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A Study of College Access and Academic Success Among First Generation Hispanic Language Minority Students at the Community College Level

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**A Study of College Access and Academic Success
Among First Generation Hispanic
Language Minority Students at the
Community College Level**

L. Lorén Barbosa

**Submitted to the Faculty of
Seton Hall University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

Doctor of Education

Dissertation Committee

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Dr. Elaine M. Walker, Committee Member
Dr. Michael Osnato, Committee Member
Dr. Lawrence E. Everett, Committee Member**

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SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Doctoral Candidate, **Loren Barbosa**, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ed.D.** during this **Fall Semester 2011**.

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly competitive world economy, America's economic strength depends upon the education and skills of its workers. In the coming years, jobs requiring at least an associate's degree are projected to grow twice as quickly as those requiring no college experience (White House Summit on CC, 2010).

Community colleges appeal to the educational needs of immigrants in search of language training, job skills, and career opportunities. The main purpose of this ethnographic-focus study is to examine how community colleges meet the needs and goals of first generation Hispanic bilingual/bicultural students by reaching out to and providing them with educational and economic attainment. In addition, this study will assess and analyze the hurdles first generation Hispanic students encounter in seeking higher education, such as academic obstacles, personal obstacles, and college administration obstacles.

This study will further contribute to data about the difficulties faced and the success of first generation Hispanic students in completing required English as a Second Language (ESL) certification courses.

This ethnographic-focus group study employed a qualitative research design. Participants were first generation Hispanic college students who provided input and interaction related to the topic. The focus group participants are immigrants from various Latin American countries.

This study further examined these participants' educational and identity development and acculturation experiences during different transitional periods of their community college life in the United States. First generation Hispanic community college students not only confront the typical student adjustment concerns, they also grapple with issues pertaining to language, immigration status, acculturation, social acceptance, socioeconomic status, and ethnic identity.

Insights gained by this investigation will provide opportunities for those interested in education at the community college level to reflect upon. Identifying and examining the practices of second language learners contributes to the growing body of knowledge concerning first generation Hispanic immigrant students, provides implications for future educational development, preparation, training, and study practices and helps community college educators gain insight into their role as instructional leaders, which can ultimately have a positive impact on student achievement.

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The journey to complete my doctoral program and this research would not have been possible without a significant level of assistance from many distinguished educators. This writer expresses sincere appreciation for the continual guidance and support received from the members of the dissertation committee. Their wisdom, patience, and insightfulness made this experience extremely fulfilling.

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I extend sincere appreciation to Dr. Elaine Walker and Dr. Michael Osnato for kindly serving as members of my dissertation committee. Their support, instruction and guidance over the years have been invaluable. I truly appreciate their taking time from their busy schedule to share with me their expertise as educational leaders.

I especially wish to acknowledge and thank Dr. Lawrence E. Everett for monitoring my progress. His insightful comments, calm demeanor and professional support over the years have been invaluable.

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Finally, I especially wish to acknowledge and thank my very patient and understanding husband, Simón B. Barbosa, for his tremendous support, love, and encouragement throughout my many years of educational pursuit. I thank him for taking care of so many things for me, so that I could take care of this. I thank him for sharing with me this time-consuming project and waiting patiently for so many years for its completion, and I thank him for his love which has served as a compass throughout this journey.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to those who matter most to me: my family. They are the ones who have supported and kept me going. By family, I mean all the people in my life who provide encouragement, advocacy, assurance, and emotional refueling. To them I attribute all the effort that went into writing this dissertation.

I especially dedicate this work to my husband Simón and my children, Andrew, Alexis and Ashley who stood by me, providing the necessary support and understanding to pull me through this process. There is absolutely no doubt that I could not have completed this journey without their love, and understanding.

I offer the lessons learned through the writing of this dissertation to my children, Andrew, Alexis, and Ashley. I never envisioned my own education would go this far. My wish is to instill in you a high value of lifelong learning, to set high goals and believe that you can accomplish anything you set your mind to as long as you are willing to work for it. Thank you for being such wonderful children, no matter how “old” you get.

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To Grandma Sara, who never stops praying and whose faith has given me so much

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Finally, posthumously, I dedicate this achievement in loving memory to my dad, Peter James Perry. Thank you, Dad, for never making me feel like a step-child. You were right: *"Solamente una vez."*

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the learning, personal, and establishment barriers that the first generation Hispanic immigrant student encounters when taking required ESL education courses in a two-year community college setting prior to enrolling in and successfully completing college level courses. This ethnographic study explored the habits and burdens confronted by ESL students on the community college level prior to enrolling in and successfully completing regular college level courses. Further, attention was given to the learning preferences of Hispanic adult community college students as they constructed new meanings out of their educational experiences in the classroom.

The growing first generation Hispanic population, with its large number of limited English proficient adults, has gravitated towards the community college institution. This is due to the fact that a high school diploma no longer serves as the basic credential for successful employment (Fry, 2002). Although many immigrants and non-immigrants alike seek a college education in order to attain a higher salaried position, the majority of Hispanic immigrants' purpose in attending college is just that: to improve their economic status. This is because Hispanic immigrants encounter greater economic hardships than the average American person. For example, the average income of Hispanic immigrant families is 40 percent lower than that of native-born families in the United States

(The College Board, 2010; Gonzales, 2009). Thus, in order to attain access to the upper sectors of the economy, Hispanic immigrants must obtain a higher education if they wish to avoid the difficult economic hardships that their counterparts faced upon their arrival to the United States (Abrego, 2009).

In order to attain greater parity in U.S. society, Hispanic immigrant students need better access to a college education. Once these students are enrolled, colleges should work to retain and graduate them. College may well be the most expeditious way to get Hispanics students into the job market and the mainstream of American economic life. The findings of this study will be helpful to colleges that may wish to implement or modify their existing ESL education programs and related services to promote Hispanic student success.

Background of the Study

College is a daunting process for all individuals. Students must adapt to their university environment and surroundings in order to succeed both personally and academically (Pascarella Yamp; Terenzini, 1991). While adjustment issues pertain to all students, the concerns and issues of first generation Hispanic immigrant community college students are intricate and complex.

The number of community college immigrant students continues to grow and they continue to seek higher education opportunities. As a result, community colleges must fulfill a multiplicity of roles within their communities and offer a myriad of educational programs and services with a broad and

sometimes contradictory set of intended outcomes. The 2010 U.S. Census Bureau reports that Latinos 25 years and older have increased their participation in community colleges from 37 percent in 2000 to 41 percent in 2008. According to a 2010 report of the National Center for Education Statistics, 17 percent of Latinos pursuing higher education attend community colleges and 10 percent later transfer to a four-year college.

There are factors that may hinder these students' access to higher education. These include the diversity of students found in community colleges; the varying academic range from students who are barely literate to professionals with multiple degrees. Immigrant students, who may not be sufficiently prepared academically, may be transformed into full members of the college academic and social community if colleges provide adequate remedial programs.

Community colleges play an important role in providing opportunities for first generation Hispanic immigrant students to participate in the American education system. Research on the obstacles confronted by bilingual community college students may benefit students, teachers, and college administrators. Modifications can be made in areas such as course format, college retention, and student services in order to address how these obstacles that hamper the ability of first generation Hispanic bilingual students to succeed at the community college level can be overcome.

The United States has been portrayed as the “land of opportunity,” a belief that has lured many Hispanics to the United States hoping for a better life. Over the past six decades, Hispanics have immigrated to the United States in larger numbers than ever before in their history, except for the period immediately following the Mexican revolution.

The larger presence in the country of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans has contributed to an increase in the population count as a function of both their internal and external growth (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010). The result has been a massive Hispanic population explosion, such that the popular and commercial media sent shock waves through the nation’s psyche when it reported that by early in the twenty-first century Hispanics would be the largest minority group in the country. The U.S. Census Bureau further predicted that by the year 2040 the Hispanic population would increase to 18 percent of the U.S. population, as compared to 14 percent for African Americans. In fact, the Census Bureau stated that Hispanics are the fastest-growing minority group.

The Census Bureau further indicates that “Hispanics in the United States are growing poorer.” Hispanics make up 24 percent of the poor in this country, exceeding the poverty rate of the traditionally poorest African Americans. The implications of these demographic changes are of great significance in many urban centers where Hispanics may be approximating a majority among the population. As such, the Hispanic explosion may present major challenges to

educational institutions that have to respond to the group's education and employment training needs (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009).

In higher education, community colleges and universities have also experienced an increased need to serve the growing enrollments of Hispanic students (Carnevele, 2009). In most colleges, the only educational support services directed at Hispanic students have been economic in nature: scholarships, federal and state financial aid, and paid interventions. Other interventions include English as a Second Language programs, remedial education, and occasionally, bilingual staff to help Hispanic students negotiate the system.

Statement of the Problem

Higher education attainment is considered essential to succeed in the workplace and in society. This is due to the fact that a high school diploma no longer serves as the basic credential for successful employment (Fry, 2009). Although both immigrants and non-immigrants seek a college education in order to earn a higher salary, the majority of Hispanic immigrants' main purpose in pursuing a college degree is to improve their economic status. This is because of the greater economic hardships Hispanic immigrants encounter than the average American. For example, the average income of Hispanic immigrant families is forty percent lower than that of native-born families in the United States (The College Board, 2010; Gonzales, 2009). Thus, in order to attain access to the upper sectors of the economy, children of Hispanic immigrants must obtain a

higher education if they wish to avoid the difficult economic hardships that their parents faced upon their arrival in the United States (Abrego, 2009).

The problem addressed by this study has various dimensions. The following chapters will expand on each dimension of the problem and will support the discussion with a review of pertinent and related literature. Briefly described below are the various dimensions and themes which will serve as headings for the extended discussions found in the literature reviewed.

1. Hispanics are not new to the U.S. experience. In fact, they have existed since before the Mayflower (Barrera, 2001; Estrada, 2008). Over the past twenty years we have seen a renewed Hispanic population explosion in the United States that will have major historical, social, and economic implications. A review of the history of Hispanics in search of social equality reveals that for more than a century they have faced major barriers to educational attainment (Barrera, 2007). Today, especially in urban America, as the economy requires that they acquire credentials to enter the employment market, Hispanics will need more access to higher education to reach parity with others in U.S. society. But access alone is not enough. Just as in the public school system, Hispanics in higher education will need access to instruction they can comprehend and educational support systems that help them stay in and complete the prerequisite college level courses before they can begin regular college level ones.

2. Community colleges have become places of hope for Hispanics, as well as other poor working class people who need to prepare for an increasingly diverse, globally-oriented employment market. However, community colleges may not be equipped with staff, instructors, and learning resources to meet the particular needs of Hispanic first generation English as a second-language learners. This creates serious challenges for the community college. To begin with, community colleges are often not fully appreciated in higher education, are generally underfunded and are constantly struggling to be valued by those in power and those that highly depend on their existence to enter an ever-changing economy. They are also institutions subject to the political conditions and ideological turns of the communities and state systems they serve, which espouse policies that have not always been favorable to the interests of Hispanics.

3. Most Hispanics in higher education are enrolled in community colleges. Their experience has received mixed reviews because it has been characterized by poor academic success as measured by participation, retention, and graduation rates. This record is in part explained by swings in the economy. When the economy is good, Hispanic students stop attending college to go to work; when the economy is bad, they return to the community college with financial assistance from the government. The diversity found in community colleges and the varying levels of academic preparation range from students who are barely literate to professionals with multiple degrees. Studies point to the

impact of socio-economic issues on student academic attainment (McClenney, 2004; Price, 2004; Martinez, 2008 and Roueche & Roueche, 2009). Specifically, McClenney (2004) states:

Community colleges serve disproportionately high numbers of poor students and students of color. Many of the students are the ones who were least well served during their previous public school education and therefore most likely to have academic challenges as well as fiscal ones (p. 11).

Further, a significant proportion of first generation Hispanic students attending community college tend to be older than the typical college student (average age is 31 years), and are dominant in Spanish (as high as 65 percent in some communities) (Census, 2010). These students often enroll in English as a Second Language community college courses which are academically difficult and challenging for them. Community colleges provide access to higher education to the most diverse student body of first generation students in history. Although the average age of community college students is 28, 46 percent of them are age 21 or younger (NCES, 2009).

4. Most community colleges offer English as a Second Language courses; however, these are not sufficient to ensure success for the first generation Hispanic student who has not attended any other prior schooling in the United States. As a result, these students often have a difficult time getting through a college-level curriculum delivered only in English.

Based on the United States Census (2010), the gap between ethnic and racial groups continues to widen and although some minority groups are narrowing the gap in participation, the disparity in achievement and opportunity remains wide. There is a growing proportion of unskilled, under-educated citizens who cannot meet the demands of a technology-based workplace (Prize, 2009; McClenney, 2009).

The literature review chapter that follows has been carefully delineated to further articulate the problem and to contextualize and inform its many dimensions. Each subsection of the literature review addresses one or more dimensions of the problem and offers instructive insights regarding the issues, especially as they relate to the condition of education and the barriers that first generation Hispanic students face in the United States.

This study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the learning, personal, and establishment barriers that the first generation Hispanic immigrant student encounters when taking required English as a Second Language (ESL) education courses in a community college setting prior to enrolling in and successfully completing college level courses.

These barriers are considered key deterrents to adult learning. The study focused on first generation Hispanic students who have not attended any prior schooling in the United States and are now enrolled in an urban community college.

Examples of educational barriers include lack of primary schooling preparation, dislike of or unfamiliarity with study, and attitude towards learning. Administration barriers relate to poor teaching methods, problematic course scheduling, and lack of instruction and tutors. Personal barriers include financial strains, transportation issues, lack of family support, and personal values and attitudes toward education. This study also served to suggest changes in policy so that policymakers may address external factors to better serve Hispanic ESL community college students through legislative action.

The findings of this study will be helpful to colleges that may wish to implement ESL education and related services to promote first generation Hispanic students' success. Community colleges are expected to produce competent students who can think critically, communicate clearly, and make good judgments. Community colleges around the nation are enrolling an increasingly diverse student population – more ESL learners, more first-generation college students, more adult students, and more students from low-income families (McClenney, 2009). These students make up almost 60 percent of all community college students and are traditionally under-prepared for the academic demands of college-level courses (Roueche & Roueche, 2009). Research in this area is important in order to address the multiple aspects of diversity among immigrants rather than treating them as one homogeneous subdivision within the community college population (Szeleny & Chang, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the learning, personal, and establishment barriers that the first generation Hispanic immigrant student encounters when taking required ESL education courses in a two year community college setting prior to enrolling and successfully completing college level courses.

The main topic guiding this study was the learning, personal, and establishment barriers that the first generation Hispanic immigrant student encounters when taking required ESL courses in a community college. Specifically, what did they need in order to be successful students? In order to acquire the data needed to gather this information, students were interviewed in an informal group setting. The interview times varied among the focus-group interviews. The interviews averaged 90 minutes, with the shortest interview at 60 minutes and the longest interview at 120 minutes.

The study sought to identify, describe, and examine the perceptions of a group of first generation Hispanic immigrant students in their learning experience at an ESL certification program, which is required in all community colleges. Further, this study helped identify the learning, personal, and establishment barriers these students experienced in order to successfully complete the program.

The study focused on first generation Hispanic immigrant students who did not attend any prior schooling in the United States and are enrolled in an .

urban community college. In this study, the researcher sought to attain a more in-depth understanding of the practice of ESL in the community college setting.

In examining students' perceptions, the study sought to gain knowledge not only of how these students view educational attainment but also, and importantly, what barriers inhibit and what drives promote their participation in the community college's ESL program. Knowledge of the students' perceptions and experiences will shed light on information which will help uncover the factors both external and internal, which affect the students' desire and intention to succeed in the required ESL college program. The study also hoped to understand how these factors influence and/or promote these students' participation in the life of the community college and its effect on their personal life.

Knowledge of the perception that students from Hispanic backgrounds have regarding participation in the community college's ESL prerequisite program may help educators, school administrators, and policymakers, as well as students who are concerned with participating in and completing ESL courses in order to attend regular community college classes. Knowing and understanding the ways in which Hispanic students perceive participation in community college prerequisite ESL courses contributes to the ability of higher education policymakers to overcome the barriers which interfere in the development of effective participation by first generation Hispanic students.

This dissertation provided a lens through which to explore a deeper understanding of the issues central to second language learning by establishing a shared vision between the participants and myself. The participants revealed their insights and experiences regarding the issues they faced in learning English as a new language. These views brought new knowledge and understanding about college level ESL students' views of language learning from their own perspectives.

Research Questions

The following questions comprised the study: (1) How do the classroom and college environments affect the educational experiences of first generation immigrant Hispanic students? (2) What types of negative or positive personal experiences do first generation Hispanic students have while attending a two-year college? (3) What types of experiences are disempowering or challenging, academically or personally, to first generation Hispanic students attending two-year colleges? (4) How did the ESL certification courses influence the educational and career goals of these students?

Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study because it facilitates study in depth and detail and is unconstrained by predetermined categories (Patton, 2006). A qualitative analysis was particularly useful for this study since qualitative analysis aids in understanding meanings of participants in

a study as well as context and influences on participants (Bickman & Rog, 2008). In qualitative research, researchers seek to understand the meanings people have constructed about their experiences (Merriam, 2007). Therefore, a qualitative design was chosen for this study that explored the meanings students attach to their educational experiences.

The participants selected for this study were a sample of adult community college students in an ESL certification program. Adult is defined for the purposes of this study as a person who is 21 years of age or older. The researcher intentionally selected participants to represent a cross-section of the Hispanic adult community college student population, seeking representation across gender, country of origin, class, and culture.

In this qualitative study, the researcher was the primary research instrument (Merriam, 2002). Twenty-one students volunteered to participate in the study. Three focus groups were conducted. The students who volunteered to participate in the study had been exposed to a number of teaching methodologies such as lectures and small group activities. The purpose for conducting focus group interviews was to determine the needs of ESL learners in a community college setting.

The researcher's role was to ask semi-structured, open-ended questions and to listen to participants' answers with an open mind, trying to find the meanings inherent in their words. Every attempt was made to report findings that reflect the participants' own voices to the extent possible. Findings are

reported in a qualitative narrative that includes rich descriptions provided in the students' own words.

Significance of the Study

This study focused on the performance of Hispanic first generation students in a Northern New Jersey community college where ESL is a pre-requisite certification program prior to taking college credit courses. This study will review the literature that offers a framework to understand the larger issues that may make this study an important contribution to the knowledge of Hispanic students in community colleges. This study may also make an important contribution to the field because it will collect and categorize valuable insights, best practices, and other evidence descriptive of prerequisite ESL program implementation into useful formats. The study, placed in its proper historical, political, legal, and educational context, may contribute to the evolution and establishment of such programs. This is important because the literature shows how ESL programs are conceptualized and implemented, and highlights the factors that can make a difference in their success and how they affect their intended constituencies.

Research on barriers to learning by Hispanic ESL students in an urban city may benefit students, teachers, college administrators, policymakers, and scholars. Stakeholders can make institutional modifications and address issues by identifying how the three barriers--learning, personal, and establishment--

affect the ability of first generation Hispanic bilingual students to successfully complete prerequisite community college ESL courses before enrolling in regular college level courses. Current and future Hispanic ESL students can be aware of specific barriers to learning that could prevent them from completing their program. Faculty may modify their teaching practices, develop new approaches, and implement curriculum adjustment to address specific barriers.

Additionally, the research may help college faculty achieve a better understanding of learning obstacles confronted by first generation Hispanic students and their educational needs. College administrators may be able to make institutional modifications. Policymakers may address external factors to better serve Hispanic ESL community college students through legislative action and lobbying efforts. Scholars may use the research as a benchmark for further studies on Hispanic ESL educational progress.

The focus group case studies as well as the analysis of the data were used to make some informed statements and recommendations about the practice of prerequisite ESL courses in community colleges. It is anticipated that this data, information, and its conclusions may be useful to future researchers, college staff, students, and community advocates who seek to influence policy, practice and future research. Further, this study may serve as a model for creating larger scale studies at other community colleges that wish to understand the learning, personal, and establishment barriers that the first generation Hispanic student faces.

Limitations of the Study

All research studies have some limitations, and this study was no exception. These limitations must be taken into account when reviewing and considering the results of this study. As such, some of the limitations are as follows:

1. This is a qualitative research study; and in general, qualitative research is not meant to be generalizable since the findings are based on a small purposeful sample. Nevertheless, the study does provide an in-depth examination of the problem; and teachers and learners in community college classrooms can determine whether or not the study is applicable to their situation.

2. Since the researcher is the main instrument in the collection of data in qualitative research, as a researcher, my beliefs about how knowledge is constructed based on my experience teaching higher education classes has informed this study. As an educator in a community college, I have a particular point of view that has an effect on how I interpret the data. Therefore, a fundamental question which I continually asked myself was: Is this what the informant truly stated? Am I interpreting this data correctly?

3. Participants in this study know that I am a teacher within the college and may have provided answers that they believed I wanted to hear. I did everything possible to encourage them to be honest and share their own ideas

with me. Further, participants' responses may have been limited by the capacity of their memories; in fact, the act of being interviewed may have changed participants' recollections of past events.

4. The study was limited in its scope and research design. The data was collected from a community college, and the sample used in the study was only drawn from the first generation Hispanic ESL student. The researcher acknowledges that by limiting the sample to ESL Hispanic students, other ESL immigrant students who are not native Spanish speakers were not represented in the study. The limitation is the result of attempting to work within existing resources and access to the needed population.

Definition of Terms

The theoretical framework is the source for defining terms and identifying essential concepts for the study. The literature addresses the issues of ESL, Hispanic, and developmental students and uses a wide variety of terms. To enhance clarity and consistency, I will use the following terms throughout this study.

Academic Integration: A term that refers to a student's academic performance in college and engagement in the intellectual climate and academic systems of higher education (Tinto, 1995).

Academic Standing: A student's academic performance in college as measured by his or her overall grade point average.

Acculturation: The process by which a person absorbs the culture of a society.

Assimilation: The process in which one group takes on cultural and other traits of a larger group.

Community College: A comprehensive two-year American college or technical institute, public or private, that is accredited to award the Associate in Arts or the Associate in Science as its highest degree. Such institutions generally change frequently in response to new student populations and program demands, maintain open access for diverse populations, and enhance social mobility in American society (Cohen & Brawer, 2006).

Cultural Adjustment: In the context of this study it refers to the process of adapting to the host culture with the community college educational setting as the backdrop. Cultural adjustment is closely related to acculturation, which represents the direct contact with another culture and results in change and adaptation.

Culture: As used in this study, refers to the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior.

Diversity: For the purposes of this study, diversity/diverse refers to all ways in which people differ such as gender, race, class, culture, age, ethnic background, and learning styles.

Dropout: A traditional term for a student who leaves a standard educational career. The term is viewed negatively with an inference that it is the fault of an individual (Nielsen, 1996).

Educational Experience: Educational experiences in higher education and in the United States education system. It encompasses location of high-school degree completion, higher education experience in the home country, higher education experience in the United States, and enrollment status (Brilliant, 2000; U.S. Census, 2010).

English Language Learner (ELL): There are numerous descriptors and designations for non-native students who are learning English. For the purposes of this study I will use ELL to describe the students, L2 (Second Language) to describe the issues which arise in learning a second language, and ESL (English as a Second Language) to describe the courses designed for ELL students at the community college.

English as a Second Language (ESL): Teaching English to non-English speaking or Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. These are students whose primary language is not English and thus English is the second, third or even fourth language spoken at home. ESL students must take an English Diagnostic Test upon entry into a college program. Test scores help to identify them as non-native speakers of English. An ESL student may or may not possess advanced linguistic and academic skills in a native language (Chamot & O'Malley, 2004).

Faculty Engagement: In this study the concept will pertain to the degree of involvement of the community college faculty and how they may or may not engage in the process of helping first generation college students to be successful in college.

First Generation College Students: These students are defined as those whose parents have not attended college in this country.

Grounded Theory: A qualitative approach to research that “is designed to inductively build a substantive theory regarding some aspect of practice” (Merriam, 2009). The themes that emerge from this process are grounded in the real world.

Hispanic: Primarily a government term used for data aggregation purposes. It also relates to a person of Latin American descent living in the United States. Gracia (2009) broadens the meaning by defining the term Hispanic as “the people of Iberia, Latin America, and some segments of the population in the United States, after 1492, and to the descendants of these peoples anywhere in the world as long as they preserve close ties to them” (p. 52). Although he prefers the term Hispanic, Gracia continues by saying, “That we are Hispanic should not prevent some of us from being also Mexican, or Argentinean, or whatever” (p. 191).

Immigrants: Those individuals who have plans to live in the United States permanently, whether or not they hold at this time permanent residency or United States citizenship. Based on this definition, immigrant students are defined as students who are naturalized citizens, permanent residents, or seek to obtain status to live in the United States permanently (Rumbaut & Portes, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Immigration Circumstances: Primarily encompass causes of immigration to the United States, current immigration/residency status, and plans for long-term residence in the United States (Padilla & Perez, 2006).

Latino: The grassroots alternative to the government designated term Hispanic. It is used in the United States to identify persons of Spanish-speaking origin or descent who designate themselves as Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or of other Hispanic origin (Carnevale, 2007; Reyes & Halcón, 2009). While the two terms can and are often used interchangeably, it is important to recognize that both Hispanic and Latino are broad terms used for extremely diverse populations, bound primarily by the common denominator of the Spanish language. Garcia (2009) states, "Radically and culturally, we are not 'pure' stock, and any separation by the Census Bureau, the Center for Education Statistics, or other social institutions that attempt to address the complexity of our diverse population representation is likely to impart a highly ambiguous sketch."

Low-Income College Student: A student who is economically disadvantaged because of the family income, family structure, and family size (Crosnoe, Mistry, Elder, 2006). Students characterized as low-income are eligible for services offered through specialized programs.

Multicultural Education: Used to encompass a broad array of approaches to education designed to meet the needs of a diverse group of students.

Nontraditional Students: Students who did not enter college directly after high school graduation. They are also students that do not fit the traditional picture of students found in the predominantly White colleges prior to the 1960s. In addition, they are often described as more likely to be first-generation adult students who attend college part-time at the same time as they maintain work and family responsibilities. They often tend to be older, more academically under-prepared, more racially and ethnically diverse, from lower income households, and more likely to be female or handicapped than the traditional students of previous years (Laden, 2004; Zwerlig, 2002).

Pullout: A college student who leaves school because of the attractiveness of opportunities outside of school (Nielsen, 2009).

Pushout: A college student who is forced to leave school because of organizational failures of the institution. (Nielsen, 1996).

Retention: The student's re-enrollment in college course work from year to year (e.g., from the Fall semester to the next Fall term) until they reach graduation.

Semi-structured Interview: A type of interview in which the interviewer asks a series of structured questions and then probes more deeply with open-ended questions in order to obtain additional information (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2006, p. 769).

Support Services: Services offered through various campus programs which place an emphasis on orienting students to college life.

Vernacular: The student's first language.

Summary

Chapter 1 presented the background of the study, specified the problem, described its significance, and presented a brief overview of the methodology used. The chapter concluded by noting some limitations of the study. A review of research and literature is presented in Chapter 2. This section includes theory and will render a review of existing research literature conducted on first generation Hispanics in community colleges, education, and in areas related to the research topic. Chapter 3 provides a description of the research design, including the participants, strategies employed to answer the research questions, methodology for data collection and analysis, and instrumentation used in the present study. The results of the investigation are presented in Chapter 4. A detailed analysis of the data and an interpretation of the descriptive findings that link to the research questions are included. A summary of the research, its limitations, and implications for further study are discussed in Chapter 5. Connections are made between prior research, current findings, and future research.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will reveal how the library searches on first generation Hispanic immigrant students' experiences in community college were conducted, what the criteria were for literature selection or omission, and what the strengths and weaknesses were of selected studies. Although the literature uses a variety of terms, including Columbian, Mexican, Mexican American, Hispanic, Latino, and others, this paper will refer to said groups as Hispanics. However, when the terms were identified by the study participants, their own identifiers will be used. One's cultural identification is deeply personal, political, and cultural. It is imperative to understand that students born in the same city with the same ethnic background may refer to themselves as Mexican American, Mexican, or Hispanic. They may also have adverse reactions to labels being placed upon them by others. Thus, out of respect for the research participants, their own terms will be used.

Library Search

Elton B. Stephens Company (EBSCO) was the primary database used in the article-gathering process. Initial search terms included but were not limited to the following: first generation Hispanic students attending community college, Latino and community college, Latinos and retention, Hispanic students and retention, Hispanics and college, Latino and college, two-year colleges and first generation immigrant students. Hispanic attrition and community college,

Hispanic and developmental, developmental English and Hispanic, ESL student and community college, developmental English and minorities, remediation and Hispanic students (For additional terminology, see Appendix A).

The search was limited to full text articles only. Further searches were completed on first generation Hispanic students, successful practices, acculturation, immigration trends, barriers of ESL certification, retention, attrition, developmental English, and Latinos, using education journals. These journals included but were not limited to *The Journal of Developmental Education*, *The Community College Review*, *College Student Journal*, *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *Community College Composition*, *The New Direction for Community Colleges*, *The Community College Journal*, *College Composition and Communication*, and *The Community College Research Center*. Searches for dissertations were conducted through UBI Dissertation Abstracts International. Research was also completed through Census 2010 and through the web at the American Association for Community Colleges, the National Center for Education Statistics, and Educational Fund sites.

Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

When considering the social critical approach of this study, method appropriateness in educational research takes on a political and social meaning. Studies that used methods that objectified participants and those that did not were of particular interest for this study, because the method may have influenced the type of data that was collected. Past research methods were

examined for the purpose of analyzing whether study participants were treated as individuals or quantified as part of a group (Hispanic students, immigrant students). Traditional quantitative studies using experimental or quasi experimental approaches do not reveal the experiences of individuals; rather, they show trends. The experience of the individual Hispanic student gets silenced in these types of studies. The degree to which a study objectified and quantified or empowered and revealed individual participant experience has ethical implications for social critical research.

The articles included in this literature review were selected based on several criteria. The first criterion was that articles were reviewed and scholarly; this aspect is important in that other scholars in the field reviewed the findings in the studies and approved the soundness of the methods used in each article. The selected reviewed articles also needed to include a significant number of recent and relevant studies in their literature reviews to reflect current demographic trends and placement testing methods.

Second, inclusion was based on the appropriateness of scholars' methods for data collection and designs that were appropriate for studying first generation Hispanic immigrant students specifically. Third, literature was included if its content revealed a focused discussion that accounted for what has been stated already in other literature, how one study would contribute to previously stated points in other literature, and what the limitations were of that

particular study. These criteria helped to establish past research practices and reveal gaps in the literature.

Last, literature that emphasized student empowerment, student voices, educational historical contexts, and liberation were included due to their relevance for a social critical study that emphasized Hispanic students' experiences. Studies that objectified and quantified student participants were included to reveal the gaps in the literature and how previous methods did not reveal Hispanic students' experiences. Literature that did not meet these criteria was excluded, with the exception of news articles and websites related to legal decisions and community college policy.

Review of the Literature

The following is a synthesis of literature related to the topic of first generation Hispanic immigrant student experience. Each section is followed by a critique of the methods used in the literature and the significance of each article to this dissertation. The literature presented here shows research conducted on the history of education in the United States of first generation Hispanic immigrant students in community colleges and in education.

The literature review is organized into four major sections: (1) historical and sociological review of Latinos in education, (2) the Latino struggle for education, (3) immigration trends and acculturation in community colleges, and (4) community college and Hispanic working class learners. The review is organized in this way to reveal how research on Hispanics in community colleges

evolved slowly (see Figure 1). Figure 1 illustrates how each of the four major sections of this literature review relates to this research project on the history of education for first generation Hispanic immigrant students in the United States.

Chapter 1 provides a broad view into the nature and scope of the study by substantiating the research need, establishing a theoretical framework, stating the research questions, and describing the study limitations. The purpose of Chapter 2 is to render a review of existing research literature conducted on first generation Hispanic immigrant students in community colleges, in education, and in areas related to the research topic.

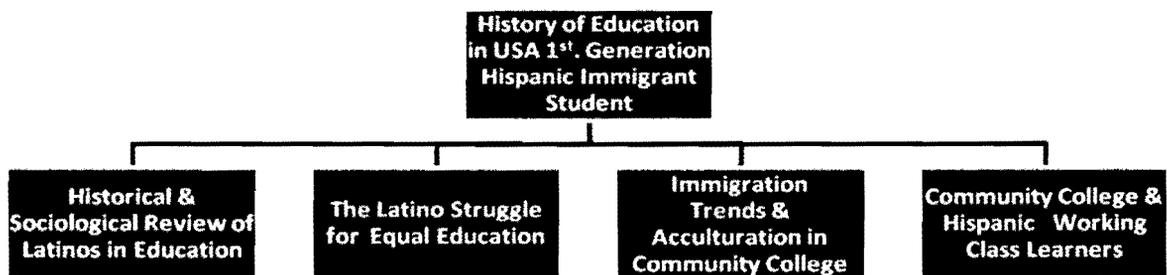


Figure 1. History of education for first generation Hispanic immigrant students.

Research Review

1. Research on historical and sociological review of Latinos in education.
2. Research on the Latino struggle for equal education.
3. Research on current immigration trends and acculturation and their impact on community colleges.

4. Research on Community Colleges and Hispanic Working Class Learners.

Historical and Sociological Review of Latinos in Education

To fully understand the social and educational issues affecting Latinos, it is important to have a grasp of the historical forces that shaped their presence in this country, forces that continue today to affect their relation to the rest of the society.

The Latino experience in America is about a very diverse group of people with very well defined national identities and different cultural and historical experiences, yet connected through the use of the Spanish language (Baez, 1995). Latinos may come from any of the Spanish-speaking nations of South America, the Caribbean, Central America, and Spain. Various migratory patterns and socioeconomic factors explain the diversity.

Acuña (2002) and Barrera & Estrada, et al. (2008) have shown that this country's economic and political expansionism during the middle of the nineteenth century led to the occupation of what is known as the culturally dominant Spanish Southwest. "With the occupation came the economic and cultural incorporation to the United States of people of Mexican descent into a subordinate class of United States society" (Barrera, 2008). While Mexicans were originally incorporated into United States society by conquest, it is through migration that this population has shown massive growth.

Hispanics have struggled for educational access since the late nineteenth century. In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the United States/Mexico War, and all Mexican nationals in the ceded territories (known now as California, New Mexico, Nevada, and sections of Colorado, Utah, and Arizona) became U.S. citizens one year later (Ferg-Cadima, 2004). As the Hispanic population increased in the Southwest, segregation became a common practice and policy.

By 1930, 85 percent of Hispanic children in the Southwest were attending either separate classrooms or entirely separate schools. The school officials often claimed that once the children were English speaking and assimilated, they would be integrated. However, integration into White schools did not occur often (Ferg-Cadima, 2004). Further, the Mexican schools were inadequate, with few teachers, poor equipment, and unfit buildings.

For those Hispanic students who did manage to persist, they experienced stereotyping that contributed to their disproportionate expulsion and suspension. Hispanics were commonly called “greasers,” “disease spreaders,” and “dirty” (Cadima, p. 10). Hispanic children would be examined in front of the class for lice or tick infestation and then suspended, although some of these students did not actually have these ailments. Some Hispanic students were expelled for weeks for having dandruff (Ferg-Cadima, p.13).

In 1946, a class action lawsuit, *Mendez v. Westminster*, on behalf of more than 5,000 Hispanic students in California was filed (Valencia, 2007). The U.S.

District Court judge ruled that Hispanic student rights were being violated under the equal protection clause of the fourteenth amendment (Valencia). This was the first federal court case involving school segregation of Hispanics, and the plaintiffs prevailed. The case laid the groundwork for the landmark decision of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case of 1954 (Valencia).

In 1898, Puerto Rico was incorporated into the United States as a result of war and conquest. The Jones Act passed by the U.S. Congress made Puerto Ricans U.S. citizens in 1917 (a fact that distinguishes Puerto Ricans from other recent Latino immigrants). U.S. citizenship presented serious challenges for Puerto Ricans. Adaptation to a new language, culture, ideas, and attitudes led to drastic transformations in their society. Explaining the migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States, Lewis (1968) tells us that in the early part of the 1940s, the United States promoted the industrialization of the Island to make it a showcase of "democracy" and progress in Latin America. This industrialization left many peasants unemployed and defenseless, and many had to migrate to the United States, where a wartime labor shortage needed them. The United States encouraged the migration to fulfill its labor needs mainly to the Eastern region of the country (Lewis, 1968).

Ogbu (1988) and Barrera (1999) make the argument that class, race, and language are critical variables, which historically have interacted negatively to maintain these two groups in a subordinate status within educational institutions. The greatest and most detrimental injustice has been the denial of

access to education (Castellanos, 2008; Cummins, 2002). Baez (2005) argues that the fact that both Mexicans and Puerto Ricans were incorporated into United States society as conquered groups has caused them to function within a sociopolitical context that continues to generate relationships of inequality.

The experience of colonialism and exploitation of both Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, the largest groups among Latinos, and their experiences fighting for social equity position them as a major political force in many U.S. urban centers, contributing to major changes in their social-political climate and culture. There is an extensive body of literature which traces the issues encountered by these two groups as they attempted to pursue the dream of a better life. Among the most significant and recurrent themes in this literature are discrimination, social inequality, and educational neglect (Baez, 2005).

However, the conditions discussed above do not apply in the same manner to other Latino national groups. Of the most recent Latino immigrations to the United States only the people from the Dominican Republic share an experience of occupation and colonial control with the Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. Central Americans from countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, for instance, also have large representation in some U.S. cities. They too have left their countries as a result of economic and political inequality. However, they were not a conquered people in the same sense as Puerto Ricans and Mexicans. By and large, Latinos that come from South America have

substantial numbers in the aggregate, but may not always constitute a major political force in a community

One Latino subgroup that differs significantly from the others is Cuban Americans, especially those in Florida and, in particular, the city of Miami. They are significant in number and hold much economic and political power. Cubans arrived in large numbers in the United States after 1960 as a result of America's political tensions with Cuba after Fidel Castro gained political power and instituted his Caribbean brand of socialism. Students of Cuban-American history state that Cuban Americans view America as a special place that opened its arms to their condition, supporting them in their struggle against communism (Moore, 2002).

While conditions are changing for Cubans in Florida after a stay in the region close to sixty years, they still distinguish themselves from other Latino nationals in their political and cultural life. Because of a stronger economic base in their communities, they are also less likely to be involved in national Latino equity struggles. The exception, however, is bilingual education, because they share with other Latinos the concern for language-based education and the preservation of the Spanish language, which they view as a historical and political right.

In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau reported a "reversal of the American dream for Latinos" when its data revealed that between 2000 and 2009 the annual income for Latinos dropped 16 percent, a trend that suggests that this

ethnic group has grown poorer with time instead of improving its economic status. Continued immigration from Mexico, Central America, and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean has contributed to this condition. In addition, it has also increased the number of Latinos in need of education and the acquisition of English language skills to mediate an English language world.

Data from the 2010 Census, for instance, revealed that more than 19 percent of people in the United States spoke Spanish and at least half of them reported having difficulty speaking English. The combination of poverty, low educational achievement, and lack of English speaking skills continues to mean more difficulties for Latinos and the nation.

While school dropout rates have declined over the past three decades for other ethnic and racial groups, this has not been the case for Latinos. Census data also indicate that only 78 percent of Latinos finished high school, compared to 91 percent of Whites and 84 percent of African Americans. Astonishingly, the majority of Latinos receive less schooling than their parents did. In 2008, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, only 12 percent of Latinos over age 25 had college degrees, compared with 37 percent of non-Latinos. In 2008, 12 percent of Latino high school completers ages 18-24 were enrolled in college, compared to 63 percent for Whites. Differences in college preparedness may explain why Latinos enroll at lower rates than their White peers (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010).

Researchers of various persuasions have argued that lack of educational attainment is at the heart of this reversal in social attainment. What should have been a trend towards parity in the social infrastructure of society has been retarded. The future of Latinos, as well as their contribution to the socioeconomic and political development of this country, will be determined by their educational attainment (Carnevale, 2002; Walker, 2008; Avalos, 2003; and Sikes, 2004).

In the past, access to public school education was denied to Hispanics; thus, the opportunity to attend higher education for most Hispanics was an impossibility. Presently, the issue of access to education is still a problem. However, access is no longer due to overt segregation by country of origin; rather, today's Hispanics face economic, curricular, placement testing, and instructional barriers to obtaining a higher education.

The Latino Struggle for Equal Education

Latinos in the United States have been facing up to social challenges since the time of the U.S. occupation of the Southwest of the United States in the late 1840's (Barrera 2003). During most of the twentieth century, they made the struggle for improved educational opportunities in the public schools central to their quest for social and economic equity and the attainment of the "dream." The Latino struggle to secure improved access and benefits from kindergarten through twelfth grade public school systems has been well documented in the

research and equity litigation literature (Estrada, 2002; Moore, 2002; Baez, 2005).

From the early 1930s to the 1990s, Latinos used the courts of the nation to force recognition of their educational needs and their right to educational opportunities under state and federal legislation. They also sought remedies to their condition under a growing set of rights flowing from civil rights litigation, especially after the Supreme Court decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (347 U.S. 484, 1954). Baez (2005) provides a comprehensive review of the history of Latino equity litigation. Baez (2005) makes the argument that the Latino educational litigation prior to 1973 was socially transformative in its purpose; it sought to change schools, other educational institutions and the social conditions in which Latinos live. After the Supreme Court's decision in the landmark bilingual case of *Lau v. Nichols* (414 U.S. 563, 1974), the purpose of the litigation shifted to securing mostly transitional bilingual education from public school systems. Baez argues that this shift helped to secure more rights for Latinos of limited English language proficiency (LEP). This meant that Latinos who are limited in their use of English now have some form of entitlement to language-based educational strategies that help them to acquire the English skills they need to succeed in education. This, however, did little for other Latinos who, even today, continue to draw lesser benefits from the schooling experience. This includes, Baez claims, adult learners, most of whom are the parents of children in the public school system.

One of the more recent cases he studied was *Castaneda v. Pickard* (648 F. 2d. 989, 5th. Cir. 2001). Castañeda is perhaps the most important of the bilingual and equity litigation cases of the last three decades. More than just creating new rights to bilingual education, it also created an analytical and accountability process. The Castañeda three-tier test places the burden on school systems and, some have argued, on any public educational institution to ensure that educational programs established to meet the needs of Latinos or any other language group will in fact do so (Lyons, 1988; Báez, 2005).

In addition to the litigation literature, there is literature on educational equity that reviews the role of the federal government and its agencies as they have responded to Latino concerns. There have been comprehensive reviews of this literature conducted by Teitelbaum and Hiller (2007); Fernandez (2007); Lyons (2008); and Baez, et al. (2005). They all conclude that federal agencies, such as the Department of Justice and the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), interpret various civil rights laws and federal education legislation, together with equity litigation, as providing limited English proficient students and adults with rights to bilingual education. Administrative memoranda issued by these agencies of the federal government have forced many school districts across the country to institute bilingual education and other language-based instructional interventions. The following statement by Norma V. Cuntú, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, in her testimony before a Congressional Committee (June 22,

2001), is a reaffirmation of the federal government's commitment to non-discrimination on the basis of language:

OCR policy on access to educational opportunity for LEP students is consistent with sound education policies. OCR policy requires that districts provide LEP students meaningful access to the educational program, including district programs that emphasize high standards. OCR policy, clearly supported by Federal case law, provides great flexibility to districts regarding how they will fulfill that obligation. The administration's broader educational programs designed to raise academic standards so that all of our nation's students may reach their fullest potential and be equipped to meet the global economic and social challenges of the next millennium.

Immigration Trends and Acculturation in the Community College Setting

Immigration trends in the beginning of the new millennium represent a significant force in shaping population characteristics in the United States. In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau compiled the most recent data on the population of the United States, including several reports on special population studies. One such report, entitled Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States (2010), shows that the foreign-born population in the United States is rapidly on the rise.

This population, according to this report, includes all individuals not born in the United States, such as naturalized citizens, permanent residents, nonimmigrant visa holders, and undocumented (illegal) individuals. The estimated Hispanic foreign-born population in March 2007 was 29.4 million people, which represents about 11.4 percent of the entire United States population. Much of the growth has occurred in California, Florida, and Texas, causing a significant shift in the regional distribution of Hispanic immigrants from previous immigration trends (U.S. Census Report, 2007).

Along with other social institutions, the educational system plays a vital function in providing the country's immigrants with opportunities for economic and social mobility. At the same time, immigrants bring an additional layer of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity to the educational system (Szelenyi & Chang, 2009). Among the many educational institutions, community colleges serve the very significant role of providing access to higher education (Bailey & Weininger, 2009). Community colleges offer open admission, affordable tuition, convenient locations, remedial programs, and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses--all of which make them an attractive educational destination for America's immigrants (Szelenyi & Chang, 2007).

Community colleges represent an important component of the higher education system in the United States, and their overarching purpose resonates well with the needs of Hispanic immigrants. Community colleges started primarily as a result of the universities' unwillingness to deal with the general

education aspects of less successful students and grew into institutions that serve many functions within their respective communities (Cohen & Brawer, 2006). In accordance with their mission of responding to community needs, community colleges around the country have become frontrunners in providing educational avenues for the growing numbers of immigrants by expanding their offerings in areas such as ESL studies and by becoming better acquainted with the cultural adjustment needs of this population (Kwo & Brilliant, 2005).

The new wave of immigrants is overwhelming and significant not only due to its size, but also due to its unprecedented diversity of race, ethnicity, language, class, and cultural origins. In addition, immigrants bring with them various cultural experiences, linguistic abilities, and educational backgrounds, as well as a multitude of achievement levels and aspirations for the future (Szelenyi & Chang, 2006). As such, community colleges are presented with numerous challenges, particularly if they are located in the urban areas experiencing the highest immigration growth. The immigrant population is largely concentrated in metropolitan areas, a demographic fact that is reflected in community college enrollments in urban colleges serving immigrant-heavy regions (Brilliant, 2007).

Cultural Adjustment

Hispanic immigrants arriving in the United States enter a period of transition from their original culture to the new culture. They leave their communities of origin in search of change, and they seek accepting political climates, improved economic conditions, and protection of their beliefs and

values. These changes “have produced more intense culture and ethnic contact than ever before in the history of humankind” (Trimble, 2008, p.3). The theoretical concept that best captures the process of cultural adjustment during this period of transition is acculturation. Acculturation became an important concept in the explanation of the varied experiences of ethnic and cultural minorities as international migration, economic globalization, and political conflicts supported the creation of multicultural societies (Trimble, 2008).

Acculturation research is present in several social and behavioral science fields such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology. While acculturation has been studied in other contexts besides the immigrant experience (such as acculturation of indigenous populations and native born minorities), this research review on acculturation relates primarily to first-generation immigrants. This section of the literature review provides a historical overview of the development of acculturation concepts from the 1930s to the present, followed by an analysis of existing acculturation models and outcomes. Related concepts of ethnic identity, cultural adaptability, acculturative stress, and culture–language connections are also discussed in relation to the acculturation process. The process of acculturation is then reviewed in light of the applied research about Hispanic immigrant students in the community college.

Definitions and Historical Development of Acculturation

The field of acculturation research deals with processes and outcomes of intercultural contact in plural societies. Such research is of growing importance

as societies are becoming increasingly diverse (Chun, Organista, & Marin, 2008). In this context, cultural exchange is expressed as a change in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. The definition of how this cultural change occurs during the acculturation process has evolved through contributions of Redfield, Linton, and Herskovitz (1936), The Social Science Research Council (1953), Teske and Nelson (1974), Berry (1998), and Padilla and Perez (2003).

Acculturation was first discussed in the anthropological context:

“Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into conscious first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovitz, 1936, p.149). Acculturation is thus distinguished from culture-change, assimilation, and diffusion. The key acculturation concept deriving from this definition is continuous first-hand contact (Trimble, 2003).

The way in which acculturation unfolds depends upon the types of cultural contacts, the situations in which acculturation takes place, the process of acculturation, and individual/psychological factors. The cultural contacts shape acculturation as they vary with respect to the following: contacts that occur in friendly versus hostile circumstances, contacts that involve groups of similar sizes or markedly different sizes, and contacts that take place between groups with either minute or significant differences in material and non-material aspects of culture. In addition, acculturation can occur in different situations: where cultural elements are received forcefully or voluntarily, where social and

political differences among groups are insignificant, and where one group may exercise political and social dominance over another group (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovitz, 1999).

The acculturation process depends on the receiving group's level of openness to and acceptance of dominant group traits, as well as on the reasons for which the group chooses to either resist or accept the new culture. For example, the receiving group may be open to incorporating cultural traits of the dominant group due to practical advantages such as economic and political gains and due to congruency between cultural patterns. On the other hand, the receiving group may choose to reject other cultural traits of the dominant group as a result of ethical and religious considerations. Psychological aspects of acculturation emphasize the role of individual attributes in the process, such as personality, attitudes and point of view, position within the group, intensity and duration of the contact, and social, economic, or political advantages resulting from cultural acceptance. (Redfield, Lipton, & Herskovitz, 1936).

The Social Science Research Council (SSRC, 1953) revised and expanded the concept of acculturation as follows: "Culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems, its dynamics can be seen as the selective adaptation of value systems ... the generation of developmental sequences and the operation of role determinant and personality factors" (p. 974). According to this definition, change and adaptation become important ingredients of acculturation (Trimble, 2008) along with the direct-

contact aspect identified by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits. In addition, the authors acknowledged that acculturation is a result of both individual traits, sociocultural environment, and non-cultural factors such as demographics (SSRC, 1953). This expanded view of acculturation also includes the importance of value systems, developmental systems, and social status or roles as factors that can influence the speed, direction, and final outcomes of the acculturation process (Padilla & Perez, 2008).

According to Padilla & Perez (2008), Teske and Nelson (2001) offered the first perspective on acculturation by developing the concept even further through discussing issues of power relationships and dominance among groups, values and cultural identity, as well as possible diverging outcomes. Dominance of the host group over the immigrant group can be political, economic, social, and cultural, and the power of one group over another influences the rate and direction of acculturation (Teske & Nelson, 2001). Acculturation may impact cultural values of both the immigrant and host groups and does not require a change in core values and beliefs, but it does require an understanding of another group's value system in order to function well within the new culture. Acculturation does not have to result in assimilation into the new cultures (Teske & Nelson, 2001).

Teske & Nelson's work contributed to the development of the acculturation concept by emphasizing the individual acculturation processes that can result in four psychological types of acculturation: assimilation, integration,

separation, and marginalization. The contribution of this definition of acculturation was to recognize the importance of multicultural societies in the acculturation process and to ascertain that individuals and groups have a choice in the degree of acculturation they allow themselves to experience. Teske & Nelson's work was instrumental in moving acculturation models from one-dimensional towards multidimensional approaches (Padilla & Perez, 2003).

Padilla and Perez (2003) further developed the acculturation concept by adding an even greater variety of factors that influence ways and degrees of acculturation. Some of these factors are as follows: power relationships and status of a particular immigrant group relative to other groups and the majority populations, age at the onset of the immigration process (assumed to be the beginning of acculturation process), possible racial discrimination associated with immigrants who also fit minority profiles, and ease of language usage.

Models and Outcomes of Acculturation

Research in acculturation reveals a multitude of models that predict and theorize various outcomes at the end of the process (Berry, 2003; Padilla & Perez, 2003; Smith-Castro, 2003; Trimble, 2003). For the purpose of this literature review, bicultural and multicultural models of acculturation are considered. One-dimensional models also exist, but they are not included in this literature review because they apply primarily to monocultural contexts (Smith-Castro, 2008), which are not relevant to the research setting and assumptions for this study that takes place in a multicultural and diverse environment. The

models under review incorporate the acculturation process, factors that may affect the process, and the outcomes at the end of the process. In addition, models include both individual and sociocultural considerations in the discussion of possible outcomes.

Acculturation as a construct is the interplay between individual (psychological) and sociocultural changes (Trimble, 2003). The models of acculturation journey from biculturalism to accommodation to adaptation, and culminate with expanding the context to include psychological and sociological dimensions. These models are not exclusive of one another; rather, they build upon one another—as in the defining concept—to expand understanding of the complex acculturation process

Biculturalism. The Acculturation-Biculturalism Model was developed by Szapocznick, Kurtines, and Fernandez in 1980 and was later tested through a cross-sectional study of Cubans in 1997. The two dimensions of the model are cultural development versus marginality, and biculturalism versus monoculturalism. The three possible outcomes of the model are monocultural (for individuals that are involved solely with the native Cuban culture), highly Americanized (for individuals that reject the Cuban culture and embrace the American culture only), and bicultural (for individuals who are involved in both cultures) (Smith-Castro, 2008).

Accommodation. Redfield, Linton, and Herskovitz (1936) explained the process of acculturation through an *accommodation model* that emphasized

contact between two cultural groups resulting in cultural changes for either one or both groups. The authors identified three outcomes of acculturation: acceptance, adoption, and reaction.

1. In the acceptance of the host culture, there is loss of the older cultural heritage and assimilation of new behavior patterns but not necessarily the inner values of the new culture.
2. The adoption outcome represents a combination of traits from both the original and the host culture, resulting in a “smoothly functioning cultural whole which is actually a historic mosaic” (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p.152). Many conflicting attitudes are reconciled and applied based on specific situations that may arise.
3. Finally, in the reaction outcome, resistance and aversion to the host culture occurs, generally due to assumed inferiority of the new culture, situations of oppression, and other similar reasons (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovitz, 1936).

Psychological acculturation. In Berry’s model (2003) psychological acculturation focuses on the adaptation outcomes of acculturation assuming a plural society. In a plural society cultural groups coexist, although differences in levels of dominance as a result of political, economic, or sociocultural power are present as well. Variety within cultural groups results from a number of factors, such as voluntariness of entry into the acculturation process (for example, willful immigration as opposed to refugee status), mobility of groups from the original

culture into the new culture, and permanence of groups, which can be explained as the ability and desire to live in the new culture either permanently, for an extended period of time, or for a short or undetermined period of time (Berry, 2003).

With the assumption of a pluralistic society and consideration of factors that create diversity among cultural groups, Berry's model identified four outcomes of the acculturation process: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Berry, 2003).

1. Integration emerges when individuals hold positive views about the host culture and function within the accepted norms of the culture, while continuing to maintain ties and positive feelings toward the culture of origin. Integration can only occur as a free choice on the part of the immigrants, and it can only occur in an open society that holds positive views towards the incoming group and toward diversity (Berry, 2003).
2. Assimilation occurs when individuals cannot, or do not wish to maintain ties to the culture of origin; they completely integrate into the mainstream culture without maintaining meaningful links to the original culture.
3. Separation takes place when individuals maintain strong ties to their original culture and do not participate in the mainstream culture.
4. Marginalization takes place when individuals do not feel part of either their original or host culture (Berry, 2003; Smith-Castro, 2003).

The main issues for Berry's model are maintenance of original culture and participation in the host culture (Smith-Castro, 2003). The outcome path of acculturation also depends on whether or not maintaining one's identity is of value to the individual and whether or not adhering to values of the larger society is considered of value to the individual (Berry, 2003).

Sociocultural acculturation. Padilla and Perez's model of acculturation addressed the sociocultural dimensions of the process. Originally developed in 1980 (Padilla), the model was expanded in 2003 (Padilla & Perez). Padilla (2000) considered the acculturation process to be shaped by two essential concepts: cultural awareness and ethnic loyalty.

Cultural awareness is defined as the knowledge of cultural content--food, artifacts, history, language, and values--of the original culture and the host culture. Ethnic loyalty represents the cultural preference or cultural orientation towards either the host culture, the original culture, or both. Padilla's model is multidimensional along the following factors: language familiarity and usage, cultural heritage, and ethnicity. Language familiarity encompasses the knowledge and ability to use the language as well as the willingness to do so. Cultural heritage represents knowledge of cultural artifacts and materials. Ethnicity is more complex and includes ethnic pride and identity, inter-ethnic interaction, and inter-ethnic distance (Padilla, 2000).

Padilla and Perez revised this model of acculturation and included social cognition, cultural competence, social identity, and social stigma as essential

mediating ingredients in the acculturation process. The outcomes of acculturation are related to each of these concepts, which they call *pillars* of the acculturation process.

Social cognition is a theoretical concept that deals primarily with what people think about other people and situations, and the motivational and intentional factors that determine the cognitive process in the social setting (Padilla & Perez, 2003).

Cultural competence is the learned ability to function in a particular culture in a manner that is “congruent with the beliefs, customs, mannerisms, and language of the majority members of the culture” (Padilla & Perez, 2003, p. 42).

Cultural competence is closely related to social identity. The primary difference is that cultural competence can be observed by others in an individual’s displayed behaviors, whereas social identity is a self-categorization. The individual self-identifiers with one or both cultures in which he or she functions (Padilla & Perez, 2003).

Social stigma stems from having certain culture attributes that are devalued or not valued in the mainstream cultural context. Social stigma can be self-evident, as is the case with race/ethnicity or accented language. It can also be less visible, and therefore the individual can choose whether to display certain signs or symbols that may invite the social stigma, as is the case with certain dress and religious symbols. Stigmatized individuals believe that certain

characteristics they possess convey a negative social identity, and therefore they may acculturate at a slower pace and avoid contact with the mainstream group (Padilla & Perez, 2003).

Concepts Related to Acculturation

In reviewing the literature related to cultural adjustment from an acculturative perspective, several concepts stand out in relation to the purpose of this study as reflected in the research questions. Thus, this particular section attempts to clarify and highlight a group of terms and their significance for understanding first-generation immigrant population: cultural/ethnic identity, cultural adaptation, cultural competence, acculturative stress, and culture-language connection.

Ethnic Identity

One of the most enduring ideas in social psychology is that groups are important sources of self-definition. The way in which people relate to their social groups of reference as well as other relevant social groups in society influences personal well-being and satisfaction. "Living in ethnically plural settings implies a constant process of negotiation of the role that both ethnic in-groups and out-groups will play in the definition of the self" (Smith-Castro, 2003, p.9). According to Berry (2003) two central dimensions of acculturation are maintenance of cultural distinctiveness and maintenance of positive interethnic contact. Acculturation is a continuous transitional process of changes through

intercultural encounters. Thus ethnic identity is an important component of the acculturation process (Berry, 2003).

Ethnic identity is a dynamic and multidimensional concept that refers to an individual's sense of belongingness to a certain group on the basis of common culture, language, religion, kinship, race, or place of origin. Changes in ethnic identity that occur during transitioning to a new culture are considered to be related to the acculturation process (Phinney, 2003).

These changes take place along the following dimensions: continued identification with the original culture, adaptation to the host culture, or development of bicultural identity; that is, identification with both cultures. In the context of foreign-born, first generation immigrants, individual changes are also marked by age at the time of immigration and length of time in the host culture (Phinney, 2003). Ethnic identity is a self-assigned concept based on self-identification with a particular group and feelings towards that group. Immigrants identify themselves through self-labeling as being part of the ethnic group, and information about ethnic identification is self-reported. Upon arriving into a new culture, immigrants generally identify with their countries of origin generally for their entire lives. Feelings about group membership vary in terms of strength, and first-generation immigrants continue to have close relationships with their ethnic groups (Phinney, 2003).

Factors related to cultural and ethnic identity influence the pathways to and the speed of the acculturation process. Religious belief and practice, race

and identity, cultural distance or closeness to the mainstream population, and perceived power relationships with the dominant group are characteristics that shape cultural beliefs and their impact on acculturation (Padilla & Perez, 2003). Immigrants that are slow to interact with members of the host culture are likely to show slower rates of acculturative changes than those who interact more easily with the host culture. Conversely, immigrants that relate to the host culture with more facility are likely to continue identifying with their original ethnic group, but at the same time they start feeling more akin to the host culture. The quality of the interaction is also important, as perceived discrimination in the process may encourage ethnic distance and thus a slowing down of the acculturation process (Padilla, 2003).

Cultural Adaptation

Adaptation represents the fit between the individual and the mainstream cultural context, and it can be captured at a specific moment in time. Generally, positive signs of cultural adaptation are a “clear sense of cultural and personal identity” (Smith-Castro, 2008, p. 10), good mental health, high self-esteem, and cultural and social competence (Smith-Castro, 2008). The ability, desire, and necessity to adapt to the new culture play a role in the trajectory of immigrants’ acculturation process. Some immigrants adapt more quickly to the host culture due not only to psychological and personality characteristics or intrinsic desire to do so; adaptation also results from “political, social, and/or economic

circumstances that make certain types of cultural adaptation preferable or beneficial... or even a condition of survival.” (Padilla, Perez, 2003, p.39).

In the process of acculturation, the host group tends to dominate the incoming group, thus having stronger influence on the direction of the adjustment process. Conflict may arise in this process as the immigrant group attempts to accommodate to the new cultural environment. Accommodation can be best understood through the concept of adaptation, which plays the role of reducing conflict (Berry, 2003). One type of adaptation is integration, which implies “maintenance of cultural integrity in the movement to become an integral part of a larger societal framework.” (Berry, 2003, p. 18). Immigrants retain cultural identity while moving to become part of the dominant society. In a society that exhibits cultural pluralism (in which several cultural groups co-exist) and in a multicultural society (in which cultural diversity is valued and supported both through individual attitudes and through institutional efforts), an immigrant group has the freedom to choose the level of cultural integrity and adoption of host culture values. (Berry, 2003).

As individuals who were brought up in one cultural context move into a new cultural context, they tend to change their behaviors in order to adapt in the new environment. Adaptation occurs in three major areas: psychological, sociocultural, and economic (Berry, 2003).

The Language-Culture Connection

Language acculturation occurs within first and second-generation immigrants, and it is crucial to newly arrived immigrants in order to function well in the host culture (Phinney, 2003). Commonly, a language shift occurs during the process of acculturation. Immigrants move towards bilingualism and biculturalism, switching between language uses and cultural styles depending on the situation. Some people may even achieve a synthesis of behavior, personality, and language that enables them to engage equally well in both cultures (Berry, 2003).

Brown (2001, p. 165) stated the following about the relationship between language and culture: "It is apparent that culture, as an ingrained set of behaviors and modes of perception, becomes highly important in the learning of a second language ... the two are interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture." Making the language-culture connection is important because learning a second language and learning a second culture occur simultaneously and depend upon similar factors for successful outcomes.

Among these factors, age, motivation, and prior experiences play a role in both language and culture learning. Although adult learners can acquire a second language, quantitative and qualitative data provide evidence that they are unlikely to achieve native-like fluency due to a variety of psychological, neurological, and sociological factors (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2001). Prior

experiences with language learning are important for the speed and quality of second language acquisition. Prior linguistic experiences include literacy in the native language, previous exposure to the second language, and experience learning other languages. Adult learners rely on all these forms of prior linguistic knowledge to acquire communication fluency in a second language (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2001).

One aspect of how language and culture are experienced simultaneously centers on adjustments in immigrants' identities as a result of language and culture learning. Social identities among individuals and even within one individual's varied social identity roles shape interests and direction of linguistic and cultural exchanges; learners negotiate their new identities through communication with the host culture (Skilton-Sylvester, 2002). The degree to which immigrants engage in the learning and educational process is a function of their cultural identity; that is, "they construct their own knowledge and meaning according to what they already know, within the social, historical, and linguistic contexts of their learning" (Alfred, 2003, p. 245).

In the context of formal education, immigrants who are able and willing to renegotiate their linguistic and cultural values in order to succeed in their new environment experience acculturation in a more positive fashion (Alfred, 2003). Along with a second language, immigrants develop a second identity or a second language ego. Acculturation, the process of adapting to a new culture, facilitates

language and culture learning (Brown, 2001).

Acculturation in the Community College Setting

Community college professionals working with newly arrived immigrants can provide insights into the challenges facing student populations when working their way into American society and particularly into its higher education system. Articles written by Do (2006) and Brilliant (2006) illustrate how concepts addressed in the acculturation theory literature play out in two-year college settings and how students, faculty, and staff negotiate the process of adjusting and becoming successful in the community college environment.

Do (2006) discussed barriers that recently arrived immigrant students encountered in their new cultural surroundings and addressed such difficulties with suggestions for counselors working with immigrant refugee students. He highlights that foreign-born students who are new to the American college classroom may be required to develop strategies for learning, test-taking, group work, interactions with faculty and classmates, and use of campus resources. Acquiring language skills quickly and becoming proficient enough for the academic setting is another major concern for newly arrived immigrants. Lack of language proficiency, unfortunately, is sometimes perceived as lack of knowledge and academic ability. This can lead to frustration, low self-esteem, and isolation.

Immigrant students face “life adjustment issues that affect their academic performance or inhibit their ability to make their decisions and

commitments” (Do, 2006, p.10). Do advocates services to alleviate these stressful situations during the acculturation process. Such services include bilingual/bicultural counselors, faculty and staff with cultural sensitivity training, and courses--such as ESL and student success--that can assist students not only with language skills, but also with skills related to personal life management, motivation, self-esteem, and career exploration (Do, 2006).

Brilliant (2006) discussed the importance of understanding the current immigration context and the acculturation process as counselors address cultural and linguistic implications in counseling immigrants enrolled in the community college. According to the author, immigrants experience cultural differences more intensely than other minority groups who are not a part of the mainstream culture. “Immigrants must engage in a delicate balance of learning to understand and function within a new environment while at the same time maintaining their own identity” (Brilliant, 2006, p. 577). Brilliant considers more subtleties by discussing issues that adults may face and that can complicate the transition between cultures: “Young adults, at a time when they may have expected they would be at the height of their energy and productivity, find themselves starting with nothing, feeling like children, and in stressed relationships with equally disoriented spouses and other family members” (Brilliant, 2006, p. 579). In fact, previous professional and personal accomplishments gained in the home culture are unknown or irrelevant in the new setting.

Many students expect that they will be able to perform academically and socially in the host culture as they did in their home country, but cultural differences, even small ones, can accumulate and become an impediment to the students' high expectations. Shifts in social roles, the need to assume more independence and individual thinking in academic endeavors, and more independence in decision making concerning educational choice can contribute to additional stress in the cultural adjustment process (Brilliant, 2006).

Brilliant and Do illustrate how theoretical concepts of acculturation translate into the reality of working with immigrant students in the framework of the community college. They highlight possible reasons for acculturative stress and suggest avenues for alleviating stressful environments and providing guidance to immigrant students in transition.

Summary of Research in Immigration Trends and Acculturation in the Community College

The transition from the culture of origin to the host culture is the defining experience of immigrant groups entering a new society. The concept of acculturation encapsulates this transitional process. The direction, speed, and nature of acculturation are the result of many factors such as individual traits, sociocultural environment, and demographic characteristics. Cultural values, ethnic identity, and power relationships between groups are also significant in the acculturation experience.

Research in acculturation and related concepts provides a theoretical basis for grasping the immigrant experience in the transition from home culture to host culture, and it further identifies immigration circumstances, communication ability, and educational experience to be essential aspects of adjustment to life in the United States. These aspects of adjustment shape motives for participation in community college education (Metianu, 2009). In the case of adult learners, the immigrant experience and effort towards cultural adjustment is intertwined with adult learning experiences that shape motivation for educational participation.

Community Colleges & Hispanic Working Class Learners

The first public two-year junior college opened its doors in Joliet, Illinois, in 1901. According to Brint and Karabel (1999), William Rainey Harper of the University of Chicago developed the concept of junior colleges. In 1892, Harper first separated the instruction into two divisions at the University of Chicago. His approach gradually led to the first two years as a “junior college” and the last two years as “senior college.” His motive for doing this was to select the most gifted students for pursuing the senior division and further graduate work. Students with lesser academic skills would receive an associate degree. In 1901, the first independent junior college was established, called Joliet Junior College (Brint and Karabel, 1999). Junior colleges grew in numbers during the next few decades. In the years between the World Wars, the movement toward two-year colleges expanded greatly, and the academic character of these two-year

institutions became more vocation, rather than liberal arts, oriented. It is not until 1947 that the Truman Commission Report formally established what we know today as “community colleges.”

The Commission recommended:

American colleges and universities must envision a much larger role for Higher Education in national life. They can no longer consider themselves merely instruments for providing opportunities for an intellectual elite; they must become the means by which every citizen, youth, and adult is enabled and encouraged to carry his education, formal and informal, as far as his native capacities permit. However, access to education had not always been there for the educationally and economically disadvantaged students, even though its early history reveals a sense of responsibility of educating the poor.

It further stated that the new community colleges:

...will provide college education for the youth of the community, certainly, so as to remove geographic and economic barriers to educational opportunity and discover and develop talents at low cost and easy access. But in addition, the community college will serve as an active center of adult education. The community college will attempt to meet the total post high school needs of its community...regardless of sex, race, religion, color, geographical

location, or financial status (Levin, 2003).

The enrollment in these colleges immediately exploded. Another influence of the Truman Commission on two-year colleges was to emphasize transfer programs to four-year colleges and terminal degrees directed at vocational and technical training. By the 1950s, the two year college was gaining in importance due to the growing significance of technology in the workforce. Michael Brick (1994), author of the study of the first 40 years of the American Association for Junior Colleges, said, "Sputnik, not speeches, made the concept of technical training acceptable," a reference to the launching by the former U.S.S.R. of the first space satellite.

The notion of community colleges offering more technical training for the workforce was gradually becoming more appealing and the community colleges were on the edge of new growth, respectability, and expansion. During the 1960s, the nation experienced important social changes. As the Civil Rights movement gathered momentum, minority students saw education as a means of gaining equality. The eagerness of community colleges to accept these students was greater than their four-year higher education counterparts. However, the accelerated increase of students in community colleges with different learning styles, educational backgrounds, and academic differences presented new challenges to the community college.

The community college did not have enough participation, time, or resources to understand the challenges ahead of it, and a large number of community college students were failing, forcing these colleges to begin exploring new alternative resources and strategies to meet the needs of this population. However, the diversification of the student body of community colleges continued to change faster than solutions were shaped and implemented. Immigrants and Hispanic minorities, under-prepared students, other minorities, and economic and educationally disadvantaged students constituted a great percentage of the new student population. These demographic changes challenged the community college to improve its planning, give greater clarity to its expectations, rethink its mission, and try new approaches to academic remediation and occupational preparation.

In the mid-1990s, Parnell (1995), Rouche and Baker III (1997), and others pointed to the fact that more than a high school education was needed to secure employment and a place in the community. These authors, among others, made a persuasive argument that, in the case of the *neglected minorities*, community colleges may be the most expedient and effective vehicle to address this problem. Parnell (1995), in defense of the effectiveness of community colleges, has also argued that "...the community, technical, and junior colleges of this land are making a difference and offer extensive evidence of their contribution, particularly in preparing students for the workforce." Parnell asserts that only 25 percent of the population that graduates from high school moves on to a

four-year institution and that the community college is the only other public institution to educate the other 75 percent. Levine (2003) asserts that because the community colleges have played a fundamental role in human resource development, and because they have grown out of the needs of the masses, they have earned the right to be called “democracy’s colleges,” “opportunity colleges,” and like the earlier land-grant colleges, “the people’s colleges.” According to Levine (2003), the community college movement today is entering its eighth decade.

Today community colleges provide low cost but high quality postsecondary opportunities for a broad array of clients, from first-generation college students to working adults and senior citizens. They are the major point of entry into higher education for America’s low-income youth, underrepresented ethnic minorities, and new immigrants. They serve students of all ages who want to earn academic degrees, as well as nontraditional students seeking specific skills in non-degree programs.

Current Research in Second-Language Acquisition

Much current research points to a need to include students’ cultural backgrounds in the ESL curriculum in order to engage and support students (Cummins, 2001; Freeman & Freeman, 2003; Leslow-Hurley, 2003; Nieto, 2003; Ovando, 2008; Urzua, 2009). Leslow-Hurley (2009) argues, “Schools need to be reflective of and respond to the histories, values, and beliefs of students from a variety of backgrounds” (p. 12). To accomplish this, teachers need to develop

familiarity with the cultural knowledge students bring to the classroom. Ovando (2008) advises, "With respect to cultural knowledge, effective ESL teachers do not necessarily need to speak the first language of their students, but they do need to have as broad an understanding as possible of the history, folklore, traditions, values, attitudes, and current socio-cultural situation of the cultural groups with which they work. (p.284)

Freeman & Freeman's (2003) description of keys to academic success for English language learners recommends drawing on students' background knowledge and cultural experiences. They counsel that providing reading and writing activities that reflect students' histories and heritage promote the literacy development of English. To tap into this cultural heritage, Freeman & Freeman (2006) recommend students read texts that mirror their own cultures and experiences. The authors describe how reading a selection about the culture shared by the students allowed students to make strong connections to the text. Student's background knowledge on a topic related to their culture improved their ability to read and retell a story.

Schechter & Cummins (2003) advise that students are motivated to read texts when they can relate to the content. When the curriculum reflects the cultural backgrounds of English learners, their literacy development and reading comprehension progress, as does their motivation to continue reading. Further, Schechter & Cummins (2003) describe how creating a community of learners which respects and values students improves instruction for English learners.

Perhaps the most important effort that teachers can make to promote students' mastery of academic English is to organize the classroom as a learning community where the voices of all students can be heard. When students feel strong respect and affirmation from their teachers and peers, this generates a powerful sense of belonging to the classroom learning community as well as motivation to participate fully in the society beyond (p. 14).

Cummins (2001) reaffirms the importance of respecting and valuing students. "Respect and trust imply that educators listen carefully to their students' perspectives and learn from their students." Providing materials that connect to the lives of English language learners and creating a learning community that values students' home cultures are powerful tools for academic success.

English Learners in the Community College

ESL students make up a significant part of the college population, and their numbers are increasing substantially (Kasper, 2007). Over the last 40 years, as more immigrants from Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East have settled in the United States, community college ESL programs have grown in size and importance (Durdella, 2003). This dramatic growth presents a challenge to ESL professionals, colleges, and to the students themselves. To achieve success in college, L2 students must acquire effective academic language proficiency. College level ESL courses must provide specialized instruction in order to prepare students to succeed in mainstream college courses. ESL

students must be able to read with comprehension, write with clarity and purpose, and hold their own in complex conversations, debates, and discussions. They must be able to listen to class lectures, take notes, read course material, and understand, evaluate, analyze, interpret, and synthesize course content in English.

In recent years, community colleges have greatly expanded their services to ESL students. Schuyler (2007) reports that while in 1999, 50 percent of community colleges offered ESL instruction, this number had increased to 65 percent by 2007. Myers (2000) reports that more than 557,000 international students enrolled in U.S. higher education programs in the 2006-2007 academic year. These students require instructional materials designed to facilitate their comprehension of course content and specific vocabulary.

Community college ESL students come from a wide variety of backgrounds and have diverse needs. Ellis (2009) notes that although some community college ESL students are international students who are well-educated in their home countries; many are refugees and immigrants who may not have had the opportunity to be educated in their native language. Some ESL students plan on transferring to a four-year institution to continue their education, while others have come to the community college solely for English instruction.

ESL students have been described as if they were a homogeneous group, yet there is considerable diversity among English learners. Some are literate in

their first language, having completed their primary and secondary education, and even completed college programs in their home countries. Others are refugees who may have experienced significant interruptions in their formal education. Still others arrived in the United States as young children or are native born United States citizens and may not be literate in their native language. In addition, some are international students who are able to focus their attention solely on their schooling, while others have full lives outside of school. They may have full or part time jobs to help support themselves and their families (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999).

This diversity presents a special challenge to second language educators in designing lessons to meet students' academic needs. However, affective factors, such as motivation, encouragement, and patience, exert a notable influence over achievement in second language acquisition. Students in second language programs come from widely diverse cultures (Harklau, et al., 1999; Raimes, 1997; Silva, 1997), and culture plays a significant role in language learning (Erickson, 2008; Lessow-Hurley, 2003). Culturally relevant materials have been found to advance literacy development in English (Freeman & Freeman, 2008; Nieto, 2008; Schecter & Cummings, 2003). Second language students report (Zamel, 2005) that patience, tolerance, and encouragement are key factors that affect their academic achievement. Drawing upon students' lives and experiences (Chamberlin, 1997; Freeman & Freeman, 2003; Nieto,

2005; Schecter & Cummins, 2003; Zamel, 1995) may go a long way towards improving pedagogical practices and promoting academic success.

Community Colleges and Hispanic Second-Language Learners

Between the World Wars America's junior colleges had to develop programs to teach English to the rapidly increasing influx of immigrants from many European countries and Mexico. Together with the military, which had to develop its own programs to teach English to recruits just off the boat from foreign lands, junior colleges gradually developed a new brand of English as a Second Language (ESL) courses and instructional strategies. These strategies generally involved customized instruction to develop sufficient English fluency among non-English speakers so that they could engage in basic oral communication. The courses, however, were not designed to develop full academic competencies in the language.

ESL programs continued in the newly created community colleges and are still with us today. Throughout the years, they were always in demand, especially in large urban centers that attract a steady flow of immigrants. In the late 1950s public schools began implementing ESL programs to teach conversational English to recent arrivals, mostly from Puerto Rico and Mexico (Baez, 2005). Gradually, ESL became the dominant instructional intervention used to provide the children of immigrants with basic oral English skills. In the

late 1960s and early 1970s, ESL took the spotlight as the federal government became involved in promoting the teaching of English to limited English speaking children (Fernandez, 2007). Where implemented, children in bilingual programs receive content instruction. Where no bilingual instruction is offered in the K-12 systems, ESL tends to be the instructional intervention used most.

Opposition to Community Colleges

In spite of this history, the usefulness of community colleges has come under serious attack since their beginning. During the 1960s, Clark (1960) and others suggested that the motivation behind community colleges was to influence the academically disadvantaged students to tone down their aspirations and accept more realistic goals to suit their capabilities, a form of educational tracking of the poor.

In the 1970s, Zweling (1996) and others argued that “the hidden function of community colleges is the deliberate channeling of students to their appropriate position of social order and to prevent upward mobility for the lower social economic groups in society.” Recently, in states like California and New York, community colleges have come under attack because of the notion that they cater to a population that may not be suited to be in “higher education,” drawing on public funds (Lavin & Hyllegard, 1996). Capturing the essence of the message of those who oppose the fundamental mission of the community college, Lavin & Hyllegard report that:

Open admission is frequently seen as yet another failed entitlement

program, attempting to educate the uneducable and, in the process, wasting huge amounts of public funds... According to opponents, the policy has so degraded academic standards that ...diplomas have lost their values.

Increasingly, community colleges have also come under attack for their alleged failure to transfer more students to four year colleges (Henriksen, 2005). Most recently, ESL and bilingual practices became the object of extensive attacks by the media in New York City and California. In May of 1977, the City University of New York's Board of Trustees passed a series of policies that directly attacked the quality of both ESL and bilingual programs in its community colleges (Ward, 2007; Benda, 2007). It then directed an extensive testing program that Latino community members and students called punitive because it was directed mostly at them. The CUNY policies tested LEP students to determine if they were suitable for college entry. They also tested them to determine if they could graduate from two-year colleges. Students who failed to pass an English writing proficiency exam at the end of their two-year program could not graduate. Over one hundred articles appeared in the *Daily News* and the *New York Times* on the subject between May and December of 1997.

Lavin and Hyllegard (2006), however, present extensive evidence that, in spite of the social and economic condition of most poor and minority students who enroll in community colleges, the educational experiences changes the odds for them. They claim this is evident in an increasingly higher rate of persistence

and graduation, despite the fact that it takes them longer than traditional students. The data also show that such progress is true for all students, regardless of race and ethnicity, although LEP students will show smaller rates of success when measured in lesser blocks of time; i.e., four-year graduation rates as opposed to eight-year graduation rates. Levine & Nidiffer (2006) also make the argument that community colleges today continue to make progress in improving the retention and graduation of minority students, where other college settings have not.

The Community College and Hispanic Second-Language Adult Learners

An important development in the community college literature deals with the concept of the adult learner. A greater proportion of those enrolled in community colleges are returning adults who may have been away from formal education settings for extended periods of time. They may also be workers displaced by the economy and in need of new job training. To meet the educational needs of this population, community colleges need to rely on theories of adult learning that can inform the nature of the instructional interventions designed for this population. Getting to this understanding has not been an easy task due to the many obstacles the adult learner faces.

The academic success of adult learners can be impacted by many social, economic, and educational factors. Because of the distinctive characteristics of

the adult learner, the strategies that will most likely support academic success may be different than those used in higher education with the traditional student population, which tend to confirm the norms established by educational institutions designed precisely for them. The literature on adult learners suggests that the retention of this population be directly related to the following factors:

1. Learning needs to be intimately related to the context of the adult learner to facilitate the connection between learning and their life experiences (Merriam, 2007; Merriam and Yang, 2006).
2. Experience is the richest resource for adults' learning; therefore, the core methodology of adult education is the analysis of experience (Knowles, 2007). Work and family are directly related to learning activities (Kasworm, 2009).
3. Adult learners are best served when teachers engage in a mutual inquiry approach rather than limiting the learning experience to the transmission of knowledge (Knowles, 2009).

An increasing amount of literature suggests that these factors are particularly important when it comes to Latinos. They sense the institutional tone, which determines how the minority adult learners are perceived and treated within the set of priorities of the institution (Schlossberg, 2002; Kanter, 2004). Other research indicates that the success of Latino students in higher education institutions and in the community college in particular, is related to the general factors mentioned for adult learners. Community colleges are being

challenged to institute new ways to respond to the academic needs of a more diverse student body. According to Altbach, Berdahl, & Gunport (2004):

This may mean greater support for ESL and related curricula, as more non-native-English speakers seek to enter college. It will also require a college climate and curriculum that welcome students' differing backgrounds and perspectives as an opportunity to bring a wider range of voices and experiences into discussion and that build upon students' diverse language and cultural backgrounds in preparing them for a more independent global society.

ESL at the community college level went through several transformations during the 1970s and 1980s. This was mostly because of changing demographics and the new role ascribed to colleges that sought to increase language minority student enrollments (Rabideau, 2003; Rennie, 2003). Almost every community college in the country establishes its own particular approach when teaching ESL courses.

In ESL courses in community colleges, students may be F-1 Visa foreign students preparing for movement into higher levels of college or working to improve their English oral proficiency. They may be immigrants preparing for American Citizenship exams. They can also be adults who are recent arrivals in the country and need to acquire English skills to validate credentials from the

former country. Such is the case with the recent Russians and Eastern Europeans who have arrived in the United States over the last ten years.

Most Latino second-language learners take ESL courses to acquire proficiency in English, English cultural literacy, and content to which they did not have previous exposure. Content-discipline ESL courses may often be a prerequisite for admission into higher level college work. In many community colleges, some of these courses may be linked to credit in content disciplines (Ward, 2007).

ESL courses may be coded in the humanities, under foreign language departments, in English departments, or they may exist under pre-college or remedial departments. In 2001, a study of a random sample of 164 community colleges by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) looked only at the courses coded under "foreign language" and found a significant increase between 1993 and 2001 in the number of ESL courses (from 30percent to 51percent). The study also found that the percentage of community colleges offering courses in the spring term went from 26 percent in 1985 to 40 percent in 2001. Many of the studies of colleges with significant Latino populations reviewed in the data base of the *ERIC Clearing house on Literacy Education for Limited English-Proficient Adults* (Washington, D.C.) show evidence that ESL courses are generally offered by community colleges to this population.

An extensive amount of literature deals with the content of ESL courses (ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education for Limited English-Proficient Adults;

Ignash, 2002; Rabideau, 2003; Wrigley, 2003; Rennie, 2003). The content of such courses varies, depending on the need of the population being served and the purposes ascribed to the program by college officials (Wrigley, 2003; Ward, 2007). Rabideau (2003) found that during the early 1980s, when greater numbers of adult second language learners sought admission to community colleges, there was a shift away from reading and writing to oral instructional goals. This shift changed the content of ESL courses to prepare adults with sufficient conversational English to access and/or retain jobs.

As the job market changed and Latinos and others sought to acquire diploma and associate degrees to sustain a job or find a new one, many colleges developed courses that were more academic in content. Wrigley & Guth (2002), in an extensive study of 123 ESL programs, found that by the early 1990s ESL instructors were drawing on research from applied linguistics, anthropology, and cognitive sciences in an effort to include emphasis on communication and “meaning making.” Ignash (2002) reports that more ESL teaching has been returning to instruction in listening, comprehension, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar.

Recognizing the diversity within the ESL student population, some two year colleges have developed separate ESL courses for each distinctive nationality group. These may include some ESL courses for F-1 Visa students only, others for immigrants preparing for citizenship exams, and still others for LEP Latino and Asian students (Ignash, 2003; Rance-Rooney, 1995). Ward (2007)

reports that a City University of New York ESL Task Force found that by the mid-1990s more and more ESL courses in that system where 50 percent of incoming students are adult second language learners, were linked to content-discipline courses. Such efforts were intended to support adult second-language learners who, because of their non-U.S. educational experience, may not have had sufficient exposure to content in the disciplines necessary to succeed in a U.S. community college setting.

A recent focus on standards at the community college level has brought much scrutiny to ESL efforts. Policymakers have questioned the fiscal value of offering ESL instruction in community and senior colleges. State government officials in New York and California, the two states with the largest concentrations of immigrant non-English speaking populations and of Latinos, have made several attempts to remove these programs from the college curriculum. Instead, they created ESL immersion institutes that operate in partnership with community-based organizations. The theory behind these exclusionary measures is that ESL, remedial, and bilingual courses do not belong in higher education and that to be globally competitive, our colleges and universities should be accessible only to those who have proven worthy of higher education.

The research literature on ESL programs in community colleges shows that Latinos have always been supportive of these programs and that they value their contributions to improved retention of Latino second language adult

learners (Wrigley & Guth, 2002; Rance-Rooney, 2005). ESL-only interventions do not seem to address the larger set of factors adversely impacting the Latino second-language learner prior to developing the ability to acquire a second language with higher level content. Many college-level ESL theorists, who come from communities where the use of Spanish continues to be significant, believe that immersion in English alone is not sufficient to ensure the acquisition of adequate levels of academic English to function in college. Appropriate correction and feedback through the use of the native language of the student has a legitimate role in the college curriculum (Rivera, 2000).

A growing body of literature in adult second-language acquisition is now providing guidance to colleges that wish to explore the use of instructional interventions that are more beneficial to the Latino second-language learner, and which may help to improve retention and graduation. Proponents of this approach argue that there are factors that cannot be overlooked if colleges wish to be effective with Latino second-language learners. These all go beyond ESL-only offerings. They include, for example, the size of the language minority community of the adult learner, as well as the value attached to the use of the home language and culture. They also include the power relations between the community and the college, and the extent to which all of these combine to make the student feel engaged and welcome (Hornberger, 1999, 2002; Rivera, 2000; Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1998).

The ESL literature supports the use of ESL courses in community college settings for the purpose of accelerating the acquisition of English language skills by Latino second-language learners. At the same time, the literature suggests that both the delivery system used by most ESL programs as well as the content of the courses offered are insufficient to help Latino second-language learners to succeed in college at rates that approximate those of other groups. Both anecdotal and research evidence also suggests that there continues to be a major incompatibility between Latino adult second-language learners and the content of ESL courses. Rivera (2000), Wrigley (2003), McGroarty (2003), and others from within the field of ESL today continue to make this point and remind ESL classroom instructors that cultural and social factors cannot be ignored.

There is also a major incompatibility between Latino second-language learners and those that teach ESL courses (in community colleges they are almost exclusively Caucasian). The essence of the concern is that many Caucasian ESL teachers will resist efforts to address Latino community concerns about cultural support and content in ESL programs and the use of the native language in the curriculum. Therefore they may deny Latino students the support needed to move beyond the acquisition of English skills and to redefine their status from recipients of teaching to active learners in control of their own learning (Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins, 1998; Freire, 2003). Proponents of more multicultural activities in the community college setting have also made the point.

Zeszotarski (2003) reviewed multicultural activity in community colleges. To her dismay, she found that only 30 percent of community colleges have a multicultural general education requirement as opposed to 58 percent of four-year colleges. This is due in part to the failure of community college faculty to recognize the relationship between multicultural activities and improved retention. Zeszotarski (2003) provides case studies of efforts by various community colleges to institute multicultural curricula, concluding that those faculties who are trained in traditional fields are not prepared to provide a culturally-based curriculum unless efforts are made to train them and minorities are added to the mix.

The focus of ESL-only instruction in many community colleges alone will not lead to the development of culturally-and-linguistically-based services for Latinos. Nor will it lead to the development of bilingual programs for college-ready second-language learners who can continue to acquire occupational and general studies skills via content courses taught in their own language while they learn English.

Hispanics' Performance in Community Colleges

As shown above, open admissions policies have made the community college a place for the poor and for minorities. Hispanic growth in community colleges has been particularly significant. U.S. Department of Education data show that in some urban communities Hispanics send as many as 80 percent of their college enrollees to community colleges. Hispanic enrollments have

increased because community colleges have been adding to their educational offerings programs such as adult basic education, GED, and bilingual education and ethnic studies which serve to attract Latinos (Fields, 2008; Rendon and Nora, 1998, 1999). Hispanics and other working adults prefer community colleges because of their lower cost, accessibility, flexibility of hours, open admission, willingness to provide day care, and because today they articulate more with high schools and universities. (Parnell, 1999; Walker, 1998; Levine, 2003).

Several other factors have contributed to the increase of Latinos and other minority students in community colleges. Among these is financial aid, which is now available for students who wish to participate in one-year and two-year programs offered only at the community college level. Often there is financial aid and/or some other form of state financial support for short-term programs that prepare adults for the workforce. These programs in particular attract Latinos.

Latino and minority enrollments in community colleges will also continue to be affected by legislative and administrative policies that force greater numbers of adult learners away from four-year colleges. That, for instance, has been the effect of remedial, developmental and ESL policies adopted in states like New York (*New York Times*, Sunday, June 15, 2007, p. 25; *New York Times*, Sunday, July 20, 2007, p. 21) and in other states with large Latino populations. In the case of remedial policies, New York's CUNY system has directed its senior colleges to cease admitting students with academic

deficiencies and re-route these students to community colleges. CUNY also has placed limits on the use of ESL courses in senior colleges along with other content instruction. This will have the effect of, again, displacing greater numbers of second language learners to community colleges.

There are, however, various indicators in the community college literature that show the condition of Latino education in community colleges is still far from adequate. While Latinos are more likely than African Americans and Whites to be enrolled in community colleges, they are less likely to graduate and to move on to a four-year institution (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). They also have higher attrition rates, especially when they are older second-language learners whose particular curricular needs are not addressed. Astin (2009) found that 56 percent of the Latino students who enroll in a community college drop out before completing their first year, as opposed to 36 percent of White students. Two-year schools, in which Latinos are most highly concentrated, tend to lose close to 54 percent of their freshmen, compared to only 29 percent for four-year colleges. The typical adult Latino college student is part-time, is over 29 years of age, and requires educational services that accommodate work and family responsibilities.

Another factor that contributes to high Latino attrition is alienation from the curriculum. Arguelles (1997) has argued that alienation may result when cultural beliefs expressed in the mainstream curriculum differ from those held by students. When the curriculum is perceived as irrelevant to ethnic and language

minority students, there is a lack of active participation in class, and in most cases the student does not return. Rivera (2000), Wrigley & Guth (2002), and Henriksen (2005) specifically point to problems in the pedagogy of many programs aimed at adult second-language learners. They argue that as long as these programs embrace pedagogies of deficits and remediation, they will bore Latino adult learners, contributing to attrition. While it is true that many that leave return, inadequate pedagogy in ESL and adult education tends to significantly delay the completion of programs by those who need them the most. Additionally, Community Colleges inconsistency in using the same assessment tools for students has also been attributed to Latino student performance, (Table 1). Other more recent reports on Latino student performance in community colleges paint a more encouraging picture. Nettles and Millett (2007) analyzed graduation data on Latinos in associate degree programs and found improvements between 1977 and 1995. They report that in 1977 the number of degrees awarded to Latinos was 8 percent of the total degrees awarded. The percent did not change until 1997, at which time an upward trend began with Latinos accounting for 11 percent of the degrees awarded. In the twenty-year period studied, Latinos realized an 111 percent increase. Asians and Latinos, they found, had the highest percentage increase of all ethnic racial groups over the twenty-year period. What Nettles and Millett (2007) could not explain was the extent to which this was also true for second-

language adults who started in community colleges as Limited English Proficient (LEP) students.

Retention of Hispanic Adult Second-Language Learners

Historically, community colleges have adjusted to the influx of language minority groups. As it specifically involves adults who are second-language learners, community colleges have responded primarily with English as Second Language (ESL) programs and related academic strategies. A wealth of literature delineates these efforts, as evidenced by the extensive research and practice archives of *The National Clearinghouse on Literacy Education for Limited English Proficient Adults*.

Research, progress reports, and evaluations of the community college adult curriculum reviewed by Rivera (2000) and Wrigley (2003), Wrigley & Guth (2002), among others, strongly suggest that, based on what is now known about the educational needs of Latinos in community colleges and about adult second-language learners, these institutions have not moved fast enough to accommodate their particular needs. The literature on the subject is growing. It suggests that the community college is not yet fully equipped to meet the needs of the second- language learners in an era of major shifts in the economy and the nature of work. Central to the arguments of those who make this claim are data that continue to point towards poor performance of Latinos in community colleges (Avalos, 2003).

There may be more Latinos enrolled than ever before, but their retention and graduation is far from equal to that of other groups. Again, one population that is affected by policy trends in community colleges with large Latino populations is adult second-language learners who may be prevented from immediate entry into programs because they must first acquire English proficiency. The impact of these adverse trends is far greater on second-language learners (Walker, 1998; Hendrickson, 2005), who take much longer to graduate at a time when welfare reform and other governmental programs are placing limits on the time allotted to finish a two-year degree.

A growing volume of literature on community college retention addresses concerns about attrition. According to a 2000 report of the Educational Testing Services and the Latino Association of Colleges and Universities, what makes the difference for these students in terms of persistence is money, affirmative action, fairness and equity in testing, which affect access, graduation, and bilingual education.

Summary Analysis of the Literature and Implications for the Research

Latinos have learned that education is the key to their movement up the social ladder. They also have learned that they are significantly behind the indicators of educational attainment. This is due, in great measure, to the fact that this society and its educational institutions have treated them as a conquered ethnic/racial group (and often as “problem” immigrants). The

political identity of Latinos in the United States continues to be connected to their continued use of Spanish. Spanish is needed by those Latinos presently living in the United States to communicate with the on-going flow of new arrivals and with a growing population of Spanish-speakers worldwide. One could also add that there is no reason they should lose this language skill if America is to draw on this resource in a global economy. Through their political struggles for equity in education, Latinos have advanced the idea that educational institutions can expand access and improve educational attainment for second-language learners.

Armed with political savvy and supported by legislation and legal mandates, Latinos continue to expect more of educational institutions. As a growing Latino community becomes more aware of the federal guidelines and regulations described in the literature above, and they surely will, it is likely that they will look at their local community colleges as having an obligation to provide bilingual education services. The implications are clear: Community colleges need to understand Latino communities and their educational expectations, and they need to respond with educational interventions that advance the group up the educational ladder and into the workforce.

The literature addressing participation, attrition, and retention of Latinos in higher education and in community colleges in particular is extensive and instructive. It needs to be read in conjunction with the literature on adult learners, discussed above. Latinos have made improvements in college

participation, but they continue to lag behind with regard to retention and graduation. This particularly is the case with second-language adult learners. Although some of the retention literature points to improvements in this area, the issue for Latino second language learners is that they need more time and more support to complete degree programs. Community college policies that place limits on access to ESL, remedial, and bilingual services can have an adverse effect on Latino student success. This problem will require community colleges to draw on good practices and programs that will be more effective for Latinos.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the learning, personal, and establishment barriers that the first generation Hispanic immigrant student encounters when taking required English as a Second Language (ESL) education courses in a two-year community college setting prior to enrolling in and successfully completing college level courses. This ethnographic study intends to explore the obstacles and burdens confronted by ESL students in the community college level prior to enrolling in and successfully completing regular college level courses. Further, attention was given to the learning preferences of Hispanic adult community college students and how they construct new meanings out of their educational experiences in the classroom.

Data was obtained through interviews with students enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. More specifically, the goal was to identify, describe, and examine the perceptions of a group of first generation ESL students in their learning experiences at an ESL prerequisite community college program. Further, this study will also identify the learning, personal, and establishment barriers they experience in order to achieve successful completion of the program, which serves as a prerequisite to taking regular community college courses.

Research Questions

1. How do the classroom and college environments affect the educational experiences of first generation immigrant Hispanic students?
2. What types of negative or positive personal experiences do first generation Hispanic students have while attending a two-year college?
3. What types of experiences are disempowering or challenging, academically or personally, to first generation Hispanic students attending a two-year college?
4. How did the ESL certification courses influence the educational and career goals of these students?

The study focuses on first generation Hispanic immigrant students who did not attend any prior schooling in the United States and were enrolled in an urban community college. In this study, the researcher sought to attain a more in-depth understanding of the practice of English as a Second Language in the community college setting.

In examining students' perceptions, the study sought to gain knowledge not only about how these students view educational attainment but also, and more importantly, what barriers inhibited and what practices promoted their participation in the community college's ESL program. Knowledge of the students' perceptions and experiences will shed light on such information and uncover the factors both external and internal to the students' desire and intention to succeed in the prerequisite ESL college program. The study also

attempted to understand how these factors affected and/or promoted these students' participation in the life of the community college as well as affected their personal life.

This dissertation provided a lens through which to explore a deeper understanding of the issues central to second-language learning by establishing a shared vision between the participants and myself. The participants revealed their insights and experiences regarding the issues they faced in learning English as a new language. These views provided knowledge and understanding about college level ESL students' views of language learning from their own perspectives.

Research Design

The research design for this qualitative ethnographic study on 21 first generation Hispanic immigrant students who were enrolled in prerequisite ESL courses at a community college followed the guidelines of grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) define qualitative research as "research about persons' lives, experiences, behaviors, emotions, and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, and cultural phenomena. It develops theories grounded on empirical data of cultural description. "As such, ethnography offers an excellent strategy for discovering grounded theory" (Spradley, 1979). Grounded theory differs from other research methods because it is "explicitly emergent" (Dick, 2006 p. 1). It does not test a hypothesis; instead, "It sets out to find what theory accounts for the research

situation as it is" (Dick, 2006, p. 1). It refers to any type of research whose findings are not determined by statistical procedures or other types of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). The data are typically gathered through a variety of means, such as interviews, observation, and documentation.

Therefore, the researcher's main purpose for collecting and interpreting data, such as interviews, is to understand what is happening in a situation and how individuals perceive their particular roles. As people move from one cultural setting to another in complex societies, they employ different cultural roles. Qualitative research methodology or ethnography offers some of the best ways to understand these complex features of modern life. It can show the range of cultural differences and how people with diverse perspectives interact. In other words, it refers to any type of research whose findings are not determined by statistical research.

Instrumentation: The Qualitative Interview

The instrument used in this study is a qualitative interview, or ethnographic interview. Ethnography is the work of describing a culture. The essential core of this activity aims to understand a way of life different from the native point of view. The goal of ethnography is to "grasp the native's point of view, his reaction to life, realize his vision of his world" (Spradley, 1979, p. 3). Ethnographic work, then, involves the study of what the world is like to people that have learned to see, hear, speak, think, and act in ways that are different

from a perceived standard. Rather than *studying people*, ethnography means *learning from people*.

As such, ethnography starts with a conscious attitude of almost complete ignorance of the subject to be studied. Therefore, interview questions are structured accordingly. Spradley (1979) identifies three major interview categories. The questions introduced in each session belong to one of the three main types of ethnographic questions, each fulfilling a different function:

1. The standardized interview, which uses a formally structured schedule of interview questions.
2. The non-standardized interview which begins with the assumption that the interviewers do not know in advance what the questions are so they cannot predetermine answers.
3. The semi-standardized interview, which uses systematic and ordered questions but permits freedom to digress (Berg, 1998).

Qualitative ethnographic research involves more than looking at quality data. The qualitative researcher focuses on subjective meanings, definitions, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of specific cases to capture aspects of the social world for which it is difficult to develop precise measures expressed as numbers (Neuman, 2007). Intending to investigate student barriers to successful achievement in a community college ESL prerequisite program, this study uses the ethnography interview structure. In this type of interview, the interviewer “must develop, adapt, and generate questions and follow-up probes

appropriate to the given situation and central purpose of the investigation” (Berg, 2008, p. 61).

The questions introduced are descriptive, structural, or contrastive questions. They arise from the interaction during the interview itself in order to gain additional information or to establish rapport when the interviewer is unfamiliar with the informant’s culture, customs, or life style. According to Patton (2000), the interviews are not a set of questions which intend to take each respondent through the same sequence and to ask each respondent the same questions using essentially the same words. By resorting to an open-ended question, each interview allows for personal descriptions and perceptions from the respondents, insures reliability of source as well as validity, and reduces the intrusion of the researcher’s biased judgment.

The interview focuses on collecting the perceptions of bilingual first generation community college students who are attempting to complete prerequisite ESL courses in order to then enroll in regular college courses at the community college. Through open-ended questions, the respondents communicate their ideas and opinions in their own terms. After transcribing the interviews, analysis of the text is performed to go deeper into the interview responses, which contained the description of the informants’ views on the educational, personal, and administrative barriers they have encountered while taking ESL prerequisite courses at a local community college.

Description of the Case Study Process

The primary advantage of interviewing as a technique is adaptability; the interviewer can use participants' responses to alter the interview situation as needed. Leads can be followed up to obtain more information and clarify responses (Merriam & Simpson, 2005). Participants' responses shape subsequent questions. The researcher needs to be able to listen, think, and talk almost at the same time (Babbie, 2006). Interviews can increase the depth of an inquiry because a researcher who establishes good rapport and encourages the participant can access information that participants might not ordinarily reveal.

The researcher, who is also the interviewer, works with several informants or interviewees. Participants are interviewed in an environment that is positive, professional, and comfortable. The goal of the interviewer is in discovering the cultural knowledge of the informants. The researcher's work begins without any preconceived opinions and waits through the course of the interviews to define what is important for the interviewer to find out (Spradley, 1979). Observation alone is not sufficient, so the researcher learns the significance of all the social experiences that take place with the participants by listening to the informants and by depending on the informants to explain these experiences to the researcher.

The interviewer elicits the perceptions from the informants through a research design, which consists of ethnographic field strategies. Informants are contacted via both telephone and correspondence for consent to participate. If a

participant consents to the interview(s), then a time and place is determined. Participants are given a letter of participation, explaining the purpose of the study.

In this study each interview conducted with each focus group lasted approximately sixty (60) to ninety (90) minutes. Participants were instructed that they could elaborate on any questions and could offer additional information not covered by questions. General questions were designed to stimulate participants' reflections regarding the topic. Appropriate follow-up questions were asked in order to delve more deeply into the topic being discussed. With permission from the participants, the interviews were tape recorded to ensure that the exact words spoken by the participants were available for analysis. In addition to the tape recordings, brief notes were made so as to formulate new questions as the interview unfolded or to record nonverbal cues, comments, and observations. The interview notes and journal entries relevant to each interview were examined along with the transcripts to achieve fuller understanding of the meanings that emerged from the interviews.

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the learning, personal, and establishment barriers that the first generation Hispanic immigrant student encounters when taking required ESL education courses in a two-year community college setting prior to enrolling and successfully completing college level courses. Interviews were conducted at a location convenient to both researcher and participant. Participants were encouraged to

speak freely and in their usual manner. Participants provided the information, and the interviewer recorded data from the exchange. The researcher then explained why the interview was being tape recorded. An analysis of the data was done after the interviews took place. Once the informants' taped discourse was reviewed, the researcher then summarized the findings.

After transcribing the interviews, analysis of the text was performed to go deeper into the interview responses, which described the students' educational, personal, and administrative barriers to successful completion of the ESL courses. The essential core of this activity aspired to understand a perception of life from the immigrant students' point of view (Spradley, 1979, p. 3).

Documentation to be reviewed was substantial and will be described and cited in more detail in the case study itself. The taped interviews were then saved on a computer disc and I-Pod and securely kept. Sole access to the tapes was maintained by the researcher. Tapes will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

The research design involved case studies because there was a need for the researcher to systematically gather enough information about the students and their participation to effectively understand how educational, personal, and administrative barriers affect their success in a community college ESL program. Moreover, collecting data through a qualitative method to determine probable causes of the students' participation provided sufficient detail to reflect on what actually occurs.

The use of a qualitative design generates rich accounts as well as illustrative quotations. Its interviewing methodology has no pre-determined questions but only open-ended ones, and this qualitative method can add in a considerable manner to the utilization of education findings because the data are perceived as personal (Patton, 1990). In this study, the informants were aware that the researcher was conducting an interview during which they answer open-ended questions. The researcher conducted this ethnographic interview in a friendly manner while introducing a few questions, which had not been pre-determined.

The ethnographic interview is one strategy for getting people to talk about what they know, and the interview shares many features with friendly conversation (Spradley, 1979). The interviewer made use of what the informants said in seeking to describe their culture. Both tacit and explicit cultures are revealed through speech, both in casual comments and in lengthy interviews (Spradley, 1979 p. 9). Because language is the primary means for transmitting culture from one generation to the next, much of any culture is encoded in linguistic form. Qualitative research is useful for involving subjective matter, which is the perspective of organizational process (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews are conducted for the purpose of adding a variety of perspectives and increasing confidence in whatever patterns emerge (Patton,

2002). The premise of a focus group is that ideas will emerge as people discuss ideas with others. A focus group is primarily an interview; however, direct interactions may occur. Participants have the opportunity to hear one another's responses and make additional comments to what they hear others say in addition to their own responses. Consensus among participants is not important, nor is disagreement. The purpose of the focus group interview is to gather data in a context in which people can consider their ideas in light of the views of others. The facilitator of the focus group should create an atmosphere that stimulates comfortable discussion among all participants in the group and the facilitator (Kern, 2006). Three focus group interviews consisting of 21 participants were conducted in this study (see Table 3), and lasted approximately sixty (60) to ninety (90) minutes.

Data collected in the focus group interviews were analyzed in a similar manner to that of the individual interviews, looking for themes and categories. Special attention was paid to issues of cultural relevance of the respondents' college experience.

Interested in learning the barriers first generation Hispanic immigrant students face when trying to complete a community college prerequisite ESL program, the researcher sought to document the existence of alternative realities through ethnography. Moreover, following the same interest, the researcher sought to describe the alternative realities in these realities' own terms (Spradley, 1979). The essential core of ethnography is this concern with

the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand. Some of these meanings are definitely expressed in language; many are taken for granted and communicated only indirectly through word and action. But in every society people make constant use of these complex meaning systems to organize their behavior, to understand themselves and others, and to make sense out of the world in which they live. These systems of meaning constitute their culture; ethnography always implies a theory of culture (Spradley, 1979, p. 5).

Participants

A total of twenty-one (21) participants took part in this ethnographic study. Table 2 provides a profile of the interviewed participant informants gender, age, nationality and date of entry in this country. Interviews took place from September 2008 to September 2009, while they were attending ESL classes at a community college. Participants were all students of this researcher. They were informed of the study and volunteers were requested. The participants who volunteered were all part of the focus group studies which met before or after class. The participants who chose to be interviewed individually met during specific times as their schedules permitted.

Profiles of Individual Participants

The 6 individual participants who participated in interviews were 4 females and 2 males. These individual informants were all of Hispanic descent,

and spoke Spanish. These six participants were part of the focus groups and also volunteered to be interviewed as individual participants. The 3 focus groups were categorized for purposes of this data as beginner/intermediate and advanced ESL students. The beginner ESL focus group (A) was comprised of 5 participants, including 3 women and 2 men. The beginner/intermediate ESL focus group (B) was comprised of 7 informants, including 3 women and 4 men. The advanced ESL focus group (C) was comprised of 9 informants, including 4 women and 5 men. The average age of the informants was 24 to 40.

The following section includes a description of each of the participants including basic demographic information as well as a brief account of their educational histories in order to provide perspective to the data reported in this chapter. The participants are presented in the order in which they were interviewed. A coded system of number and letter is used to protect identities and maintain confidentiality.

Individual Participants

Individual Participant 1 is a 33-year-old woman who was born and raised in Peru where she earned a degree in Business and Finance. Individual participant 1 immigrated to the United States in 2004 and has been attending Community College, (herein after referred to as CC) part-time for the past two and a half years in pursuit of an ESL certification. Her goal is to continue studying at CC in order to acquire an Associates Degree in Accounting.

Individual participant 2 is a 31 year-old woman born in Peru where she completed a college education earning her a degree in Accounting. Participant 2 migrated to the U.S. in 2000 and attended one year of community college in New York City. Currently she is working on completing an ESL certification. She has no immediate plans of continuing her college education after ESL certification completion. At the present time this decision is attributed to lack of financial resources.

Individual participant 3 is a 29 year-old man born in La Havana, Cuba. All of his prior education including college took place in La Havana where he earned a college degree in Computer Engineering. He immigrated to the U.S. in 2002. Once the ESL certification is completed he plans to continue his college education and pursue a certificate degree as a paramedic.

Individual participant 4 is a 34 year-old woman born in Colombia where she attended a number of schools but did not complete a college education. She immigrated to the United States in 1998 and began to study ESL at CC in order to learn the language and be able to get a better job. Her future plans include attending college for nursing.

Individual participant 5 is a 23-year-old man, native of Puerto Rico where he attended elementary and some high school. In 2003 he immigrated to Pennsylvania. Years later he completed a GED program at night while working

full-time. He began taking ESL certification classes at CC in 2007, and intends on pursuing an Associates degree in computers.

Individual participant 6 is a 24-year-old woman from Colombia. She immigrated to the U.S. in 2001. Prior to attending CC she attended two other local community colleges. Participant 6 plans to pursue a nursing education once she completes the ESL certification program.

Focus Group Participants

Three focus groups comprised of a total of 21 adults attending community college, ages 23 to 54. Table 3 provides a profile of the interviewed participants divided into 3 groups according to ESL levels of beginning, beginning intermediate, and advanced. They were asked many of the same questions that were asked of the individual interviewees.

Focus Group Study 1

FG 1-1 is a 36-year-old woman born in the Dominican Republic but raised in Puerto Rico where she attended public schools. At the age of sixteen she became a teen mother in the eleventh grade. Because there was no day care available to her at that time, she dropped out of school. In 1994 at the age of 26 she went to prison in Puerto Rico and that is where she received a G.E.D. She relocated to the U.S. in 1999. Currently she is attending the ESL program at CC where she plans to continue her college education majoring in nursing.

FG 1-2 is a 37-year-old man, born in Costa Rica where he attended a vocational-technical school. In 2001 he immigrated to the U.S. After losing his job in 2007, he took advantage of a government program that allowed him to attend community college full time. His future plans include completing his ESL certification and continuing at CC in order to complete an Associates degree in Management.

FG I-3 is a 36-year-old woman, born in Mexico where she attended high school. After marrying, raising a daughter, and dealing with serious personal problems, she moved to the United States in 2000. Currently, she is nearing the completion of her ESL certification. Once finished she intends on continuing her education and pursue a degree as a teaching assistant.

FG I-4 is a 24-year-old woman, born in Ecuador and attended high school there. In 2004 at the age of 19 she relocated to the United States. Presently she is nearing the completion of her ESL certification and plans to apply to a four year college in order to complete a degree in Business.

FG I-5 is a 34-year-old woman, born in Colombia. Although she wanted to attend college, coming from a very large family did not allow her the financial resources to do so. Instead, in 1998 she relocated to the United States, worked, married, and reared children. In 2006, she took advantage of a government financial aid program to attend CC. She is nearing completion of an ESL

Certification and intends on continuing her education at CC to pursue a degree in nursing.

Focus Group Study 2

FG 2-1 is a 32 year-old man born in Venezuela where he received a degree in psychology. He immigrated to the U.S. in 2004 and began taking ESL classes at CC in 2006. His goal is to eventually move on to a four year college and pursue a degree in child psychology.

FG 2-2 is a 39-year-old man from Venezuela. He completed high school and attended some college in Venezuela. In the 1990s he found it necessary to escape from his country because of political unrest. He has been a student in the ESL program since arriving to the U.S. in 2001. He has had to stop his studies on two separate occasions due to financial hardship, but is eager to finish soon.

FG 2-3 is a 40-year-old man educated in Mexico where he received a four-year degree in Accounting. In 2001 he immigrated to the U.S. He began attending CC in order to fulfill required ESL courses prior to enrolling in the schools Accounting program.

FG 2-4 is a 33 year-old woman from the Honduras, where she attended high school. She came to the United States in 1997 at the age of 18 and immediately began to take English courses in several language schools in New York City. She first attended a community college in Manhattan, New York,

before starting at CC. Her goal is to finish the ESL program and acquire a better paying job.

FG 2-5 is a 24 year old woman who emigrated from Ecuador in 2007 and is attending CC while also taking care of her family and working full-time. She enrolled in the ESL program in 2004, and is currently working on her last required course. She plans to enroll in a four year college to study education.

FG 2-6 is a 24-year-old woman from Colombia. Prior to immigrating to the U.S. she was attending school to become a flight attendant. In 2001 she came to New Jersey to learn English, which was a requirement for flight attendants. While attending classes she married and permanently relocated. Her goal is to finish the ESL certificate program and enroll in nursing program.

FG 2-7 is a 38 year old man from Chile. In 2005 he immigrated to the U.S. in order to join family members already here. He's been taking ESL classes at CC on and off since 2006. His plans include finishing up the program and pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Computer Information Systems Management.

Focus Group Study 3

FG 3- Inf.1 is a 26-year-old woman who was born in Argentina. She immigrated to the U.S. in 2006. She is nearing completion of the ESL certification at CC. She wants to continue studying at CC in order to acquire a translating certification for use in her country.

FG 3-2 is a 54-year-old man who was born in Columbia. After graduating from high school, he attended a technology school, and a four-year college where he earned a degree in Dentistry. He immigrated to the U.S. in 1998. After completing his ESL certification at CC he wishes to continue his education and enter the nursing program.

FG 3-3 is a 33-year-old woman who was born and raised in Peru where she earned a degree in Business and Finance. She immigrated to the United States in 2004 and has been attending CC part-time for the past two and a half years in pursuit of an ESL certification. Her goal is to continue studying at CC in order to acquire an Associate's Degree in Accounting.

FG 3-4 a 31-year-old woman was born in Peru who grew up and attended public schools in Ecuador. At the age of 17, she stopped her education in order to marry. In 2000 she immigrated to the U.S. In 2006 she decided to enroll at CC in order to attend the ESL certification classes. Presently she is undecided as to what to do after she completes the certification program. Informant attributes this indecision to family responsibilities and lack of available financial resources.

FG 3-5 is a 39 year-old woman born in Guatemala where she completed a college education earning her a degree in Accounting. She immigrated to the U.S. in 2005 and attended one year of community college in New York City previous to attending CC. Informant is unsure of what her future educational plans are. She attributes this decision to lack of financial resources.

FG 3-6 is a 23-year-old man, native of Puerto Rico where he attended elementary and some high school. In 2003 he immigrated to Pennsylvania. Years later he completed a GED program at night while working full-time. He began taking ESL certification classes at CC in 2007, and intends on pursuing an Associate's degree in computers.

FG 3-7 is a 29-year-old man, born in Cuba. In 2002 he immigrated to the U.S. After losing his job in 2006, he took advantage of a government program that allowed him to attend community college full time. His future plans include completing his ESL certification and continuing at CC in order to complete a certificate program to become a Paramedic.

FG 3-8 is a 31-year-old man, born in Mexico where he attended high school. He moved to the United States in 2003 in order to join other family members. Currently, he is nearing the completion of his ESL certification. Once finished he intends on continuing his education at CC and pursue a degree as a medical assistant.

FG 3-9 is a 29-year-old man from the Dominican Republic. He attended schools in his country where he received a computer degree. In 2001 his family moved to New Jersey where he began attending Community College. His plans include attending a four year college in order to pursue a career in Computer Technology.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred simultaneously with collection. All data was reflected on and transcribed and as Patton (2002) recommends, I became immersed in the data. Themes or topics were searched within the words of the interviewees. This enabled me to revise the semi-structured questions early on in the data collection process when needed.

“Data interpretation and analysis involve making sense out of what people have said, looking for patterns, putting together what is said in one place with what is said in another place, and integrating what different people have said” (Patton, 2006, p. 380). The data were analyzed using the constant comparative method as described by Glaser & Strauss (1997) which involves:

1. Studying the interview transcripts in order to generate tentative categories and coding data into the various categories
2. Integrating categories and their properties
3. Reducing categories onto fewer categories
4. Writing the researcher’s interpretation of the data.

Transcripts of the interviews were analyzed by identifying key terms. Then, common threads among the coded themes were reviewed and integrated into categories. As this process evolved, some of the initial themes appeared irrelevant and were eliminated, thus reducing the number of categories. Finally,

the findings which emerged from the categories were analyzed and written in order to gain new understanding of the data.

Trustworthiness

It is important to discuss the trustworthiness of the findings of this study. Lincoln & Guba (2005) refer to reality as “a multiple set of mental constructions” (p. 295), and they point out that the qualitative researcher “must show that he or she has represented those multiple constructions adequately” in a manner that is “credible to the constructors” (p. 296) of the multiple realities. They point out that trustworthiness involves persuading the audience that the findings of a study are worth paying attention to and suggest four criteria to assure trustworthiness of qualitative data: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Credibility

Credibility refers to believability of findings. Fundamental to credibility is the idea that findings represent the meanings of the study participants authentically from their own points of view. This study involved interviewing 6 people individually, and 3 focus groups made up of a total of 21 students. Individual participants were interviewed in depth, as well as in follow-up conversations to clarify points and to allow participants the opportunity for further comment. Other individuals reviewed the coding of data; i.e., my dissertation advisor and readers. These reviews served to question interpretations that were emerging in the researcher’s mind and also allowed for

developmental and initial testing of the next step. Further, it served not only for review of transcripts but also to offer opinions on emerging themes. This process allowed the researcher to receive feedback which helped to put data and findings into perspective.

An electronic recording of what was being studied was utilized so that data could be examined and compared to the interpretations being developed. Such recordings served as a benchmark against which later interpretations could be checked for accuracy. The audiotapes of the interviews in this study were used for this purpose. The use of direct quotations also contributed to referential adequacy.

Participants' review of their own transcripts added credibility to the study by verifying information and perhaps expanding on the information that was originally given. In this study, during follow up conversations, participants had the opportunity to add or offer additional insights that may have occurred to them since the initial interview. Additionally, the researcher was able to clarify or follow up on previous information or to ask additional questions that had arisen.

Transferability

It is not the responsibility of the qualitative researcher to determine transferability"; it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of the potential appliers". (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316) Purposeful sampling can enable the qualitative researcher

to provide a wide range of information for inclusion in the thick, rich descriptions that make up the findings.

Dependability

Dependability refers to whether the process of the study is consistent and stable over time and across researches and methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Process is the main issue of dependability concerns, since the setting of qualitative research as well the researchers' focus are in a state of change. Dependability addresses whether the design, methods, and findings make sense to other researchers. Lincoln & Guba point out that if credibility has been established, then dependability can be assured by "overlap methods: which refers to methodological triangulation." In addition, the audit trail mentioned previously will allow another researcher to assess the study and its findings.

Conformability

Conformability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed by other researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Conformability addresses whether the findings are based on the participants' meanings rather than on the opinions of the researcher. Also, for it to exist, other researchers should reach the same conclusions if they follow the process of the original researcher, being able to track how participants constructed knowledge and the role of the researcher in that process. The audit involves keeping all the documents that are part of the process and product of the study and coding

them in such a manner that would allow other researchers to assess the adequacy of the process and the findings.

Summary

This is a research study and is not meant to be generalized, since the findings are based on a small purposeful sample. Nevertheless, the study does provide an in-depth examination of how a diverse group of adult community college students construct new meanings out of their educational experiences in the higher education classroom, and teachers and learners in adult higher education classrooms can determine whether or not the study is applicable to their situations. Learning the instructional preferences of first generation Hispanic immigrant adult students adds to the existing learning preference literature and enables adult educators and administrators to more effectively design programs and instructional activities to meet the needs of this growing group of students.

This chapter reviewed the purpose of the study and the key research questions, followed by an examination of the qualitative research paradigm and social constructivism as a research perspective. Next, the criteria for participant selection was discussed, followed by a discussion of data collection analysis techniques. Then, profiles of the participants were provided. Finally, the measures intended to ensure trustworthiness of the findings were discussed. After the first few interviews in which the open-ended question technique was

used, interviews then moved towards more probing questions as categories (themes) arose from the data. The questions introduced in each session belonged to one of the three main types of ethnographic questions, each one of these questions fulfilling a different function:

The *descriptive question* enabled the researcher to collect an ongoing sample of an informant's language, as in the question, "Can you recall your most interesting experience at the college?" The *structural question* enabled the researcher to discover how the informant has organized his or her cultural knowledge, as in the questions, "Could you tell me how the ESL learning lab is helping you?" and "Could you give me an example of what types of assignment deadlines you currently have?" The *contrast question* enabled the researcher to discover the dimensions of meaning that the informants employ to distinguish the objects and the events in their world, as in the question, "What barriers do you believe you are encountering in your educational/ personal life at the community college?" The purpose of these questions does not intend to direct the exchange with the informant, but to elicit, collect, and discover a growing body of cultural information so that the researcher may then make a final translation of that data.

In summary, the case studies are central to this study because they provided the best mechanism for a discussion of the theoretical and educational context of English as a Second Language program implementation in two-year community colleges. As will be noted in later chapters, there are many lessons

to be learned from the case studies. Most are applicable to future scenarios involving the conceptualization and implementation of ESL services in these institutions.

Chapter 4

Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the learning, personal, and establishment barriers that the first generation Hispanic immigrant student encounters when taking required ESL education courses in a two-year community college setting prior to enrolling and successfully completing college level courses.

This ethnographic study explores the obstacles and burdens confronted by ESL students in the community college level prior to enrolling and successfully completing regular college level courses. Further, attention was given to the learning preferences of Hispanic adult community college students and how they construct new meanings out of their educational experiences.

Participants were all Spanish speaking immigrants from various countries and some may not be documented American residents. In order to protect identity and maintain confidentiality, their names were not used in this study. In order to maintain anonymity and avoid any potential risk, pseudonyms were used as stipulated by the Institutional Review Board (Appendix C).

This ethnographic study addressed the following research questions, and attempted to find answers which will provide assistance and guidance to the study:

Research Questions

1. How do the classroom and college environments affect the educational experiences of first generation Hispanic immigrant students?

2. What types of negative or positive personal experiences do first generation Hispanic immigrant students have while attending a two-year college?
3. What types of experiences are disempowering or challenging, academically or personally, to first generation Hispanic immigrant students attending two-year colleges?
4. How did the ESL certification courses influence the educational and career goals of these students?

This chapter attempted to answer the research questions postulated above by providing a vivid account of the experiences of first generation Hispanic immigrant students. These students are completing ESL certification requirements before enrolling in community college credit courses.

Results of the Study

The nature of the study required that the data be analyzed in terms of domains or larger units of cultural knowledge, and cover terms and descriptors following Spradley's Developmental Research Sequence (1979). Further examination of the data called for taxonomic and componential analysis in an attempt to identify recurrent themes among the informants, as well as their views and experiences.

To understand the general pattern of the study, recurrent themes were identified and organized in five major sections. In finding the recurrent themes, the study rendered a general view of the first generation Hispanic immigrant student attending community college. It also rendered a general view of the educational, personal, and administrative barriers they confront. The analysis of these themes and

their corresponding domains led the study to be divided into five main sections, each of which attempts to provide answers to the study research questions and to give a comprehensive picture of the study and its findings.

Section 1, Informants' Preferences for Community College Instructional Practices, focused on students' learning practices and motivators. The section provided informants' views on the quality of instructional care facilitating student success. Section 2, Student Adjustment Process and Demands, addressed the psychological, emotional, intellectual, goal defining, academic, and socio-historical integration informants' face in the community college experience. Section 3, Barriers and Challenges Identified, explored factors informants identified while learning a second language, including course placement, lack of academic preparation, quality of teacher instruction, services offered to students by the community college, financial hardships, and family stress and lack of support. Section 4, Dimensions of Motivators Identified, unveiled the positive factors and experiences informants experienced while completing ESL certification courses. Section 5, Activities Promoting ESL Success, culminated in a discussion of student suggestions and preferred activities in the community college experience which promote successful language acquisition. It further unveiled the conditions and accommodations necessary to create and establish a positive school culture where first generation immigrant Hispanic students are most likely to succeed and achieve academic success. Each section was discussed and analyzed in terms of cultural themes and sub-themes in an attempt to provide a more in-depth examination

and investigation of the categories and domains under study. The chapter ends with a personal interpretation of the main findings postulated in each of the sections.

Informants' Profile

Semi structured, in-depth ethnographic interviews were conducted with 3 focus groups, totaling 21 informants. The first focus group was comprised of 5 informants, the second was comprised of 7 informants, and the third was comprised of 9 informants. Table 1 presents a specific profile of the interviewed informants. All informants were current students in an ESL community college program within the two years preceding the interviews.

Initial interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Transcript copies were given to participants for review and comment. Follow-up interviews were conducted with some of the participants in person and by telephone. The transcripts, along with the researcher's journal, provided the data on which the findings of the study are based. No special instrument was used to obtain the informants' background information. Most data were gathered and generated from statements made by the informants during the interview process.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1: How do the classroom and college environments influence the educational experiences of first generation immigrant Hispanic students?

Community college administrators are concerned with how to attract students to their institutions. Therefore, knowing the learning preferences of adult students and how they make meaning out of their learning experiences is an important aspect of

adult education.

Section1: Informants' Preferences for Community College Instructional Practice

Caring as facilitating student success

Section 1 describes informants' perceptions of instructional practices which influenced students' success. These include an instructor having the following characteristics: being caring, engaging students, motivating students, being personable, making the curriculum relevant, and being an effective role model and mentor.

Many informants described caring instructors as those who care about students' learning and who will make an effort to facilitate student success in their classes.

It's very important that the teacher care about what they're teaching, not just about their job. And to care, for me, means to like, just being willing to like back these students up. You know, help them to succeed, not just, "This is my job, this is what I have to do, I'm going to get a paycheck." I need somebody that's just going to be like an inspiration, you know, not just here's the book, here's the syllabus, get the work done, you have this much time to do it. A teacher that cares takes risk and gets involved with the students, so that's real important for a teacher to care about how their students are going. (Inf.7, Inf.3)

Similarly, others spoke of instructors caring whether students are getting the education they paid for.

I think it's important for them to care that you learn...If you see somebody that really wants to learn, that you [the instructor] want to help them in any way you can. I guess the way I look at it is the teacher chose this profession...That's what you're there for, and you want that person to succeed, so you have to care that they're getting the education that they're paying for. (Inf. 11, Inf.7)

They care that you're giving all you can give, they care that they're giving all they can give, and they care that you're trying to get it. This means a lot to me because I need to do good in these classes so that I can get a better job. No English, no job; no job, then no money. (Inf.2)

Informants expressed opinions of a caring instructor as one who tries to make sure students understand them when they teach.

Caring to me is when the instructor, like I said, will notice maybe your lack of interest in class or your lack of participation, your homework, you know. And they're willing to try and find out, "Hey, what's wrong?. Is everything OK? Is this class a little bit too hard for you? Or...What can I do to make it more interesting for you?" ...Caring to me is somebody who is willing to take the time to find out what's going on in your life. A lot of the teachers they are born in this country and they don't really know how hard it is for the students to learn English and do all the work. (Inf. 5)

The key to caring...That if you said it one way and somebody still didn't understand it, you would step back and say, "Well, why don't we put it this way and maybe you will understand it." Maybe it's the English and maybe no; it's the teacher. You understand what I mean? (Inf. 3)

Students were in agreement that if a teacher does not seem to care, it makes it difficult for them to learn, since a student learns best when the teacher shows interest in the students' own learning.

Discussion regarding students' perception of an instructor who cares about the student learning versus just collecting their pay checks took place.

A lot of the teachers don't realize that we're seeing through them, you know, that we can tell those that are here for, just for the paycheck versus those that are here, you know, to teach us and care about...our learning...It's noticeable; it stands out. Even in my country it was the same. Some teachers even helped me find work when I was at the University, but here I ask a teacher a question about a job and they say; "go to student services'. That's not good for some people. (Inf.2)

Informants often agreed that the instructor should be willing to put extra effort into helping students. Sensitivity on the part of the instructor was deemed necessary for students.

A caring instructor is sensitive to others' needs, our needs. In case we need help, just call the teacher; and we feel that he wants to help." For example, I asked a question about the citizenship test in my class and the teachers stop and explain to me the question. After a while the whole class was listening to him because he said that a few years ago he also taught the citizenship class. By answering my question a lot of the class got help in this problem because he stopped and answered me. (Inf. 13)

A good teacher is an important figure in education. If they don't deliver the product, there will be failure in the system. Throughout discussions pertaining to caring instructors, informants were in agreement that in this society learning is essential and that there are many qualities and characteristics which define an outstanding teacher. They include attitude, knowledge, compassion, and training. Teachers must have the right attitude towards the students, and having the right attitude will make it easier for students to learn. Teachers must also be trained in the subject they are teaching and teach with a passion which will help students to learn.

Without education we have no future. Teachers shape your mind; they take a role in your life. I don't think that everyone can be a teacher. It takes a lot of work and dedication. Unfortunately many teachers have an attitude that is negative. When I get a teacher like this I drop the class because I know that will not work. Most of the time students don't want to learn, they just want to hang out. A good teacher will work with a weak student and not make them feel like he's a failure. (Inf. 1)

These participants described their best college instructors as those who cared about their learning. They emphasized the underlying importance of a caring instructor to their learning and spoke of teachers who truly care that their students do well and are willing to put forth an effort to assist them in this goal. These instructors did not

appear to be there just for monetary compensation or status; they truly wanted to be a part of their academic success.

Being an engaged, connecting presence to students

Student engagement by a college instructor was viewed as an important and successful teaching tool. Overall, students were in agreement that when the teacher does not seem to care, “it makes it very hard for the student to learn.” Students learn best when the teacher cares and when the teacher appears to empathize with how hard it is to learn a second language.

A caring instructor try to make sure students are understanding them...the key to caring...that if you said it one way and somebody still didn't understand it, you would step back and say, “Well, why don't we put it this way and maybe you will understand it.”. (Inf.4)

The relationship instructors have with their students is an important consideration for participants in this study. That connecting presence is implicit in the words of (Inf. 3), a single mother of three children. When she first enrolled in the community college, she was dealing with a difficult divorce. She described the importance of the caring support she received from faculty in sustaining her through that difficult time.

You know my background, just everything I've gone through since I've been here. Just the support from everybody and the caringness...it really touched me and really helped me through all times, and it was very important to me. (Inf. 7)

Informants pointed out that instructors who devoted a lot of time to class preparation and materials are successful in the class.

You can tell that [the instructor] put a lot in [her] classes and class material like the handouts [she] gave us, the outlines [she] gave us. That took time to do, and [she] didn't have to do that. It was just something that [she] thought would benefit the class; and [she] cared enough about us to give that to us...so that's showing...consideration for the class, and that stands out. That draws me in too, you know, that's a stepping stone for me to connect with what I'm supposed to learn because sometimes the book, Oh my God, the book is too much! (Inf.19)

Students indicated that an engaged and connected instructor is very important to their success in learning as adult students.

...They want you to succeed in the class, to get good grades, to understand the language; but they want me to succeed because they know, especially being an immigrant adult, there's things out there in the real world that I have to take care of and if you have a trained instructor, they understand that. (Inf.6)

Differentiated instruction as well as caring was seen as a concrete and positive teaching tool by various participants. Some informants were very specific in their expectations.

Caring that your students get what you're giving, not just standing up there saying the same thing that you've said for the last twenty years... that you're reaching somebody, that what you're giving is going somewhere... The people that are getting it and liking it and asking for more information; or if they don't know it, direct them where they can get it... I remember two instructors that seemed to me as not caring if I learned or not; let me tell you "I was out of there in a minute." I dropped those courses. (Inf.8)

Participants reported that they expected their teachers to be certain students understood the material they were being taught, and not just memorizing it. Students acknowledge that memorizing is not learning. This makes the difference between becoming successful and just becoming average. Overall, students were in agreement that a caring instructor will try to make sure students understand them. Students learn

best when the teacher appears to empathize with how hard it is to learn a second language.

In numerous ways, students described caring instructors as engaged, with a connecting presence; someone who is there for them in various ways when needed. Some described caring teachers as being personable while others described them as available to them when they need academic help. Some described these engaged instructors as being interesting and enthusiastic about teaching, indicating that teaching is more than just a job to caring instructors. Respecting and understanding students and their lives beyond the school setting was also an indication to some participants that the instructor is engaged with the students.

Being a motivator for learning

Participants had opinions about the types of values necessary to be an effective teacher, such as responsibility, honesty and kindness. Responsibility is considered very important because a student will follow what they see. Examples were given of an instructor as motivator.

If a teacher comes late to class; the student will do the same. There has to be an example set for the student to follow and it should be set by the teacher. Adults are no different than kids and will play around if given the opportunity. (Inf.13)

Also honesty, it gives trust. If you are honest you get the trust from other people. When the professor lies to the student he's hurting both the student and himself because it will create a problem for both. The student is not receiving a fair education, especially when the teacher just does not have the proper training and will only cheat another student from getting a good education. (Inf.11)

Kindness is also part of being an effective teacher. It's difficult for a beginner student to adjust and to do well in college. Even students that are advanced have problems doing the work because they work and have responsibilities.

Patience is a value that goes with kindness. Many teachers have it but there are some that do not. (Inf.13)

The instructor was seen as the most important person in this country's educational system and references were further made about their having attributes that the student was always going to remember. 'Feeling comfortable' and being able to ask and respond to questions in class was important to students.

...this semester I was having difficulty in a class and I had to pass it in order to keep financial aid. I asked the teacher for extra type of work so that my grades will go up. The teacher said yes and I was glad that I feel comfortable talking to this teacher. If I had not said anything I probably would have failed the class. It's hard in this country when you don't know anybody so it helps when the teacher's making you feel trust. At least I can count on the teacher to help out with some of the problems that I have at the school. (Inf.9)

Participants expressed a desire for instructors who motivated their desire to learn. Often when speaking about their preference for motivating instructors, they also described them as being interesting and enthusiastic about teaching. Further, when describing a caring and motivational teacher, students commented on teachers always being prepared.

...a good teacher should always be prepared before class by having the class lesson prepared; work graded and knows what they're going to teach the class before they start their lecture. He will not only be prepared for the class they are going to teach they are also going to take some extra time to find out the way they are going to find the time and the way to really inspire the students to get what the topic they're teaching really is about. (Inf.9)

When asked what she would do to create a successful learning experience if she were the teacher, Inf. 10 responded,

I think the very first thing you need to do when you walk into the classroom is to introduce yourself and make the students...see you as a person and feel

welcome in your class. That is important...because if they [the students] like you when they first meet you, even if they don't like some of the things you do later on, but if they like you...I don't mean it as a popularity thing. I meant that they come in they feel good about being in your classroom...that gives you [the instructor] a better feeling to teach. It goes both ways.

Overall, participants agreed that teachers are in charge of one of the most important roles in our society. It involves shaping the mind of future generations. The best teacher will take the time to do the one extra task that will shape a person's life.

Being personable, available, and able to motivate

Participants expressed a desire for instructors who are personable. Often when speaking about their preference for personable instructors, they also described them as being interesting and enthusiastic about teaching. When defining the types of characteristics which best describes a college instructor, numerous students shared their own personal observations of instructors who create a relaxed classroom atmosphere.

It's a good thing too for a teacher to make a classroom in which students are happy to be comfortable with that teacher. I can grow. You know, to learn, really great, to want to learn, to be able to learn, to keep it with me, to encourage me, to take me to a higher level in my classes.... Totally motivated, encouraged, excited about what I'm learning. ... You know, hope. ... I'm going to do a good job. It takes away fear; worry and anxiety. It lets you know if you mess up it's not a fatal error.... It takes the pressure off. (Inf. 12)

Informants described caring instructors as those that who are available to students and who show interest in them.

... Be available...Know you can call them and that they will return your call. If they need to call you at home, they will and are available when students visit their offices .I know they're busy, but some [instructors] will always make the time for me when I visited the office. ... my worst instructors was not caring if I learned or

not, was not being willing to take the time to make that students understood, and not always available after class to help students who needed help. (Inf.14)

... I believe that a caring instructor would always have an open door, and be available to students. "I think the caring from the instructor also goes outside the classroom. Like, with you, with you saying if you have a problem, [instructor] calls your home or send you an e-mail... they're available to you outside and inside the classroom. To me, it's important that they [instructors] care about teaching and be ready to answer questions about that. I don't care if they don't like me. I know everybody has bad days but the teaching is supposed to happen no matter what. (Inf.12)

It's important for students to have instructors available to them while trying to complete their ESL certification requirements. Informants further explained that a caring instructor plays an important role in their success by motivating them to work harder and be more successful as students. When they perceive that the instructor cares about them and their success, it energizes them to persist and achieve beyond what they may have if the instructor had not appeared to care.

I had one teacher who went out of her way for me. She really pushed me farther. . . . She just made things seem simpler. And then, I guess she put things in a way I could understand them. Some other teachers stuck strictly to the book . . . I think it definitely helped me to pass all the requirements for ESL, and got me more interested in the class (Inf.16)

It made me feel a lot more at ease. For example in the pronunciation classes, if I say a word incorrectly sometimes people are not very nice and laugh when I say it. But my instructor here just does exercises with the class. Everybody repeats the words that are in the reading. You know like the vocabulary or the hard ones. I wish that I knew her when I first came to this country because that was a very sad time in my life. (Inf. 14)

Participants in this study expressed that a personable, available, and enthusiastic instructor uses a number of different techniques and classroom activities when teaching. Further, informants expressed the need for instructors to run an organized

classroom and have a plan and to share the goals of the class with the students. Then, they want the instructor to see that the plan is carried out in a meaningful way. Some of the informants in the study indicated that they prefer instructors that know how to motivate students to understand content and who will take the time to do whatever they can to ensure student comprehension.

...I prefer the instructors who understanding what they're teaching and the way it's presented makes sense. "They make it more understandable, it's a lot more fun for the student to learn English, even the writing is better." (Inf.15)

...My grammar teacher explained the work in a way that it seemed that I was learning "by magic." "Just for some reason it sunk into my head and I really enjoyed it." He said, "I do like it when the teachers make it a little bit easier for the class, like give a lot of examples or try new things, not just read, "Blah, blah, blah from the book." (Inf.14)

Students explained that instructors who took the time to make sure that students understood what was being taught were more effective in their instruction.

Making curriculum relevant

Students appreciated the relevance of assignments in their ESL classes to their educational goals and their learning of English. They were asked if the assignments encouraged or discouraged their learning success. Students stated in several conversations that curriculum that is culturally relevant and student centered supported their learning. They mentioned that they appreciated instructors who assigned books written by authors who wrote about topics with which the students could identify. This helped them to comprehend and remain interested in their reading. Multicultural and culturally relevant readings also facilitated their writing of academic essays.

I think they are encouraging me. I am learning more. They're all these essays we have to read throughout the book. They are like real life situation stories. There's essays regarding the 9/11 incident. There are stories regarding television commercials. So, it is actually teaching me stuff that is going throughout life right now... Yes, some of the assignments the teacher gives it has to do with like a culture that we're coming from. And she gives us the right to write our own experiences. And to like express ourselves like how we feel about going to college and stuff. . . . It helps me lot ...cause I know what to say. ...Cause I've been through it. And, uh, it really does, it helps a lot. (Inf.17)

The interview data revealed that all or mostly all of the participants felt that the ESL assignments given by instructors increased their ability to read and write. These findings support the literature which shows that the community college promotes learning, especially in basic skills courses, (Boroch, et al. 2007). It seems clear that students would benefit from assignments that were relevant to their cultural experiences.

Being an effective role model and mentor

Informants expressed the importance of positive role models at the community college. The role models that these students referred to are their teachers. When asked about their role models, participants said that teachers had helped, mentored, and guided them during their learning experiences. Students were asked to describe a time when they received encouragement or mentoring in their pursuit of a community college education.

My role models are my teachers, the ones that really care for me and my education. Well it's 'cause some of them they support me a lot through my entire time at the college life. They want the best for me. And they are very supportive. Even when I have my fears to this country, at this school she [instructor] gives me information about the college and she helped me to enroll in other activities and motivate me to continue. She teach me that I don't have

to wait for somebody to help me. I have to look for it. I need to struggle to get my objectives. . . .get good grades. (Inf.1)

The students had role models, and these role models empowered them to complete their educational goals.

....the mentoring also gave me the idea on college and on life; since time will pass no matter what choices you make, why not go on to college after I finish ESL? (Inf. 3)

I really want to get my education. My sisters, all of them are younger than me, I am the oldest one. I want to do it for myself, but I want to do it for my family. You know, it is kind of like an effect I guess you can say sometimes. When the older one graduates college and they see that, they want to go to college. Hopefully then I can be the role model for them. (Inf.18)

Some participants use the skills learned in college to teach their own children to prepare for the future. As parents, they are providing role models for their children. This empowers them to take action to improve their own family situation based on the skills gained from their education and life experiences. Watching role models and acting as role models supports the academic pursuits of these participant students. They actively choose whom they want to be like and actively model behavior for others. These roles result in a stronger motivation and foundation for achieving their own academic goals.

The mentoring that students have received at community college is mostly informal, yet effective. A teacher's words, encouragement, or advice all provide mentoring for students. That mentoring is an important tool and support for students, for they use this knowledge to guide them toward their goals. As a result, many students serve as positive examples in their families and their communities. This helps

to shape their own futures and their communities by choosing to attend college and to act as role models for others.

I had one teacher who went out of her way for me. She really pushed me farther. . . . She just made things seem simpler. And then, I guess she put things in a way I could understand them. Where other teachers stuck strictly to the book . . . I think it definitely got me more interested in the class and in what she was talking about.

There are some teachers that helped support me along the way, help me out, doing things I needed, give me extra help. Just you know, wanted to make sure that I understood the subject, understood the language, and how it would benefit me you know later on in the future. (Inf.18)

When the instructors care and provide effective instructional practices, it shows that they are interested in students and believe in them; as a result, students become energized to do their best. In summary, caring instructors are preferred by the informants in this study because they strive to facilitate academic success; they are engaged, connecting, and provide motivation for students.

Research Question 2: What types of negative or positive personal experiences do first generation Hispanic immigrant students have while attending two-year community colleges?

Section 2: Student Adjustment Process and Demands

Section 2 addresses the psychological, emotional, intellectual, goal defining, academic and socio-historical integration informants' face in the community college experience.

Psychosocial integration

The participants interviewed in this study reported various feelings about

their journey as first generation students in an ESL community college program. Many reported that for the most part they were alone on their academic journey. They indicated that, in many respects, they were most influenced in making the decision to attend community college by the following people: parents, siblings, teachers, and sometimes other extended relatives.

For many of the participants, education symbolized an opportunity for a better life. With education being a pursuit highly valued by their parents and extended family members, the hope of obtaining a college education was expressed as a treasure for some and a burden for others. By burden, some students noted that they have often felt pressured to succeed in college because the hopes of their families often rest with them. Thus, they feel compelled to finish their education for two very strong reasons: first, because they do not want to bring shame and embarrassment to the family, and second, because they know that a college education can open the doors to economic opportunities.

For example, Inf.5 revealed that his father told him, "I do not want to die until see you graduate, you know," and the student expressed his reaction.

Things like that really hurt, and it was really stressful just to hear that because my dad is older and my mom is older. They are constantly just telling me, when you are going to graduate"?

Another participant expressed the following:

...being in an ESL program with people that I knew and people that were from the same background as me, you know, really allowed me to be more open to making friends. That really took a lot of the pressure off. I really met some of my best friends that I am still friends with today. I see those same peoples that were

in my ESL the first semester and I go give them a hug and I feel a bond to them.
(Inf. 7)

For some of the participants, friendship played a strong role in their psychological adjustment. Many expressed that they understand they can depend on each other for support and are able to build relationships. One participant spoke of how in certain classes students pulled together socially as friends and how important this became to their success.

I have many classmates I think believed in me. Some of the groups that I was in, we were happy to have found each other. I think that was the important thing, I think, for my group. Just being together, and then becoming really good friends and continue, and know that we are together from the beginning, and are going to be here for each other. You know, if you help me I will help you kind of thing.
(Inf.5)

This example of social support and cohesion was supported by observations witnessed by the researcher. In this observational role, the researcher watched the relationships of the students evolve over the course of the semester into deep friendships. Many of the students came to rely on one another in order to get through the tough times and to cope with various problems that arose throughout the semester. They would come to class together, leave together, and spend time together after class. This was something that occurred quite naturally and not something that appeared to be forced because of a class assignment. Many students in the ESL courses grew to value the social connectedness and integration that they had come to know as a result of being with a group of peers from similar backgrounds and with similar social and emotional struggles.

Emotional integration

For the first generation Hispanic community college students in this study, coming to grips with the emotional and psychological challenges that college is filled with can be difficult. In this study the emotional integration sub-domain emerged as a very important theme in the students' adjustment process to college.

Emotional integration basically entails the self-transformation that students go through on a psychological level in college; it encompasses the maturity they possess in dealing with real life issues and their level of responsibility in combating daily life stresses and expectations placed on them by the experience of college. For many students this becomes a battle of trying to cope with problems while balancing school and trying to find the right coping mechanisms that will enable them to ward off fears and to keep them motivated to stay in school. This requires a degree of self-confidence, persistence, and resiliency on the part of students. For those students with high self-esteem and a positive self-image, the emotional upheavals that often accompany college do not pull them off course.

For those students who experience a sense of hopelessness and loneliness and perhaps helplessness, the college experience can be daunting. All in all, personality variables seem to play a key role in how empowered a student will feel to succeed or how frustrated they feel about the whole process of obtaining a degree in higher education. If they feel overwhelmed, question their performance, and have lots of anxiety, and the intimidation factor is too great, their willingness to take risks and try new things is squelched and their degree of college readiness is diminished.

Ultimately, in the emotional integration sub-domain, students are dealing with the internal concepts of themselves. They are dealing with their spirituality, issues of dependency versus interdependency, and whether or not they have the hope or stamina to succeed in college. Thus, the emotional integration sub-domain really speaks to how students manage stress, personal freedoms, and how they come to negotiate and figure out who they are as educated persons.

All of the participants touched on these facets of emotional integration. Most pointedly, one participant described how important it is for teachers to help students work through issues that might be impacting their emotional well-being.

Going to college and working plus all the family responsibilities students have makes it sometimes hard. Sometimes the teachers don't even show interest, and don't give encouragement. It's hard to keep doing it all. You know learning English and it's hard when somebody don't understand you. (Inf.2)

Yeah and also even if you receive a bad grade, you don't want to think it's a failure. You can go on. But sometimes you have to really open your eyes and see the truth. You know, when some student has gotten all A's and has been perfect. I have to be like that; otherwise I will not make it. But here I am. So you just do not take it personally, you know. (Inf.9)

Participants emphasized the role of the teacher in building students' self-confidence.

When I feel that the teacher believes that I am able to do the work, the class is a lot easier for me. If the teacher doesn't try to even help me to try, then the class is hard for me. (Inf.11)

Emotional integration becomes more about helping to bolster the confidence of students and providing them with emotional support when they are trying their best to succeed. Students not only need praise and support from instructors; sometimes they

need advice from someone who will take the time to understand and to relate to their experience as a first generation community college student.

It's better for me when the teacher speaks another language too you know because that means they know how hard it is to learn English and go to college too. (Inf.10)

At times it appears that this is the level of intervention that is required for some students who simply cannot focus on their work because their personal problems have overcome them. They are not concerned about assignments that are due or getting good grades; they are worried about the daily stresses that they face often weigh them down. For instance, there are times when students appear to be doing all right on the outside when in reality they are not.

I remember a student in my class that was absent one day and then the other students told me she has tried to commit suicide. I felt so bad you know because I never knew she was feeling a lot of depression or stress. You never know what problems people have. I think that sometimes the college and everybody that works there with students just don't get it that for some students things are very bad. You know, they want the homework on time. They want us in class on time, buy the expensive books, etc. and nobody think about the kinds of things they might be experiencing. (Inf.7)

Another participant expressed the same feelings of despair about her college experience.

I felt really kind of alone. I went to class without any friends, you know. I just went back and forth to the classroom. It changed me. I did not get to know my instructors that well. (Inf.16)

Students can be hit with a whole host of problems such as deaths in the family, relationship concerns, and adjustment issues, all of which affect them on an emotional level. As suggested by all the participants in the study, the esteem of such students can

crash. They are much more willing to come to tell their personal problems, their language problems, and their academic problems to someone who is willing to listen and work very closely with them.

For most students the best way to circumvent these feelings is to rely on the support of peers going through the same emotional issues. They need a support system that they can depend on. Based on the social and emotional sub-domains that comprise psychosocial integration, we see that there is a relationship as described by the participants between the social and psychological well-being of a student.

Intellectual integration

To understand the scope of how students' learning is affected in the classroom, it is important to look at the role of abilities, achievement, and academic performance in students' college success. Intellectual integration entails looking at both the academic and goal-oriented aspects of the education process.

Students bring a range of ability levels to the arena of higher education, which stem in part from their developmental learning experiences with others, the nature of the resources available to them as students, and their intellectual prowess in the academic setting. Each of the sub-domains that follow address how the academic and cognitive skills of first generation Hispanic ESL students affect their perceptions of community college and their perceptions of success in higher education.

Academic integration

The term academic integration, as elaborated by the participants in this study, has come to be defined by how students achieve at the college level as measured not

only by their overall grade average, but also by their English language acquisition. It also entails how students adjust to being in ESL developmental course work and the success or lack of success that they gain in such courses.

In the academic integration sub-domain, feelings of self-efficacy and the need to foster academic growth is of importance to students, particularly when facing academic challenges that they confront on the collegiate level. Ideally, students are assigned to faculty who assist them academically and help them achieve success. Faculty assistance can also help minimize the academic confusion that students face by instilling a sense of classroom ownership and helping students with challenging work. Moreover, faculty can help students to become more academically attuned to what they need to do to complete their course work with excellence. On the contrary, if students encounter a mismatch between their abilities and actual earned grades, it will be difficult for them to fully integrate in this domain.

To support these ideas, numerous participants commented on the role of academic success in the retention process. For example, participants spoke of community college experiences in relationship to academic progress during the first semester and how this integration was complicated by social distractions.

Yes, my first semester in community college I did not do well with grades, you know academically. I actually was on probation my first year. I was very happy being in community college being able to do what I wanted to do and go where I wanted to go. I did not focus much on school. So when I went to class, sometimes I did not go all the time. That led me to being on academic probation. (Inf.9)

Integration into the community college campus experience was met with another form of re-adjustment and re-awakening, as revealed by one of the participants.

My experience, I think, was a little worse. I felt kind of lost. The students that I did see they were all over the place. I do not have anyone in my classes I knew. It was kind of different. It was kind of bad because you experienced something like maybe confusion or stress. I guess I am just an emotional person but you experienced something when you are walking in the community college and not really know who the people are. (Inf.14)

Me too, but for me I did not take much too seriously, especially, I do not know—it was just a whole different world. My first semester, it was an eye opener. I learned a lot of things, but academically I did not do well. But it was a good experience, as far as meeting people. But academically, it was not good. (Inf.11)

When the topic of acculturation came up in discussion, participants provided the following comments:

It means that students who have no experience with college—either with their families or with friends. Or also students who are academically needing remedial class work, plus what about the students who have work and family obligations also find it difficult. They don't have time to spend on campus. They don't have time to take advantages of the resources available on campus—or of the extra-curricular activities. Like me I can play in the soccer team but my friend has a baby and has to work two jobs. He's really good too; it's too bad you know. (Inf.6, Inf.9)

They don't have time to schmooze with other students at the student center. (Inf.15)

Students who have to work or have family responsibilities often feel intense pressures. The obligations may require that they leave college to attend to these issues. One common theme that has emerged from this data is the concern that students in the ESL program at the community college do not have time to spend after or before class engaging in college activities. Unlike residential university students, community college students are almost always commuters, and many have work and family obligations. As

a result, many agreed that building a sense of community in the classroom is crucial since it will help to develop students' acculturation to the community college educational process.

For many students being able to acculturate and perform well in an ESL program can be both difficult and challenging. This seems to occur when they get lured away by other things. Participants expressed that as students they have to purposefully focus on their academic goals, as their grades will reflect the level of energy they have put into their work.

I think that for me, I did well at the beginning because I come from a poor family. I have to work harder at achieving than some of the students that are younger and have money. I have to prove I could do this to my family and myself. I was the only one that went to college. I wanted to do something even though I didn't have all the resources. (Inf.17)

I know what you mean because to finish the ESL program, finish college—that will be a huge success. There's no time or money to waste. (Inf.4)

However, there are times when participants' academic outlook can be affected by their progress in particular courses. This can often be attributed to a mismatch in their academic ability and placement in a particular course. When asked which factors helped them adjust to community college, participants often spoke about the connection between college and work:

The fact that I didn't want to be working at a fast food place anymore was important in helping me adjust to community college quick. So even if I don't get good grades with some classes like writing I still try harder because I know to finish the ESL will get me a better job. (Inf. 21)

I have been having a real bad time with the grammar courses. It's very strange to not get A's in all subjects. I do great in writing and reading. I was doing good and then this problem started with the grammar class. I felt bad about it, so it is

like I know this, I do not want to do it; I do not want to deal with it. So yes, it felt bad, but I had to do it. So I am going to need to receive more help or else I fail and have to take it again. (Inf.1)

Participants agreed that engagement in the community college had a significant impact on student adjustment and integration; however, several also acknowledged that there are challenges inherent in community colleges, particularly for those students with family obligations. Therefore, family and work obligations were cited as prime obstacles to their integration in the community college. Participants also expressed that Hispanic females tended to have a hard time integrating into community college life. Many have families. They work and have children they have to care for. Sometimes they have a spouse to worry about.

If you're older like maybe the late 30s, it's very hard to make that transition. It's not only the stress of studying, but also the stress of everything that goes along with college. You have to make a schedule, keep up with homework, keep up with a spouse. And you have to put school in a little pocket of time and that's about it. So you're not really going to participate a great deal outside of class. (Inf.5)

...well, if the community college would do more extracurricular events geared towards families, maybe I would go too with my family. (Inf.13)

One common theme that has emerged from this data is the concern that ESL students at a community college do not have time to spend in college activities. Community college students are almost always commuters, and many have work and family obligations. In addition, first generation Hispanic ESL students in community college, have to repeat failed courses. Although repetition can be helpful, it can impact their academic perceptions of themselves or reinforce underlying perceptions they

might have about their academic abilities. Grades and performance seem to be central to the integration of first generation Hispanic ESL students in community college.

For the most part, participants were very concerned about helping one another get through their academic world and their ESL classes because many of them felt that at times they were simply lost. They did not know what to do and had little hope. Many lacked confidence and felt lost.

After a while you start to see that some of your peers try to help you along. And maybe if you're lucky the teachers will help too. (Inf.3)

Participants tried to support one another. Academically it helped them get through difficulties. Knowing that somebody was doing poorly in the class was hurtful to them; for the most part they wanted to be there for each other. Well, the growing experience is unexplainable. I cannot explain how much I -- my mental capabilities. Is like I am in a whole different world. Time has gone by so fast. When I first came to this country we were really poor. We did not have any money to do anything. So it was my situation here. Now I have been able to become of course a more mature person. I know it is because I'm a student at community college but life is more balanced now. It has been a learning experience, definitely. Very hard but I would not trade if for anything. (Inf.5)

Participants collaborated and aided one another in the learning process, and they further agreed that the sense of community among peers is what helped them to survive the early days at community college. It also helped their intellectual growth and learning in the classroom.

Goal definition integration

One of the primary reasons that first generation Hispanic ESL students come to college is for the opportunities that college affords in terms of helping them to fulfill their goals and dreams. This sub-domain broadly extends to the kinds of career choices that participants are attempting to make, their decisions regarding a major, and their

comfort level in making these choices. All of this entails a lengthy decision process that will greatly impact the course which the students' community college academic and career journeys will take.

The support mechanisms within the community college and the faculty play a role in affirming the goals of students. If students feel support for their goals and sense that others believe in them, then they are likely to become more self-directed and self-regulated. If they are unable to find a fit for their goals in the community college, and lack clarity of purpose, then their goal definition integration may be stymied.

One of the big things that I always need help with is making the right decisions when I have to register for classes. What if I should take Psychology now - Or later? I don't know. I'm so worried I have to pass the ESL classes I can't think right about taking other classes, you know. (Inf.17)

I think about not taking any other classes because it will be a waste of time and financial aid. When the ESL courses finish I don't know, but maybe I won't stay in community college. There are so many places to go to get training. I do not know that, that necessarily has to be college. It might be in something else. It might be going to culinary school or to do something with computers or something like that. (Inf.9)

It would help if the teachers and the college maybe they would give training classes to show us about all the other programs here not just college this, or college that. I'm getting old to be in school so much. Right now I just want to finish the ESL certificate. Then later I can think about college or something. That's really what I want to do. Maybe they [administration] can really help students by giving them the encouragement to go do that. Then they can come back here later on if they want to. (Inf.21)

These participants describe the struggles that some of the first generation Hispanic ESL students face in trying to manage school and home. This is further complicated by responsibilities with work, family, home, friends, and personal commitments. Despite the fact that many ESL participants have powerful stories of

what they envision themselves becoming in the future, there are also others attending community college that do not have a clue as to what they want to do. Participants expressed the need to have help exploring possibilities that are available to them at the community college.

A lot of times people in the community college [faculty, administration] don't understand that most of the ESL students have a hard time adjusting, because they are from very, very large families and the family responsibilities are very heavy. Sometimes they have to quit the class to go back and take care of things at home, sick relatives, money problems, etc. It's like we are swimming in two different cultures. Sometimes the teachers ask a question and I'm trying to answer so fast because I don't want to get picked in case I don't know. You know because if I worked double shift and didn't do the homework then the teacher will say I'm not responsible. It's so scary sometimes. (Inf.4)

By the end of the semester, several Hispanic participants began to bond with other immigrant students when they realized how similar their family circumstances were. For some students the initial fright over the vast cultural differences amongst their college peers led to some very meaningful and enriching relationships.

The most important thing is that being in the ESL classes what it did was it helped me make a lot of friends with students. I shared a lot of class materials with my fellow students, both in class and outside of class. Also another thing is that I learned about different cultures, the way different students behave, and the way they carry themselves. I met different students from different cultures and I think that is the most important aspect. (Inf.1)

While many of the participants who were observed and interviewed formed these friendships, cultural integration did not come easily for all of them. Culturally, community college can be hard. It requires that students have to learn how to cope in a community college classroom culture, which is so different from when I was in college

in my country. I didn't have to worry about the language or the traditions. Everybody spoke the same language and knew what to do.

That's how I met my good friend. I was having problems with some other students in the cafeteria because they made fun of my accent. It was quite a hurtful experience for me, but when he was relating of his similar experience I did not feel so alone after that. (Inf.4)

Participants come to respect the classroom as a sacred place of learning while embracing the differences in themselves, others, and their teachers.

Socio-historical integration

Issues such as racism and bringing a history of the immigrant struggle to the college journey in some respects affected the experiences of the participants. They spoke of the immigration experience and of adjusting to a new home country. They also talked about how poverty greatly affected the way they lived and how limited access to resources impaired them educationally and economically.

My family is poor, but everybody was poor. So that is just kind of the way it is. But the bitter part is that there are so many opportunities for problems like alcoholism, drug use, and poverty. That's all there, too. The hardest part for me was having that combination of the good and bad, and it was difficult, especially my first semester in community college. Now is better. I'm more used to life in this country and this neighborhood. (Inf.12)

As the images of the participants' early histories indicate, both cultural and communal issues are of central import to the first generation college student experience. These sub-domains form the social histories of students, how they learn, how they perceive, what their expectancies for life goals are, and what they will later come to value. For the participants, the socio-historical sub-domain was the focal point

from which their identities emerged. It also formed the place in which they addressed the lifelong inadequacies and misfortunes suffered by their families.

For many participants overcoming the difficulties of the community college experience was extremely challenging. However, for others building relationships with peers helped them excel and understand the community college better. Participants agreed that the culture of the community college was definitely different from what many were used to. The college expects them to just dive in and know everything; consequently, all those rules, policies, and intricacies that they have to navigate through are really important. This process can be eased if participants acquire from peers or administrators, a basic understanding of the community college in terms of requirements, policies, and procedures.

The biggest thing was when I came in. I had financial aid, but I only had limited financial aid where I paid for my tuition. But I did not have money for clothes, for books and stuff like that in the beginning. So I began to think about things in my life like maybe I need to get a job and just wait. I was actually thinking about dropping out, but I was like the resources were there, I just did not know how to apply them all the way. So I needed financial aid, and I actually got some loans and stuff. It was able to work out. (Inf.21)

This same student also reported on the stress of living situations that proved to be difficult to manage.

The problem I had was living with people I really didn't know. It was a problem with roommates you know sometimes my things got stolen and I had no privacy to bring my friends over. I remember getting headaches from stress. My mom's boyfriend has a daughter that gave me so much stress. I know she took my things and then said she didn't. There was always a fight when I had to go to class and then I found out my things were missing when I got home. Everybody was always fighting at home. (Inf. 18)

All of these combined forces of money, housing, and health issues can be taxing for first generation Hispanic ESL community college students as they seek to stay in school and not drop out of the system of higher education. Thus at a very fundamental level students are able to understand the college better when they can share their institutional experiences with others. Otherwise, when these and other issues complicate students' basic resources, the transition process into community college can prove to be very difficult.

Research Question 3: What types of experiences are disempowering or challenging, academically or personally, to first generation Hispanic immigrant students attending two-year community colleges?

Section 3: Barriers and Challenges Identified

Section 3 explores factors informants identified while learning a second language, including course placement, lack of academic preparation, quality of teacher instruction, services offered to students by the community college, financial hardships, and family stress and lack of support.

Participants in the study discussed experiencing various barriers and challenges that stood in the way of completing their ESL certification and pursuing their career aspirations. Some of these barriers and challenges included difficulties in learning a second language, inappropriate English placement, teacher instruction, community college services offered to students, financial hardships, family stress/lack of support and lack of academic preparation.

Learning a second language

Learning the English language was identified by participants as the foremost major obstacle to learning and achieving success at the community college. This transition from learning English to speaking English to thinking in English and finally to learning in English is difficult for students. Indeed, it may be in this process that students get lost, get stuck, and may give up. It may be in this precarious transition that students are most vulnerable. Even those students advantaged by previous educational experience in their native countries may temporarily be taken aback, not by the challenges of learning English, but by the challenges of using English to learn and to communicate with other students and instructors.

My friend he live [here] for a year, but he cannot speak English well....many times he was absent from school, because I already talked to him about that 'why you many time miss your class' he said it's too hard. If this class hard you can take more class but he said I mean using English is hard so but that's why you want to learn English that's why you came here and you spend all our money. (Inf. 9)

You are thinking what is the word, what is the word and sometimes you get frustrated in that way and sometimes you get nervous and that's why makes more difficult the communication...(Inf. 17)

Participants further indicated that there was a need for more instructional time as well as a need for more opportunity to practice spoken oral English. They commented on the lack of opportunity to interact with English speaking people while taking English courses. Participants agreed that this would help ESL students apply their English skills in practical real life settings.

Maybe that I'm afraid is the biggest problem. But actually I haven't a problem about going to school. I am still scared to talk in the class. I am trying very hard to listen to the teacher and then I think, and think to say it but I still get very scared to talk. I don't know why. (Inf.20)

It's the same for me. I know the answer but I think about it very much that it gets me nervous." I have to ask the smart students "what did she [the teacher] say? All the time is the same. (Inf.7)

It's because we don't have classes just for talking you know. Not that many like we do for the writing and all the other ones. (Inf. 6)

The concept of fear only comes up in relation to speaking the English language in a college setting and not about any one particular person or activity at the college. Being an English speaker is different from being an English language learner. Being an English speaker means possessing the English language demonstrated by English *speaking* skills. The object, the English language, is something to be feared, speaking is "a concern," and the language is a barrier on the path to the desired destination:

...the only thing that scares me is the English...., Speaking is my concern... it's like when you speak I think the first barrier is the language for me. (Inf. 7)

These participants equate English with an object (thing) that is frightening, yet something that is desired, something to be possessed or overcome. English is recognized as the basic building block of an education.

Inappropriate ESL course placement

Participants in the study were assessed and then placed in ESL courses based on language proficiency. Initially many did not question their placement into a certain ESL level, and even when they felt they were placed in classes that were too high or too low a level for their skills, they remained in those courses. However, after failing or enduring classes that were too advanced, some students agreed they were not placed properly.

I started the ESL program in one class that I thought was too difficult for my ability level. I went into the adult school for the Basic English and then I came here to ESL. . . . I still don't get the grammar. And the teacher had told me I was ready to go to the next level. I realized it was too hard for me. I am just staying there. (Inf.13)

I can't change it. If I fail then I must take the class again and now my financial aid will be in danger. It's very stressful all the time. I can read but the writing is not the same. It's too much. The research is difficult but that's where I'm supposed to be at so that's it. (Inf. 10)

Some participants revealed that they were placed in ESL classes which were not the appropriate level.

Yeah, I felt that I belonged higher than the reading class I had, but the writing was too difficult. I felt that I was not feeling comfortable there. But I didn't feel, I just, I just, I did not think I could do the writing. Um, I guess it's okay. It helped me to become a better writer. (Inf.21)

Not me, my class was really just slow. I think that I shouldn't have had it. That class was horrible. It was like first grade English class or something. And there was, the teacher didn't even, he passed everybody. And he didn't even care as long as you just showed up. I think I could have scored higher on the assessment test. I think I just scored a low score. So, I was placed in a lower ESL level class. (Inf.17)

Maybe not every class I needed was the right level for my intelligence. It was the test that said I should be there, not me. (Inf.20)

Participants were asked about the placement assessment used by the community college and several agreed that placement in ESL courses was helpful in preparing them for future college courses.

I did good on the math part, so I guess it's okay, it basically is a test to see what you know. If you need more help in the writing then you get it. (Inf.10)

...Yeah, I was placed in the low level writing and reading due to my testing results. . . . I guess the testing scores showed where I stood. I guess. I accepted it. I wanted to be placed in the higher class, but I kept getting bad grades. Finally, I was put on academic probation. Now I'm good. (Inf.3)

...I took the English assessment test and I was placed in Level 5, which is the class before this one. . . . I didn't feel bad. The teacher says that this class will help me a lot with the next one. ...Well, if we don't take all the classes the college say we have to, then we can't take the classes for our college major. So you have to do what you have to. (Inf.9)

Participants entered ESL classes through different pathways and had different results with their course placement, some successful and some not. Even when the students were unsure about their placement, they accepted the results. For others, this experience was frustrating since they had to sit through classes they believed were either too basic or too challenging. Ultimately, participants agreed that the choice to begin ESL classes at a lower level would benefit their learning process in the long run. Likewise, other participants who have not excelled in their ESL courses have expressed disappointment after failing courses.

I think it was because I was not well prepared for that class. And then because the teacher saw my flaws, she was not motivated to help me. And besides that, it was summer, and the course was a lot. But I feel that I am gonna learn. I went one level below and then I think that I'm gonna learn what I have to learn. Im gonna learn it well; even if it takes me many times. (Inf.16)

Participants time and time again cited inappropriate placement as a major factor in not passing classes or receiving low grades. Others felt the instructors needed to be more understanding of the ESL students and their situations. Still others said some teachers were too strict and others acted too much like a peer and friend rather than a teacher. Participants were asked what they would change about the ESL placement problem if they could.

I would probably change the assessment test to more of a writing skill type of exam. I'm talking about short paragraph essays. That would better show the

skills, the actual skills of the student. And we should probably use that to, uh, maybe as statistics what to teach. And like have a better understanding of what they're dealing with. And as far as the classes, um, I guess as a beginning student I guess it's always set up fine, except for that test. I'm pretty sure I will have a different perspective after I finish, and I go through these ESL classes. (Inf. 17)

What is evident from the experience of these students is that the assessment process impacted them in different ways educationally, depending on which course they enrolled in, how long they had been out of school, and whether they felt they were placed at levels too high or too low for them. The literature shows that assessment, along with multiple measures, improves student retention and pass rates in developmental coursework (Boroch, et al., 2007; Boylan, Bliss, Bonham, 1997).

However, the participants in this study had varying results after being assessed and placed into ESL courses. None of them challenged the assessment results when they were given. Based on these participants' experiences, it is evident that more research on the effectiveness of multiple measures and the timing of developmental education is needed (Crews & Aragon, 2004; Marwick, 2006).

Language difficulty

In the study, participants talked about receiving support from other bilingual students and from programs established in schools. They also discussed the challenges they experienced when trying to get an education as second-language learners. As students spoke about their experiences in the community college, a need to speak up in class, to ask questions, and to interact with faculty and other students required that they overcome their nervousness about speaking.

For ESL we need the content of the course more explicit, more understandable, and the teacher should explain it like she's teaching someone that is stupid. [laughs], like they're teaching to little kids. I don't know for the other students, but for me, yes. (Inf.16)

Yeah. More easy, more dynamic, don't complicate, that way I could feel confident and go step by step as I learn English reading and writing and all the other stuff. But I know that's not gonna happen because the English classes are college classes not high school or like the ones I took at the church. (Inf. 2)

Other informants spoke of the fear learning a new language caused them.

And then in front of the whole class you have to say it loud [aloud], and I'm so shy so I don't like,The first time I got fever I can't sleep I can't think and that was my worst part but finally it was the best for me because I lose like some of the scare. Now I will never feel the same for fear about speaking at the front class. (Inf. 15)

The teacher has to know that knowing two languages can be confusing when you are learning to write. It is kind of hard to figure out the differences. Some of my classmates never said a word in class because they were so scared the teacher didn't understand them. Plus the Community College and the teachers they don't understand that nobody in the house is speaking English so there is no help outside the school for many students. (Inf. 2)

Overall, informants shared that the beginner courses were not as basic as they believed they were going to be. Some further shared additional thoughts on the earlier challenges they faced being ESL learners at a community college.

I remember when especially when I first came to study English. Oh, some days, oh I say "I can't give up because I don't understand the teacher today"; everything he said was hard. But then when I try to do the homework! No that was the worse. I don't understand what he say, so I'm losing time. So, it's better to stay at home. I'm never gonna learn English. (Inf. 1)

The students revealed their viewpoints on the difficulties of learning a second language and the unique pressures that they faced as ESL students. The emotion that was identified most clearly was fear: fear of speaking English, fear of being

misunderstood, fear of speaking in class and asking questions, fear of speaking with other students. Each participant expressed some form of this fear; yet, the complementary emotion expressed was that of determination and self-reliance in overcoming this fear.

Their concerns support the findings from the literature on Hispanic student needs (Canizales, 1995; Hinkle, 2006; Perin, 2004), particularly in the areas of scaffolding and placement. Their needs surpassed the needs most community college students face, such as adjusting to campus life, peer pressure, gaining core competencies, and feeling accepted. First generation Hispanic community college students must also translate the lesson, the materials, and the books for themselves and advocate for themselves. The community college's developmental English program provides students with varying backgrounds with the grammar skills needed for success, and its English curriculum will further improve student success in other courses. Clearly, the student experiences show that the curriculum and developmental English programs meet some of their needs, but more changes must occur to address the additional pressures they face as first generation Hispanic English language learners.

Teacher instruction

Informants expressed their viewpoints on instruction and the unique pressures that first generation Hispanic second-language learners face, particularly in the areas of inadequate instructional methods. Additionally, participants repeatedly expressed concern over instructors' failure to effectively communicate with them.

Many times the teacher is too fast. I need more time to understand, “maybe the teacher talking, talking. I don’t want my time in class and not learn anything. Also ‘natural’ conversation was more helpful than hearing the stories being read on the computer. I need the teacher to talk like real life so when I go to work I understand the people. Right now I think it is difficult for me because I don’t get everything they are saying. But I need to understand everything for make an opinion... Well, sometimes I am embarrassing about ask something, and I didn’t get the idea”. (Inf.11)

Another student perceived that a problem for teachers was that they were often bound to a curriculum guide; consequently, they did not take enough time to discuss lessons thoroughly because to do so would result in getting behind in their schedule.

The teacher have to do [syllabus] and what the students have to do. The teacher say, “You going to learn this, and I going to write a couple of things on the board that you have to learn,” and they talk and talk and talk, and last they say; any questions?” Yes, the questions was before, not later [after]. (Inf.19)

...the teacher goes too fast; they don’t discuss some important things... we don’t have time for discuss anything. All the times I stay quiet. Why, because when I ask the teacher she don’t understand my accent. She say, “please repeat’ I repeat, but now I’m more nervous and the teacher still do not understand. The class is looking and then somebody tell me what to do. “the other student from different country understand, but the teacher, says, “sorry I don’t understand. Is very, very bad like this to learn. (Inf.7)

Practically all comments that related to barriers to instruction dealt with the placement for instruction or the need for an instructional organization which allowed for more personal interaction among students and teachers. Informants expressed the need for someone to assist them in daily conversational English. This process would allow them to practice their language skills during class time. Informants further expressed concern that they did not always understand teachers and that the explanations of the lessons led to further confusion and frustration.

Community college services to ESL students

Informants frequently expressed a need for advice and information. Many complained that services were not always available to the evening students, particularly those which dealt with counseling services or with the college's main campus function. The greatest number of concerns reflected the lack of knowledge about what is available or where to go, who to see, and what to do on campus.

The staff, sometimes they are rude, a lot of time ... you can just be standing there for too many minutes and the desk person is there and won't even ask you what you need. They don't tell you nothing. Because in the beginning when I start here I was so shy and just came and asking for classes or something. I was so lost and then I find that I was in the wrong day at the school for my classes. (Inf.5)

Is not that they are rude. Is that they are too busy in the day time. For the night students the real problem in that they [college services] are gone and nobody is around to ask. You know like the counselors. (Inf.7)

Financial hardships

Both male and female students frequently spoke about the challenges of finding time to work, to take care of home responsibilities, and go to school at the same time. Work was seen as essential to earn money whether it was to provide for family, personal, or educational needs. Students who carried the main burden for their own educational expenses put a high priority on work even if they were highly committed to continuing their education. Several students referred to the problem as "a fact of life." Others expressed the issue with more emotion. Work issues were expressed almost equally between males and females. The financial hardships included balancing time and work, having to buy expensive books, and feeling financial stress.

Work

The surviving thing is very difficult. I have to work, if I didn't work at the plant [factory] then I don't eat and I still have to work someplace else. I had either choose do I go to school and eat tortillas and beans or find a job. (Inf.12)

The frustration of balancing work and time with school and family

responsibilities was heard in many emotional responses.

Because I come to work and I am really tired, and I go to the shower, maybe eat and everything go fast because I am late [for class] and my children crying, crying. (Inf.1)

Sometimes for the transportation and sometimes because the train is not in the time, I have to be late to class. When you work, it's hard to work the house and start the job and go to school, and sometimes the peoples is very tired. (Inf.3)

Books

Many students expressed frustration over having to purchase books for class that are barely used during the semester.

I think that the teachers should not require the purchase of so many books and they do not use. It's expensive and many times we do not get [re-sale] the money back at the end. Next class, new book; It's very expensive. (Inf. 1)

It is not a fair deal when you buy too many books and all the time you take care of the books. When you will go back to the store to sell the books the money is not the same. It's very little money. Nobody then wants little bit of money." (Inf.3)

The most recurrent theme overall related to general financial needs and financial aid for college expenses. Money was seen as a barrier, especially for male informants who were also paying for a spouse, child, or family member that wanted to go to school at the same time.

Financial stress

Well, my first barrier was being disqualified for financial aid. Struggling in one class, and I failed it which made me disqualified for financial aid. So, my first barrier was coming up with money to buy all the books and stuff. And at first, the first year, I was funded by financial aid. . . . It was uh, well, the second class I failed. That's why I'm not on financial aid this year again because of the English class. (Inf.4)

They denied my financial aid because last semester I had to drop the class because I got my car repossessed. So, last semester I drop it but the teacher did not do something right so it appeared like I was an F. Two F's. So, because of that they denied the financial aid to me this semester. Now is o.k. I receive an email, they revised it, and they are going to give me financial aid on the 20th. Next week. Next week I will be fine. (Inf.8)

The basic financial stress that students discussed in the interview and focus groups centered on money needed for books, food, supporting the family, home expenses, and costs associated with college. Students emphasized the need to help support the family, and they said some Hispanics will choose not to attend school so that they can earn money. The students' experiences are consistent with the figures available regarding the economic status of students attending community college. The 2010 Census reports that one-third of students are below the poverty level, and the County residents earn \$8,000 less than the New Jersey average. Further, the students' words support the literature which cites a lack of money as a reason that students do not return to school (Bonham & Luckie, 1993; Montano, 1997; Tracy, 2004).

Family stress and lack of support

The students spoke about the strong family values shared among Hispanics. The emphasis on having children, raising them at home, caring for one's parents, women

taking care of the children, and supporting one another were commonly discussed.

These values provided support for students, but they also caused stress. In a one-on-one interview, one student expressed how she experienced family stress.

Well, my brother, the one that has always given me housing was very angry when I got into school. When I got here, because he say I should be working. Then I went to McDonald's, and I decided this was not going to be my fate. (Inf.14)

Women in the focus groups spoke about the messages they received from some family members about attending school.

I remember when I get my first A, I was so excited telling my husband about this class. —No big deal, he says. I feel terrible, — I was so excited. But when a friend called and told me, —Yes, you can do it. Continue going to school. And I say, okay, don't worry about what he say. (Inf.18)

Participants discussed what it was like to juggle parenthood and attending community college in order to learn a second language.

My mom says, —Oh, [your son has] been waiting for you. But I have been at the tutor lab all day long. I need to get this. I need to get this work done. She supports me, but she says, —Poor him, you abandoned him (Inf.21)

These discussions demonstrated the difficult place that some Hispanic women find themselves in as they try to improve their lives but face tremendous pressure at home to take care of children or receive little acknowledgment of their educational pursuits or accomplishments.

As these students attempt to receive an education, they must also balance their home lives and families. This becomes very difficult when receiving one's education causes others to question their actions, their choices, and their contributions to the family. Thus, the Hispanic emphasis on the family that provided support for these

students and their children ironically served as a roadblock for some of them as well. These students' experiences are consistent with research which shows that having a component of parent and family engagement is critical for nurturing Hispanics in higher education (Montano, 1997; Olivos, 2006). Perhaps the students would experience increased support from their families if a family-engagement component existed at the community college.

Lack of academic preparation

Students were asked how their previous schooling experiences influenced their success in taking ESL classes. Students reported that their previous education either somewhat prepared them or did not prepare them for college. They also said the following:

When I was going to high school and grammar school I think they passed everybody just because they passed them. I don't think I really learned much. Because when it came down to really write an essay, I had to go from basic. I didn't really know, I didn't have the first thing about how to break it up and. So either I forgot everything that I did learn, or I wasn't taught very well to begin with. . . . I don't remember doing much writing in high school or grammar school. All I remember is spelling. They did it based it on spelling tests and stuff like that. I don't even remember doing writing essays in high school at all. (Inf.4)

The students in this study recognized that they were not prepared for college level English work based on their prior academic experiences, and they were generally not surprised by their placement into lower ESL level classes. In fact, some students were glad to be placed into the lower level classes. Their attitudes about themselves were positive, and they saw the coursework as a necessary step toward achieving their goals.

I think we have problems, but they come like everything else. You have to fight for any position you want. I think that it is natural for me, or for any other Hispanic students, we just have to fight. (Inf.10)

First generation Hispanic students perceive themselves to be less successful adjusting to the academic demands of college and developing effective study skills. Specifically, they have difficulty understanding what professors expect academically and not able to fully comprehend what is being taught or to manage time effectively. Students overall did not view their personal circumstances to be significantly different from anyone else who was trying to be successful in college while working to make financial ends meet, raising a family, or overcoming daily frustrations common in life.

Summary of findings

The analysis identified various patterns and individual insight that illuminates the experience of first generation Hispanic students who experienced barriers and challenges while completing English as a Second Language certification courses.

All of the students failed at least one course, which results in a lower grade point average and is in line with the research that suggests first generation Hispanic students earn lower grade point averages. From this finding one recommendation for improved communication is that first generation Hispanic students who failed at least one course should be contacted by college personnel to identify the reasons for failure and inform them of the college policy on retaking a course and the supplemental services available to the student. Final grades in courses are ultimately going to define whether or not a student can advance to the next level course and ultimate completion of the program.

Students need to be made aware of how to achieve and succeed in a classroom environment. The majority of the students were not aware of support services, which may be attributed to a lack of understanding of support programs and resources for successful student integration. Nearly all of the participants reported issues with language difficulty, inappropriate ESL placement, meeting academic demands, and developing study skills. Some of the participants, when asked what the community college could have done to support their academic and social adjustment, replied, "Nothing," and took full responsibility for their lack of achievement. Ultimately, the onus is on the student to succeed; yet, the institution must identify at-risk populations and strategies to support those groups. In particular, first generation Hispanic students, according to research, do not have an understanding of college expectations, which may hinder how they ultimately adjust to the academic environment.

Nearly all of the students reported having family stress or lack of support from home. In addition, their low socio-economic status further hinders their opportunity to succeed in academia due to the lack of funds available. Counseling can possibly help students deal emotionally with family stress and lack of support. Further, the majority of the first generation Hispanic students also suffered separation anxiety from their family circle.

Research Question 4: How did the experience of taking ESL certification courses influence the educational and career goals of the students?

Section 4: Dimensions of Motivators Identified

Section 4 unveils the positive factors and experiences informants experienced while completing ESL certification courses. The counterbalance of many of the barriers and challenges that students face is the motivators that encourage them to continue their pursuit of an education. Such motivators include family support, positive experiences in the ESL program, helpful college services, defined career goals, curriculum that is relevant, effective role models and mentors, caring teachers, positive peer relationships, the role of family, grades, and the desire to be successful and have a better life.

Family support

First generation Hispanic students revealed that family support for them was a critical part of their reasons for going to school and staying in school. The extended family provided opportunities for some students to attend school, as their relatives cared for their children. Further, it was clear that first generation Hispanic parents were proud of their children for attending college.

My parents really want me to go to community college. In my country they both didn't go; she got pregnant; she didn't get to finish college. They both went to work. The main thing is they push me all the way to get a degree, to wait to have kids. Before they didn't think I could do school so good. And now I have been here for almost two years, so, you know it's going. They are all behind me. (Inf. 21)

I'm happy they feel proud of me because I couldn't study before I get married because we cannot afford to pay for school in Mexico. Now in this country I have the opportunity to study. They told me they are proud and they motivate me to continue because they know that is the best way to do something and to be somebody and especially because I will be a role model for my kids. (Inf. 20)

Although Hispanic students experience family stress and pressure, their families are also supportive of them and their individual goals and dreams (Montano,1997; Olivos, 2006). The students debunk the myth that the Hispanic family is not supportive of an education. Claims that Hispanics do not value education and therefore do not support their loved ones as they pursue an education oversimplify the complex experience of these students. For Hispanics, cultural values run deep, and one's loyalty to family does not equate to a lack of desire for an education. Encouraging these students to complete their education requires educators to understand these cultural realities. A Hispanic family may have cultural values that conflict with the values in the educational system. Thus, first generation Hispanic students may experience tension as they try to be loving, caring members of the family while fulfilling their educational obligations.

It is further clear that students within these programs are experiencing both family support as well as stress due to family obligations. The community college lacks programs that include family engagement. Creating family engagement components into their developmental English as a Second Language programs would emphasize and recognize the strong family values of first generation Hispanics and offer additional support for students (Montano, 2007).

Positive experiences in the ESL certification program

Students were asked to describe the purpose of taking English as a Second Language certification courses. Several students explained the purpose was to improve their reading, grammar, and writing process skills and to help them move on to college

level writing courses. Other students described the courses as emphasizing their speaking and reading skills in English, which in turn helped them improve their skills and confidence in English.

The main purpose according to the teacher is to perfect writing skills, you know learn all your abbreviations, punctuations, and how to write a paragraph and essay. All that stuff that gets you ready to transfer to a college. You have to know all this stuff before you can really go into the college course or else you won't really do too good. (Inf. 17)

Because I am living in the United States so I need to do it. Being a fluent speaker and being able to write, read, and understand perfectly other people. That's why I have to take these classes. (Inf. 11)

Participants were also asked to describe their ESL classroom environment, and whether that environment impacted their learning. Various participants described their classroom as being homey, comfortable, and diverse. Others felt the rooms were initially crowded but got better as students dropped the course. The instructors generally created collaborative, supportive environments.

Environment; I think it's a good environment. We do a lot of group work. Before, the teacher was an older teacher... she was more of a lecturer, monotone. The teacher I have now is younger, and she can relate more to us and joke. So she sets a setting that's more, you can pay attention to it., more interactive. Everybody pretty much sits where they want. They talk to each other. We help each other out basically. (Inf. 16)

Our teacher makes us get together in partners and groups. So, we try to help each other out. I like the class, um; we're kind of close to each other. We do a lot of group work, and that is where we get to meet each other more. It's pretty laid back classroom. It is a very cultural class. There is every kind of race in that class. Everybody is okay with everyone. Everybody accepts everyone's different culture. (Inf. 13)

Overall, the students had positive comments about their ESL classes and experiences in the classroom. The focus group interviews data demonstrated that

relevant skills were being taught and instructors generally used student centered methods. It also showed that the programs contained some aspects of culturally responsive teaching practices. Many classes were student-centered with assignments that had relevance to the life experience of the students. The positive experiences of the ESL students in this study supported the literature findings on the utility of CRT, relevant curriculum, student-centered instruction, and student-centered learning environments (Boroch, et al., 2007; Caballero de Cordero, 2005; Canizales, 2005; Strange & Banning, 2007; Tinto, 2006).

Helpful community college services

Students at the community college tended to use a range of student services available at the college, including financial aid, the tutoring lab, academic advising, and the assessment center. Even students who did not use the services were aware of the availability of the services.

I've used counseling. It was good. I got a better understanding of what I need to do. What I need to touch up on. What my grades need to be. So I can go where I need to go. You know, make it to the school that I want to go. It helped me better understand things. (Inf. 7)

With the English tutors and the writing labs sometimes you have to make an appointment. Before you need to ask when they are able to do it. Like last semester. It was so hard because they don't have a lot of tutors. Um, but the tutor that they have, two tutors was great, were great, excellent, they tell me. (Inf. 2)

The students who use student services found them to be helpful and in many cases critical support for their continuation in college. Campus financial aid, the tutoring center, and academic advising were critical components of the educational experiences

of these students. These programs were also well publicized on the college websites. The student comments were consistent with previous studies that show that student services, tutoring centers, and advisement help support student learning (Perin, 2004; Roueche, Roueche & Ely, 2007).

Some students, however, reported that they were unaware of student services at the community college and that their experiences with student services were not helpful.

For some reason I am like shy. Shy as far as seeking help. I don't know where to go. Or if I did, I wouldn't feel like. I don't know. I don't want to bug anyone. (Inf. 1)

When I came to enroll here, they asked me for what my major was going to be , and I said, business, but I wasn't quite sure. I was just trying to. They didn't really tell me what classes I needed to take to get to my major, they just told me just, what classes I need and to for the ESL, my requirements for that and that's it. (Inf.5)

The few students who did not use student services or find them particularly helpful were largely lacking knowledge about the types of student services available on their campus. This suggests that they need more information about student services, especially since other students and the literature report that student services can greatly benefit students.

Defined career goals

Students were asked to describe their future educational and career goals. Most of the students wanted to pursue their bachelor's degrees, and their areas of interest included math, nursing, early childhood education, computers, and accounting. Several students talked about their aspirations to earn their associate's degree or higher.

I want to go for my BA, I can't fail. It's sort of like, wow. I'm gonna go strong for that degree. I want to get a job where I use my mind more than my body because I have been working in labor since I was 16. I've always had jobs where I have used my muscle and my body. ((nf.3)

Inf. 5 said she was still exploring her options based upon her circumstances as a single mother who needs to provide for her child.

I'm gonna get at least a bachelor's degree. But, I still have to decide because I am waiting for my transcripts from Mexico, whatever things I didn't finish, I don't know how they are going to evaluate them. What doors will be opened for me or closed for me.

The students had very clear goals for themselves, and it was evident that these goals provided support and direction for them in their pursuit of higher education. Some students had increased their educational aspirations after enrolling in college. The focused goals and increased expectations of the students in this study contradicted existing literature which asserted that Hispanics who entered college expecting to obtain a degree decreased their expectation by the end of their first year (Hernandez, 2009).

Relevant curriculum

Students were asked to describe the relevance of ESL reading and writing course assignments to their culture, life experience, educational goals, and their learning of English. They were also asked if the assignments encouraged or discouraged their learning. Students stated in several conversations that curriculum that is culturally relevant and student-centered supported their learning. They mentioned that authors

who wrote about topics with which the students could identify helped them to comprehend and remain interested in their reading. Multicultural and culturally relevant readings also facilitated their writing of academic essays.

I am learning more. There are many essays we have to read throughout the book. They are like real life situation stories. There's essays regarding the 911 incident. So, it is actually teaching me stuff that is going throughout life right now. (Inf. 4)

Some of the assignments the teacher gives, it has to do with like a culture that we're coming from. And she gives us the time to write about our own experiences. It helps me lot, 'cause I know what to say. 'Cause I've been through it. And, uh, it really does, it helps a lot. (Inf. 7)

The effective role of campus leaders and mentors

The importance of campus leaders and mentors in the success of students was expressed by the participants. Several indicated that a specific individual or group of individuals on campus had contributed to their academic success. Those identified included administrators on campus as well as peers and faculty. The participants described how these individuals served as a support base they could talk to.

I think just having a faculty member who's Latino, and like someone you can talk to; people who can motivate you or help you out in different ways. I think that's really important. It's just like a personal issue; sometimes there is no one just there to listen. (Inf. 13)

The tutors do. I had one, she had the greatest advice on everything like... "Where can we go from here?" Helping me map out what I can do. I think that the main thing that she taught me was just to stay focused and stay motivated. (Inf. 2)

Some informants viewed advisors as being instrumental in their academic success.

He has been a good advisor, he has been a great help. I think that - I think I wouldn't have been able to navigate through the system without his help. I think he has done a great job. (Inf. 1)

The findings of this study reveal that the success of the students is a collective experience and not an independent endeavor. The participants identified a network of support that they relied on which included their peers, professional staff, and faculty on the campus. Whether participants referred to one individual or several, their success was clearly influenced by others on campus. Students in the study repeatedly disclosed that their success was contingent on others' support and failure to receive it was detrimental to their academic progress.

Academic success

Many participants talked about the importance of their academics and success as first generation Hispanic students attending community college. This particular dimension of success includes the sub-themes of grades, completion of ESL certification, and learning in and outside of the classroom. Participants attributed, as part of the unwritten code to success, the understanding of how higher education is structured in different countries and how it compares with what is expected in the United States.

In many of the participants' native countries attendance at class lectures is not required, participation in class is unrewarded, homework is rarely given, and students are held accountable only to the extent that they pass final exams. Community colleges, unlike some university models of undergraduate education, favor small classes, active learning, and individual and collective accountability on a regular basis. That accountability may further include required attendance. As such, those students who

learn how the educational system works or who can recognize how systems work differently and act accordingly are at an advantage in the fulfilling of their educational goals.

....And then for the first part the first maybe a semester I was a little bit shocked because back home it's like that you go to lectures you're not required to even have to go, I mean for you have a session like the final exams week and you can show up in the class maybe once the whole semester but you study for exam and you go. (Inf. 19)

Yeah that's the system I was accustomed to. Here you come and you took three or more absences you're in big trouble. You have to do homework every day, over there you did just lectures you didn't have homework's. And it's totally different system so for me it was kind of shocking but then on the other hand I think it's much better cause they keep you up to speed all the time. (Inf. 8)

Estrada and Dupoux (2005) reported that an external locus of control was associated with better psychosocial adjustment to college and that immigrant and first generation English language learners had more difficulty adjusting to college. This difficulty in adjusting may have more to do with a lack of cultural capital than with an internal locus of control. Participants in the present study acknowledge that success requires study, preparation, and the willingness to engage in conversation both in the classroom and socially, characteristics more indicative of academic success.

Grades

Participants made several general observations about their academic standing. Although students identified a number of positive experiences relative to grades, some students struggled at times academically.

I brought my GPA up because I think to me that's - to be successful. happy in school and to be able to be successful in my education and to love what I do and to still get good grades. (Inf. 9)

(Inf. 3) noted as well that she did gain knowledge and is satisfied with her academic standing. However, she commented that she wishes she could have done better.

"In terms of my grades, academically I feel like I could've been a little bit more successful in trying to do better in my classes but I did learn a lot and am finishing the last ESL requirement with a high average. I am okay with that."

Similarly, (Inf. 16) stressed the importance of keeping his grades up. He added,

"I guess the most basic thing that was set before you is to know that you have to do well in school and you have to get good grades...As long as you do that, you're not gonna get kicked out of the university or anything. You're not gonna lose financial aid. So that was the major thing that I focused on to be successful, just as long as I'm getting good enough grades".

When asked about academic success, several students spoke of how first generation Hispanic students on campus find a community of peers within their program. Concerning this sense of community (Inf. 13) stated,

"Some students feel connected to their academics. Hispanics just find, eventually "find their niche" in their classes or in the campus they attend. You know they stay where they are comfortable. I feel that in this college students can stay motivated because they are connected because everybody has to finish the same program but also because they have goals. . I'm gonna stay close to the people I met here. I'm gonna stay with this program and finish my degree in accounting.

Completion of ESL courses

Several participants, when asked about their academic success, also noted that the fact that they were continuing with credit courses after finishing their ESL certification was a success to them.

Finishing school itself is a milestone. A lot of my friends that I've seen that didn't complete their ESL program during the first or second year because they didn't - they may not have experienced immediate success. So they chose not to continue with their schooling. The first two years are crucial for Latinos specifically if they want to reach their ultimate success of graduation. (Inf. 8)

For some participants, academic success was measured by their personal satisfaction with their grades, class assignments, and program completion. Also related to grades and completing the ESL certification program, participants also revealed that knowledge attainment was crucial for their success in community college. Further, acquiring knowledge, learning how to navigate two cultures while attending community college, and not forgetting about who you are while in college was important to their success.

(Inf. 20) disclosed his gratitude for being challenged to think differently. He shared his appreciation for his college experience.

The understanding that you have after having a college education is pretty broad from what I came in with from my country. Learning more concepts, getting involved in what it really takes to have a higher education, to be challenged, to think differently, to view things from different points of view, to understand others as well, to respect others' points of view, and to work with others as well. So I think I've learned to do all those things thanks to the education I've gained since I have been attending community college.

He continued by asserting how he had to navigate two cultures as a college student and how this was a challenge for him. He further stated,

"We all have to be reminded where we come from and keep our roots in the back, because it plays a big role, I think, for the community and for you as an individual...I've seen a lot, those that have succeeded sometimes tend to forget where they're coming from. And it's something that really hurts me, to see people hold an office in Congress or people in general, when you see lawyers, when you see Latinos, don't really connect with the Latino community.

It really hurts sometimes to see someone, a Latino that has succeeded and forgets the community.

Learning in and outside of the classroom

As participants were asked about their learning that was taking place in and out of the classroom, students responded to the experiences they gained on both fronts.

I think that good things could come from especially those people, those college students that I have seen, like my classmates that are Latinos as well. I have a lot of respect for them because I can see they've been successful, they are good students, and they do all the things that will make them grow as students. (Inf. 17)

Overall, first generation Hispanic participants spoke of how academics contributed to their success while attending community college. Participants also viewed their success as more than wanting to graduate from the community college. Participants shared that attending the college caused them to learn and think in new ways and that this was a challenge.

Desire to be successful

Self-confidence, drive, motivation, belief in self, and peace within one's self are a few of the responses that participants used to describe the "desire to be successful" dimension. Students frequently articulated that one's success comes from within and that this was necessary to achieve success in completing the ESL program at the community college. Several participants discussed the need for wanting to succeed and having an understanding of one's sense of self and dedication.

My success on campus, has been positive and I think this was important for me doing my best academically. Yeah, you have to want something. You've got to envision that you already have it and I think when you have those two factors, you can achieve it. And I think people really have to believe in themselves as

well...So I believe it and I tell myself that I am going to get that A and I get my A...You have to believe in yourself and be confident (Inf. 15).

On a similar level (Inf. __) advocated that students must have the drive and desire to succeed in college. She suggested, You have to get that drive and that desire, like you need it desperately that...Without that, if you don't know what motivates you...! think you won't be as successful as you could be because you're just gonna be like doing it for somebody else, so it's just like you kind of don't care. But I think -motivation and drive, like all of that. Without those, you really won't be able to do anything.

Desire for a better life

Students were asked what made them want to go to college. Wanting good jobs, support from teachers and family, wanting a better life, and fulfilling personal goals were the dominant reasons given.

Just, to have a good life. And I want a well-paid job. I seen people, __cause this person told me, you know, the people around you is who you're gonna become. I have friends like I said who are just staying at home taking care of the kids. I think I'm too young. I just turned twenty-two. I'm not gonna stay at home. I still have a whole lot to go for. Just go to college to see what else is out there for me. That's when I went back and to get my ESL certificate. (Inf. 4)

Various participants agreed that knowledge was the key that opened a lot of doors. These students discussed their reasons for coming to college, and their comments reveal their desire to help their parents, find better jobs, pursue their goals, and support their families.

Section 5: Activities Promoting ESL Success

Section 5 culminates in a discussion of student suggestions and preferred activities in the community college experience which promote successful language acquisition. It further unveils the conditions and accommodations necessary to create

and establish a positive school culture in which first generation Hispanic immigrant students are most likely to succeed and achieve academic success.

Participants in this study expressed the following as best practices for success: Having self-discipline, choosing friends who are supportive of attaining an education, going to class, doing their homework, and attending tutoring sessions. These acts of self-discipline and positive practices are critical in that students are using the tools of education to succeed in their educational pursuits. Increasing their knowledge through education is a step on their pathway to a successful future.

Smaller class size is one strong component of community colleges which contributed to success. Participants felt this learning environment to be more forgiving and offering more opportunity to develop conversation skills and academic speaking skills:

I know that when you study in the college is different when you study in the university because it's every class here is like 20 people in every class. At the university I know that it's like 100 likeLike more it's not the contact ...you are like a number or because there are a lot of people in each class ... so I prefer here and it's a small group and it's more I feel more comfortable, I don't know.
(Inf. 3)

This is especially true for students who are beginning undergraduate study, although some graduate students may also find the community college a less stressful place to practice new communication skills and new academic practices. The smaller numbers of students who speak similar first languages and who might congregate or take classes together may also maximize the opportunity to interact with native English

speakers. This interaction may expose English language learners to a variety of American English patterns used in different social settings.

The action of attending college has had an enormous impact on the families of these first generation Hispanic students. The students' methods for disciplining their children, supporting their own children in school, advocating for their families, communicating with their spouses, and encouraging other family members to consider school result directly from their choices to attend college. These choices set the stage for change at the local level within their families. These grassroots efforts at home may lead to bigger changes in the future that impact the broader Hispanic community in terms of increased participation in education, improved family relationships, better paying jobs, and securing their future.

Summary

Themes emerged from the research conducted that answered the question, *How did the experience of taking ESL certification courses influence the educational and career goals of the students?* The themes show the many pressures and choices that first generation Hispanic students must cope with in their efforts to go to school, stay in school, and complete a degree. Their self-discipline, selection of role models and friends, clear goals, and choice to attend college serve as acts of self-empowerment. By acting in a manner that provides them with opportunities to gain information about their lives, they empower themselves. By speaking to one another about their experiences in the world of academia, they empower themselves.

Students at a community college represent a wide range of diversity within their ranks, including age, career or professional experience, and social background. This may be even more so for first generation Hispanic immigrant students studying at the community college. There may be many reasons beyond simply learning English for an English language learner to begin their college studies by taking one or two ESL classes, even if their knowledge of English as determined by pen and paper assessment may not require it.

The participants in this study acknowledged their academic success was the result of hard work and study. This seemed true for those who were accessing higher education for the first time, learning English for an opportunity in higher education or for an opportunity to access the global market. Most students accepted the challenge of using their time for study. These English as a Second language classes can be instrumental in giving first generation Hispanic students the confidence needed to achieve academic success in other courses or programs of study and provide for them an experience with various social languages. For some English language learners, confidence may not be enough to propel them down the path of higher education. They lack more than English language skills; they lack necessary cultural and academic skills in order to have a successful education.

The community college offers an environment that allows for the transition between ESL courses and other college courses. However, this may still represent a gap too wide to cross without specific programs, classes, and other help to address differences, allow students to practice the new skills and make the advances

successfully. For many Hispanic students, education does not require their active involvement. They expect that the professor will provide them the required factual information needed to pass exams. Consequently, developing the necessary skills in critical thinking and class discussion are a part of the new education model.

Although ESL classes might be instrumental in developing the confidence to speak English, participants also recognized the importance of cultivating American friends, talking to instructors, and speaking English at every opportunity. This study reflects findings in earlier research that identified the importance of interaction with American students and satisfaction with communication skills to the adjustment to campus life for international students at a university (Swagler & Ellis, 2003; Zimmerman, 1995). The community college can provide an environment more conducive, less threatening, and less competitive than the university setting. For example, several students indicated that attending the community college provided greater freedom in choosing classes apart from ESL classes.

Participants in the study admit being nervous and fearful about not only learning English as a second language but also speaking it; they also recognize the need for extra study and preparation time. On some level they understand that this academic experience means mustering the courage to conquer their learning challenges as well as their fear of speaking in a new language. It also means being encouraged, even pushed, by caring instructors to do more than they ever thought possible; it means interacting with classmates, asking questions both in class and in private with the instructor.

This experience means overcoming communication apprehension, identified as problematic in earlier research (Saito, 2000; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1984). It means cultivating American friends and speaking English with other classmates of different ethnic background, thus reducing perceptions of social alienation and increasing a sense of well-being related to successful communication with others (Zimmerman, 1995). The community college can provide the learning environment of smaller classes, readily accessible instructors, and a diverse student population, including other English language learners, which facilitates the move from the ESL curriculum to the traditional college curriculum. This transition from learning English to using English to learn is a valuable stepping stone to those who wish to pursue college degrees.

Although learning English as a second language is a desired goal, it is only a means to a greater goal or destination. This might be academic success (good grades) or employment, or it might mean more significant achievement, such as degree attainment. This greater destination may be access to a global economy, one in which the dominant language is English and one which offers economic rewards. As students begin to gain confidence in speaking English their identity as an English language learner is altered becoming a college student. Thus, advancement must go from ESL classes to college classes, but, movement must also go from being an English language learner to being a college student, and eventually a college graduate.

Chapter 5

Discussions and Recommendations

This chapter consists of a discussion of the results of the study and the recommendations for further study. The discussion presents the interpretation of first generation Hispanic immigrant students' responses to the learning, personal and establishment barriers they encountered while taking prerequisite English as a Second Language courses in a two-year community college. The proposed recommendations are offered in light of the findings of the study, review of the literature, and conclusions. This chapter further discusses research strategies for working with first generation Hispanic immigrant students, discusses contributions of this study to the literature, and suggests possibilities for future research.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the learning, personal, and establishment barriers that the first generation Hispanic immigrant student encounters when taking required ESL education courses in a two-year community college setting prior to enrolling in and successfully completing college level courses. This ethnographic study explored the obstacles and burdens confronted by ESL students on the community college level prior to enrolling and successfully completing regular college level courses. The primary questions that guided this study were the following:

1. How do the classroom and college environments affect the educational experiences of first generation immigrant Hispanic students?
2. What types of negative or positive personal experiences do first generation Hispanic students have while attending a two-year college?
3. What types of experiences are disempowering or challenging, academically or personally, to first generation Hispanic students attending two-year colleges?
4. How did the ESL certification courses influence the educational and career goals of these students?

Twenty-one (21) first generation immigrant Hispanic students in a community college were participants in the study. These participants were separated into three (3) focus groups. The interviews were conducted using guiding questions (Appendix E) to encourage students to share their stories about their experiences as community college students enrolled in the English as a Second Language program. The questions were designed to elicit stories from the students that would ultimately answer the research questions for the study.

The research in this study followed the guidelines of grounded theory. The words of the students were emphasized throughout the study in order to allow the reader to hear the experience of these students in developmental English as they described it. They provide information concerning changes they recommend be made to their educational programs, so that the instructors

could then take action to improve the educational experiences for first generation immigrant Hispanic students.

The participants in the study included Hispanic students from Mexico, Peru, Cuba, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Chile, Honduras, Argentina and Costa Rica. The students expressed how they balanced the roadblocks and motivators that they faced in their education journey.

Key Findings

Five important key findings surfaced through the focus group interviews: (1) informants' preferences for community college instructional practices (2) student adjustment process and demands (3) barriers and identified challenges (4) motivators and (5) activities promoting ESL success.

Research Question 1: How do the classroom and college environments affect the educational experiences of first Generation Immigrant Hispanic students?

The students discussed the environments of the classrooms and the colleges in mostly positive ways. They felt these environments were multicultural, friendly, reflected their culture, and promoted interaction. Students described their campus environments as safe and inclusive. Campus support programs, such as student centers, helped students feel comfortable about their learning needs and increased their opportunities to attend classes.

In some cases, individual classroom environments did not promote student interaction and thus students did not feel engaged. When teachers were not supportive of students in the learning environment, conversation and student interaction were stifled.

Research Question 2: What types of negative or positive personal experiences do first Generation Hispanic students have while attending two-year colleges?

The students in this study reported that placement assessments and placement in English courses do not work for all students. Some students had been improperly placed at levels too low or too high for their abilities. Often, they had to take additional coursework and spend more time to complete their English requirements. The students expressed frustration over having to take additional coursework and sit through classes that were too hard or too easy for them.

Other students reported that their previous education in ESL programs had prepared them well for ESL college courses. They felt confident completing ESL coursework, especially in the area of written grammar. However, they discussed their desire to receive more practice in spoken English.

Research Question 3: What types of experiences are disempowering or challenging, academically or personally, to first Generation Hispanic students attending two-year colleges?

The first generation Hispanic immigrant students in this study stated that curriculum with rigor and relevance supported their learning and empowered

them. Group work, student-centered instruction, social learning, and students being responsible for a portion of the lessons were cited as methods that promoted learning. This is consistent with research on adult learning, (Abrego, 2009). The students also spoke of their increased confidence as they gained skills in grammar, sentence structure, essay writing, and reading. Further, they felt motivated by their ability to act as role models for their friends, siblings, children, and parents.

The students named teacher-centered instruction, irrelevant curriculum, testing bias, and family stress as disempowering. Instructors who chose curriculum that did not interest students or lacked life relevance bored students and impeded their progress. Teachers who did not answer student questions, who did not employ collaborative methods, and who did not seem interested in student learning frustrated students and in some cases resulted in being less motivated. The students also felt that exit exams which required them to denote their status as ESL learners were biased and resulted in an unfair assessment of their work. Students also expressed that family stress was disempowering. Although the students felt supported by their families, they also felt disempowered when family members did not understand the challenges they faced at school or did not recognize their achievements.

Research Question 4: How did the ESL certification courses influence the educational and career goals of these students?

All of the first generation Hispanic immigrant students in the study entered developmental English with clear career and educational goals. Students were pursuing certificates and degrees in the areas of Nursing, Education, Computers, Communications, Psychology, Early Childhood Development, and Business. Some students raised their educational aspirations during their developmental English experiences from the pursuit of a certificate to that of an Associate's degree. Some students remain uncertain as to what careers they want to pursue in their chosen fields.

Conclusions

From the study and the students' responses, six conclusions emerged:

1. First generation Hispanic immigrant student participants feel supported by their families and friends to attend college, even though family pressures and a lack of encouragement sometimes put students in the difficult predicament of having to choose between school and family obligations. Thus, creating programs that promote family engagement can provide added support for students.
2. English placement is not working consistently for all students, arguing the need for better assessment tools and departmental practices regarding initial placement.
3. English as a Second Language classes with student-centered instruction provide these student participants with improved skills and confidence in writing, reading, and speaking.

4. Curriculum that is relevant, multicultural, and rigorous encourages learning for these student participants.

5. Developmental English programs with structure and clear assessment policies provide these student participants with information they need to achieve their aims in college and in their future accomplishments.

6. As ESL learners, these student participants struggle at times with communication and homework due to language barriers. Thus, teachers and student service providers need to actively facilitate their understanding of class materials.

Conclusion 1: First generation Hispanic immigrant student participants feel supported by their families and friends to attend college, even though family pressures and a lack of encouragement sometimes put students in the difficult predicament of having to choose between school and family obligations. Thus, creating programs that promote family engagement can provide added support for students.

First generation Hispanic immigrant students report that their parents are highly supportive of them and their education and career pursuits, even if those parents did not attend college. The students also stated their own concern for their children's education, as they enroll them in head start, provide them with knowledge they have gained about writing, help them with homework, and mentor them. Olivos (2006) points out that bicultural parents are blamed for not participating in their children's education; yet when the schools invite parents to

participate, the schools use approaches that are contradictory to their authentic involvement. He also states that schools need to invite parents to participate with the understanding that the school and the parents share equal responsibility for transforming the schools (2006). Such notions can be applied to first generation Hispanic immigrant students in the community colleges. Family engagement can provide support for students who state that even though their family responsibilities sometimes created pressure on them to choose either family or school; they felt supported by their families. Family engagement programs can build upon the strong bonds of Hispanic families, while providing students and their families with information that can help to support the student. It was also clear that the students received support from their peers. The students talked about how their friends, both in and outside of college, encouraged and supported them, even if those peers had no college aspirations.

Conclusion 2: English placement is not working consistently for all students, arguing the need for better assessment tools and departmental practices regarding initial placement.

Although participants understand that assessment is necessary and did not express that assessment should be eliminated, they did share their frustrations with being placed in courses too high or too low for their level of ability. Students stated that although their teachers had informed them at the

beginning of the semester that the course would require a lot of extra work or, conversely, seemed too low a level for them, the teachers did not recommend to the students that they should be reassessed, nor did they refer the students to a different level. Since these students have already beaten the odds by being in college, it seems logical that colleges would want to place students correctly. One of the goals of assessment should be to help students have a productive and successful experience with course placement. Therefore, colleges need to assess how well their current placement practices work.

Conclusion 3: English as a Second Language classes with student-centered instruction provide student participants with improved skills and confidence in writing, reading, and speaking.

Consistently, students discussed the benefits they had received from ESL courses. These courses increased their levels of confidence about speaking, reading, and writing. They named collaborative activities, the writing process, and constructive instructor feedback on their writing, peer review, and supportive environments as beneficial to their learning.

Although the participants did not use the terminology, their words described that the teaching and learning in their classes included constructivism, social learning, cooperative learning, and transformational learning (Baumgartner, 2001; Prickel, 1998). Students talked about building on the skills they had gained previously in prior ESL courses. They shared that working together helped them to better understand other perspectives and class

materials. Students also talked about how their new knowledge helped them improve other areas of their lives, including communicating with a boss or with their families.

Conclusion 4: Curriculum that is relevant, multicultural, and rigorous encourages learning for these student participants.

The participants talked about the importance of the curriculum being relevant to them. Assignments, topics, and readings that were relevant to their life experience, their culture, their coursework, and their goals helped maintain their interest in and motivation regarding the subject. Some students indicated that the curriculum that was too simple or basic made them lose interest and the motivation to complete the assignments. Again, the students' observations echo the literature about basic skills students. The literature makes it clear that teaching that is responsive to the culture of students engages students (Fry, 2002).

Participants also found that these types of methods made them want to read, helped them connect with the assignments, and supported their learning. The students further indicated in the focus groups that not all instructors gave them responsibility for presenting portions of lessons. The researcher did not observe instructors, and thus no evidence was uncovered that showed what number of instructors asked students to engage in student-led activities in the classroom.

Conclusion 5: Developmental English programs with structure and clear assessment and policies provide these student participants with information they need to achieve their aims in college and in future career pursuits.

When students talked about their English as a Second Language programs, they stressed mastery exiting exams. They had all had a basic understanding of the requirements of the mastery test, how to prepare for it, and what it would include. They were less clear on who graded it, why one teacher could give it one score and another teacher a different score, and what its significance was in relation to class grade. The structure of the curriculum and the supporting materials that students were given for the mastery helped students understand what was expected of them.

Informants also report that a structured learning environment benefits the weakest students. The curriculum in the ESL program was structured and centered on teaching the writing process along with reading and grammar. The students spoke of the curriculum they had experienced and reported they had learned strategies for invention, proofreading, writing, and revising. They also said they had improved their spoken English as well. This curriculum corresponds with the skills needed to achieve success in college and was useful for the students.

Conclusion 6: As ESL learners, these study participants struggle at times with communication and homework due to language barriers. Thus, teachers and

student services providers need to actively support these students to facilitate their understanding of class materials.

The students in the study reported that they experienced communication difficulties and expressed difficulties asking questions about their progress, asking for help or clarify issues on assignments. Participants further discussed their frustration with not understanding what the teacher said during lectures, what the instructions were for homework, or being able to understand their own children's homework or paperwork from their schools.

Schools and colleges should provide as-needed translators for students. Providing translation services would send a message for students and their families that schools do want to work with them and understand their needs. Further, providing translators would help to alleviate the pressure that bilingual students experience.

These difficulties show a need for educators and student service providers to do more to actively help these students understand what they are signing, what the assignments are, and what tools they can use to better understand the instructions in class. For instance, instructors can provide written materials for ESL students that summarize lecture materials. This act still encourages communication in the target language, and reinforces the learning for ESL students, while also benefiting other students. It does not require money for additional translators, but provides an opportunity for ESL students to better grasp what is expected of them on assignments. When instructors rely primarily

on verbal communication, they limit what information ESL learners and other learners may receive, especially for assignments and key lecture points. Therefore, one-on-one tutoring or additional help outside of class can assist those students who need academic support.

Explanations of assessment processes and implications of the assessment tests should also be available in translation not only in Spanish, but in several other languages as well. This holds true for documents parents must sign regarding their children. Providing Hispanics students with information about their education and the education of their children helps them to empower themselves to make informed choices for them and their children.

Recommendations

In addition to the conclusions drawn from the research, recommendations for English as a Second Language policymakers and students emerged from the research as well.

Recommendations for Practices in English as a Second Language Programs

The students in the study pointed out several features of developmental English programs that promote positive learning experiences for first generation Hispanic immigrant students. Based on the observations of the students, the following recommendations for program improvement were created. These recommendations include strategies for the following areas: curriculum and teaching, classroom environments, campus environments, academic and student support services, assessment, and structured programs. This study and research

indicate that culturally responsive teaching [CRT] strategies promote student learning. Culturally responsive teaching can help to form strategies for including diverse readings in the classroom, and it focuses on skill development, core competencies, knowledge building, student centered learning, and positive perspectives on experiential knowledge.

English as a Second Language programs should employ culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as a foundation of their curriculum. Practical ways to do this include teacher training on CRT methodology, cultural competency, and pedagogy. Instructors need to recognize their own cultural values and biases and understand how those cultural values and biases impact the way the students interact with them. Further, teachers should understand students, department how cultural values and biases impact communication among students and faculty members, and the instructional and student services areas on campus. They should promote all student experience by using instructional examples and materials based on the cultures, words, music, literature, and art of those students (Bruch, Jehangir, Jacobs & Ghare, 2004). This type of teaching promotes social justice values, and does not believe in erasing one canon to replace it with another. Rather, the notion is to broaden the ideas of the literary canon to acknowledge experiential knowledge and provide equitable representation at the table of academic discourse. Further, in conjunction with already established good practice, such as structured programs, CRT can improve student learning for all students.

Developmental English [ESL] programs should have clear program outcomes and policies that support student learning. The policies should emphasize the completion of student work in developmental English as soon as possible in the student's academic plan (Boroch, et al., 2007; Aragon, 2004). Programs also need to have clear but flexible guidelines for students regarding which assessments to take and what the implications are of taking those assessments. Just because English is a student's second language does not automatically mean that the student should be taking ESL courses.

The student's education background in the United States is a critical factor in making assessment determinations. Did the student receive a high school diploma in the United States, for example? Many programs, though, do not provide clear guidelines for students. Programs should employ methods that allow students to be referred to a different level by instructors. Although this would not impact a large number of students, it can affect those students on the margins who would benefit from either a higher or lower course level placement.

Student participants and the literature both report that curriculum with structure benefits student learning (Boroch, et al., 2007). English as a Second Language programs should create clear policies for students and clear criteria by which students are promoted into the next level of English learning. What is critical, though, is that programs must follow their own policies and be consistent in administering those policies.

Another area for English as a Second Language programs to consider is collaboration with speech departments or the creation of speaking courses in English. The literature shows that immigrant students in community college ESL programs want such assistance (Oudenhoven, 2006). ESL programs also need to work closely with student and academic support services staff and administrators on the issues of campus environment and climate. Environments that promote a sense of belonging and camaraderie among students help to encourage students to remain in school. When the staff and faculty are positive and friendly toward students, the students have a more positive experience and are more likely to ask questions, use campus services, and attend classes. A large portion of this issue, though, depends on staff obtaining a degree of cultural competence. Physical environments with areas for student conversation, interaction, studying, and reflection encourage learning (Strange & Banning, 2007). These types of student-centered environments focus on the needs of the students and the instructors, staff, and administrators. Campus environments that have several areas for collaborative tutoring or studying that can be accessed by all students promote a sense of community and show students that the campus is responsive to their needs.

Further, faculty members should go beyond the role of personally ideal teacher and seek to be academically ideal in a long-term way, as faculty advisors who can help students plan a course sequence, choose a major, and meet major requirements, and even prepare to transfer to other institutions. Many faculty

members at community colleges already do perform the role informally, but the practice should be more widespread, especially at community colleges and with adult students who may not have college models and mentors readily available in their personal lives. If faculty members were familiar with their own departments' major requirements and generally familiar with deadlines and requirements for other local colleges and universities, they could open these doors of opportunity for students who may not be comfortable enough or able to access traditional advising offices or schedules (Tinto, 1998).

The climate of a classroom environment, as expressed by the students in this study, is also central to a student's level of comfort. The students discussed how a collaborative, supportive, student-centered, culturally diverse classroom created a positive learning environment. As evidenced in the literature and in the study, support services for students are fundamental to their experiences (Boroch, et al., 2007; Hagedorn, 2002, Perez 2009). Services such as tutoring, writing labs, academic advising, financial aid, child care, LASO, Puente, Aspira, MESA, and other such programs provide students with opportunities to pursue their education. Without these services, these students most likely would be unable to attend college. Students who are aware of the services report receiving great benefit from them.

English as a Second Language programs can support students by collaborating with student service programs. Creating a handout, putting phone numbers for services on syllabi, inviting student service representatives to their

classes, taking students on student service tours, or creating liaisons between student services and ESL programs are just a few ways that programs can work together to improve student learning. Students, especially first generation students, are not always sure what the writing lab offers, why academic advising is important, or where to find out about campus services. All members of the college campus need to understand the importance of basic skills and the needs of basic skills students, and all ESL instructors need to convey the importance of programs that can benefit students. The students in the study talk about being improperly placed into a class, being afraid to talk to counselors, not finding advising to be helpful, not knowing about career advising, and losing their financial aid. Student support services should be a critical component of any developmental English program.

English as a Second Language programs should use mandatory assessment with multiple measures for proper assessment. Assessment practices that include multiple measures have been shown to be the most accurate for Hispanic immigrant students, so it is imperative that the multiple measures be used (Marwick, 2004). Multiple measures include critical components, such as how long a student has been out of school, when the last assessment was conducted, transcripts, experiential knowledge, family circumstances, and financial status. Assessment practices should look at the whole student, both as a person and as an academic performer, in order to properly place students. Just

because a student was placed into a course several years ago does not mean that student is still performing at that same level.

Recommendations for Future Research

Since the literature regarding the experience of first generation Hispanic immigrants in higher education, specifically in ESL courses is limited, the opportunities for future research are plentiful. Based on this study, suggestions for future areas of research include the following:

1. Examine the effectiveness of multiple methods for placement of Hispanic students. What are the shared and different experiences of Hispanics? Do Hispanics feel rejected by other Hispanics based on language study, immigrant status, and generational students into English courses? Which measures work best?
2. Conduct a longitudinal study of first generation Hispanic immigrant students on their journey from ESL through their highest level of academic achievement. What actions do they take to empower themselves and their communities as they increase their knowledge and achieve their education goals?
3. Conduct a case study on the assessment processes at community colleges. What information do first generation Hispanic immigrants receive?
4. Explore the experiences of mixed race Hispanics in community colleges. Do they have experiences similar to or different from other Hispanics?

5. Conduct a case study on how Hispanic students relate to and communicate with non-Hispanics in the academic world.

In addition to suggestions for further research that emerged from this study, more suggestions for future research follow. These suggestions are based on the researcher's experience as an instructor.

1. Research how money for basic skills initiatives is spent in community colleges. Does the funding actually go towards improving instruction and student outcomes?

2. Research the experiences of Hispanic faculty at community colleges and universities. What challenges do they face? Do generational, language acquisition and immigrant status differences impact their experiences with one another or with the institution? What facilitates their success?

3. Conduct a study that examines the knowledge of ESL teachers about ESL students and programs. What do English teachers know about second-language learners?

4. Explore the perceptions of community college faculty about Hispanic students and Hispanic faculty. What do they believe are the cultures, attitudes, and values of Hispanics in college?

Recommendations for Policy

This study provides a voice for a group of stakeholders too often ignored, and evidence and reasoning to support the growth of programs which are developmental, rather than remedial in nature. There are many policy

implications from this study's findings; however, I will only focus on the following: mandatory developmental education placement, student-centered class scheduling, and the creation a new federal laws similar to NCLB.

First, the controversy between mandatory versus recommended developmental education placement refers to how colleges respond when students test low on entrance exams. Some colleges recommend that students with low reading, writing and math scores take developmental classes but still allow them to register for any course, on the reasoning that students have what is sometimes called the "right to fail" along with the opportunity to transcend possibly in accurate test scores; this policy has been identified as an institutional barrier that is significantly related to lower grades and retention in college-level classes (Cooney, 2008). Other colleges require that students who test below a cutoff score take developmental education classes before college level classes; this policy is significantly related to higher grades and retention for those who complete the course, but it is also related to delays in graduation and difficulties with financial aid limits (Attwell et al., 2009; Aragon, 2004).

Based on the findings of this study, I recommend mandatory developmental education placement, or at least mandatory placement in some type of student success course, for those who test low on entrance exams. I further recommend combining developmental education courses with college-level content courses, in what is referred to as "learning communities" (Tinto, 2002). This recommendation would include all levels of ESL placement, not just

the advanced ones. In addition, this approach would allow for connections with student peers that would support both their social and academic integration into the college. The drawback to this proposal is that adult ESL students, like those in this study, may not be able to take these courses unless more content classes are offered in the evening to accommodate those who must work during daytime business hours.

This employment-related constraint on adult students' time leads to my second policy recommendation: increased scheduling of classes, including learning communities, and student support services office hours during evenings, and weekends. As demonstrated by the informants, the experiences of family and employment pressures meant that participants often could not take classes during the day or visit student support services such as advising because these offices are normally open only during business hours. The community college could better accommodate the efforts of students in need by shifting from a faculty/staff centered approach, offering services and classes at the convenience of instructors, to a student-centered approach. Knowing how adult students differ from traditional students challenges the assumptions evident when scheduling classes and programs during the day as if all students can participate at that time (Philibert, Allen, & Elleven, 2009). If a majority of students on campus and in developmental reading classes are adult students, campus scheduling should shift to accommodate.

These kinds of shifts would represent changes in campus and climate, a sometimes lengthy process. However, campus climate affects adult student persistence, and policy makers should keep this in mind when devising key documents such as a mission statement, codes of conduct, employees training that define roles and responsibilities, curricular development directives, cross departmental efforts and strategic planning initiatives.

Finally, in order to renew America's status as the world's leader in college attainment, the federal government needs to transform America's community colleges and equip them for the twenty-first century. I recommend the development of a federal law similar to the *No Child Left Behind Act, (NCLB)* for community colleges which would promote accountability. Although, NCLB contains scant mention of community colleges or other postsecondary institutions, the landmark law aimed at improving public schools has had a profound and lasting effect on community colleges.

Community colleges play a pivotal role in education and training in the United States. They have demonstrated their ability to provide a solid education at a good value, and to function as an important engine of workforce development for local communities. The economy of the twenty-first century calls for a skilled workforce and expansion of opportunities for rigorous, research-based education and training for all.

Even if community college remediation programs were able to meet the needs of just the top half of remedial students, the aggregate nationwide impact

could be an additional 150,000 college graduates per year, (White House Summit on Community Colleges, 2010). President Obama's administration is aware of this potential and is looking to community colleges to help the United States out of the economic crisis and meet our longer-term needs for more college graduates.

New federal laws can transform our community colleges into engines of opportunity and prosperity by targeting new investments to those colleges that succeed in helping their students succeed. To that end, the federal government should implement the following reforms:

1. Stimulate instructional innovations and practices to increase the quality of community college education by devoting funding to evaluate and improve practices enhancing community college education
2. Support the improvement of student data systems necessary to measure and track ESL community college student outcomes, guide funding, improve accountability, and promote continuous improvement in educational quality.

Creating new federal laws that would modify achievement goals for English learners would assist in achievement and consistent progress for ESL students, rather than expecting students with language challenges to meet the same standard as others.

Contribution to the Literature

The study presented the experiences of first generation Hispanic immigrant students taking English as a Second Language courses at community colleges. Previous literature on Hispanics in community college ESL programs was limited, and this study will add to the literature by including a focus on the experiences of first generation Hispanic immigrant students. This study contributes to the literature by its use of social critical methodology as a way to promote the voices and needs of Hispanic students in community colleges. The research was also conducted by a Hispanic researcher, whereas in the past, few studies on first generation Hispanic immigrant students were conducted by a member of their own group.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the learning, personal, and establishment barriers that the first generation Hispanic immigrant student encounters when taking required English as a Second Language courses. Further, it sought to understand the educational experiences of these students in community colleges. As a Hispanic, the researcher focused on understanding the unique experiences that Hispanic students face. As a community college professor, the researcher shared stories with the study participants to build trust and to create a dialogue with them. She also used her knowledge of Hispanic culture and values to form questions that would help her to best understand the experiences of the study participants.

The students in this study shared many experiences and stories, which revealed their perseverance, intelligence, compassion, and inner strength. Their direct involvement with this research and their recommendations for policymakers contribute insight and practical suggestions for those who want to improve education for first generation Hispanic immigrants in ESL courses.

The dedication of these students to their studies, their families, their peers, and their jobs shows the tremendous promise that Hispanics in the future will bring to the fields of computer science, law, communications, early childhood education, physical education, business, and other fields. The study dispelled some myths surrounding Hispanics, especially the myth that Hispanic families do not support their children's education. It also dispelled the myth that Hispanics do poorly in college because they are English as a Second Language learner. The students in the study showed that the ESL students benefitted tremendously from ESL education as they entered college-credit courses, regardless of the struggles experienced.

The students showed that an education system that does not properly assess, place, teach, and support second-language learners creates unnecessary roadblocks for Hispanic learners at the community college level. They also provided insight into what motivated them to stay in school and how those motivators helped them to negotiate the road blocks they faced in their own pursuit of an education. Educators and administrators who are serious about educating Hispanics need to listen to the stories, advice, and aspirations of these

students. Practicing student-centered instruction, providing appropriate student assessment, gaining cultural competency, creating welcoming environments, and exercising culturally responsive teaching methods are ways that community college teachers and administrators can support and promote the success of Hispanic students.

Creating campus communities that support Hispanic immigrant students, as well as traditional students, makes sense when increasing numbers of Hispanics are entering community colleges. Educating Hispanics is a crucial step toward providing students with the skills and knowledge they need to improve themselves, their families, and their communities. As educators, we should take the crucial steps of building campus communities that support these students as they strive toward a positive and just future.

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Table 1
Taxonomy: Assessment Tools Used by Community College Institutions

Institution	Assessment Tools
Atlantic Cape CC	Compass ESL and in-house essay test
Bergen CC	Accuplacer, CASAS; Marano/NYCE
Brookdale CC	Michigan Test (reading & listening). In-house essay questions and oral interview
Burlington CC	Accuplacer ESL Reading Placement Test, Accuplacer ESL Language Placement Test, Oral Interview, Written Essay
Camden County CC	ESL Accuplacer
County College Morris	Accuplacer - LOEP
Cumberland CC	COMPASS-ESL Computerized assessment, oral interviews, Accuplacer (limited)
Essex CC	Holistic writing test – Scored by 2 or 3 faculty members, and/or interview. Accuplacer-used for math.
Gloucester CC	Best Plus, TABE
Hudson County CC	Accuplacer (LOEP); In-house writing assessment
Mercer County CC	Accuplacer, Marano placement
Middlesex CC	Accuplacer ESL test and oral interview
Ocean CC	Michigan Placement Test. In-house composition assessment. Oral interview
Passaic County CC	Oral interview, grammar multiple choice, 30 minute essay
Raritan Valley CC	Accuplacer, LOEP
Sussex County CC	CELT, Comprehensive English language test, Best Plus, Basic English skills test
Union CC	Oral interview followed by one of 3 in-house written placement tests (advanced, basic or native language test)

Table 2
Taxonomy: Participants' Demographic Data

Informant I.D.#	Gender/Age	Country of Origin	Date of Entry
Inf. 1	F-33	Peru	2004
Inf. 2	F-31	Peru	2002
Inf. 3	M-29	Cuba	2003
Inf. 4	M-54	Columbia	1998
Inf. 5	M-30	Puerto Rico	2003
Inf. 6	F-39	Guatemala	2005
Inf. 7	F-36	Mexico	2000
Inf. 8	M-40	Mexico	2001
Inf. 9	F-37	Puerto Rico	2003
Inf. 10	F-24	Ecuador	2007
Inf. 11	F-36	Dom.Republic	1999
Inf. 12	M-37	Costa Rica	2001
Inf. 13	F-23	Colombia	2007
Inf. 14	F-29	Ecuador	2004
Inf. 15	F-39	Venezuela	2001
Inf. 16	M-32	Venezuela	2004
Inf. 17	M-38	Chile	2005
Inf. 18	F-33	Honduras	1997
Inf. 19	F-34	Columbia	1998
Inf. 20	F-26	Argentina	2006
Inf. 21	M-29	Cuba	2004

Table 3
Profile of Focus Group Participants: Group 1 Beginner, Group 2 Beginning-Intermediate, Group 3 Advance

Informant I.D. #	Gender	Country of Origin	Date of Entry	Age
FG 1 #1	Female	Dom. Republic	1999	36
FG 1 #2	Male	Costa Rica	2001	37
FG 1 #3	Female	Mexico	2000	36
FG 1 #4	Male	Ecuador	2004	24
FG 1 #5	Female	Columbia	1998	34
FG 2 #1	Male	Venezuela	2004	32
FG 2 #2	Male	Venezuela	2001	39
FG 2 #3	Male	Mexico	2001	40
FG 2 #4	Female	Honduras	1997	33
FG 2 #5	Female	Ecuador	2007	24
FG 2 #6	Female	Columbia	2001	24
FG 2 #7	Male	Chile	2005	38
FG 3 #1	Female	Argentina	2006	26
FG 3 #2	Male	Columbia	1998	54
FG 3 #3	Female	Peru	2004	33
FG 3 #4	Female	Peru	2000	31
FG 3 #5	Female	Guatemala	2005	39
FG 3 #6	Male	Puerto Rico	2003	23
FG 3 #7	Male	Cuba	2002	29
FG 3 #8	Male	Mexico	2003	31
FG 3 #9	Male	Dom. Republic	2001	29