parents, teachers, and students. She argues that having a school staff that reflects the students and their families in terms of language, race, and ethnicity is the best way to “assure kids that the experiences the school opens up for them are not always ‘White’ or ‘Black,’ but belong to them all” (Meier, 2002, p. 37).

The present research, however, calls for a radical re-thinking of the notion of community schools. South Boulevard is not a neighborhood school. It has no neighborhood attendance zone. Its students come from all over EBRP. The foreign language immersion teachers do not look or sound like the students who attend school there. The language of the school is not the language of either the White or the Black students and parents. Despite the geographic dispersion of its families and the distance between the school and almost all of its families, South Boulevard is thoroughly infused with what I call a culture of community. The culture of community at South Boulevard is created not by physical space or geographical boundaries, but by the foreign language immersion curriculum in three primary ways.

First, the foreign language immersion curriculum engenders a type of loyalty that other types of curricula may not. Parents, teachers, and administrators are protective of the immersion program. The community feeling at the school has resulted in significant parental activism in support of the improvement and growth of the immersion program. Parents promote the school in the community by wearing South Boulevard FLAIM (Foreign Language Academic Immersion Magnet) t-shirts and displaying bumper magnets and yard signs that showcase the immersion
aspect of the program. Parents, teachers, and students actively participate in the immersion community at South Boulevard.

Second, a culture of community is present at South Boulevard through positive, trusting relationships between members of the school community—even though the school staff does not mirror the ethnic and linguistic composition of the students and their families, as Meier (2002) suggested. Many teachers at South Boulevard have taught there for years; they are familiar with their students’ parents and siblings. Relationships between students are largely positive and are nurtured through cooperative teaching methods and the many communicative activities necessitated by the immersion curriculum. It is impossible to acquire a second language without the significant linguistic interactions common at South Boulevard. Teachers, many of whom identified the faculty as the greatest strength of the school, develop friendships amongst themselves. The immersion teachers say that they enjoy being part of a school community where others speak their native language. Parents also develop friendships with other South Boulevard parents. They see each other at birthday parties, chat with each other during carpool, and call on each other to pick up kids from school when emergencies arise.

Third, the culture of community at South Boulevard is a learning community that includes teachers, students, and parents. The immersion program is sufficiently unique that parents have to be committed to it in order for their children to succeed in the program. French and Spanish are the dominant languages of the school. They are the ones heard in the hallways; they are the languages sung at school programs; they are the languages their children come home speaking. Parents learn second language phrases and words from their students. They buy software to help their students improve their second language proficiency and end up learning some of the language themselves. At a PTO meeting in February 2007, a parent suggested that
the PTO investigate the possibility of French and Spanish classes taught by the immersion teachers for South Boulevard parents. Students also learn from each other; they sit on the benches outside the school during carpool and teach words, phrases, and songs in their language to students in the other language track. They also learn commonly-used phrases in the other language track, such as how to make introductions, how to count from 0 to 10, and how to sing short nursery rhymes and songs.

The immersion curriculum creates a sense of community that might otherwise be absent at a school like South Boulevard that has no neighborhood attendance zone. Neighborhood schools are becoming increasingly rare as school districts tussle with racial and socioeconomic status quotas to show that they are not intentionally creating segregated schools. Programs such as the ones at South Boulevard fulfill similar roles as neighborhood schools did in the past. Despite the fact that families live great distances from each other and their interactions with each other are limited almost entirely to the school day and school activities, South Boulevard feels like a neighborhood or community school in which all members can participate.

**Future Questions**

What are the implications of this study for the future of South Boulevard and for future educational reforms? What can we learn about the important role of school cultures? This research raises several questions that warrant further exploration.

First, are there other kinds of curricula that might be able to create similarly positive school cultures, or is the culture at South Boulevard unique to foreign language immersion education? Findings from this case study partially corroborate the work of Conchas and Rodriguez (2008), wherein certain structural and curricular arrangements in the small schools they studied promoted cohesion and racial tolerance, while others did not. Like Conchas and
Rodriguez, this study identified the importance of a common curriculum, an academic culture of success, pride in the school, and a feeling of belonging. Meier (2002), in her work in small schools in East Harlem and in Boston, also identified trusting relationships, creating a community of learners, and multiple modes of assessment as important in creating school cultures that work.

Despite these similarities, South Boulevard is distinct because of the critical role played by the second language in the creation of a unique immersion subculture that promotes student achievement and the democratic ideals of diversity and multiplicity. Although there are many kinds of special curricular offerings, such as Montessori, visual and performing arts, science and technology, and engineering programs, that can lead to parental commitment and a sense of community, the second language at South Boulevard fundamentally changes the school culture in a way that these other curricula cannot. While these other programs may require specialized vocabulary, philosophical orientations, and dispositions, they do not require completely new languages like the immersion curriculum at South Boulevard. The language we speak is an important influence on the way we see the world. Thus, the shift at South Boulevard from Standard Edited English (SEE) as the language of power to Spanish and French as the languages of power essentially re-maps or re-writes the cultural fabric of the school. Delpit (2006) writes that “success in institutions—schools, workplaces, and so on—is predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those who are in power” (p. 25). The immersion culture at South Boulevard is unique because there is no one group or language in power. Rather, all students must learn to acquire a new language and culture and thus can become equally empowered as they learn the codes and rules of power of a new language.
Second, all schools do not have the kind of internationally diverse teaching staff found at South Boulevard. Therefore, this case of South Boulevard raises the question: what can teacher education programs do to help American teacher candidates unlearn commonly-held stereotypes and perceptions of urban and minority children that can lead these students to not perform up to their inherent capabilities? How can teacher training programs be structured to encourage teacher candidates to develop philosophies of learning that embrace the potential of all children, rather than using White and middle-class achievement as the ruler by which all other students are measured? Delpit (2006) suggests that this difficult task might be accomplished by being explicit about the rules of the culture of power in schools and by including teaching strategies appropriate for all the children in a classroom that acknowledge the value of the cultural and linguistic systems they bring to school. Heath (1983) likewise urges educators to establish trusting relationships with their students and to search for links between students’ home language(s) and their school language(s). Both Delpit (2006) and Heath (1983) suggest that learning to engage in mainstream modes of discourse is essential to academic success in schools, but also urge teachers to highlight the ways in which language can be used in multiple contexts and for a variety of purposes.

Third, what types of school structures will support the kind of school culture found at South Boulevard? Is the school culture at South Boulevard a consequence of its small size? Can similar school cultures be created in autonomous schools and schools-within-a-school, two types of reforms that are becoming increasingly common as school districts struggle to find ways to narrow the achievement gap, decrease student drop-outs, and increase parental involvement? Or will those kinds of structural arrangements limit the creation of cultures of community and integration like the one at South Boulevard? Meier (2002) and Ayers, Klonsky, and Lyon (2000)
argue that smallness is a critical characteristic of schools that work. This study finds, however, along with Conchas and Rodriguez (2008), that although smallness may help create successful school cultures, size alone is not enough.

A major assumption behind small school and small learning community (SLC) reforms is that we can fundamentally change school cultures and the beliefs and practices of educators by simply re-structuring schools and re-arranging students. Elmore (1995) critiques this assumption, suggesting that structural changes do not necessarily lead to changes in teaching and learning, but we tend to focus on them because they are often easier to implement than other kinds of changes. Elmore (1995) writes that educational reform should begin with “changing norms, knowledge, and skills at the individual and organizational level before the focus on changing structures” (p. 26).

As curricular scholars and practitioners, if structural changes are insufficient to change the fundamental make-up and outcome of schools, then what kinds of philosophical and epistemological changes should we focus on? What do the normative school cultures of differentiation, deprivation, and the privileging of the individual communicate about the purpose of the institution of public education? They reveal the unfortunate reality that schools, as currently constituted, serve to maintain our socioeconomic class system. Despite racial quotas and a focus on test-driven accountability that look like they are trying to ensure fairness and objectivity, the underlying issue is that racism and classism persist and are deeply-embedded in White historical consciousness. Our schools are structured in ways that reproduce many of the inequities they should be working to eliminate. Our schools sort and track students. They use narrow forms of assessment to evaluate student ability and growth. They label them as “college-bound” or “vocational.” If we want to create schools that will ultimately lead to greater civic-
mindedness and participation in a more democratic society, we must radically re-think not only the way we structure schools, but must also grapple with our understandings of the purpose of education, what it means to be educated, who can be educated, and what kinds of knowledge are worth seeking. At the most fundamental level, we must consider whether we really want schools that treat all students equally and that enable all students to live up to their potential. If we do, and I argue that it is the most fundamental mission of schools to do precisely that, then we must radically reinvent school cultures that better conform to democratic ideals of social justice and equality of opportunity.

**Epilogue**

EBRP Schools in general and South Boulevard in particular are at a crossroads. The closing of the desegregation lawsuit in July 2007 (Davis et al. v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, 1961) brought about the return of local control of schools. EBRP superintendent and Louisiana-native Charlotte Placide is dedicated to improving educational quality and equity for all students. EBRP magnet programs have undergone significant changes in recent years. The Supreme Court, in *Parents Involved in Community School Inc. v. Seattle School District and Meredith v. Jefferson County Ky. Board of Education* (2007), recently restricted the ability of public school districts to use race to determine which schools children can attend. Thus, although schools districts are required to maintain racially integrated student populations, they are not allowed to use race as an admissions criterion. Instead of using race as a criterion for admission into a magnet program, which they have done for years, EBRP used a socioeconomic status quota (55% full-pay lunch, 45% free and/or reduced lunch) instead for the first time in 2007-2008.
Substantial changes are on the horizon for South Boulevard. Despite parental requests to maintain the deteriorated school building in which the program is currently housed, it is scheduled to be demolished in 2009. The program, which parents have been assured will remain intact, will be moved to another campus which is currently being completely renovated and expanded. The foreign language immersion magnet program will be housed in a single school, together with a Montessori magnet program and a regular (non-magnet) program that serves socioeconomically-disadvantaged children who live in the surrounding area. It remains to be seen how the new socioeconomic status quota used in magnet admissions and changes in the school structure will affect the immersion culture at South Boulevard.

Anthropologist Ruth Benedict (1946) once suggested that Americans “crave solutions” (p. 192). Education scholars and practitioners likewise crave solutions. We want to figure out ways to improve education. Findings from this dissertation imply that there are no easy solutions or fixes. Race, democracy and education work in complex and often conflicting ways. The work of creating schools that are both democratic and that lead to intellectual growth is difficult. This study of South Boulevard Foreign Language Academic Immersion Magnet, however, demonstrates that it is possible to create schools in which students excel academically and positive, cross-racial friendships thrive. We do not have to choose between social integration and intellectual growth.

School integration is significantly more complex than just finding ways to make Whites and Blacks and rich kids and poor kids sit in the same classrooms next to each other. As Vygotzky (1978) noted years ago, “[w]e grow into the intellectual world around us” (p. 88). Students of all races, religions, classes, and languages should go to school together and should learn with and from each other. This social mission of education is at least as important as
academic objectives. In the quest for equity, however, educational quality cannot be overlooked. Students are most likely to succeed academically in school cultures in which expectations are high and intellectual growth is the objective. South Boulevard accomplishes these dual goals because of the school culture created by the unique foreign language immersion curriculum.
REFERENCES


Committee passes Baton Rouge High magnet school plan. (1975). *State Times*.


Huge expansion program set by EBR Parish School Board. (1949, January 1). *State Times Advocate*, pp. 16-A.


More that [sic] 18,000 school children enrolled in EBR. (1949, September 7). *State Times Advocate*.


Negroes try to enroll in white school. (1954, September 3). *State Times Advocate*.


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Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).


Public school registration in parish continues to increase. (1949, September 11). *State Times Advocate*.


APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

1. Study title: Desegregation, magnet programs, and immersion education: A case study of South Boulevard Elementary School

2. Performance site: South Boulevard Elementary School, Baton Rouge, LA

3. Investigator: Heather K. Olson Beal, (225) 802-2892, holson1@lsu.edu

4. Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this study is to explore the role of magnet programs, particularly the foreign language immersion magnet program at South Boulevard Elementary School, in desegregating schools in East Baton Rouge Parish.

5. Study procedures: This is a qualitative research project. The principal investigator will conduct participant observation at the study site on a weekly basis between August 2006 and April 2007, open-ended interviews with parents, students, and school staff, and archival document analysis.

6. Subject inclusion: South Boulevard Elementary staff, parents, and students

7. Potential Risks: The study will not cause any psychological harm to the participants. The study risk is the disclosure of the subjects’ identities that may reflect those individuals’ personal positions or perceptions of race relations and desegregation efforts in Baton Rouge or elsewhere. All personal data collected will be confidential. Every effort will be made to maintain subjects’ anonymity. No subjects’ names will be disclosed in subsequent publications from this study.

8. Benefits: This case study will yield an in-depth historical interpretation of the role of one magnet program in desegregating schools and school districts. The results will be useful in enlightening and clarifying the debate regarding successful desegregation strategies.

9. Right to Refuse: The researcher will select participants to be interviewed, but participation in these interviews will be voluntary and participants can decline at any time before or during the interview without penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled.

10. Confidentiality: To ensure confidentiality, names of teachers, school staff, and students will be coded in the study. Results of the study may be published, but no names will be included in the publication. The name of the school (South Boulevard Foreign Language Academic Immersion Elementary) and its location (Baton Rouge, Louisiana) will be disclosed.
I agree to participate (or have my child participate) in this study on the role of magnet programs in desegregating East Baton Rouge Parish schools.

If, during the course of study, significant new information becomes available that may relate to my willingness to continue to participate in this study, this information will be provided to me by the investigator.

I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time.

I voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

I understand that any information derived from this research project which personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about subject rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, LSU Institutional Review Board, 225-578-8692. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the researcher’s obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form if signed by me.

I have been fully informed of the above-described procedure with its possible benefits and risks and I give my permission for participation (or participation of my child) in the study.

______________________________
Subject or Parent/Guardian signature

______________________________
Subject or Parent/Guardian name (print)

____________
Date
APPENDIX B: STUDENT ASSENT FORM

1. Study title: Desegregation, magnet programs, and immersion education: A Case study of South Boulevard Elementary School

2. Performance site: South Boulevard Elementary School, Baton Rouge, LA

3. Investigator: Heather K. Olson Beal, (225) 802-2892, holson1@lsu.edu

I, ______________________________, agree to participate in this study on the role of magnet programs in desegregating East Baton Rouge Parish schools.

If, during the course of study, significant new information becomes available that may relate to my willingness to continue to participate in this study, this information will be provided to me by the investigator.

I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time.

I voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

I understand that any information derived from this research project which personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered.

______________________________   __________
Signature of Child               Date

______________________________   __________
Witness                          Date
VITA

Heather Kathleen Olson Beal, the third daughter of James and Judy Olson, received her primary and secondary education in public schools in Huntsville, Texas. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish education with a minor in sociology from Brigham Young University in 1994. She taught Spanish at A & M Consolidated High School in College Station, Texas, from August 1994 to May 2000, during which time she also pursued and completed a master’s degree in modern languages from Texas A & M University. Heather then taught Spanish at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, for three years before deciding to begin the doctoral program in curriculum and instruction, also at Louisiana State University, in June 2003.

Heather’s professional interests include foreign language teaching methodology, urban education, school choice, and women’s and gender studies. Heather will begin teaching in the Department of Secondary Education and Educational Leadership at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas, in June 2008 and will receive her doctoral degree in August 2008. Heather and her husband, Brent Beal, have three children: Kennedy, Marin, and Stuart.