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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

WE SHALL OVERCOME: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE ROLE  
ACADEMIC, SOCIAL AND FAMILY FACTORS HAVE ON ENGLISH LEARNERS'  
DECISION TO PURSUE HIGHER EDUCATION

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy

by

Jennifer L. Huang

November, 2017

Linda Purrington, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Jennifer L Huang

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee has been submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Doctoral Committee:

Linda Purrington, Ed.D., Chairperson

Paula Thompson, Ed.D

Randall B Lindsey, Ph. D

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## DEDICATION

This labor of love would not have been possible had it not been for the support of my sons Daniel, Jimmy, and Tommy, my husband and my committee.

Daniel, you have been and continue to be my role model. You are consistently steadfast in pursuing a goal, and meet each challenge for what it is; one more opportunity to grow. You are also the most patient editor I could have asked for.

Jimmy, keeping up with your adventures has allowed me to maintain perspective on the work at hand, and the options that are available. Your stories remind me that there is a great big world out there just waiting to be experienced.

Tommy, you have been my rock. You have been my harshest critic and my trusted confidant. Your day-to-day actions and concern for the well-being of your brothers and parents has transformed each of us. It is because of your unwavering commitment to our health we were able to grow into the friendships we now share. Your support is appreciated more than words can express.

For my husband, Tsu Jit, this work is done because of your life story. The denial of educational opportunities due to not understanding the language of instruction is an injustice you should never have had to experience. Your life story has given me my life's work.

To my committee, I aspire to grow into the mentor you have each been for me. I am forever grateful for the honest conversations, long talks bringing me back into focus, and belief my study was meaningful. Each of you have been with me every day throughout this journey.

## VITA

## Academic Preparation

Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA Doctoral Candidate Education in Educational Leadership, Administration and Policy	2017
Point Loma Nazarene University Master of Education	2005
Pacific Oaks College Bachelor of Arts Human Development	2003

## Professional Experience

Alhambra Unified School District Teacher Park Elementary School	2015 – Present
Alhambra Educational Foundation Principal Summer Enrichment Academy	Summers 2013, 2014, 2015
Alhambra Unified School District Instructional Specialist English Language Development	2014 - 2015
Alhambra Unified School District Assistant Principal Multiple Sites	2005 - 2014
Alhambra Unified School District Teacher Park Elementary School	1999 – 2005

## ABSTRACT

The attainment of a college degree has long been a part of the American dream. For the English learner, however, reaching this goal is a task fraught with difficulty. Yet, as the participants in this study demonstrate, it is possible.

In this qualitative, phenomenological study of seven current community college students who graduated from a Southern California high school, not yet proficient in the English language, the researcher sought to identify the factors that both encouraged and discouraged their decision to pursue higher education.

This study collected original data on factors within the school setting, peers, family and personal characteristics that supported or discouraged the participant continuing their education past high school. To identify facets most significant in each of the three areas, the data is viewed through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.

The English –only policy is viewed through the lens of the Critical Race Theory and student experiences highlight the restrictive nature an English only policy places on our state's English learner population.

Conclusions derived from this study point to the importance of adult and peer relationships in the adolescent's life, and the significance seemingly small acts can have on the English learner's decision to continue on to higher education.

To support the English learner population, recommendations of primary language support upon entrance into the California school system, and the establishment of a bilingual single subject English credential for secondary English teachers is suggested.

Further recommendations include a standard practice for reviewing the English learner's language proficiency quarterly, research into what allowed the adolescent to reject negative

perceptions of the peers may build upon the body of research into strategies to support the English learner.

Last, this study was limited to current community college students in the Southern California region. Research into English learners who went into a four-year university may develop findings that support or contradict this study and broaden the research base into school, peer, and family factors that encourage English learners decision to continue on to higher education.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The attainment of a college degree has long been a part of the American Dream. Those who attain a Bachelor's Degree will earn approximately \$1.9 million over their career, which is twice that of high school graduates (Hershbein & Kearney, 2014). The economic investment of a college degree in 2011 was determined to be 15.5% per year, double that of a stock market investment over a span of 60 years and higher than corporate bonds or long-term government bonds (Greenstone & Looney, 2011). In addition to the disparity in earning power, those having a degree are less likely to face periods of unemployment. According to the Georgetown Institute of Public Policy, by the year 2020, 65% of all jobs in the U.S. will require postsecondary education (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013, figure 4). The U.S. Department of Education echoed the importance of postsecondary education when it stated:

In today's economy, higher education is no longer a luxury for the privileged few, but a necessity for individual economic opportunity and America's competitiveness in the global economy. At a time when jobs can go anywhere in the world, skills and education will determine success, for individuals and for nations. As a result, college education remains the best investment a student can make in his or her future. (U.S. Department of Education [US Dept. of Ed], 2015, para. 3).

Research conducted by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education found higher education to be more important now than in past decades (Immerwahr, 2004). Of those individuals surveyed nationally by nonprofit organizations, 87% believe a college education is now as important as a high school diploma was prior to the late twentieth century (Immerwahr & Foleno, 2000).



Compounding English learners' challenges in becoming college- and career- ready is location, as they are frequently clustered in urban areas with other ELs and have minimal opportunity to interact with peers who can serve as English-speaking role models (Gandara & Hopkins, 2010). Calderon and Minaya- Rowe present an additional obstacle: ELs in secondary school may not develop strong literacy skills in their primary language or English, resulting in needed additional support to build academic word knowledge and language proficiency to allow full engagement with content standards (Calderon & Minaya-Rowe, 2011). English learners in high school who have attended school in the United States for six or more years, but who are not reclassified as English proficient, are referred to as long-term English learners (LTELs). They have a unique set of needs separate from the traditional EL that require differentiated language instruction (California Department of Education [CDE], 2012).

Despite the challenges English learners face in the K-12 grade setting, many continue on to post-secondary education. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, 36%, or 2.5 million of the 7.3 million student body, are first generation students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2016, p. 2). The decision to attend post-secondary education when not proficient in the language of instruction is an emerging area of research.

### **Problem Statement**

California has the highest percentage of ELs in the United States, with 22.3% or 1,373,724, students in some stage of learning English (California Department of Education [CDE], 2016b, Table 1). To ensure the development of skills needed to access the state curriculum, California's English learners participate in an English-only language development program appropriate to their language needs: either structured English immersion, specialized English language mainstream, or an alternative program (California Department of Education [CDE], 2012, Chapter 1).

Participation in a language program does not guarantee reclassification to English proficiency. Factors such as amount of time in a language development program, quality of instruction and language program materials, and individual learning styles impact learning a second language. During the 2014-15 school year, 30,380 English learners in California, 6,791 from Los Angeles County, graduated high school in the spring without being reclassified as English proficient (CDE, 2015c).

California community colleges offer accessible and local post-secondary education, are the most cost effective point of entry for a wide spectrum of students, and accept a higher number of incoming freshman each year than private or public institutions of high learning (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office [CCCCO], 2016). In fall of 2015, the California Community College system accepted 270,867 new, first time students (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office [CCCCO], 2015).

These students represent an identifiable population of high school graduates not yet English proficient who seek a higher education without having had full access to the state's secondary curriculum. Insight into the factors that encourage these English learners to continue on to higher education may prove useful to: (a) improving ELs full access to the curriculum; (b) enhancing the EL learning experience; (c) promoting greater English and academic competency, and, consequently; (d) supporting more ELs' preparation for post-secondary education. To acquire this knowledge, data derived from this population's personal accounts is needed, which would include their views of whether and how components to academic programs, social experiences, and family support encourage, or conversely, discourage the decision to continue their education despite low language proficiency. This information would provide a deep understanding of key factors that influence the decisions of high school graduates who are not yet proficient in English to pursue higher education.

Therefore, a need exists to explore the role academic, social and family experiences played in the decision of high school graduates who exited high school not yet proficient in English to continue on to higher education.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe the school components (academic and social), family experiences, and individual characteristics that support the English learner's decision to seek a post-secondary education despite their failure to be reclassified as English proficient by high school graduation. The study investigated the factors students identify as discouraging to their efforts to continue education past high school.

To investigate the impact of English-only secondary programs on English learners, seven English learners who graduated from Southern California high schools and continued on to higher education in the California community college system were purposefully selected to participate in individual interviews. The interview questions encouraged students to share school experiences, both academic and social, family experiences, and personal characteristics they believe encouraged or discouraged their pursuit of higher education as an English learner who did not have full access to the secondary curriculum.

### **Importance of Study**

The study is particularly crucial and timely as English learners take more prominence in accountability under the reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which increased the role of federal funding for public education. The latest reauthorization, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), calls for EL accountability to transition from Title III to Title I in state accountability frameworks (Pompa, 2015). The move in accountability places increased importance on the progress schools make with their EL population, which means hearing from the students themselves about their needs, barriers, and goals is a necessary

consideration for school reflection of practice and planning for improvements. Further, California is in the planning phase of creating pathways to proficiency after 18 years of English-only instruction, which supports the argument that we urgently need to identify and develop updated and effective ways to support the EL population.

The proposed study's findings will contribute to developing new ways of providing effective instruction for the state's EL population that will reflect the changing language and economic needs of the state. Interest in the study's outcomes may come from schools and districts that plan to design new pathways to English proficiency and the professional development that will be required of teachers to implement them. Policymakers may determine that the findings are useful to decisions about where and how to allocate funding, and community colleges may benefit from the awareness of needs, barriers, and goals expressed by their current student bodies. The study's outcomes may be utilized in planning efforts to support existing ELs, whether or not they are long-term English learners, to continue on to higher education, and once enrolled, to receive support in language acquisition. Furthermore, outcomes of this study may have implications for teacher preparedness in the area of teaching English as a second language, how to work with LTELs, and methods for supporting ELs as they transition to higher education. The investigation's value is particularly compelling given that long-term English learners represent the fastest growing subgroup in the state at this time, and given that it will be the first to focus on this population in Southern California. Additionally, it will contribute to the literature on student-perceived impact of English-only instruction nationwide while building on the works of Dr. Calderon, Dr. Minaya-Rowe, and Dr. Olsen in the area of needed supports in school for LTELs.

## Definition of Key Terms

The following list includes definitions of key concepts and terms used throughout the dissertation.

- Critical Race Theory: “Radical legal movement that seeks to transform the relationship between race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 159)
- English language learner (EL): students for whom there is a report of a primary language other than English on the state-approved Home Language Survey and who, on the basis of the state-approved oral language assessment (grades kindergarten through grade 12) and procedures and literacy (grades 3 to 12 only), have been determined to lack the clearly defined English language skills of listening comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing necessary to succeed in the school's regular instructional programs.
- Higher education (n.d.): education beyond the secondary level; especially education provided by a college or university.
- Long-term English learner (LTEL): “An English learner who has been schooled in the United States for six or more years but has not made sufficient linguistic and academic progress to meet the redesignation criteria and exit the English learner status” (California Department of Education [CDE], 2012, p. 18).

Reclassification: a process used to determine whether a student has acquired sufficient English language fluency to perform successfully in academic subjects without English Language Development support (California Department of Education [CDE], 2016e).

- Proposition 227: A California proposition that required public schools to teach English learner students in special classes taught almost exclusively in English. In most cases, the proposition eliminated bilingual classes and most programs that provided multi-year special classes to EL students by requiring that (a) EL students move from special classes

to regular classes when they have acquired a good working knowledge of English, and  
(b) these special classes should not normally last longer than one year (Ballotpedia, n.d).

- Second language acquisition: meaningful interaction with the target language during natural communication.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Language policy included in this study is viewed through the lens of Critical Race Theory, which originated in the legal field during the 1970s following the slowdown in the rate of reforms that came with the Civil Right Act (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, Chapter 1). The specific tenet of the theory, social construction, purports that race is created through social inventions that shift when convenient for the dominant group, and addresses ways in which the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times to respond to the shifting labor needs in the job market (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, Chapter 1).

The Social Ecology Theory of human development proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner was used to view the interplay between school, family, and the individual in constructing identity (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). According to ecological systems theory, the individual is in the center of ever-expanding layers or systems of influence. The first system of influence, the microsystem, reflects the individual's most direct interactions, commonly involving relationships with family, peers, and, for youth, school. The next layer or system is the mesosystem. In this layer, the individual is influenced by the interactions of factors within the microsystem, such as between the parents and the teacher or the child's father and the grandparent. The individual or child is not directly involved in mesosystem interactions, but their outcomes affect him or her. Bronfenbrenner's third system is the exosystem. This system encompasses environments and people with whom the individual does not have direct interaction; however, the events that occur in this system, such as at the parent's workplace or in the community, can create a difference in

the microsystem relationships (e.g., when the child's mother loses her job, his quality of life and relationship with the mother may be impacted). The fourth system capable of exerting influence on the individual according to the ecological systems theory is the macrosystem. It is from this system that cultural values and rules of society are transmitted and government policies can trickle down to impact the child or family (Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015). The fifth system of impact on the individual is the chronosystem. This study did not include an investigation of the participant's macrosystem or chronosystem as a level of influence on the individual.

The study's factors of people, events, and processes that encourage or discourage the English learner from pursuing higher education, were viewed through the lens of the 40 Developmental Assets Framework (Appendix A), a strength-based approach (Scales, Benson, Roehlkepartian, Sesma, & Van Dulmen, 2006). The 40 Developmental Assets Framework is an outgrowth of research conducted by the Search Institute and is based on positive influences leading to healthy social and academic development in adolescents (Scales et al., 2006). The 40 Developmental Assets included in the framework were drawn from existing research in the areas of child and adolescent development and prevention research. The identified assets were included in the framework if they met the criteria of reducing risk behaviors, encouraging positive behaviors, and facilitating the development of resilience or successful outcomes despite experiencing adversity (Benson, Scales, & Mannes, 2003). The 40 Developmental Asset Framework was introduced in 1990, and since its release, close to five million middle and high school students have completed the 152-question survey to determine what attributes are present that support healthy adolescent development. The findings, which continue to be built upon, were compiled into 40 indicators falling into five categories: academic success in school, close peer relationships, family ties, extended support network in the community, and time spent helping others.

## Research Questions

Through this study of English learners who continued on to higher education despite not being proficient in English upon high school graduation, the researcher sought to understand:

1. What are the school (academic and social) experiences, family role, and individual characteristics of students who exited California high schools, not yet classified as English proficient, and who continued on to higher education despite challenges they encountered?
  1. In what ways did school academic experiences encourage the English learner to continue on to higher education?
  2. In what ways did school academic experiences discourage the English learner from continuing on to higher education?
  3. In what ways did school social experiences encourage the English learner to continue on to higher education?
  4. In what ways did school social experiences discourage the English learner from continuing on to higher education?
  5. What role, if any, did family play in the English learner's decision to continue on to higher education?
  6. How did individual characteristics, if at all, encourage the high school student to pursue higher education?
2. In what ways, if any, did language policy affect the student?

## Delimitations

This study had five delimitations specific to the population under of focus. Participants selected for this study were; (a) students who graduated from a Southern California high school, (b) were not reclassified as English proficient by high school graduation, (c) are current



California community college students, (d) spent their entire educational career in America in an English-only educational system, and (e) are enrolled in one of several history courses offered by one professor at a specific community college. Further, the investigation used a single interview protocol to answer the research questions.

### **Limitations**

This study was limited to a select group of community college students in the Southern California region. The students are graduates of various urban high schools in the region and are eligible to participate in a college class that has a recommended prerequisite of college level English. The region in which the community college is located has the highest concentration of English learners in the nation, and, thus, the study's findings may not be generalizable to other environments.

This study is limited to the lived experiences of English learning students regarding specific domains: academic and social relationships at school, role of family, and personal characteristics. Therefore, it does not examine the full range of possible experiences, life events, or factors that might encourage or discourage English learners' educational decisions and goals to attend a post-secondary institution.

### **Assumptions**

The researcher held the following assumptions for the study:

1. The participants were open and honest in their telling of experiences;
2. the retelling of experiences accurately reflect participants' lived experience;
3. the researcher did not exert suggestive bias on the participants' responses;
4. the participants had the cognitive capacity to self-reflect and articulate during face-to-face interviews;

5. the participants did experience language marginalization from the mainstream language majority in both school and community settings; and
6. the participants did experience institutional oppression limiting their academic choices within the school setting.

### **Organization of Study**

This phenomenological narrative study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the need for and significance of the study, key terms, research questions, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions of the study. In Chapter 2 the researcher provides a review of literature related to (a) Critical Race Theory, (b) Social Ecology of Human Development, (c) Developmental Relationship Framework, (d) the evolution of language policy in the nation and California, (e) a profile of English learners in the state of California, (f) educational programs for secondary English learners in the state, (g) peer influence in secondary school, (h) family influence on the adolescent, and (i) identity construction of the adolescent. Chapter 3 presents the methodology for the phenomenological study. Chapter 4 includes profiles based on the personal stories of community college students who exited high school not yet proficient in English and responses to the study questions with the objective to identify components that encouraged or discouraged their decision to continue their education after high school. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the study results, conclusions, and recommendations for future exploration.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter presents the rationale for conducting a study on the school (academic and social) experiences, family role, and individual characteristics of students who exited California high schools not yet classified as English proficient, and who continued on to higher education despite challenges they encountered. From the inception of our country's first public school in the 1850s, debates over language instruction have been present in education (Olsen, 2009). Interest in, and intensity of, English-only education has waxed and waned in alignment with immigration waves (De Jong, 2015). In 1997, after an approximate three-decade acceptance of primary language used for instruction, the state of California passed Proposition 227, resulting in hundreds of thousands of English learners experiencing their entire educational careers submerged in a language they do not fully comprehend. After Proposition 227 passed, all English learners in California were assigned to one of two similar programs, with the exception of children whose parents completed a waiver process permitting exclusion from the programs (California Department of Education, 2015a).

Continuing to this day, in place of primary language instruction, English learners are assigned to an English language development program. Although the specific programs' names vary (Alternative Program, Structured English Immersion, or English Language Mainstream), they are similar in intent. The goal in California is for English learners to acquire the English language as quickly as possible in order to access the curriculum (CDE, 2012). Once the acquisition of English is determined by the state's language test to be at a fluent level in reading, writing, and speaking, the student is reclassified English proficient. The road to reclassification may have challenges beyond learning the language. Factors beyond students' ability to acquire English play a role, such as inconsistencies in English language instruction and access to programs within and between schools and districts (Minicucci & Olsen, 1992).

Due to the No Child Left Behind assessment mandates enacted in 2000, English learners were identified as a significant subgroup of students, and the state of California set statewide benchmarks for language acquisition. A monitoring process was required at the district, school, and classroom levels for the newly-identified group of English-learning students that included mandatory reporting of progress from all schools who serve English learners.

In an effort to support the student-learning outcomes of English learners educated in English-only, significant research was conducted in the areas of language acquisition and instructional practices that support access to the curriculum (Olsen, 2016d). In 2015, research into best practices and measuring proficiency in English language arts and math resulted in California becoming the first state to adopt a policy that requires monitoring a subset of English learners, referred to as “Long-Term English Learners” (CDE, 2012). Long-Term English learners now form an official subgroup of English-Learners (ELs) and are the fastest growing student population in the state (Olsen, 2014).

Although they do not receive instruction in their primary language, English learners commonly exit high school not proficient in English and may pursue higher education, even though most colleges and universities lack the educational and social supports ELs experience in the secondary school setting.

A review of the literature that pertains to this study will be presented in 9 sections, (a) key theoretical frameworks, (b) the evolution of English as the national language, (c) English learners in California today, (d) second language acquisition, (e) traditional English learners, (f) long-term English learners, (g) educational programs available to English learners in California, (h) English learner high school graduation rates, and (i) major factors that may encourage and/or discourage post-secondary education.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Three theories constitute the theoretical framework for this study, and each is summarized in this section. English language policy was examined through the lens of Critical Race Theory, while learners' social development was viewed through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). The study's variables of school, both academic and social, experiences, family influences, and personal characteristics that encourage or discourage the English learner from pursuing higher education was viewed through the Developmental Assets Framework (Scales et al., 2006).

**Critical race theory.** Critical Race Theory (CRT) examines the historic and current use of the U.S. legal system to uphold white supremacy and the associated hierarchies of class, gender, and sexual orientation (West, 1995). It provides an explanation and critique of the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3). CRT holds the following basic tenants: (a) racism is an ordinary experience for most people of color in our country; (b) we need to be skeptical of legal neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy; (c) historicisms need to be challenged and insist on a contextual/historical analysis of law; (d) presumes racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of White over color advantage; and (e) the historical story of people of color is not the same as the historical story of the dominant group in America (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

CRT considers race a social construct that has no fixed, biological, or genetic reality. Race is not objective; rather, races are categories invented by people to label and at times manipulate them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This view suggests that as a social construct, racialization fluctuates in response to economic need.

CRT grew out of Critical Legal Studies (CLS), a movement that came about in the 1970s because of the stalled legal gains brought about by the Civil Rights movement of the mid-1960s.

The aim of CLS was to examine laws for their ability to use race or *whiteness* as a way to construct and/or retain an unequal distribution of property, with property defined as the totality of a person's legal rights (Harris, 1993). CLS contends that the laws of early America, which are being upheld to the present day, are based upon the subjection of blacks as slaves and, thus, property. Furthermore, the U.S. legally sanctioned removal of native people from their land, thereby validating the occupation of White settlers and securing the privilege of property ownership to Whites (Harris, 1993). Consequently, property rights have served as the base of power in America since the time of the colonies (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Graman, 1988; Lopez, 2006; Slaughter, 1985). Delgado and Stefancic 2001, explain that unequal treatment occurs both blatantly and in more subtle ways such as through policy, creating systemic racism. According to CRT, laws are seen as a vehicle for shaping race to ensure property rights are maintained while being exclusionary. Therefore, it argues that U.S. laws are a result of, and produced to maintain, the established social power dynamic (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

With the help of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) in the mid-1990s, CRT branched out into educational scholarship. Their research, presented in *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education*, stated the purpose of the early United States government was to protect property, which was the main object sought by society. They argued that the protection of property was maintained by restricting access to the opportunity for education and through deliberate manipulation of language to prevent English learners from understanding their world, thereby preventing them from improving their economic and social status. The effects of oppressive language policy were evident in the U.S. educational policy No Child Left Behind (NCLB) that eliminated half of the funding for bilingual programs and removed the requirement of schools to provide bilingual education (Liggett, 2013). NCLB policy required all English learners,

regardless of their language proficiency level, to take standardized tests in English. The scores resulting from the standardized tests were used to limit English learners opportunity to take higher-level courses in high school, thereby limiting their potential for college acceptance (Liggett, 2013).

Freire and Macedo (1987) in addition to Graman (1988) contend that education is the avenue used by the dominant class to perpetuate the protection of property rights by Whites, and is achieved through educators' use of the receptive mode of learning: the banking system of education. Banking education is a way to falsely intervene on students' behalf and give the learner a false reality of importance invented by the teacher. The invented reality is devoid of learners' capacity to construct their own knowledge and, therefore, the status quo in a society remains unchallenged (Graman, 1988). The student need only regurgitate the teacher-deposits of knowledge to have evidence of learning, thereby securing the transmission of what the dominant culture views as necessary for education even though it is disconnected from what the learner needs. As Paulo Freire explained in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

The banking notions of consciousness [are] that the educator's role is to regulate the way the world "enters into" the students. His task is to organize a process which already occurs spontaneously, to "fill" the students by making deposits of information which he considers to constitute true knowledge – deposits which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity. (Freire, 1970, p. 57, pp. 62-63)

The nation's history has presented the use of language policy as a way to restrict access to social power (Olsen, 2016a). In the article, *The Pedagogy of Profit*, Slaughter (1985) contends education is used to retain the power of the dominant class, which is consistent with Critical

Race Theory (Slaughter, 1985). Several researchers agree that language policy has been used to limit educational opportunities (Freire & Macedo, 1987, Graman, 1988). English learners are a product of politics, specifically the language policies enacted by the power structure in the country and state. The proposed study will consider the role of language policy through the perspective of Critical Race Theory by exploring the experiences of an English learner in an English only school environment.

**The ecological systems theory of human development.** The model of ecological human development is a conceptual framework in which development is defined as "...a lasting way in which a person perceives and deals with his environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 2009, p. 3).

Employed by social scientists to explore the interrelationships between individuals and their social environment, Bronfenbrenner (1976) proposed his Ecological Systems Theory to explain how the development of an individual relates to his/her direct and indirect relationships with the environment.

Bronfenbrenner outlines the role of a series of nesting units or layers of influence, one inside another, similar to a set of nesting Russian dolls. The spheres or layers are ascending in impact on the individual. The processes taking place within and between the spheres are viewed as interdependent and influencing each other. Bronfenbrenner proposed that the interplay between and within spheres shapes the development of the person over time. The following describes the layers of the nesting system:

***Microsystem.*** The innermost layer of the ecological model is the environment in which the individual resides and the immediate setting where the individual's development occurs. In regards to children, this layer often consists of family, school, teachers, friends, and community, and the interactions, or lack thereof, and reciprocity that occurs within it has the most direct effect on development.



**Mesosystem.** The second layer of the ecological systems theory consists of the interactions between the entities within the microsystem. Positive interactions between the home and school, parents and peers are thought to positively affect the child development.

**Exosystem.** The third layer, the exosystem, focuses on the impact of systems that are outside of the immediate interactions taking place in the child's microsystem and mesosystem. For example, this layer consists of the interrelationships between and among community members and institutions in which the individual lives, the school and community resources, parental workplace, and the media, all of which can affect the child. The impact is not through direct interactions involving the child; instead, for this layer, the child interacts with people that are in direct contact with external groups.

**Macrosystem.** The layer within which the three previous spheres operate is the macrosystem, defined by Bronfenbrenner as the cultural institutions that transmit information about, and endow meaning to, the systems (e.g., family and community) in which the individual exists. This includes the cultural values and legal, economic, political, and educational systems that have a direct impact on the development of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1976).

**Chronosystem.** The outermost layer of the ecological systems theory is the chronosystem. This system includes the time in history the individual experiences events and interactions with others as well as the age the individual is when events occur (Bronfenbrenner 1976).

The ecological systems theory was used to explore and understand the views and decisions of English learners related to their pursuit of higher education in spite of not being reclassified as English proficient by high school graduation. This study will only look at events and people within the microsystem, mesosystem, and ecosystems of the individual participant.

## **40 Developmental Assets Framework**

The variables of this study, school factors (both social and academic), family factors, and personal characteristics that support English learners in pursuing postsecondary education, were identified in the work of the Search Institute, a United States-based research organization that partners with World Vision to support the healthy development of young people across the globe (Appendix A).

## **40 Developmental Assets**

In 1990, the Search Institute released the Developmental Assets framework, which identifies 40 components that contribute to successful development, based on the compilation of existing research in the areas of child and adolescent development and prevention of risk-taking behaviors. Components of successful development were included in the framework if they met the three criteria of (a) reducing risk behaviors, (b) encouraging positive behaviors, and (c) aiding in the development of resilience or successful outcomes despite experiencing adversity (Benson et al., 2003, Search Institute, 2012). The positive and protective characteristics that emerged are viewed as the building blocks that contribute to three types of developmentally healthy outcomes: prevention of high-risk behaviors, enhancement of thriving behaviors, and resilience (Benson et al., 2003, Mannes, 2006). High-risk behaviors include underage drinking, tobacco use, illicit drug use, violence or antisocial behaviors, sexual activity, or suicide ideation (The Search Institute, 2012). Positive behaviors and resilience behaviors are identified as school success, persistence, physically and nutritionally healthy behaviors, financial responsibility, valuing diversity, and involvement in leadership activities.

The 40 Developmental Assets are categorized into two asset types: external and internal (Scales, 1999). External assets are developmental supports that are transferred to the youth from adults within the youth's inner-most sphere of influence (Fulkerson et al., 2006), which aligns

with Bronfenbrenner's concept of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Internal assets are developed through the individual's characteristics and their responses to the external environment. They are the internal values that guide adolescent decision-making.

The assets are subdivided into eight categories. The first four categories are identified as external assets and include interlocking supports for youth outside of their locus of control. These include: support from family, other adult relationships, caring neighborhood and school climates, empowerment gleaned from service to others, boundaries and expectations experienced in family and school structures, and peer influence, and constructive use of time. The remaining four categories are internal assets: commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. An underlying assumption of the framework is the notion that increasing internal control over time facilitates positive youth outcomes. Hence, to ensure successful progress toward internal control, nourishing the items identified as internal assets is essential (Benson, 1990).

To measure the presence, or the alternative, absence of assets, a Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) survey with 58 questions and a four-point Likert scale response option is administered to the target population, 12-18-year-olds. The survey includes statements such as "I stand up for what I believe in", and "I build friendships with other people." The options for responding to the provided statements are: "Not at all or rarely", "somewhat or sometimes", "every so or often", and "extremely or almost always." The Search Institute, in partnership with World Vision, has collected survey information on more than five million young people across the United States and around the world (Search Institute, 2016). The findings of research using the DAP have consistently suggested a cumulative effect of the presence of the 40 Developmental Assets. They indicate that the higher the number of assets a youth possessed, the greater the youth's school success, as well as the greater likelihood of becoming a caring, healthy

and responsible adult (40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents, 2007). Further, having more assets was related to increased self-reporting of participation in positive social behaviors and higher academic success (Leffert et al., 1998; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000; Taylor et al., 2003). Increases in developmental assets correlated with healthier and more caring behaviors and reduced risk taking among adolescents (Mannes, 2006).

Adolescents that have an increased number of assets have been found to engage in more prosocial behaviors including academic success. However, the research base did not segregate for English learners' and the majority, 73%, of adolescents surveyed in the most recent data are white (Search Institute, 2012).

The survey was revised in 1996 to allow for a more detailed analysis of the 40 Developmental Assets and increased the ability to precisely gather data on item sets that measure high-risk and thriving behavior (Mannes, 2006). The first external category presented in the Developmental Assets is Support, which includes six sets of indicators that fall into Bronfenbrenner's microsystem sphere of influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The six categories are, 1) *Family Support*, 2) *Positive Family Communication*, 3) *Other Adult Relationships*, 4) *Caring Neighborhood*, 5) *Caring School Climate*, and 6) *Parent Involvement in Schooling* (40 Developmental Assets for Adolescence, 2007). Although this external category includes a number of nonfamily influences, the most dominant factor is the family. According to Scales (1999), the family positively impacts the development of a student by (a) expressing care for the child, (b) challenging the child to continually improve, (c) providing the child support to attain his or her goals, (d) encouraging shared power in the family by involving the child in family decisions, and (e) expanding the possibilities and opportunities available to the child.

The second category under *Support* is *Positive Family Communication*. Research findings suggest a positive correlation between parent-child involvement, particularly frequent

communication during family mealtime, and diminished engagement in high-risk behaviors such as substance abuse and sexual activity (Eisenberg, Olsen, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, & Bearinger, 2004; Fulkerson et al., 2006; National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University [Columbia University], 2011).

Similar to *Positive Family Communication*, the third, fourth, and fifth categories of *Support* are primarily located within Bronfenbrenner's first layer of influence, the microsystem, although the latter two might include some mesosystem interactions. They are labeled and defined as follows: *Other Adult Relationships*, the amount of support received from three or more nonparent adults; *Caring Neighborhood*, the degree to which the family interacts with concerned and involved neighbors; and *Caring School Climate*, the extent to which the school provides a caring, encouraging environment (Search Institute, 2012; Table 2). The final category under *Support* is *Parent Involvement in Schooling*, which represents the interrelationship between school and home that falls into the second layer of influence, the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In this area, asset building is created by parents' active involvement in the adolescents' schooling, which can be varied across families, and may not reflect direct knowledge of the California college system (De La Rosa, 2006).

The Search Institute found the higher the number of assets a student self-reported in grades 7 through 9, the higher their grade point average was in high school. Those with between 0-10 assets and those with 31-40 assets resulted in a grade difference of a C to a B+ (Search Institute, 2003).

It has been suggested that the level of education one is able to achieve is as dependent on interpersonal relationships and social successes as it is on the academic performance (Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994).

## **The Evolution of English as the National Language**

Language has been a basis of discrimination throughout history (Carbonell, 2016). Language restriction and bias in America has ebbed and flowed with immigration trends (Crawford, 1996); with each wave of immigration, immigrant groups have been perceived as threats, and language became the indicator of national loyalty. In the United States, languages with an origin other than Europe have been less tolerated, and therefore, the speakers of these languages are often intentionally marginalized and assigned an inferior status (Wiley, 1998), as with the Chinese after the building of the transcontinental railroad. Discrimination based on language has also occurred when the language represents a group that threatens security, as with the Germans during WWI and WWII.

This section provides a historical background of the evolution of English, with emphasis on its role in social and political considerations and on language instruction in the United States. The evolution of English is described in relation to immigration trends and policies that have resulted in the marginalization of speakers of languages other than English. United States language policies will be presented in four sections starting with (1) pre-European contact to the 1880s, (2) the 1880s - 1960s, (3) the 1960s - 1980s, and (4) the 1980s to the present.

**The permissive period: Pre-European contact through the 1880s.** English was identified as the dominant language in America prior to the uniting of the 13 British colonies and achieved its status through the perceptions of those who settled the colonies (Wiley, 2014). The acquisition of English brought prestige to people as they settled in the country and it became readily accepted as the language of choice for the colonies due to its perceived superiority, rather than by official decree (Wiley, 2014). As a status symbol, English spread by consent rather than by force, and although it brought prestige, there continued to be contact with other languages in the early colonial period, leading to tolerance of them. Yet, even today, the assumption remains

that tolerated languages should be, or are, subordinate to English (Kloss, 1998). Phillipson (1992) contends the way in which one language is used to dominate another is a form of an *ism*, “Linguicism involves representation of the dominant language, to which desirable characteristics are attributed, for the purposes of inclusion, and the opposite for dominated languages, for the purpose of exclusion” (p. 55).

Wiley (2014) contends the history of language in the United States is about expansionist wars and annexations as much as it is about immigration. By the time European settlers came to the New World, native cultures had already experienced the oppression of their language by Spanish conquistadores for over 100 years (Macias, 2014). In California, exploration and hunting patterns brought diverse languages to the state, with the Spanish language traced back to 1519 and the landing of Cortez in Mexico (Garcia, 2008). Spanish was declared the official language of Upper California in 1768, during the planning of the future San Diego and Monterrey missions and after more than two centuries of Spanish exploration and settlements (Starr, 2007).

The establishment of the mission system by Spain firmly entrenched the Spanish language; as the aim of mission system was to colonize the territory and convert the native people to the Catholic religion. With the secularization of the missions and the increase in Californios, Spanish became intermixed with English as settlers came west to claim a section of the newly available mission land. Spanish would remain the primary language until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when waves of settlers from the newly formed United States moved west. During that period, the Spanish language was officially downgraded to second-class status due to the arrival of English-speaking pioneers (Garcia, 2008).

***The Gold Rush and early statehood: 1849 – 1880s.*** By the time gold was discovered in California, Spanish had been the primary language for centuries. The 1848 treaty of Guadalupe-

Hidalgo guaranteed citizenship and the continued use of the Spanish language in education to all people living in the areas annexed by the United States at the conclusion of the war with Mexico. However, Spanish speakers were the minority by the drafting of California's first constitution in 1849, with only 13% of the 100,000 residents identified as Spanish speaking (Spanish Language Rights in CA, n.d.). English was made the official language of California at the meeting held to revise the first state constitution in 1878, as there were no delegates present to support the continued use of Spanish for official proceedings.

Present at the revision of the first constitution were representatives from the Workingman's Party, who proposed, and were able to attain, harsh policies against the increasing Chinese immigrant population that arrived as part of the Gold Rush (Spanish Language Rights in CA, n.d.). The Chinese population grew as California went into an economic depression, and by the end of the 1860s, Chinese immigrants made up 20% of San Francisco (Chinese Immigration, n.d.). Resentment against the Chinese increased, as many Whites who had come to California during the previous two decades were out of work and felt the Chinese laborers who worked for lower wages took available jobs (Chinese Immigration, n.d.). Restrictions were placed on the ability for Chinese immigrants to gain citizenship, the number of immigrants allowed into California, and the ability for children of Chinese parents born in America to attend school (Kuo, 1998). It was not until 1905 that the US Supreme Court permitted children of Chinese immigrants access to public education and, therefore, have the opportunities to learn English.

**The restrictive period: 1880s through the 1960s.** The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw an increase in immigration and campaigns to "Americanize" recent immigrants (Schmid, 2001). With the buildup to WWI, anti-European sentiment emerged and proficiency in English began to be equated with national loyalty. In 1906, the Nationality Act mandated all immigrants speak English in order to start the nationalization process (Ovando, 2003). The 1917 Burnett Act was



passed by Congress to prohibit immigration from Asia with the exception of people from Japan and the Philippines, and all new immigrants had to pass a literacy test (1917 Immigration Act, n.d.). Any language other than English was seen as a threat to the nation's unity as stated by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1926:

We have room for but one language in this country and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding (Merchant & Steele, 2008, p. 111).

Bilingual education was all but eliminated in the United States by the 1930s and would remain so until the 1960s, although the courts continued to affirm the rights of citizens to teach and to learn their preferred language (Nieto, 2009).

**The opportunist period: 1960s through the 1980s.** By the end of WWII, Sputnik and the Cuban revolution laid the way for an increase in interest in foreign language education (Ovando, 2003). The passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 outlawed discrimination and Title VI of the Act stipulated that funds would be withheld from school districts that adhered to segregation. In 1968, the Bilingual Education Act, also known as Title VII, was passed in response to barriers to educational opportunities and limitations from full educational participation by linguistic minority students in the pervasive English-only school environment (Nieto, 2009). The Bilingual Education Act reversed the federal government's 200-year hands-off trend regarding the role of language in school settings (Schmid, 2001). Title VII encouraged, but did not mandate, new approaches to instruction for non-English speaking students by providing funding for programs. Viewed as the most significant law to recognize the rights of non-English speaking populations, it was the first bilingual, bicultural, federally approved program in United States history. What followed was a stream of legislation to rescind laws that

were discriminatory to non-English speaking populations, including the use of English-only IQ tests to evaluate non-English speaking students.

The 1974 Bilingual Education Act was amended to include specific definitions of bilingual education programs and to include accountability from school districts. That same year the Supreme Court ruled on *Lau vs. Nichols*, a lawsuit against schools in San Francisco that failed to provide equal access to education. The court determination found that students had been left to “sink or swim” when provided instruction primarily in a language they did not understand (Olsen, 2016b). Bilingual programs increased during the 1970s, and in 1980 the passage of AB 507, the Bilingual Educational Improvement and Reform Act, made bilingual education mandatory when 20 or more students within the same grade level spoke the same primary language. During the 1980s, education became a focus of the federal government with the establishment of the Department of Education. During that same decade, the state of California established the Bilingual Cross-Cultural Specialist Credential and established Bilingual Teacher Training Programs (Olsen, 2016b).

Although this era witnessed some of the biggest advancements in bilingual education, the tolerance for the bilingual approach in California halted during the Reagan era. Then-President Ronald Reagan pronounced, “It is absolutely wrong and against American concepts to have a bilingual education program that is now openly, admittedly dedicated to preserving their native language and never getting them adequate in English so they can go out into the job market and participate” (Crawford, 1998/1999, p. 53). California passed the 1986 Proposition 63 English – only initiative, with a margin of 73% to 27%, and anti-bilingual sentiment spread as an exclusion strategy (Dyste, 1988; Olsen, 2016b).

**The dismissive period: 1980s to the present.** The sun-setting of California’s Bilingual Education act, once the strongest bilingual program in the nation, coincided with a notable

immigration wave from Southeast Asia. The Asian immigrant population rose 308 % between 1970 and 1980 to 2.5 million, and then to 4.9 million by 1990 (Zong & Batalova, 2016). The shifting demographics of California led to political conflicts regarding who belongs, as the state no longer had a single ethnic group majority (Olsen, 2016a). In 1994, the Bilingual Education Act was reauthorized and for the first time, bilingual programs were viewed as a way to develop the natural resource of diverse languages in America and to compete globally (Crawford, 2004). California continued to place importance on bilingual programs, and in 1994 the state required teachers of ELD and academic subjects to English learners to be Cross Cultural, Language Development credentialed. Three years later, with the passage of AB 748, the development of English Language Development standards as well as a statewide ELD test was mandated.

In line with patterns experienced in the previous century, as minority language use increased, legal restrictions against bilingual education were put in place. In 1998, California passed Proposition 227 by a 2 to 1 margin, severely restricting bilingual education programs and resulting in only 10% of the state's English learners receiving primary language instruction (Olsen, 2016b). Bilingual programs were replaced with English-only instruction simultaneous with the launch of No Child Left Behind, and the authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 mandated testing to assess academic performance of all public school students in grades 2 to 11. The mandated testing brought the acknowledgment that English learners were a significant population in California schools and were to be monitored for language acquisition as well as academic performance. Still, in the 18 years since the passage of Proposition 227, hundreds of thousands of California English learners have passed through the K-12 educational system without primary language support.

## California's English Learner in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

California has had a long history of language diversity, and large numbers of English-learning children in our schools, community colleges, and universities. This section provides key demographic data on the current English learner population of California, highlighting their substantial magnitude and cultural and linguistic diversity.

**English learner demographics.** According to the California Language Census, in Fall of 2015, 1,373,724 students in grades K-12 were in various stages of learning the English language (California Department of Education, 2015a), equating to 22% of the students in grades K-12 not having full access to educational opportunities due to the mandated English-only instruction. The majority of English learners are in grades K to 6 (73%), with the remaining 27% enrolled in grades 7 to 12. Hence, the current English learners in California are relatively young.

Of the 60 language groups for which data is regularly collected by the state, 94% speak one of 10 languages as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

### *Percentages of Languages Spoken by English Learners in California Public Schools*

Language	Percent
Spanish	83.5%
Vietnamese	2.2%
Arabic	1.3%
Cantonese	1.2%
Korean	0.8%
Hmong	0.8%
Punjabi	0.7%
Russian	0.6%

The majority of EL students are born in the state and are more likely to attend urban schools in the Southern California region (Breiseth, 2015). They live in more financially stable homes compared to the ELs who immigrate to California, as immigrants are more likely to live in poverty and have less formal schooling than their native-born English learning peers (Zong & Batalova, 2015).

**Identification of English language learners.** A student is identified as an English language learner upon school registration through the state's Home Language Survey. A parent or guardian enrolling the student in school is required to respond to the survey by stating the language used in response to questions presented. The enrollment form asks four questions pertaining to the student's language, as follows:

1. Which language did your child learn when he/she first began to speak?
2. Which language does your child most frequently speak at home?
3. Which language do you (the parents or guardians) most frequently use when speaking with your child?
4. Which language is most often spoken by adults in the home? (by parents, guardians, or any other adults)

When a language other than English is indicated on the Home Language Survey, the student is given the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), which has three functions: identify students who demonstrate limited English language ability, determine the level of English language proficiency of identified students, and assess yearly progress toward English fluency in speaking, reading, and writing in English (California Department of Education 2016a).

The CELDT evaluates proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and students receive a score in each in addition to a composite score. Prior to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, California identified five levels of proficiency: beginning, early intermediate, intermediate, early advanced, and advanced, but these levels changed under the Common Core State Standards to only three: emerging, expanding, and bridging. Program placement and reclassification decisions are made annually based on the student's performance on the CELDT.

In accordance with the California Department of Education, parent/guardians of English learners enrolled in California schools that receive Title III funds are to be notified of their child's English proficiency level within 30 days of the start of school (California Department of Education, 2016c).

### **Second Language Acquisition**

In the following section, a brief summary of second language acquisition is presented and will focus primarily on the work of two leaders in the field, Dr. James Cummins, and Dr. Steven Krashen. Following the discussion of second language acquisition is a description of traditional and long-term English learners and the process of reclassification from English learners to English proficient.

**Language acquisition.** Humans are born with the ability to acquire spoken language (Sousa, 2011). Humans have both the physiological and neurological capabilities to be receptive of sounds and to produce them to communicate meaning. It is because of this ability, contends Sousa, that the human species has assumed its dominant place on the planet. To acquire an additional language, Dr. Steven Krashen suggests language acquisition requires meaningful interaction with the target language for the purpose of communication and not merely rote memorization of the target language's grammatical rules (Krashen, 1981).

Krashen and Sousa both agree that the quality of education a student receives in his or her first language is a critical factor in acquiring a second language (Krashen, 1998; Sousa 2011).

Krashen (2009) developed a theory of language acquisition based on this overarching assumption, which he presents as a series of hypotheses (a) the acquisition-learning hypothesis, (b) the monitor hypothesis, (c) the natural order hypothesis, (d) the input hypothesis, and (e) the affective filter hypothesis. They are summarized in Table 2, along with implications for teaching.

Table 2

*Krashen's Hypotheses and Their Applications for Teaching*

Hypothesis	Application for Teaching
<i>The Monitor Hypothesis</i>	
The acquisition system initiates an utterance and the learning system 'monitors' the utterance to inspect and correct errors.	A challenge to balance between encouraging accuracy and fluency.
Monitoring can contribute to the accuracy of an utterance, but its use should be limited. The 'monitor' can act as a barrier as it forces the learner to slow down and focus more on accuracy as opposed to fluency	This balance depends on language level of the students, the context of language use, and the personal goals of each student.
	The goal is competence in communication.
<i>The Natural Order Hypothesis</i>	
Language learners acquire parts of language in a predictable order.	Awareness that certain structures of a language are easier to acquire than others and, therefore, language structures should be taught in an order that is conducive to learning.
For any given language, certain grammatical structures are acquired early while others are acquired later in the process.	Start by introducing language concepts that are relatively easy for learners to acquire and then use scaffolding to introduce concepts that are more difficult.
Occurs independently of deliberate teaching and, therefore, teachers' efforts cannot change the order of a grammatical teaching sequence	

(Continued)

Hypothesis	Application for Teaching
<i>The Input Hypothesis</i>	
Language acquisition occurs when learners receive messages that they can understand also known as comprehensible input.	Use the target language in the classroom. The goal of any language program is for learners to be able to communicate effectively. By providing as much comprehensible input as possible, especially in situations when learners are not exposed to the TL outside of the classroom, the teacher is able to create a more effective opportunity for language acquisition.
Comprehensible input should be one-step beyond the learner's current language ability, represented as $i + 1$ , in order to allow learners to continue to progress with their language development.	
<i>The Affective Filter Hypothesis</i>	
An obstacle that manifests itself during language acquisition: a 'screen' that is influenced by emotional variables that can prevent learning.	The teaching environment should be safe and welcoming to encourage students to learn. In language education, this is especially important since, in order to take in and produce language, learners need to feel that they are able to make mistakes and take risks
Does not affect acquisition directly, but rather prevents input from reaching the language acquisition part of the brain.	
Can be activated by many different variables including anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and stress.	

The hypotheses presented in Table 2 guided the researcher's understanding of the language development process of study participants.

James Cummins (2008) presents a theory of language acquisition that focuses on two fundamental acquisition modes: basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). As presented in Cummins's entry in the Encyclopedia of Language and Education, the difference between the two modes of acquisition is that one reflects conversational fluency (BICS), and the other, (CALP) refers to the English learners' ability to comprehend and express, both verbally and in writing, the concepts presented in formal schooling (Cummins, 2008). Cummins argues that the failure to acquire these two aspects of the English language leaves students indefinitely in language acquisition programs and prohibits reclassification to English proficiency as determined by the California English Language Test.



### **Traditional English Learners**

A traditional English language learner (ELL) is a student who is unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English (English Language Learner, 2013). Traditional English learners often come from non-English speaking homes and require specialized or modified instruction in the English language and in content courses. They typically progress along a language development trajectory to ever-increasing English fluency. The course of their language acquisition varies in length with the assumption that school will facilitate the development of fluency, allowing them to be reclassified as English Proficient in 5 to 7 years. If adequate progress is not made by that time, the student is at risk of becoming a long-term English learner.

### **Long-term English Learners**

Olsen conducted extensive research on long-term English learners, and defines the long-term English learner as any English learner in grades 6-12 that has attended school in the United States for six or more years, is not progressing toward English proficiency, and struggles academically due to their limited English skills (Olsen, 2014). In her study of over 40 school districts, and 175,000 secondary English learners, Olsen found that academic struggles of long-term English learners may cause many to fall behind their English-speaking peers and have accumulate an academic learning gap, and that long-term English learners may have highly developed social language, meaning they can converse with friends in English, however, they lack academic language proficiency (Olsen, 2010). Moreover, due to academic deficiencies, long-term English learners tend to develop habits of disengagement with curriculum and demonstrate learned passivity and many long-term English learners may aspire to a higher education yet often are unaware of the academic preparation required due to lack of, or limited, accurate information on the college preparation process (Olsen, 2010).

## **Education Programs for Secondary English Learners in California**

The state of California provides three pathways to English proficiency for the English learner regardless of grade level at point of entry, and the specific academic courses assigned are determined by the student's level of language acquisition and school site. The three options established by the California Department of Education for secondary students learning the English language are Structured English Immersion (SEI), English Language Mainstream (ELM), and Alternative Programs (Alt; California Department of Education, 2015a). The SEI option is for students who have not yet developed a sufficient level of the target language to be placed in either a heterogeneous EL (some English language development support) or an EO (no English language support) student classroom. The ELM option is for students who have acquired enough target language skills to participate in a classroom with those who speak only English. In both classroom settings, all instruction is in English. The final option, Alt, are programs in which students receive specialized instruction in their primary language, as requested through waivers by parents. In each of the three programming options, the goal is for students to learn English as quickly as possible (California Department of Education, 2015a).

## **Graduation Rates and Post-Secondary Options**

In 2015, 426,982 students graduated high school and 30,380 were English learners in the state of California (Appendix B). In Los Angeles County, 6,791 English learners graduated (California Department of Education, 2015c).

**Post-secondary options and enrollment figures.** High school graduates who wish to stay in the state of California for their higher education may attend a public or private university, a community college, or a trade school. A public or private college or university is a four-year option that offers Bachelor's Degrees. Each type of school has its own application process with criteria for enrollment. Aside from trade schools and community colleges, secondary grade point

average and the passing of an aptitude test are often part of the acceptance and enrollment process.

In California, community colleges are two-year publically supported institutions, generally spread across the state to ensure student accessibility. During the 2012-13 school year, California community colleges provided education to 2.1 million students, or 75% of the state's public undergraduate enrollment for both vocational and academic program offerings (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office [CCCCO], 2016, p. 24). Recent data from the Public Policy Institute of California has places English learner enrollment in community colleges at 6%; this is approximately 30,000 students yearly entering the community college system without proficiency in the English Language.

### **Factors That Influence Pursuit of Post-Secondary Education**

In a study commissioned by the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (NPEC), three factors play a significant role in encouraging or discouraging high school students' decisions to pursue a higher education: the school experience (both social and academic), family influences, and one's personal characteristics (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). This study examined whether these three factors play a role in English learners' decisions to continue on to post-secondary education through intensive interviews with a representative sample of English-learning students attending a local community college. The discussion to follow outlines key existing research on the various dimensions of school, family, and personal characteristics that play a major role in whether English learners' attend college.

**Academic experiences that encourage post-secondary education.** To understand the role that school experiences play in whether English learners pursue education beyond high school, consideration should be given to the organizational frames of resources, politics, and structure of academic institutions and their ability to encourage the adolescent to pursue post-

secondary education (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Bolman and Deal state that the factors within schools and academic systems that may encourage or discourage the English learners' quest for higher education are: available resources - both human and material, school and district policies, school structure, and rules employed by the school.

*Academic and human resources.* Access to curriculum and sufficient materials at a district or school site can create and support a college-going atmosphere, which can encourage the secondary student to pursue a higher education (Sloan, 2013). A rigorous secondary curriculum, including advanced math and AP classes, in a college-going atmosphere, has been identified as the greatest predictor of college completion (College Board, 2006). A review of existing studies reported by Eccles, Vita, & Barbara (2004) revealed that academic performance in high school is a significant factor in college. Success in rigorous high school classes is positively correlated with high self-confidence in academic ability and encourages post-secondary education (National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, 2007).

The presence of trained and effective counselors may encourage the adolescent to pursue post-secondary education because they can provide information the students and their families require to navigate the college preparatory process (Holland, 2010). High school counselors play a pivotal role in assisting underrepresented secondary students to continue to higher education (McKillip, Rawls, & Berry, n.d.). The importance of the counselor-adolescent relationship increases in importance when the school does not have a clearly delineated college-going culture (Holland, 2010).

The quality of the teacher-student relationship can also encourage a student to continue on to post-secondary education. Teachers who hold high expectations for their students may increase their students' desire to learn (Gallagher, n.d.). Motivation to learn has been linked to self-efficacy, and the quality of adolescent-teacher relations may result in a decrease in student

anxiety, depression, and the risk of dropping out of secondary school (Krane, Ness, Holter-Sorrenson, Karlsson, & Binder, 2016).

***School policies.*** Graman contends that politics is present in all education, particularly in the education of English learners (Graman, 1988). Bolman and Deal contend organizations are instrumental for achieving the goals of those that make the rules (Bolman & Deal, 2013, Chapter 11), a notion consistent with Critical Race Theory. California Education Code contains the laws for governing educational institutions and is designed to regulate the California education system, which consists of 69 parts, each with a range of 1 to 12 chapters. Each chapter is further broken into articles (McGuigan, 2016). In general, California school policy starts at the state level, is then interpreted by the county offices of education, further interpreted and analyzed at the district level, and, finally, implemented at individual school sites and in classrooms (Olsen, 2016c). A policy that is enacted at the site level can encourage a student to pursue higher education.

***Structure.*** Structure in an organization is the method used to transmit resources and materials. Public schools are vulnerable to external pressures due to minimal ability to gain the needed resources and to shape student outcomes they are expected to produce (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Structures that may discourage students from pursuing post-secondary education may include the size of the secondary school and the regulations regarding the programs the student has available to them (Holland, 2010).

Smaller class size and smaller secondary schools have been found to encourage post-secondary education. Although there is a lack of agreement on the degree to which smaller class size leads to higher student achievement, there is support for the contention that smaller class size promotes an increase in college enrollment (Oseguera, 2013).

The availability of college preparation and motivation activities on the secondary school campus had been shown to encourage continuation to higher education (College Board, 2006). For example, school structures that provide access to AP courses and high-level math courses may encourage post-secondary education (Oseguera, 2013). The uniformity and regularity of distributing college information have been found to encourage post-secondary education (Hill, 2008).

**Academic experiences that discourage post-secondary education.** More American high school students aspire to attend a post-secondary institution compared to those of past generations; however, students face several academic barriers regardless of race, socioeconomic status, family support, or language (Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). As in the previous section on factors that encourage the pursuit of post-secondary education, this section will address the role the same general factors may play in discouraging high schoolers from attending college: available resources - both human and material, school policies, and school structure and rules.

**Academic and human resources.** Sloan (2013) identified the key elements that support the secondary student to pursue higher education: access to curriculum, sufficient materials at a district or site, and the development or maintenance of a college-going atmosphere. Discouragement may impact pursuing higher education when the converse of Sloan's key factors are present: insufficient access to curriculum, insufficient materials at the district or site level, and the inability to develop or maintain a college-going atmosphere. Adolescents who experience a limited availability of AP, science and high-level math classes may be discouraged from continuing on to post-secondary education (Oseguera, 2013). Furthermore, students who do not experience success in these types of classes may not be aware that the most important factors of the college admission process are the grades earned in rigorous classes.

Site- or district-level practices that can discourage continuing on to higher education have been identified through extensive research on college preparedness for underserved and underrepresented populations (Gonzalez, 2015; Holland, 2010; Kuh et al., 2006; Venezia, et al., 2003). Limited curriculum access and insufficient materials at a district or site can discourage the secondary student from attending higher education. The lack of college preparatory materials and instructional resources to academically challenge students and lack of school personnel to assist students have a negative impact on student aspirations (Temple, 2009). In particular, the lack or unavailability of college counselors may discourage the adolescent from attending higher education as high school counselors can play a substantial role in assisting underrepresented students to prepare for higher education (McKillip et al., n.d.).

The quality of teacher-student relationships can also discourage a student from continuing on to post-secondary education. Research shows that poor teacher-student relationship quality may result in an increase in student anxiety, depression, and the risk of dropping out of secondary school (Krane, et al., 2016).

***School policies.*** The inverse of school policies that help students aspire to a college education result in discouraging them. Unsupportive policies have a huge impact on English learners. As mentioned earlier in this review of the literature, the English-only policy led to the implementation of three programs to which English learners can be assigned for English development: Structured English Immersion (SEI), English Language Mainstream (ELM), or an Alternative Program (ALT) placement (California Department of Education, 2015a). Academic course placement is determined by the student's level of language acquisition and school site. The SEI option is for students who have yet to develop a sufficient level of English to be placed in heterogeneous EL and EO student classrooms, while the ELM option is for students who have acquired enough of the English language to participate in a classroom with English-only

speaking students. In both types of classrooms, all instruction is in English. The ALT option allows students to receive specialized instruction in their primary language once requested through waiver by the parent (California Department of Education, 2015a). The result of these three options is that most English learners are receiving English-only instruction, which presents challenges for them, as outlined below.

***Structure.*** There are several factors identified by Olsen (2010) that may discourage an English learner from continuing on to higher education. Her research has determined that inappropriate placement in a language mainstream program without proper support, lack of English development programming, and inappropriate curriculum can discourage the English learner from pursuing higher education. She also determined EL programs that are English-only have inconsistencies with grade level programs, do not develop language skills, and have narrowed curricula, which result in linguistic challenges for adolescents that may discourage post-secondary education.

### **Peer Influence on the Decision to Pursue Post-Secondary Education**

The social structure available to a secondary student can have a profound impact on their academic achievement and levels of self-worth. Correlations have been found between connectedness to a peer group and a student's adherence to social norms of responsibility, connectedness to community, and higher GPA (Scales, et al., 2006). Ryan and Deci (2000) contend connections to a peer group provide support that assists one in developing autonomy, competence, and internal motivation of the student to pursue goals, which they maintain is the most influential factor revealing one's potential.

**Peer experiences that encourage post-secondary education.** Peer relationships cover a broad range of activities that, when present, are thought to support the development of healthy relationships. The power of strong peer relationships in predicting the pursuit of higher education



was demonstrated in Sokatch's (2006) study of low socioeconomic status (SES) urban youth. Sokatch's findings show positive correlations between peers' decision to attend college and the individual student's decision to attend. These results support the research of Palardy (2013), who found that peer influences regarding planning to attend college may be greater in high SES secondary settings (Palardy, 2013).

Other studies have identified ways that peers can influence students' likelihood of attending college. One major study on peer groups and their relation to educational outcomes found that students who belong to peer groups that included friends who expressed care about their academic achievement had better educational outcomes, were less likely to drop out of high school, and had increased likelihood of enrolling in higher education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997). In short, peers have been shown to exert a strong positive influence on whether students continue on to higher education.

**Peer experiences that discourage post-secondary education.** The values adolescents hold in relation to secondary school may play an important role in the students' capacity to attend post-secondary education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997). Further, the types of activities an adolescent's peers engage in may negatively influence educational outcomes as peer influence can lead to antisocial behavior such as delinquency and dropping out of high school. Similarly, an adolescent who has friends that are engaged in sexual activity or substance use were more likely to experience academic difficulties, not attend higher education, and/or drop out of high school education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997).

### **Family Influence on the Decision to Pursue Post-Secondary Education**

The literature on family influences on secondary school English learners' interest in college can be separated based on two major models highlighted earlier in this literature review. First, the organizational frames identified by Bolman and Deal are helpful in analyzing what

aspects of the family system may encourage or discourage the adolescent's pursuit of post-secondary education (Bolman & Deal, 2013). These elements include the availability of family resources, both human and material, and family structure. Second, the Developmental Relationships Framework identifies additional family relationship factors that have been researched, including 1) expression of care, 2) challenge growth, 3) provide support, 4) share power, and 5) expand possibilities (Search Institute, 2014, table 1).

**Family factors that encourage post-secondary education.** In theory, the family is considered to be the child's first and most powerful teacher.

*Family resources.* The importance of parents' educational values to adolescent school achievement has been extensively researched (Eccles et al., 2004; George Mwangi, 2015). Two of the three most influential factors on adolescents' pursuit of higher education are parents' educational attainment and parental encouragement (National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, 2007). In most studies of family influences, the education level of the parent has been singled out as the strongest predictor of student academic success (Egalite, 2016). College-educated adults have a higher earning capacity than do their non-educated peers (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011; Davis-Kean, 2005). The relationship between parental educational attainment and child academic success may be due to indirect effects such as the parent being an educational and occupational model for the child and inspiring optimism in educational pursuits (Dubow, Boxer, & Huesmann, 2010).

A relationship exists between parent involvement in their children's academics and school life and the educational outcomes for adolescents, with those parents who are more highly involved tending to have children with stronger outcomes. This benefit exists regardless of students' socioeconomic or race/ethnic backgrounds (Catsambis, 2001), meaning that even children from low-income families who have involved parents have higher academic

performance. However, the amount of time parents spend with their children's schooling may depend on the family's SES (Hill & Talyor, 2004).

Many English learners come from non-English speaking homes and struggle financially. In the 2014-2015 school year, 86.1% (1,182,654 of 1,373,724) of identified English learners in the State were identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged (California Department of Education, 2015d). However, George Mwangi (2015) contends with the changing composition of families and the ways they may be involved in the community, the benefits of parents' involvement with their adolescents' academics or schools can be found even when parents are not directly engaged with the actual school site (George Mwangi, 2015). Involvement with schools may occur through the use of *social capital* rather than through traditional forms of parent involvement on campuses. George Mwangi includes within his definition of social capital those who are able to exert an influence on the adolescent and provide resources for college. In other words, he argues that parents and other people in the community to whom parents connect their children can impact adolescents' academic paths outside of the school site itself. Included as social capital for teens are the immediate family, the extended family, and those close to the family, but not tied by blood or marriage (George Mwangi, 2015). Adolescents are able to draw funds of knowledge to assist their pursuit of higher education from an extended social network.

According to Holland (2010), the act of communication has a profound impact on a child and may be in the form of verbal and/or emotional support. The impact of verbal affirmations has been found to be present in families of high SES at a greater rate than in families of mid to low SES (Hart & Risley, 2003). Hart and Risley studied communication patterns of college-educated parents and non-college educated parents with their children under the age of three years. Their data found that among professional families, the affirmatives a child hears in comparison to discouragements were present at a 6:1 ratio, with 32 affirmatives to five

prohibitions per hour. Among the midrange SES families, children were observed to experience a range of affirmatives to prohibitions at a rate of 12:7, and in the low SES families, they reported affirmatives to prohibitions ration of 5:11, nearly a precise inverse of the ratio for professional families. While affirmations alone do not predict academic success, they have been found to contribute to the building of self-confidence in underrepresented adolescents and may take the place of formal knowledge of the college process, thereby encouraging the prospect of higher education (Holland, 2010).

Related to verbal communication patterns, research demonstrates that the difference in the number of words heard by children of college-educated, high SES parents by the age of three years and those of non-college educated, mid to low-SES parents is about 30 million words (Hart & Risley, 2003). This dramatic difference in words heard by children by the age of three has lasting implications on their academic achievement by third grade (Sparks, 2015).

***Family structure.*** Family structure is a socio-demographic label that identifies the living arrangements based on the number of caregiving adults that reside with the child (O'Malley, Voight, Renshaw, & Eklund, 2014). Family structure plays a significant part in a child's academic success, as students living in a family structure with two parents report higher GPAs, and greater academic success (O'Malley et al., 2014). Two-parent families have been found to have the resources of time and money to provide their children enriching environments (Sandefur, McLanahan, & Wojtkiewicz, 1992). Students from two-parent families have been found to outperform their single-parent peers in math (Woessmann, 2015), and success in math is a gateway to higher education (Lucey, 2014).

**Family factors that discourage post-secondary education.** "Going to college represents the best, and perhaps the only, realistic option for upward social mobility and escape

from poverty, and poor minority students most in need of this opportunity are the least likely to take it” (Sokatch, 2006, p. 129).

***Family resources.*** Family factors that may discourage the pursuit of post-secondary education include parental education level, since less educated parents tend to be of lower socioeconomic status than their college-educated counterparts (Dubow et al., 2010). Single parents head many low-income families, and teens who live in non-married families are less likely to graduate high school or to attend college. The exception to this has been found when the adolescent is living with their single mother and at least one grandparent (Deliere & Kalil, 2002).

Cost is often a factor that discourages underrepresented students for continuing on to higher education. Families without information on financial aid or those who receive or believe in an overestimation of how much a college education will cost have children who are less likely to continue on to higher education (Pettus, 2006). In a study cited by De La Rosa (2006), it was found that English-speaking students were better informed about financial aid than were English learners (De La Rosa, 2006). Families of low SES rely more heavily on the school system for accurate college information compared to their high SES counterparts. Given that English learners are generally of low SES, they may be discouraged from attending college and likely are unaware of their ability to contact school personnel for information (Holland, 2010).

Furthermore, families struggling economically have ongoing, often chronic, financial stress that may negatively impact parent-child relationships, resulting in lower levels of nurturing and monitoring of the adolescent and increasing the likelihood of behavioral issues of the adolescent (Dubow et al., 2010). The resulting behavior issues often impact student learning (Public Agenda, 2004).

***Family structure.*** Family structure can also serve as a barrier to academic achievement. There is substantial research that points to the ongoing stresses within single-parent homes,

particularly in comparison to two-parent homes (Sandefur et al., 1992). Teens who live in non-married families may receive fewer resources in the terms of time and money from parents and are less likely to graduate high school and attend college (Sandefur et al., 1992). The exception to this has been found when the adolescent is living with their unmarried mother and at least one grandparent (Deliere & Kalil, 2002). Family structure has implications for academic success, as research has found adolescents in alternative family structures score lower on standardized tests (Cavanagh, Shiller, & Riegle-Crumb, 2006). Academic success is necessary for adequate college preparation; hence, adolescents in single parent or alternative family structures may be discouraged from pursuing higher education due to repressed academic success.

### **Individual Characteristics That Influence the Pursuit of Post-Secondary Education**

A range of characteristics or traits can play a role in how the individuals interact with their worlds. In this section, an overview of specific characteristics thought to facilitate the pursuit of higher education and successful interactions with school, peers, and others at school, and the family is provided. Its goal is to analyze research that identifies those characteristics that may negatively affect students' interactions with key people in their environments and discourage the desire to continue on to higher education after secondary school.

**Characteristics that encourage post-secondary education.** Personality, or character traits, are strongly related to academic success (Hakimi, Hejazi, & Lavasani, 2011). Two versions of character indicators that contribute to adolescent success will be presented. The Big Five personality indicator of conscientiousness and the internal assets components of the 40 Development Assets as presented by the Search Institute.

The Big Five personality traits are categories of personality traits that are thought to be present, along a continuum, for all people (Trapmann, Hell, Hirn, & Schuler, 2007). They include extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. Only

conscientiousness has been shown to have a positive correlation with academic success (Hakimi et al., 2011). Conscientiousness may have more impact on academic achievement than one's intelligence (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

The internal assets identified by the Search Institute are commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity (Search Institute, 2012). Together they constitute an internal compass by which the adolescent navigates their way to adulthood. Decisions, contend the Search Institute (2012), are contingent upon the degree of internal assets developed.

**Characteristics that discourage post-secondary education.** As described above, The Big 5 personality traits include extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. All but conscientiousness has the possibility of a negative aspect, which may hinder school success (Trapmann et al., 2007).

Prince-Embury posits the demonstration of emotional reactivity as a factor that may work to discourage post-secondary education (Prince-Embury, 2015). Prince-Embury also notes the inability to regulate one's emotions has been associated with "...behavioral maladjustment and vulnerability to pathology" (Prince-Embury, 2015, p. 58).

### **Summary of Literature Review**

Chapter 2 began with a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that are most valuable in considering what influences English learners' pursuit of a higher education. Critical Race Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the influences of language policy on English learners. Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Theory was presented and was used to frame the influences that encourage or discourage EL students' ambitions to pursue higher education. The conceptual framework of the 40 Developmental Assets Framework was

reviewed and was used to structure the exploration of the relationships between the English learner and the family and peer group.

The history of language policy was presented from pre-colonial contact to the present, which provided insights into shifts policies and attitudes toward English learners in our country. A profile of the current California English learner population and subgroups was discussed along with a description of the English learner identification process, second language acquisition theory, and the differences and similarities of traditional and long-term English learners. Program placement options for English learners' were reviewed, along with English learner's graduation rates and post-secondary options. Lastly, an analysis of the known factors determined to most impact or predict students' decisions to continue on to post-secondary education was presented and focused on the school experience, family dynamics, peer influences, and personal characteristics.



### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter presents the qualitative research methodology utilized in the study. The chapter begins with the study purpose, research questions, research methodology, and rationale. Following will be the setting, target population, sampling procedure, human subject considerations, instrumentation, content validity, data collection, data analysis, positionality of the researcher, and summary of the study methodology.

#### **Statement of the Purpose**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe the school components (academic and social), family experiences, and individual characteristics that encouraged English learner students to continue on to post-secondary education, even though they were not reclassified English proficient upon high school graduation. The study also investigated the factors students identified as discouraging to their decision to continue education past high school. The study is necessary at this time as English learners take more prominence in accountability under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which calls for EL accountability moving from Title III to Title I in state accountability frameworks (Pompa, 2015). The move in accountability places increased importance on the progress schools are making with their EL population, and hearing from the students themselves is a needed piece for school reflection of practice.

#### **Research Questions**

Through this study of English learners who continued on to higher education although not identified as proficient in the English language upon graduating high school, the research sought to understand:

1. What are the school (academic and social) experiences, family role, and individual characteristics of students who exited California high schools, not yet classified as

English proficient, and who continued on to higher education despite challenges they encountered?

1. In what ways did school academic experiences encourage the English learner to continue on to higher education?
  2. In what ways did academic experiences discourage the English learner from continuing on to higher education?
  3. In what ways did school social experiences encourage the English learner to continue on to higher education?
  4. In what ways did school social experiences discourage the English learner from continuing on to higher education?
  5. What role, if any, did family play in the English learner's decision to continue on to higher education?
  6. How did individual characteristics, if at all, encourage the English learner to pursue higher education?
2. In what ways, if any, did language policy affect the student?

### **Research Methodology and Rational**

This study utilized a qualitative approach and phenomenological methodology. The researcher conducted seven face-to-face semi-structured interviews with current community college students who graduated high school not having been reclassified as English proficient. The interview questions were open-ended, with prompting as needed, to elicit a candid, authentic recounting of the lived experience of the English learner in secondary school. The use of a qualitative approach is to allow the students to share first person accounts of their life experience of being educated in a language one did not fully understand.

The use of qualitative research allowed the researcher to study a group for which the variables are not easily measured (Creswell, 2013.) Creswell explains that qualitative studies are conducted when a “complex, detailed understanding of the issue is required” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). Creswell contends the level of understanding required of the researcher can only be gained when the researcher talks with the individuals who have firsthand experience of the issue under investigation. The use of the qualitative method is congruent with the Critical Race Theory tenet of the use of stories to name one’s own reality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Qualitative research allows for the empowering of those who were silenced (Creswell, 2013, Chapter 3). Creswell reasons that by providing the marginalized voice, the researcher may begin to understand why the individuals “responded as they did, the context in which they responded and their deeper thoughts and behaviors that governed their responses” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). The use of qualitative research will allow the student to share first person accounts of the life experience of being educated in a language one did not fully understand.

This study is well suited to utilize a phenomenological methodology. This study will focus on the experiences of English learners in an effort to understand experiences that encouraged or discouraged the English learners’ decision to continue on to higher education.

The goal of phenomenological methodology is to “...determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Utilizing phenomenology to explore one’s life story indicates that people have an important story of worth to tell about an experience, and the meaning making that took place (Seidman, 2013). The use of a phenomenological methodology permits the focus on descriptions of experiences, as “Descriptions keep a phenomenon alive, illuminate its presence, accentuate its underlying meanings, enable the phenomenon to linger, retain its spirit, as near to its actual nature as possible” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 59). It is through

the act of deliberate attention given to an experience that the individual is able to reconstruct and then reflect on the experience, allowing for contemplation on the meaning of the lived experience (Seidman, 2013). It is upon the researcher to explicate the experience of selecting to proceed to higher education when one has not been identified as being fluent in the language of instruction, through the semi structured interview questions, and observational notes, and communicate the lived experience of the non-reclassified English learner.

Seidman argues, “At the very heart of what it means to be human is the ability of people to symbolize their experience through language” (Seidman, 2013, p. 8). At the same time, Seidman cautions the interviewer that to interview is hard work and the interviewer should have “...interest in the participant's experience and willingness to hold one's ego in check” (Seidman, 2013, p. 83). Moustakas adds that the phenomenological interview involves open-ended comments and questions and is interactive in nature: “...determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).

**Target population.** The target population for this study was English learners at Esperanza Community College who have not yet acquired enough units to transfer to a four-year institution to complete their Bachelor’s Degree. Criteria for inclusion in this study are:

1. English learners in a Community College in the Los Angeles area.
2. The English learners were in an English-only secondary educational environment.
3. The English learner graduated high school not reclassified as English proficient.

**Sample.** The sample was limited to seven participants. The researcher sought to identify non-reclassified English learners, who experienced all of their high school career in California. The researcher used purposeful sampling, identified by Lunenburg and Irby as frequently used in qualitative studies (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Purposeful sampling, as presented by Creswell,

involves the researcher selecting sites and individuals for inquiry due to the ability of the individuals at the sites to assist in the understanding of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013).

**Setting.** This study took place in the Los Angeles region of Southern California, identified as having the highest kindergarten-grade12 English learner density in the United States (Ruiz Soto, Hooker, & Batalova, 2015). This study focused on English learners who attend Esperanza Community College.

**Participants.** The criteria for selection of participants was guided by the study purpose. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the factors that students who did not reclassify as proficient in English upon graduation from high school, identify as encouraging or discouraging to their decision to continue on to higher education. In keeping with the purpose of qualitative research put forth by Lunenburg and Irby, an interview allowed for in-depth personal descriptions from the participants, from which the researcher gained understanding from the participant's perspective (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). The researcher recruited seven participants.

**Sampling procedure.** The researcher leveraged a network of educators at the community college level to select participants for this study. Los Angeles Unified School District educates the largest number of English learners in the nation (Ruiz Soto et al., 2015). As such, an institution of higher education that serves high school graduates from the Los Angeles Unified School District was selected. The researcher utilized criterion sampling, once the region of Southern California was selected. Lunenburg and Irby present criterion sampling as the selection of participants who meet a criterion determined by the researcher (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008).

The researcher solicited information regarding current community college professors who taught English learner students from the researcher's network of fellow educators during the Spring of 2017. Contact was made with a professor at Esperanza Community College who

offered to recruit participants that meet the criteria of graduating high school not yet reclassified proficient in English.

The professor provided an overview of the study, the Participation Recruitment Letter (Appendix C) and the researcher's contact information to four history classes at Esperanza Community College. Twelve participants contacted the researcher. Of the twelve initial contacts, three did not reply to the researcher's outreach, and two did not match the study criteria of being an English learner, leaving the participant sample at seven.

After criteria for inclusion was established, the researcher outlined the purpose, data collection process and intended outcome of the study. All participants were sent the Participation Recruitment Letter and Informed Consent via email. Details were presented in written form to study participants regarding the voluntary participation in the interview, confidentiality of participants, the length of the interview, and communication after the interview has been transcribed and coded.

*Criteria.* The criteria for selection of participants was guided by the study purpose. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe factors students, who did not reclassified as English proficient upon graduation from high school, identified as encouraging or discouraging their decision to continue on to higher education. In keeping with the purpose of qualitative research put forth by Lunenburg and Irby, interviews allowed for in-depth personal descriptions from participants, from which the researcher gained understanding from the participant's perspective (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). The researcher limited the participants to seven individuals.

### **Human Subject Considerations**

Upon successful completion of Preliminary Oral, the researcher reached out to Esperanza Community College for permission to conduct the study. Esperanza Community College

indicated they required Pepperdine's Graduate and Professional School Internal Review Board (GSP IRB) approval first. The researcher submitted an application to the Pepperdine GPS IRB requesting conditional approval. The researcher provided conditional approval to Esperanza Community College as part of their IRB application approval procedure. Once approved (Appendix D), the researcher returned to Pepperdine University's GSP IRB for final approval (Appendix E). Once permission was granted, the study commenced with participant selection.

**Permissions.** The purpose of the IRB is to protect human subjects participating in the study. This study was expected to have minimal risk to participants, to the Pepperdine University School of Education and Psychology, and to Esperanza Community College. Minimal risk is defined as "The risk of participating in the research are no greater than risks encountered in normal daily life (E-protocol tip sheet for determining level of IRB review, 2016, p. 5). The researcher completed the online training for human subject research in Summer 2016. The researcher anticipated there would not be any social, psychological, legal, or economic risks to the participants. The participants may experience physical discomfort dependent upon the climate of the interview location and sitting for the duration of the interview time allotted of 60 to 90 minutes.

As sensitive material may have arisen for the participant during the conversation of lived experiences, attention was made by the researcher to listen on three levels as described by Seidman, and to shift the focus if needed (2013). The first level of listening, Seidman states, is listening for the substance of responses made by the participant to ensure the interviewer is able to internalize what the participant is sharing. Second, the researcher is advised to listen for the participants' use of the authentic inner voice as opposed to the guarded, public voice. Lastly, care must be taken, Seidman continues, to be aware of the process of the interview, how much time

has elapsed, the engagement of the participant, when prompting is required to move the interview forward, and nonverbal cues the participant may send (Seidman, 2013, Chapter 6).

If a participant exhibited or verbalized discomfort with an interview question, the researcher asked a clarifying question to check the accuracy of the observation. If the participant confirmed the observation of discomfort with the question, the researcher redacted the question for the participant's interview. The participant was asked if they wished to proceed with the interview process. If the participant elected not to proceed, the researcher thanked them for their time and offered to accompany them to their next location to ensure a stability of emotion. If the participant appeared visibly upset, the researcher accompanied the participant to the campus health/counseling center and notified the counseling staff of perceived student distress. This did not occur.

**Procedure for informed consent.** Informed consent procedures were provided via email upon initial email contact with selected participants and prior to onset of the interview (Appendix F). The Participation Recruitment Letter and Informed Consent was shared through email and prior to commencing the interview. An opportunity for questions to clarify further was provided on both occasions.

A request was made by the researcher to determine the participant's preference for face-to-face or virtual (e.g., Skype) interview. Each participant selected a time and location on the Esperanza City College campus of the interview

**Confidentially.** Confidentiality procedures were provided to the participants in the study via email. The confidentiality of the participant was maintained through several precautions. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. No identifying information was requested on the demographic form and no identifying information was included in interview process, other than the gender of the speaker.



The transcript of the interview process remained in the locked, password-protected personal computer of the researcher until coding was complete, at which time the file was transferred to a password-protected external hard drive and stored in a locked file cabinet. The researcher was the only person with the password to the personal computer, the external hard drive, and the key to the file cabinet.

**Access to interview transcript.** Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed by Rev Transcription, an online audio transcription service accessed via an application on the researcher's iPhone and computer. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. No identifying information, other than gender, was recorded during the interview. The researcher made access to the transcript of the audio recording available to the participant, through email, within 24 hours of receipt of the transcript. The participant had the opportunity to review the transcript for the accuracy of their responses. After the researcher received confirmation that the participant responses accurately reflected their interview responses, the transcript was prepared for insertion into the HyperResearch system for analysis.

### **Instrumentation**

A phenomenologically based interview was the most appropriate interview for this study as it emphasizes the participants' reconstruction of their experiences, and the meaning they make from those experiences. Seidman calls this form of interviewing phenomenologically based interviewing (Seidman, 2013, p. 14). As Seidman states, in phenomenologically based interviews, "... interviewers use primarily, but not exclusively, open-ended questions (Seidman, 2013, p. 14).

The researcher created the primary tool for data collection (Appendix G). The instrument is an 11-question semi-structured protocol. The instrument is based on, and was used to examine, the three factors identified by the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative as the most

likely to influence the secondary student's decision to continue on to post-secondary education: the school experience, family and self (Kuh et al., 2006).

The 11-question interview protocol was designed for the participant to share the factors that encouraged or discouraged their decision to continue on to higher education. The instrument contains 11 semi-structured interview questions divided into four sections. The first nine questions required oral responses only. The last two questions required a single word or short phrase response, and was written on a graphic organizer supplied by the researcher.

The interview was scheduled at the convenience of the participant and lasted less than sixty minutes. The interviews took place in May 2017. At the start of each interview, the participant was presented with the nature of the study and the intent of the researcher. The participant was assured that the interview, and all information shared, would be kept confidential and that the participant may drop out at any time.

The four sections of questions included:

Section I: Secondary school experiences:

1. Tell me about your academic experiences in high school.
2. In what ways did the experiences encourage you to go on to higher education?
3. In what ways did the experiences discourage you from continuing on to higher education?

Section II: Peer group:

4. Tell me about your social experiences in high school.
5. In what ways did the experiences encourage you to continue on to higher education?
6. In what ways did the experiences discourage you from continuing on to higher education?

Section III: Family:

7. Please tell me about your family.
8. What role if any did your family play in your decision to continue on to higher education?

Section IV: Self:

9. How would a teacher or counselor describe you?
  - a. How would a peer describe you?
  - b. How would your family describe you?
  - c. How do you describe yourself as a student, peer and family member?

A blank graphic organizer was provided for each of the following questions:

10. Please fill in the graphic organizer with you at the center and attach descriptors of yourself?
11. Using another graphic organizer, please write the influences to your decision to continue on to higher education. Place you at the center and the people, or events that most influenced your decision to continue on to higher education, either as encouraging or discouraging, closest to you. In expanding circles, place other people or experiences you have already identified or that may come to mind now, with the most impactful people or experiences being the closest to you and those of lesser influence further away from you.

**Alignment of research questions.** The interview instrument was aligned to the research questions and to the literature appropriate for this study (Appendix H). The following is a presentation of the study questions, their alignment to the interview questions, and a brief summary of the literature that supports each interview question.

The research base that undergirds the purpose of this study; to investigate the school (academic and social) experiences, family role, and individual characteristics of students who exited California high schools, not yet classified as English proficient, and who continued on to higher education despite challenges they encountered, was built from three primary sources. The first was Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecology of Human Development. Bronfenbrenner contends the people and entities within the individual's immediate layer of influence, the microsystem, have the most influence on the individual's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The second, was the Search Institute contention that people within an adolescent's immediate environment have the opportunity to support the development of positive assets in the youth. The development of prosocial assets, such as involvement in school and constructive use of time through organized activities, are thought to support the youth as they grow toward adulthood and increased community responsibilities. At the same time, studies have shown the development of assets may provide a buffer against adolescent substance abuse and antisocial behavior. The third and final source that formed the research base of this study was the National Post-Secondary Education Cooperative (NPEC) contention that there are three factors that are the most likely to influence the student's decision to continue on to post-secondary education: the school experience, family and personal characteristics (National Postsecondary Education Cooperative 2007).

*Academic influence.* The first three interview questions sought to explore the impact of academic experiences on the participant's decision to pursue higher education. Interview questions 1-3 align with the research questions 1, In what ways did school academic experiences encourage the English learner to continue on to higher education? and 2, In what ways did academic experiences discourage the English learner from continuing education beyond high school?. The interview questions are 1. Please tell me about your academic experiences in high

school, 2. In what ways did the experiences encourage you to go on to higher education?, and 3. In what ways did the experiences discourage you from going on to higher education?.

Research to support the influence of the school system on encouraging or discouraging the student from pursuing higher education comes from several sources. Access to curriculum and sufficient materials at a district or site can support the creation of a college-going atmosphere and encourage the secondary student to continue on to higher education (Sloan, 2013). Studies cited by Eccles et al. (2004) have found academic performance is a significant factor in college planning (Eccles et al., 2004). Access to AP courses and high-level math courses may encourage post-secondary education (Oseguera, 2013) and success in rigorous classes has a positive correlation with self-confidence in one's academic ability that has been found to encourage post-secondary education (National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, 2007). Adolescents that experience a limited availability of AP, science, and high-level math classes may be discouraged from continuing on to post-secondary education (Oseguera, 2013).

The quality of teacher-student relationships can also encourage a student to continue on to post-secondary education. Teachers that have high expectations for their students may increase the students desire to learn (Gallagher, n.d.). Quality teacher relationships may result in a decrease in student anxiety, depression, and the risk of dropping out of secondary school (Krane et al. , 2016).

Oseguera (2013) contends smaller secondary school class sizes promote an increase in college enrollment. The availability of college-going activities has been shown to encourage continuing on to higher education (College Board, 2006). The uniformity and regularity of college information has been found to encourage post-secondary education (Hill, 2008).

***Peer influence.*** Study questions 1.c, and 1.d sought to understand the relationship between the peer associations of the participant and the influence the peers had on the

participant's decision to continue on to higher education. Study question number 1.c. In what ways did school social experiences encourage the English learner to continue on to higher education? and 1.d. In what ways did school social experiences discourage the English learner from continuing on to higher education? align with interview questions 4. Please tell me about your social experiences in high school, 5. In what ways did the experiences encourage you to go on to higher education? and 6. In what ways did the experiences discourage you from continuing on to higher education?

Research to support the influence of a peer group and the decision to pursue higher education comes from several sources. Major findings in a study on peer groups, and their relation to educational outcomes, were: peer groups that included friends who expressed care about their academic achievement had better educational outcomes, were less likely to drop out of high school and increased the likelihood of enrolling in higher education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997). Correlations have been found to exist between an adolescent's connectedness to a peer group and a student's adherence to the social norms of responsibility, connectedness to community and higher GPA (Scales et al., 2006). Ryan and Deci (2000) contend connections to a peer group allow for the social support that assists one in developing autonomy, competence and internal motivation of the student to persevere goals, which they maintain is the most influential factor revealing one's potential. Furthermore, a correlation has been found between the peer's decision to attend college and the individual's decision to attend (Sokatch, 2006).

The type of activities an adolescent's peer group engages in may negatively influence educational outcomes, as peer influence can lead to antisocial behavior such as delinquency and dropping out of high school. An adolescent who has friends that are interested in sexual activity

or substance use was more likely to experience academic difficulty, not attend higher education, or drop out of high school (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997).

***Family influence.*** Study question 1.e sought to explore the impact the participants family had on their decision to continue on to higher education. Study question 5, What role, if any, did family play in the English learner's decision to continue on to higher education? aligns with interview question 7. Please tell me about you family and question 8. What role if any did your family play in your decision to continue on to higher education?

Research to support the influence of family and the decision to pursue higher education comes from several sources. The National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (2007) found two of the three most influential factors in an adolescent's decision to continue on to higher education are their parent's educational attainment and parental encouragement. In most studies on family influence, the education level of the parent has been singled out as the strongest predictor of student academic success (Egalite, 2016). College-educated adults have a higher earning capacity than their non-educated peers do (Carnevale et al., 2011) and parent education level has been identified as a predictor of a child's educational outcomes (Davis-Kean, 2005).

The relationship between a parent's educational attainment and their child's academic success may be due to indirect effects, such as the parent being an educational and occupational model for the child and inspiring optimism in educational pursuits (Dubow et al., 2010). Hill & Talyor (2004) contend that the amount of time a parent spends with their child's schooling may depend on the families SES.

George Mwangi (2015) purports that the benefits gained from involvement with the adolescent's school need not occur on the school site, and that involvement with the school may occur through the use of social capital rather than utilizing the traditional form of parent involvement at the school site.

Holland (2010) contends the act of verbal communication has a profound impact on a child and may be in the form of verbal and emotional support. Affirmations have been found to contribute to the building of self-confidence in underrepresented adolescence and may take the place of formal knowledge of the college process, thereby encouraging the prospect of higher education (Holland, 2010).

Family structure plays a significant part in a child's academic success (O'Malley et al., 2014). Students living in a family structure with two parents report higher GPAs, and greater academic success. Two-parent families have been found to have the resources of time and money to provide their children (Sandefur et al. 1992). Students from two-parent families have been found to outperform their single-parent peers in math (Woessmann, 2015), and success in math is a gateway to higher education (Lucey, 2014).

Family factors that may discourage post-secondary education include parental education level that results in lower socioeconomic status than college-educated counterparts (Dubow et al., 2010). Teens who live in non-married families are less likely to graduate high school or to attend college. The exception to this has been found when the adolescent is living with their unmarried mother and at least one grandparent (Deliere & Kalil, 2002)

***Individual characteristics.*** Study question number 1.f seeks to explore the participants self-identified characteristics that encouraged or discouraged them from pursuing higher education: How did individual characteristics, if at all, encourage the high school student to pursue higher education? aligns with interview questions number 9: How would a teacher or counselor describe you, how would a peer describe you and how do you describe yourself as a student, peer, and family member?, question 10. Please fill in a graphic organizer with you at the center and attach descriptors of yourself? and question 11. Using another graphic organizer, please write the influences to your decision to continue on to higher education. Place you at the



center again and the people, or events that most influenced your decision to continue on to higher education, either as encouraging or as discouraging, closest to you. In expanding circles, place other people or experiences you have already identified or that may come to mind now, with the most impactful people or experiences being the closest to you and those of lesser influence further away from you.

Research to support the influence of personal characteristics influencing the decision to pursue higher education was drawn from two sources, the Big Five personality indicators (Trapmann et al., 2007) and the internal assets as presented by the Search Institute (Search Institute, 2012). Only one of the personality indicators, conscientiousness, has been shown to have a positive correlation with academic success (Hakimi et al., 2011) and may have more impact on academic achievement than one's intelligence (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

The four internal characteristics linked to the positive development of the adolescent are a commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity (Search Institute, 2012).

**Demographic information.** The second form of data gathering was from a demographic information form filled out by the participant prior to the interview (Appendix I). Questions on the demographic form were based upon the literature of factors that may encourage, or discourage, the English learner to pursue higher education. Participants were asked to share their living arrangement and family income during their high school years, their parents' highest education level, and the grade at which they entered into California schools. Additionally, they were asked to provide their first language, the language they use most frequently, their high school cumulative GPA, what if any Advanced Placement courses they took, and any special recognitions they may have received.

## **Content Validity**

Two forms of content validity were used for the interview instrument. The first form of content validity was an alignment of interview questions to the questions that guide this study, and to contemporary research in the field. The second form of validity was the use of experts in the field of English learners to provide feedback on the interview questions. Feedback was sought to ensure the questions are phrased as to generate responses that allow for the telling of the EL's perspective

**Expert review.** To ensure the validity of the content of the interview questions the researcher submitted the questions to two experts in the field of English language learners. The researcher requested feedback from two experts in the field of English language learners on the clarity and appropriateness of the wording to allow the participant to share their perception of factors that encouraged or discouraged the decision to continue on to higher education. The first expert has 45 years of experience working with English learners. The individual has been a teacher, principal, and county office administrator. Additionally, the individual served on the State Superintendent Transition Team, was Senior Project Director for a County Office of Education, was a member of the English Learner Advisory Committee to the California State Board of Education, and served on several state and county committees to further educational access for English learners. The second expert has over 38 years of experience as a teacher, administrator, and director of multilingual education at the county level. The individual has served on several state and regional committees including facilitating the Commission on Teacher Credentialing panel to develop a single subject English language Development credential. The researcher made appropriate edits to interview questions upon receipt of expert feedback. The feedback of the expert review included the recommendation to explore how well the student felt prepared academically and socially for higher education, and what gave the

student the confidence and skill needed to continue. The insight was valuable; however, it was not incorporated into the interview questions.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

This study utilized three forms of data collection. The primary form of data collection was the transcripts of each interview containing the responses to 9 of the 11 interview questions. Secondly, data was collected from participant-constructed graphic organizers. Lastly, data was collected from the participants demographic information stating their (a) name, (b) age, (c) the first language, (d) when the participant entered school in California, (e) secondary school of attendance and, (f) their level of language acquisition at time of graduation as indicated by their self-reporting of CELDT level.

**Interview.** The initial form of data collection was from one-on-one interviews. The interviews took place on the Esperanza Community College campus and lasted between twenty and sixty minutes each. Nine of the eleven interview questions were an oral response only. The recorded interviews were sent for transcribing at the conclusion of each participants interview process.

The participant filled in a graphic organizer for interview questions ten and eleven. The graphic organizers were analyzed under three conditions. The first was individual analysis for correlation, or lack thereof, with the participant's oral responses. The second analysis was for themes across the sample of participants and third, the responses looked for a correlation, or not, to literature.

The researcher coded each interview as the transcription became available. A code book was created in HyperREARCH3.7.3. The initial coding was to identify the factors that encouraged or discouraged the participants' decision to continue on to higher education. Subsequent coding was determined by themes that emerged from initial contact with the data.

The codebook and transcript were shared with an external coder in the field of education. The external coder was used to remove potential bias that may have come through the researcher's analysis, and to triangulate the findings of the external coder with the researcher to ensure trustworthiness. The external coder found discrepancies in how participant three was inductively coded, citing passive peer group influence specifically as a code to consider several of the responses. No other discrepancies were noted. The researcher made adjustments accordingly.

### **Data Management**

The security and confidentiality of the data were maintained through several precautions.

**Master list.** The researcher developed a master list of participants. A master list was necessary to ensure accurate triangulation of participants data collected through demographic information, transcribed interview, and anecdotal notes. The master list contained the name of the participant and the assigned pseudonym. Additional information on the master list was a row with column headers to check off for receipt by the researcher of the informed consent, demographic information, interview preference (face-to-face or virtual), and participant review of transcribed interview. The master list was kept in a passcode-protected file on the researcher's passcode protected personal computer until the conclusion of the study, July 2017.

At the conclusion of the study, the master list file was transferred to a password-protected external hard drive. The external hard drive containing the master list was kept in a separate, locked file cabinet from the password-protected hard drive, which contains the interview transcript and data analysis. Only the principal investigator had access to the hard drive password and the key to file cabinet. At the end of three years, the data will be purged from the external hard drive.

**Informed consent.** The hard copies of informed consent forms were imported into the researcher's personal, password-protected computer, and stored in a password-protected file, not labeled or embedded in folders containing information associated with the study. The hard copies of informed consent forms will remain stored in a locked file cabinet within the researcher's residence for a period of three years and then destroyed. Only the principal investigator has access to the hard drive password and the key to file cabinet.

**Demographic information.** Demographic information collected contains no personal identifying information. Reference to demographic information is made through a pseudonym. Once the principal investigator completed the data analysis; the demographic information and coded data were transferred to a password protected external hard drive and placed in a locked file cabinet. Only the principal investigator has access to the hard drive password and the key to file cabinet. At the end of three years, the data will be purged from the external hard drive.

**Interview.** Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed by Rev Transcription, an online audio transcription service accessed via an application on the researcher's iPhone (<https://www.rev.com/transcription>, n.d.). Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. No identifying information, other than gender, was included in the recording. At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher uploaded the audio file of the interview to the transcription service. The transcribed interview was sent to the researcher's email within 24 hours and the researcher sent the transcript to the participant for authentication of their transcribed responses to the interview questions. After the participant authenticated their transcribed responses to the interview questions, the researcher deleted the recorded interview from the recording device.

The interview transcript remained on the researcher's password protected, personal computer until coding and analysis of the transcript were complete. After coding and analysis of the transcript were complete, the data was transferred to a password-protected external hard drive

stored in a locked file cabinet. Only the principal investigator has the hard drive password and the key to file cabinet. At the end of three years, the data will be purged from the external hard drive.

**Graphic organizers.** The original hard copies of graphic organizers are stored in a locked personal file cabinet at the researcher's residence. At the end of three years, the graphic organizers will be destroyed.

**Destruction of data.** All data collected will be destroyed.

**Hardcopy.** All hard copy data related to this study will be shredded three years after the completion of the study and final editing, as accepted by Pepperdine University per APA requirements.

**Electronic.** Three years from the completion of this study, the researcher will destroy all electronic files associated with the collection of data from participants as set forth by the Privacy Technical Assistance Center (PTAC), a division of the U.S. Department of Education (Privacy Technical Assistance Center [PTAC], 2014). The method of data destruction will be to purge the information. Purging is a method of sanitization that applies physical or logical techniques that make the target data recovery unfeasible using currently available, state-of-the-art techniques.

## **Data Analysis**

The audio data collected through the one-on-one interviews was analyzed on multiple levels. The first level of analysis was from the transcribed interviews. The transcripts were placed into HyperResearch and a codebook was created for each variable. Analysis of questions 1-9 first utilized deductive analysis to search for the themes that are represented in the literature pertinent to this study (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). On the subsequent rounds of analysis, inductive analysis was used to identify themes that emerged. In questions 10 and 11, the participant filled in graphic organizers. The two visual representations used inductive analysis. The researcher

reviewed the transcript of question 9 and the two visual representations, looking for common themes, and created codes accordingly. The transcript of question 9 and the two visual representations created for questions 10 and 11 were analyzed based upon the emerged themes.

Data collected from question 9, was triangulated to the data collected in question 10. Data collected from questions 1-8, as well as demographic information, was triangulated to question 10. Question 11 was a sorting task, which required participants to identify people and/or events that either encouraged or discouraged them from continuing on to higher education. The identified entities were then placed in concentric circles representing the layers of influence identities in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The data collected from this sorting task was triangulated with data collected from the triangulation of questions 1-8 and the graphic organizer to construct the identity of the English learner as a college student.

The data collected from the demographic information was analyzed in two ways. The first analysis of demographic information was to compare the individual participants' responses to the literature on factors that may encourage or discourage the adolescents' decision to pursue higher education. The demographic information collected from all participants, was then analyzed collectively to look for themes that emerged for the sample.

The final level of analysis was to view the participant's responses through the perspective of the Critical Race Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and the 40 Developmental Assets.

The first level of theory-based analysis was to analyze the participants' responses through the lens of the Critical Race Theory. The analysis of this concept answered the second research question of this study, "How and in what way did language policy affect the student?"

According to CRT, laws are an exclusionary vehicle for shaping race to ensure the maintenance of property rights and U.S. laws are a result of, and produced to, maintain the

established social power dynamic (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Participant responses were analyzed for evidence of limitations in educational options due to an English only policy.

The second level of theoretical analysis was the application of the Ecological Systems Theory to examine the participant's responses for evidence of the influence relationships in the microsystem and mesosystem may have had on the participant's decision to continue on to higher education. (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

The third theoretical analysis looked for the presence of evidence to support the presence of the 40 Developmental Assets. The researcher used the 40 Developmental Assets Framework (Appendix A) as a checklist to review each participant's interview for evidence of the presence of both internal and external assets.

The analysis of the participant's responses through the lens of the Critical Race Theory answered the second research question of this study, How and in what way did language policy affect the student?

According to CRT, laws are a vehicle for shaping race to ensure property rights are maintained while being exclusionary and that U.S. laws are a result of and produced to maintain the established social power dynamic (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Participant's responses were analyzed for evidence of limitations in educational options due to an English only policy.

**Academic experiences that influence pursuit of post-secondary education.** The variable of academic factors that encouraged or discouraged the English learner's decision to continue on to higher education were created. The two main categories of this variable were Encourage and Discourage.

***Encourage.*** Under the category Encourage were sub categories of material resource and human resource availability that are identified by the National Postsecondary Education



Cooperative (2007) as positively influencing the adolescent to pursue higher education. Under material resource were two sub categories, access to college material and program placement.

Under college material were the indicators of, access to brochures, college and career center, college fairs and any categories' that arises through data analysis. Under program placement were the indicators of continuous ELD program from time of entry into CA school until graduation, appropriate program placement, being as the student has progressed in English proficiency their program has been adjusted to meet their language demand and the student received some form of primary language support during their time in the ELD program.

*Discourage.* Under the discourage category were the sub categories of material resource and human resource availability. Under material resource were two subheadings, access to college material and program placement.

Under access to college material were the indicators of limited or unlimited college information available at the site, unawareness of college career center, absence college fairs, and any categories that arises through data analysis.

Under the program heading were the indicators of erratic or inconsistent ELD program placement, no program placement, and no primary language support at any time of the schooling.

The categories identified by literature were not expansive enough to allow for all of the participant's responses and while they served as a guideline, inductive coding revealed themes specific to this study population.

**Peer influence on the decision to pursue post-secondary education.** The variable of social factors that encouraged or discouraged the English learner's decision to continue on to higher education will be created. The two main categories of this variable were Encourage and Discourage.

**Encourage.** Under the category of Encourage were the sub categories 1) express care, 2) challenge growth, 3) provide support, 4) share power, and 5) expand possibilities. The transcript was coded for the presence or absence of elements in the peer relationships that have been identified as having a positive influence the English learner to continue on to higher education (Scales & Leffert, 1999).

**Discourage.** Under the category of discourage were the subcategories research has shown, when present in one's peer group, discourage the adolescent from pursuing post-secondary education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997). These include academic difficulty, delinquency, dropping out of high school, sexual activity, substance abuse, and not planning to attend higher education. The interview transcripts were coded for the presence of each subcategory.

The categories identified by literature were not expansive enough to allow for all of the participant's responses and while they served as a guideline, inductive coding revealed themes specific to this study population.

**Family influence on the decision to pursue post-secondary education.** A category was created in the codebook for the variable of family factors that encouraged or discouraged the English learner' decision to continue on to higher education will be created. The two main categories of this variable were Encourage and Discourage.

**Encourage.** Under the category of encourage were four subcategories identified as having a positive influence on the adolescent's decision to pursue higher education: educational level of parent (Carnevale et al., 2011, Dubow et al., 2010), socioeconomic level of family (Dubow et al., 2010), parent involvement (Catsambis, 2001), and two-parent household (Sandefur et al., 1992). The interview transcripts were coded for the presence of each subcategory.

The categories identified by literature were not expansive enough to allow for all of the participant's responses, and while they served as a guideline, inductive coding revealed themes specific to this study population.

*Discourage.* Under the category of discourage were factors that, when present, have been found to discourage the adolescent from pursuing post-secondary education. The four sub categories were not having a college education (Dubow et al., 2010, Carnevale et al., 2011), low socioeconomic level (Dubow et al., 2010), single-parent household (Sandefur et al., 1992), and limited or no information on financial aid or an overestimation of the actual cost of college (Pettus, 2006).

The categories identified by literature were not expansive enough to allow for all of the participant's responses and while they served as a guideline, inductive coding revealed themes specific to this study population.

**Individual characteristics that encourage or discourage the decision to pursue post-secondary education.** A category was created in the codebook for the variable of individual characteristics that encouraged or discouraged the English learner's decision to continue on to higher education.

Under the category of personality traits the researcher identify themes and categories from the audio transcript, and both graphic representations of factors that encouraged or discouraged the decision to continue on to higher education, created by the participant.

### **Positionality of the Researcher**

The researcher holds the bias of California language policy being enacted in an attempt to limit, if not eliminate, the use of languages other than English. To bracket the positionality of the researcher, interview questions did not include mention of language policy. Analysis of transcripts included only responses to interview questions and trends that may emerge from the

participant's responses. How, and in what ways, language policy impact participants was viewed through the educational options that were available to the student during their time in secondary school.

The motivation of the researcher was to discover the factors in an English learner's environment that led to their decision to continue on to higher education without being reclassified English proficient in order to build upon the encouraging components identified. The researcher intends to share the findings with site and district leaders in the hopes of opening access to more English learners attending higher education by bolstering encouraging factors. The researcher also sought to identify and start the conversation to put a process in place to mitigate the factors on a secondary campus that discourage English learners from continuing on to higher education.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

This chapter presents the detailed findings of this study, and begins with a restatement of its purpose and research questions and provides an overview of its design. That discussion is followed by a presentation of the findings that is organized into three sections that include (a) participant demographics, (b) individual participant profiles, and (c) data analysis organized by each of the research questions.

### Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore and describe the school components (academic and social), family experiences, and individual characteristics that supported English learners' decisions to seek post-secondary education despite not reaching the classification of English proficient by high school graduation. The study also investigated the factors students identified as discouraging to their efforts to continue to post-secondary education.

The study involved an exploration of the lived experiences of seven purposely-selected community college students who continued on to higher education without reaching proficiency in English by high school graduation. The researcher sought to understand the overarching question:

1. What are the school (academic and social) experiences, family role, and individual characteristics of students who exited California high schools not yet classified as English proficient, and who continued on to higher education despite challenges?

The sub questions explored in this study were:

1. In what ways did school academic experiences encourage the English learner to continue on to higher education?

2. In what ways did school academic experiences discourage English learner from continuing on to higher education?
  3. In what ways did school social experiences encourage the English learner to continue on to higher education?
  4. In what ways did school social experiences discourage English learner from continuing on to higher education?
  5. What role, if any, did family play in English learners' decisions to continue on to higher education?
  6. How did individual characteristics, if at all, encourage the English learner to pursue higher education?
2. In what ways, if any, did language policy affect the student?

### **Research Design Overview**

This study utilized a qualitative approach and a phenomenological methodology. The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with seven community college students who graduated high school without reaching English proficiency. Student participants were recruited from one Southern California community college. The interview consisted of 11 open-ended questions: nine solicited verbal responses that were audio recorded and two required brief written responses. The audio recording was transcribed by Rev Transcription and coded in HyperResearch. Each participant also provided demographic data by completing a questionnaire prior to the start of the interview.

### **Participant Descriptive Information**

**Demographics.** The researcher provided the seven participants with a 14-question demographic questionnaire via email (Appendix I). The questionnaire solicited background information on current age, gender, the number of siblings, and family composition and income

while attending high school. Additional information collected included parents' highest level of education, grade of entrance into the California school system, first and preferred language, academic grade point average, and level of English proficiency upon high school graduation.

Appendix J indicates that 43% were male, 57% female, most lived with both parents, over one-half were from Spanish speaking homes, most entered the school district by second grade. A closer analysis indicates that participants who reported income below \$30,000 reported that their parents had lower educational attainment than did participants with family incomes that were higher. Further, students from lower income families reported more family members living in the home compared to participants who reported higher family income, and three participants in the higher income group had at least one parent who graduated from college, whereas none of those from low-income homes did.

### **Participant Profiles**

The profiles of the seven participants emerged through the collection of demographic information and the face-to-face interviews the researcher had with each participant. All information in participant profiles was self-reported and pseudonyms were used for participants' names.

**Participant 1: Alvaro.** Alvaro is a 21-year-old male who is the second in his immediate family to attend college. His parents immigrated to the United States when his older sister was six, and neither parent graduated high school. Alvaro entered the California school system in kindergarten and did not know his English level upon high school graduation. His first language is Spanish, although he reports he speaks English more frequently.

Alvaro described his high school academic experience as difficult, primarily due to English classes. He did not pass any English classes until his senior year, and he cited formal writing as his greatest obstacle. Alvaro reported a reliance on peers to help him with course work

because he viewed them as more helpful than teachers in providing writing support. In addition to formal writing challenges, he reported that his teachers spoke too quickly so he could not understand them. Having attended California schools since kindergarten, Alvaro attributed the lack of language support he received to the perception teachers may have had of his English language inability. However, he considered himself lucky, as he understood some of what was said in his classes, unlike his Spanish-speaking friends.

Although Alvaro struggled academically, he never discussed his English-only class placement with a school counselor. He expressed that there was a benefit to his mainstreaming even without primary language support – he felt that English support classes would have slowed down his English language acquisition. Still, Alvaro struggled academically and did not think about attending college until college representatives came to the school during his junior and senior years. The representatives reassured him he would get support for his writing and that he could start at an appropriate academic level.

Alvaro said he experienced two sets of peers: the group who spoke their primary language and the group that spoke English. He described the differences in interacting with these peer groups as experiencing two disparate worlds. One group was fluent in English and did well in school, whereas the English learners struggled academically. Alvaro questioned whether the teachers reached out to the English learners about attending college, as he held the impression that the school focused on English-proficient students who would likely go to college, while ignoring those who could not keep up. He did not believe that teachers were at fault for not taking the time to support language learners, since they had to ensure that the required material for each class was covered.

Alvaro identified his family as the most significant factor in the decision to continue on to higher education. His parents, who immigrated to the United States with his older sister, were



pivotal in encouraging their daughter to get a higher education, and they also played a large role in Alvaro's motivation to attend college. His sister provided both the assurance he could get a degree and answers to all of his college questions. Alvaro also identified a close friend as an additional significant influence. That friend told Alvaro he was taking him to Esperanza Community College (ECC), a school he had never heard of so that they could register together. Alvaro felt that the registration staff was supportive and that ECC would give him the needed step forward in his college career.

Alvaro presented himself as a thoughtful and focused young adult. He plans to pursue a career in criminal justice. A recurring theme throughout the interview was his concern for the academic support provided to English learners, sharing that it was "sad" for him to witness the lack of support from teachers and the resulting discouragement of his English learning peers.

**Participant 2: Beatriz.** Beatriz is a 20-year-old female who is the second in her family to attend college. While in high school, she lived with both parents who are El Salvadorian immigrants, her older brother, and younger sister. Her first and most used language is Spanish. Her father had some college education, whereas her mother did not graduate high school because she needed to work to contribute to her parents' household income. Beatriz entered the California school system in the fifth grade and, as with all the participants, was not aware of her proficiency level upon high school graduation. After community college, she intends to transfer to a university in the California State University system and aspires to become a special education teacher.

Beatriz described her high school experience as "typical." She stressed that despite some peer issues, which she called "nonsense," her high school experience was positive. She remained focused on her schoolwork, as she knew what she wanted to get through school quickly and attend college immediately after high school graduation. Beatriz credits three people for the

encouragement to attend college: a teacher, a counselor, and herself. Having previously taught her older brother, a science teacher contacted Beatriz and continually inquired about her college plans and kept college a topic of conversation during her entire high school experience. Beatriz also credited her counselor for the keeping her academically on track to meet college entrance requirements. As her parents did not discuss college, Beatriz took it upon herself to learn about colleges beginning in the ninth grade. She attended college fairs to get general information and was impressed with the time and effort the colleges put into student recruitment. As Beatriz was learning about college, she also noticed the unequal treatment students received from a teacher she had twice in high school. She stated, "...like if you look, Latino, then you wouldn't get an expression or a specific good experience I guess from that teacher." While most teachers would challenge her, Beatriz felt this teacher was an obstacle to college. Although her parents did not discuss going to college, Beatriz credits her mom with providing the most support. "She's my biggest cheerleader. She wants me to do better, she wants everything that she did not get to have. She wants me to have it."

Beatriz presented herself as a spirited and confident young adult. A recurring aspect of her personality that emerged during the interview was her self-reliance. She initiated learning about and identifying a college, put an end to a relationship with a peer group that did not support her needs, sought a counselor for college information, and is clear about her college and career goals.

**Participant 3: Cisco.** While Cisco is the oldest and only participant self-identified as gifted, he met the study's criteria of not acquiring enough credits to earn an Associate's Degree or transfer to a four-year university. He is 27 years old and his chronological distance from high school did not lessen his recollection of events; on the contrary, it added depth to his responses.

Cisco lives with both parents and has an older brother and sister who do not live in his home. He frequently interacts with his siblings. Cisco entered California schools in kindergarten and was identified for the Gifted and Talented Education program in fifth grade. Spanish is his first language and he speaks English more frequently than Spanish and was not aware of his English proficiency level upon exiting high school.

Cisco did not believe he applied himself in high school and described his high school experience as follows:

My education in high school was just more or less just me, my lack of motivation. It wasn't really bad teachers or bad education per se, but it was mostly me just not being motivated, not paying attention. I hated going to school. I hated waking up. Just all that, what most people go through I guess. That's high school for me in a nutshell.

Experiences that discouraged Cisco from continuing on to post-secondary education included his cynicism of the educational system. He did not believe in the relevance of some required high school curriculum. He felt that courses with little or no significance to future educational or career goals were "pushed" on students. Cisco opined that the rigidity of the current educational system does little to motivate students to engage with learning; rather students take courses to fulfill requirements that will have no importance other than to college admission.

Further discouragement to his pursuit of a higher education was the concern that college would be as cliquish as his high school experience. Having groups called the rockers, metal heads, pretty boys, and emos, Cisco stated everyone in high school hung out with their own group, which did not appeal to him as he felt the segregation of cliques limited one's individuality. He acknowledged that he felt the most comfortable with the Bisas, the Spanish-speaking group comprised of recent Mexican immigrants with whom he played handball.

Cisco could not identify what school experiences encouraged him to pursue a higher education. He felt that college was something that an individual was supposed to do and did not want to be viewed by family and society as an “outcast” or a “loser.” Cisco described continuing on to higher education as a cultural expectation and did not question whether he would attend college.

Cisco presents himself as an observant and introspective young adult. While he did not elaborate on his plans after college, he spoke often of the need for individualism and independent thought that he felt the educational system failed to encourage.

**Participant 4: Danika.** Danika is an 18-year-old female who lived in a two-parent, multigenerational household with one sibling while in high school. She is a first-generation Sri Lankan, and her father is a college graduate and her mother holds a professional degree. Danika’s first language is Sinhalese and her most frequently spoken language is English. Danika entered the California school system in kindergarten and moved between districts during her schooling. She was not aware of her language proficiency level upon high school graduation.

Danika entered high school as an honor student, but as time progressed, peer influences negatively affected her academic standing. Math and English were cited as her most challenging subjects. As other participants stated, Danika had two sets of peers – a group motivated to do well in school and one that did not place much emphasis on academic pursuits. Danika did not identify any academic experiences that encouraged her to pursue a higher education. Instead, she credited her peers and parents for influencing her to attend college and indicated that her mother was particularly encouraging.

Danika found the school environment to be discouraging of the pursuit of higher education and spoke of a specific set of peers who were not motivated to focus on school; rather, “...they just wanted to party.” In retrospect, she felt that her unmotivated peers may not have

believed they could attend higher education because of the cost, and therefore, were not focused. Danika acknowledged she may have been more academically focused had counselors reached out to her. However, she did not elaborate on what type of support would have been beneficial.

Despite the current researcher's effort to put the participant at ease, Danika appeared uncomfortable and responded to all interview questions with brief responses. She appeared distracted, frequently scanning the environment of the interview location on the ECC campus. Danika did not elaborate on her post-community college plans.

**Participant 5: Fatima.** Fatima is an 18-year-old female who emigrated from Syria to California at the end of her eighth-grade year. She resides with her mother and has two older brothers. Fatima's mother is a college graduate and her father, who remains in the Middle East, has some college experience. Arabic is her first language and English is her preferred language. As with the other participants, Fatima was not aware of her English proficiency level upon high school graduation.

Fatima recalled an enjoyable high school experience in which she was well known and felt supported both academically and socially. She took courses she enjoyed and identified no discouraging factors regarding her academic experiences.

Fatima acknowledged that her social interactions increased as she progressed in grade level, which she felt was a benefit to her English acquisition. Fatima identified help from peers and the supportive college-going environment as encouragement to continue on to college. However, she credited her mother and older brothers as primarily responsible for her pursuit of a college education. As she spoke of her brothers her eyes watered, and she described them as "fatherly figures."

The researcher found Fatima to be confident and cheerful during the interview. She spoke animatedly, smiling often as she recounted her secondary school experience. Her

education goal is to become an architect and return to her hometown where she aspires to assist in the rebuilding of war-torn Syria.

**Participant 6: Galena.** Galena is a 19-year-old female. Her family emigrated from Mexico and she entered California schools in the second grade. While in high school, she lived in a multigenerational home with her, grandmother, two older brothers and both parents, neither of whom graduated high school. Spanish is her first and primary language and Galena was not aware of her English proficiency level upon high school graduation.

Due to fear of interacting with others at the beginning of her high school experience and the resulting isolation, Galena described her entrance into high school as tough. She stated that she kept to herself, not engaging with peers or teachers. She described her reluctance to speak with teachers this way: “And then, with my teachers, I was very scared to talk to them because I didn’t know how to approach them. I had a more difficult accent, so they couldn’t really understand me, or I had trouble communicating with them.” In addition to her fear of communication with teachers, she felt that they discouraged her attempts to speak and write English through both public and written comments. Galena’s peers laughed at her for not speaking English properly and were not supportive of efforts to learn the language.

However, a peer experience led to her academic growth when a peer encouraged her to become more involved in school, which Galena identified as a turning point in her high school experience. She stated, “And there was this one girl that motivated me, she was telling me you should join, it helps. It gets you more involved; you have more communications amongst other people. I was like, ‘I don’t know, I guess I’ll give it a try.’” Galena credited the peer for both locating tutors for writing and language support and facilitating entering into school activities. A combination of language support and broadening social experiences bolstered Galena’s confidence – and as her confidence increased, she engaged in school activities.

The academic and peer support she received at school was not replicated in her home environment. Galena's family did not support her desire to pursue a higher education. Her two older brothers had dropped out of high school, and her parents expressed their doubt she could handle the challenges of college. Despite the lack of support, she was determined to be the change in her family and go to college, as represented in the following:

They were kind of tough on me; they were saying that you're going through a very tough challenge; they were scared I was not going to do it on my own. Because my parents, too, they thought they're not gonna have money for me to go to school and everything, and I was like...And then it made me concerned. I was like, well, I know my brothers couldn't do it, but then I could probably work and do all these things like scholarships and all this, but I was like, but then at the same time I was like, I don't know if I'm going to be able to do it by myself. Because I wasn't having that support from my family.

The researcher found Galena to be reflective, candid, and passionate in the retelling of her high school experiences. She is on track to transfer to a University of California campus in the Fall of 2017. Her goal is to become a social worker so that she can help people and let them know they are not alone in their struggles.

**Participant 7: Hoon.** Hoon is a 19-year-old male who entered California schools in the first grade when his parents emigrated from Korea. Although Korean is his first language, English is his preferred one. Both his parents graduated college and Hoon lived with only his father throughout high school. He moved between schools and between districts during his school experience and was not aware of his language proficiency level at high school graduation.

Hoon had a positive academic experience in high school, which he credited to being close with his teachers. He believed it was motivation from his teachers that provided encouragement to continue on to higher education. Hoon also cited positive peer experiences in high school as

playing an encouraging role. He indicated that spending time with like-minded peers through high school helped to reinforce the focus on academic achievement and attending college.

Although he admits he and his peers drifted away from studying more than they should have, one friend would inevitably refocus the others and they would resume attending to their academics.

Hoon was predominantly influenced by his father stating, "...I'd say, I learned a lot from my dad because he was the only one that taught me how to like grow as a man and stuff."

Hoon's father had a deep respect for education and Hoon felt he had no choice but to pursue a higher education. The only barrier to pursuing higher education was devoting too much time to social activities and not giving academics full attention.

The researcher found Hoon to be thoughtful and respectful in his responses. He plans to transfer to a four-year university and continue in higher education until he earns a Master's Degree.

### **Research Question Findings**

This section presents participants' responses to the interview questions. The interview questions corresponded to specific guiding research questions as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

#### *Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions*

Research Sub-Question (RQ)	Interview Question (IQ)
RQ 1: In what ways did school academic experiences encourage the English learner to continue on to higher education?	IQ 1: Please tell me about your academic experiences in high school.
RQ 2: In what ways did school academic experiences discourage the English learner from continuing on to higher education?	IQ 2: Which of the experiences encouraged you to go on to higher education? IQ 3: Which of the experiences discouraged you from going on to higher education?

(Continued)



Research Sub-Question (RQ)	Interview Question (IQ)
RQ 3: In what ways did school social experiences encourage the English learner to continue on to higher education?	<p>IQ 4: Please tell me about your social experiences in high school.</p> <p>IQ 5: Which of the experiences encouraged you to go on to higher education?</p>
RQ 4: In what ways did school social experiences discourage the English learner from continuing on to higher education?	IQ 6: Which of the experiences discouraged you from continuing on to higher education?
RQ 5: What role, if any, did family play in the English learner's decision to continue on to higher education?	<p>IQ 7: Please tell me about your family.</p> <p>IQ 8: What role, if any, did your family play in your decision to continue on to higher education?</p>
RQ 6: How did individual characteristics, if at all, encourage the high school student to pursue higher education?	<p>IQ 9: How would a teacher or counselor describe you? How would a peer describe you? How would your family describe you? How do you describe yourself as a student, peer and family member?</p> <p>IQ 10: Please fill in a graphic organizer with you at the center and to the center attach descriptors of yourself. Using another graphic organizer, please write the influences for your decision to continue on to higher education.</p> <p>IQ 11: Place yourself at the center again and write the people, or events, that most affected your decision to continue on to higher education, either as encouraging or as discouraging, closest to you. In the expanding circles, write in other people or experiences you have identified or that may come to mind now, with the most impactful people or experiences being the closest to you and those of lesser influence further away from you.</p>

The researcher held one face-to-face interview with each of the seven participants in May of 2017. Data on the factors that encouraged or discouraged the participant are presented in five sections; (a) academic influences, (b) social influences, (c) family influences, (d) personal characteristics, and (e) the level of influence each participant ascribed to factors that either encouraged or discouraged the participant to continue onto higher education. Findings for each

interview question are presented separately and begin with a table of the themes that arose from participants' responses. The table is followed by a summary of each of participant's responses. The responses are organized into categories that reflect themes that emerged from common patterns of experiences.

**Academic factors.** The first three interview questions sought to understand the academic factors that either encouraged or discouraged the participant's decision to continue on to higher education. Interview questions 1-3 align with the guiding research questions 1.1 (In what ways did school academic experiences encourage English learners to continue on to higher education) and 1.2 (In what ways did the school academic experiences discourage English learners from continuing on to higher education?).

*Question 1.* This interview question asked participants to discuss their academic experiences in high school. Table 4 presents the four themes that arose through inductive coding of responses to this question: (a) challenging, (b) positive, (c) product of personal motivation, and (d) product of peer influence. The academic experience of challenging was defined by the participants as experiencing difficulty passing classes due to their limited English. A positive experience was described as having no struggle with passing classes. A product of personal motivation was acceptance of the participant's personal responsibility for not putting in sufficient effort required to pass classes. A product of peer influence was the participant not being academically successful due to over involvement with peers and insufficient focus on academic success.

Alvaro and Galena indicated their academic experiences provided language challenges that were difficult to overcome, whereas Beatriz, Fatima, and Hoon shared they had positive academic experiences. Cisco was the only participant to express that he recognized his lack of

motivation influenced his academic experience and Danika accepted peer influence as affecting her academic success.

Table 4

*Themes Associated With Academic Experiences While in High School*

Themes	Alvaro	Beatriz	Cisco	Danika	Fatima	Galena	Hoon
Challenging	x					x	
Positive		x			x		x
Product of personal motivation			x				
Product of peer influence				X			

The following provides examples of how these themes were expressed by the participants.

*Beatriz.* Beatriz stated that she primarily had a positive academic experience. “For the most part, high school was good. I mean it’s just typical high school where you go in to do what you’re going to do and then you come out when you graduate.”

*Fatima.* Fatima summarized her high school experience as being positive:

I mean, I think I had a very good academic experience. I was more; there were so many options for me to pick from, to choose my classes. I loved how I could choose my classes and really do what I was interested in. Just overall, I think I had a good academic experience.

*Hoon.* Hoon shared that communication and having a good relationship with teachers contributed to a positive academic experience, which resulted in a sense of support in achieving academic goals.

I learned a lot from my teachers. Because I always wanted to get close to my teachers.

Like, I felt that was the best way to like, get help from them and communicate with them.

So I felt like I learned a lot through communicating with my teachers. They helped me with my academics through that way and like, yeah, I'll be able to go through high school by communicating with my teachers.

Both Alvaro and Galina reported experiencing challenges due to their limited English.

*Alvaro.* Alvaro shared his challenges related to formal writing and understanding what his teacher was saying:

My academic experience in high school - I guess you could say were tough a little bit with English classes I guess. I mean I would never completely pass a full year of English, except for my last year, my senior year. But I would always had [*sic*] trouble with essays and learning how to do everything in a formal way, and I think that was the hardest part of school.

Alvaro later shared he felt the teacher spoke quickly and he was not able to understand all that was presented in class. He added, "Maybe in high school I thought I would get a little bit more help than I got in high school because I sometimes felt like I didn't get... Well, me and my friends, too."

*Galena.* Galena experienced challenges with both peers and teachers due to her limited English:

My academic experience in high school was very tough at first, going into [my] Freshman year in high school because I was scared because I didn't know anybody. I was very isolated because I didn't really make any friends. Because of the past of what happened. And then my teachers, I was very scared to talk to them because I had a more difficult accent, so they couldn't really understand me, or I had trouble communicating with them.

*Cisco.* Cisco claimed personal motivation dictated the high school academic experience:

My education in high school was just me, my lack of motivation; it wasn't really bad teachers or bad education per se, but it was mostly just me not being motivated, not paying attention.

*Danika.* Danika stated peer influences distracted her from focusing on her academic success and consequentially her grades dropped:

I started off an honor student. I did do well, but then as time went on, I got more [sic] influenced by my friends, and it became a little bit harder. I think all subjects.”

**Summary.** Question one allowed for each participant to share an overall reflection of his or her high school experience. Three participants described their high school years as a positive experience and had no difficulty passing classes. Two participants identified the English language as a barrier to their academic achievement in high school. One participant noted a lack of motivation to be academically successful impacted their high school experience and one participant believed their high school experience to be a product of peer influence overshadowing academic pursuits.

**Question 2.** The second interview question asked students about the school-based factors that encouraged their pursuit of a higher education. Table 5 presents the four themes that reflect those factors in the academic setting that encouraged the participant to continue on to higher education. The themes that emerged were teachers, counselors, rigor of courses and the school environment. The theme of teachers includes both the identification of an individual teacher that provided support or collectively teachers who were instrumental in providing encouragement to the participant. Counselors were referred to as both high school counselors and college recruitment counselors. The participant defined rigorous courses as mainstream content level courses that provided no English language development support. The school environment

included the collective influence of staff and students welcoming of an English learner who was also a refugee.

As indicated in the table, 3 of 7 participants expressed that one or more teachers played a prominent role in their pursuit of a higher education. The second most common theme was the role of counselors, as providing awareness about higher education. Finally, Cisco and Danika did not identify a factor or aspect to school that encouraged her to seek a higher education.

Table 5

*Themes Associated With Academic Factors That Encourage Continuing to Higher Education*

Theme	Alvaro	Beatriz	Cisco	Danika	Fatima	Galena	Hoon
Teachers		x				x	x
Counselor	x	x				x	
School environment	x				x		
None identified			x	X			

*Teachers.* Teachers emerged as a prominent theme in regards to the school factors that contributed to participants' desire to attend college. Some participants found an individual teacher to be most inspirational, whereas others made reference to teachers in general or a few specific teachers. Beatriz provided a solid example of how a specific teacher influenced her academic success and pursuit of college. She said:

I think it was myself. It wasn't so much that my parents told me that. They didn't bring up college a lot, but I brought it up myself. I made it a point to go to the college fairs whenever they had them. Even though I was in ninth grade, I went to the college fairs even to look...My wonderful teacher that I had in 7<sup>th</sup>-grade science...he would just push

me and always ask me like, “Hey, what college are you starting to look at?” and stuff.

He would always just remind me here and there like, “Hey, you’re almost in tenth grade.

You’re in twelfth grade.” He’ll always be the person that encouraged me the most.

Hoon also found the role of teachers to be instrumental to his school success and desire to attend college. However, for him, multiple teachers were key to his motivation, as reflected in the following statement:

Experiences that led me to higher education. I would say, just motivation from my teachers, and because like I was, I kind of looked up to my teachers because some of them had like education from Stanford and like higher Universities, So I like, was very motivated by that, which led me to like, want to do higher education.

Galena found the support from teachers in a less conventional way. Her confidence to continue on to higher education developed through the writing and other support she received from teachers who were not her own, which she explains here:

Then they were some teachers, I actually had to go to teachers that weren’t my personal teachers because my friends would tell me about them, so I was okay, I’ll go talk to them.

They were actually nice teachers that had patience with me - they stayed with me after school and they actually helped me out a lot.

*Counselors.* Like teachers, counselors also provided encouragement for some participants. Alvaro indicated that along with class placements, counselors influenced his decision to continue on to higher education:

Well, I wasn't ... I really didn't think I was going to go to college until my junior, senior year when people started coming over and talking about it, and I was like, "I'm struggling in high school. I'm going to struggle more in college, so why would I go?" And then people came over, and then counselors, too. I had this one counselor, he reached out to

me, and he would tell me like, "Don't worry. If you go to community college or any college, they'll help you. You'd start at your own level, not like in high school, where they almost put everybody in the same level at certain times." And that kind of encouraged me too. I was like, "Maybe I could do college." And yeah, academically, I think that's what pushed me too - my counselor and people coming over and telling me like, "Yeah, it's a different environment. You're not going to be left behind. You could do it if you take it slowly, like by the year classes."

*School environment.* Participants indicated that a few different aspects to the school environment encouraged their interest in attending college. These included taking specific classes or being in an encouraging and demanding classroom environment as well as general school support. Alvaro shared that placement in mainstream classes despite his limited English challenged him to keep up with the non-English learner students, as reflected in the following statement:

I mean, I think that's what pushed me more because since my friends would be in the other classes and yeah, they would learn, there would be help for them, but I guess if I was in the other class, it would slow me down a bit. Because being in normal classes, it'd [*sic*] push me to be like "I need to understand. I need to catch up." So being in normal classes would kind of push me more too.

Alvaro clarified what he meant by normal classes in this way. "Yeah, mainstream classes. Those classes pushed me, like you have to be...right now everyone's at this level, so try to catch up. And I would, I would try to learn everything to catch up." Fatima also felt the school environment played a role in her decision to pursue college, but she did not emphasize just one school factor that was encouraging. Instead, she felt the in general her school supported her efforts to do well and to pursue a college education. She said, "Definitely, my school was



very supportive of continuing to higher education, and doing what you love, and all that stuff. The faculty, my family, they were all supportive.”

*Summary.* The second interview question asked students about the school-based factors that encouraged their pursuit of a higher education. Five of the seven participants identified one of three themes in their high school academic experience as encouraging factors to pursue higher education. The themes that emerged were teachers, counselors, and the overall school environment. The participants identified either the impact of an individual teacher or the collective impact of teachers on their decision to continue on to post-secondary education. Participants both high school and college recruitment counselors as providing information on higher education options and encouraging to the participant’s decision to continue on to post-secondary education. Additionally identified as an encouraging factor to continuing on to higher education was the school environment, expressly stated as rigorous classes or the family like environment. Finally, two participants did not identify any school-based factor as encouraging their decision to continue on to higher education.

*Question 3.* The third interview question was in reference to academic experiences that discouraged participants from continuing on to higher education. Table 6 depicts the identified academic experiences that discouraged participants from continuing on to higher education. Two themes or factors emerged, which were specific teacher comments that discouraged them from believing they could continue on to higher education, and various aspects of the school environment as a whole. Two participants did not indicate any factors that discouraged them from doing well in school and pursuing higher education.

Table 6

*Themes Associated With Academic Experiences That Discourage Continuing to Higher Education*

Theme	Alvaro	Beatriz	Cisco	Danika	Fatima	Galena	Hoon
Teacher comments	x	x				x	
Academic setting			x	x		x	
N/A					x		X

*Teacher comments.* Alvaro, Beatriz, and Galena identified negative teacher comments as a discouraging factor to continuing on to higher education, perhaps best illustrated by Alvaro, when he stated:

I guess the teachers would sometimes say, “If you’re having trouble here catching up on your essays and homework, it’s going to be harder for you to get into college.” So that would kind of discourage me. I would be like “Well if I can’t catch up here in high school, then college is going to be... Wow. Maybe college is not a level I can reach or something. It would be too much.”

Beatriz discussed that although some teachers were supportive, just a single negative teacher can reduce a student’s motivation to do well in school. She found one teacher to be particularly discouraging, which she believes is related to the teacher’s racial biases. Beatriz provides an example of that teacher’s negative comments when she stated:

Around the ninth grade, I started noticing that a specific teacher in my high school has started [*sic*] treating some of the people differently and stuff. It was one of those experiences where it was like a little, you could tell, it was a little bit racist. Like if you look, Latina, then you wouldn’t get an expression, or a specific good experience, I guess

from the teacher. It would be different and it was starting to get noticeable. I had this teacher twice, two times. It was kind of a setback where I had good teachers that would push me and then I had the one teacher that kind of, I made two steps forward getting excited for college, and then one step back.

Galena had a similar experience with teachers. She also felt some teachers were highly supportive, while others ignored her or were impatient, making it hard for her to learn or be motivated in school. She indicated that repeatedly receiving negative comments made her doubt her ability to succeed. She discussed that in the following comment:

And then I noticed that some teachers that I had, they would not have patience for me, and so I struggled more with my class grades because I feel like they wouldn't pay attention to me. And I tried asking for help, but then same thing. They'd tell me something and I'd be like, "I still don't get it, can you explain it slower or slow down or something?" And they didn't have the patience with me... It was just bad. Those moments where the teachers would tell me that you won't be able to succeed or do better on a certain essay because my process, how I did pretty bad, they kept pointing out a bunch of things and I was like... Well, it got me thinking, "Okay if they're saying that I can't do it, I guess I can't."

*Academic setting.* Danika found the school environment to be generally discouraging, which made her feel as though she was not capable of continuing on to college. This is best reflected in her declaration:

I think my environment. At the school that I was in, there were a lot of people that wouldn't pay attention to it. Or, I guess they would say like I'm not good enough to be pursuing more higher education.

Cisco viewed the academic setting as being discouraging in a way that is different from that of Danka. He criticized the educational system's support in pursuing college when he stated:

A lot of the educational system seems kind of fixed to me. Not very open to new ideas. Just the way the system is kind of set up. It's not that it doesn't allow for it, it's just difficult for the progress to be made at the speed that it should be made when all these other things, all the other factors, kind of...the system essentially, the educational system, kind of puts a strain on everyone's individuality of their thinking, you know?

Galena shared several aspects of her academic experiences that were discouraging to her continuing on to higher education. The language barrier making course work difficult, lack of academic support, students teasing her attempts at using the English language and teacher comments. She shared the combination of discouraging factors this way:

I guess you could say it would be the students who would make fun of me in class with the teachers putting me on the spot and the students actually laughing and not even being supportive of me when you'd expect them to be like, oh, it's okay, we can help you. They wouldn't even offer me help. I guess that was the thing that I didn't feel supported.

**Summary.** The third interview question sought to identify academic experiences that discouraged participants from continuing on to higher education. Two themes emerged, specific teacher comments and various aspects of the school environment as a whole. Discouraging teacher comments made the participant question their academic ability to continue on to higher education. Aspects of the school environment identified as discouraging to continuing to higher education included interference of the instructional program by academically unmotivated peers, the required courses students must take to graduate and the lack of support from both teachers

and peers. Two participants, Fatima and Hoon, did not indicate any factors that discouraged them from doing well in school and to pursue higher education.

**Peer influence.** The second set of interview questions (numbers 4-6), align with guiding research question 1.3, which focuses on ways the school academic experience encouraged participants to continue on to higher education, and question 1.4, which asked participants about the ways the school social experience discouraged them from continuing on to higher education. In this series of questions, the researcher sought to explore the importance of the social experiences to English learners' decisions to pursue higher education.

**Question 4.** The fourth question asked participants to talk about their social experiences in high school. Table 7 summarizes participants' responses to the question. The three themes that emerged were (a) interacting with two or more peer groups that were different either in regards to language (English speaking and own primary language group) or in another way, (b) limited social engagement on the school campus, and (c) positive peer experiences. As indicated in the table, three participants shared they went between two very different peer groups, two participants acknowledged limited social interactions in high school, and two described positive social experiences in the school setting.

*Table 7*

*Themes Associated With Social Experience in High School*

Themes	Alvaro	Beatriz	Cisco	Danika	Fatima	Galena	Hoon
Two or more peer groups	x		x	x			
Limited social engagement		x				x	
Positive peer experiences					x	x	x

*Two or more peer groups.* Two of the three participants who talked about interactions with two or more notably different peer groups, Alvaro and Cisco, shared that they traveled regularly between their primary language groups and English-speaking peer groups. They described the group as being different not just in terms of language, as reflected in Alvaro's statement, "Well I guess you could say I experienced both worlds because I had friends who didn't know a lot of English and I had friends who were fluent and were doing really good in school."

Cisco identified multiple peer groups in his high school and discussed his preference for the group that spoke his primary language. He declared:

I've been turned off by that stuff forever. I still am. All the different cliques and groups. So what I found myself doing was hanging out in the handball courts...What was interesting about the handball courts is that it was mostly [a] Spanish-speaking student population there playing handball during nutrition and lunch. A lot of kids had just recently come from Mexico. So at our school, they called them Bisas...So essentially I would hang out with them...And I remember every once and a while I would go up there to the quad area where everyone would hang out in their different groups.

According to Cisco, the quad area was where the cliques would hang out and he appeared to be conflicted about it. He shared how his English-only friends would try to encourage him to stay up in that area and hang out with them, as he related in this statement:

They never actually said it, you could just sense it. And they would try to get me to hang out up there, but I would talk with them for a little bit, but then five minutes is up, I've spoken to my friends...So I went right back down and hung out with these quote-unquote Bisas and we would talk Spanish all the time.

Danika similarly shared that she went between two different groups on her high school campus, but did not mention whether the groups differed in the language spoken. She said, “I think some of my friends were very motivated in school, and some of them were not. So they had like two different sides to it.”

*Limited social engagement.* Beatriz and Galena stated they had minimal social relationships at school. Beatriz specifically mentioned she was not very social and stayed to herself because she felt it was better to be on her own, as she reflects on below:

Like I stated earlier, I wasn't really open. There was some issues with some girls that had just been nonsense so I decided to keep to myself, in my own bubble and not focus too much...I was just trying to get in and out as fast as I could and just do my thing because I mean, that's what high school is there for. In the end, a lot of people that were your friends in high school didn't really follow you to college anyway. So that's why I just did it...It was good, my social experience for the most part.

Galena had similar social experiences, at least early in her high school education. She started her high school with limited social interactions due to the fear of peer judgment. She said:

I didn't really have friends in high school. I was scared to make friends, just because of knowing how they might act, or react with me and stuff. So that was tough for me...

Yeah, they're [social experiences] bad. I was scared to talk to people.

*Positive peer experiences.* Three participants, Fatima, Galena, and Hoon shared they had positive peer experiences. Fatima believed that those positive relationships with peers assisted in her English acquisition and adjusting to life in the United States. She stated:

I found this out about high school. I got the higher level, or the higher grade I was, the more social I was with my peers. And I think it was a great experience...Everyone, they knew who I am. And I think, and, I don't know, I just kind of had a really good social

experience, which defiantly made my, also English learning experience a lot easier and adjusting to life here was much easier. Of course, it took time; it wasn't my Freshman year, right away. It took time to develop the relationships with my peers.

Galena started her high school experience with a limited social interaction due to the fear of peer judgment. Her fear diminished when a friend encouraged her to become more engaged in school activities, as she indicated when she said: "And there was this one girl that motivated me, she was telling me you should join, it helps. It gets you more involved; you have more communication amongst other people. I was like, I don't know, I'll give it a try."

Hoon reported his social experiences were positive, because of the closeness of the peer group. He mentioned:

Social experiences; so I always had like a peer group, like a clique that I always hung out with every single day. So like, I wasn't too much of the type of person who would like to go out and seek new friends. But I always like, tend to like to stay with my own group.

**Summary.** Question four asked participants to share their social experiences in high school. Three themes that emerged from the responses. The first theme, identified by three participants, was interacting with two or more peer groups that were different either in regards to language (English speaking and own primary language group) or in another way. The second theme, identified by two participants, was their limited social engagement on the school campus. Lastly, the third theme, identified by two participants was an overall positive peer experience.

**Question 5.** The fifth interview question asked participants to identify the social experiences that encouraged them to continue on to higher education. Peers are thought to encourage continuing on to higher education by expressing care, challenging growth, providing support, sharing power and expanding possibilities (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Table 8 illustrates the social experiences identified as having an encouraging effect on participants' decision to



continue on to higher education. Peers emerged as especially important to encourage participants to pursue a higher education. However, two distinct peer themes emerged from the data: individual peer influence and peer group influences. Three participants identified a group of peers that was influential to their decision to continue to higher education, while two identified one specific peer rather than a group of peers as being pivotal in their encouragement to continue with their education. Only one participant identified the lack of social experiences as an important contributor to her decision to continue on to college and two interviewees identified their belief that societal expectations were an encouraging factor.

Table 8

*Themes Associated With Social Experience That Encouraged Pursuing Higher Education*

Social encouragement	Alvaro	Beatriz	Cisco	Danika	Fatima	Galena	Hoon
Peer group support	x			x	x		x
Specific Peer	x					X	

*Peers.* Alvaro provided a solid example of the theme of peer group support, which is consistent with the element of peer encouragement through expanding possibilities. He shared that that one particular group of peers provided encouragement to pursue a higher education. He stated:

So then I would hang out with people who were doing really good in school, that when I would hear about college. And I would hear about the GPA and how important it is to have a high GPA, or how important it is to pass your classes or how important college is, and that the Bachelors and Associates is [*sic*] what that brings you. So I guess you could say when I was with them, I would be motivated, I would be like, “Okay, yeah. College

is the route for me, and I kind of need college in my life if I want to do the thing that I would want to be.”

Alvaro also identified a specific peer who he said influenced his decision to continue his educational path. He said:

Like when it came to ECC, one of my friends told me like, “You should come with me. I’m signing up to register.” And I’m like, “To where?” And he told me Esperanza, and I had no idea where Esperanza was, ECC, and I was like...I knew I was going to register but he was just like, “Just come right now. Might as well do it right now so that way if you decide to go, you’d be ready.” And I was like, “Maybe. Maybe yes, maybe not.” And then he encouraged me to...Like “Come on. Come with me.” And I signed up. I did every step.

Like Alvaro, Galena identified a specific peer who provided support. Her friend encouraged her to become more active in school, and the increased school involvement facilitated her English language acquisition. She said, “And so I guess that girl, she was, you could say we became really close. She actually helped me be more active in school. She's the one that helped me with other teachers as well.”

Danika similarly credited peers as supporting her pursuit of higher education. She discussed it in the context of academic struggles. She said peers helped when her grades and confidence was down. They helped her believe she could do better, as reflected in this quote: “They would just encourage me and say that this is not the only thing you can do.”

Fatima explained her supportive peer experience this way:

I mean all my friends, mainly because our school encouraged us to pursue our education, go to good school, and everyone around me was very passionate about going up there.

And hardly anyone slacked off or didn’t care about just going somewhere in life, which

defiantly encouraged me of course. Whenever it's around you, it definitely affects, it affects what you think so that definitely helped me a lot.

Hoon also credited his peer group for the encouragement to continue on to higher education, which he believes was due to their shared goals. Hoon commented, "Honestly, they're alike, we all had similar goals. Like we want to like, like graduate with a BA and follow to a Masters after that. So like, having a, having friends, with like similar goals like really like, motivated me to continue on with my education."

**Summary.** The fifth interview question asked participants to identify the experiences that encouraged them to continue on to higher education. Peers emerged as especially important to encourage participants to pursue a higher education. Two distinct peer themes emerged from the data: individual peer influence and peer group influences, which are, consistent with Scales and Leffert's contention (1999). Three participants each identified a group of peers that was influential to their decision to continue on to higher education. Two identified one specific peer rather than a group of peers as being crucial in their encouragement to continue with their education. Only one participant identified the lack of social experiences as an important contributor to her decision to continue on to college. Two interviewees did not identify peers rather identified their belief that societal expectations to continue on to higher education were an encouraging factor.

**Question 6.** The sixth interview question asked participants about any social experiences that discouraged them from continuing on to higher education. Table 9 portrays the themes that emerged that reflect specific social experiences, which include peer behaviors, passive peer influence, and the social structure of the high schools they attended. Five participants identified passive peer influence, hanging around unmotivated or distracting peers, as a discouragement from continuing on to higher education. One participant mentioned that the social structure of

high school, specifically cliques, as discouraging. One participant, Galena mentioned specific peer behaviors, her peers laughing at her attempts to speak English in class as a discouragement to pursuing higher education. One participant, Fatima, did not identify any social experiences as discouraging her decision to continue on to higher education.

Table 9

*Themes Associated With Peer Influences Discouraging Continuing to Higher Education*

Theme	Alvaro	Beatriz	Cisco	Danika	Fatima	Galena	Hoon
Passive peer influence	x	x	x	x			x
Peer behaviors						x	
Social structure			x				
N/A					x		

*Passive peer influence.* Alvaro shared that he was discouraged from attending college by his peer group who was not focused on academics or college, which he believed was due largely to not having been reached out to by teachers or counselors. He said, “And then I would hang out with my other friends, the ones who didn’t know a lot of English, they were...I guess they never really...college was never brought up because there would never be jobs for them.” His comment reflects the more passive way that being around unmotivated peers affected him. He also discussed the lack of teacher and/or counselor outreach to the English learners in the following statement:

I guess they [counselors or teachers] would never see them [the English learners] like, “They’re going to go to college, so let’s talk to them about college.” They would never really talk about it...Yeah, like the teachers or counselors; they would never reach out to them [English learners]. I would never hear...My friend would never tell me like, “They were talking to me about college or anything.” Because my other friends, the teachers

would talk to them like, “Have you heard about this school? Have you registered? Have you done this?” And then my other friends [English learners], they would never tell them anything. I guess that they never really reached out because I never really heard them.

Alvaro reported that his English learner peer group did not have plans to attend college after high school, as indicated when he said:

And then they would never say anything about college because they didn't really know anything about college, and they didn't think they could do it...My friends who didn't know English fluently, they had other plans, just to work like in their father's business or something.

Beatriz felt her peers were so distracting her from continuing on to higher education she stated the experiences left her with a desire to go to school far away. “I actually wanted to switch schools to a school that I didn't know anybody. I wanted to start fresh.”

Danika experienced a passive form of peer influence that discouraged her from focusing on attending college, which she said arose out of being around peers who lacked academic motivation – a type of passive influence. She stated the behaviors of unmotivated peers were distracting, “The people that were not as motivated, they just wanted to party or not pay attention in school.”

Hoon also experienced a passive form of peer influence that was discouraging his focus on academics. He said, “Maybe like when we had like too much fun. Like sometimes we'd like get like too distracted from like academics and like studying...” He continued to share that his grades would be impacted by the peer distraction and returning back to the focus of academics was difficult, for he had to make up the work he missed and keep up with the current assignment.

*Social structure.* Cisco experienced peer discouragement from the pervasiveness of cliques in high school and from his related concern that college would have similar cliques, that would make being on campus difficult for him. During the interview he stated:

But yeah, I just felt like, man it better not be super-cliquey the way it is in high school in higher education. And you know, it's not as bad, I would say it's not that bad as high school. High school's the worst probably in terms of how groups stay to their groups and have all these crazy ideas. But it's mostly because they're insulated in their own little world. So, higher education ... that was one of the things I was like, aw man. Hopefully, it's not like that. But other than that, there wasn't too much that discouraged me socially other than that.

*Peer behavior.* Although it did not emerge as a theme across participants, Galena indicated that peers directly impacted her in a negative way. She was discouraged by the hurtful behaviors of her English-speaking peers who laughed at her attempts to speak English, as reflected in the following statement:

There were students who would make fun of me because I wouldn't speak it [English] properly or something in the past. I guess you could say it would be the students who would make fun of me in class with the teachers putting me on the spot and the students actually laughing and not even being supportive of me when you'd expect them to be like, "Oh, it's okay, we can help you." They wouldn't even offer me help.

*Summary.* The passive influence of peers stood out as a significant theme in Question 6. The reported experiences of the study's participants are similar to the findings of research demonstrating that the types of activities in which an adolescent's peer group engages can negatively influence educational outcomes and may lead to antisocial behaviors, such as delinquency and dropping out of high school (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997).

Five participants identified passive peer influence, hanging around unmotivated or distracting peers, as a discouragement from continuing on to higher education. Cisco mentioned the social structure of high school, specifically cliques, as discouraging and one participant, Galena mentioned peer behaviors as a discouragement to pursuing higher education. One participant, Fatima, did not identify any social experiences as discouraging her decision to continue on to higher education.

**Family influence.** The third set of interview questions, numbers 7 and 8, align with guiding research question 1.5: What role, if any, did family play in English learners' decisions to continue on to higher education?

*Question 7.* The seventh interview question asked participants to describe their families. Factors thought to play an encouraging role in the decision to continue on to higher education are the educational level of the parent (Carnevale et al., 2011, Dubow et al., 2010), the socioeconomic level of the family (Dubow et al., 2010), parent involvement (Catsambis, 2001) and living in a two parent household (Sandefur et al., 1992). Table 10 presents the three themes that emerged in these descriptions. The first theme identified is family member academic experience. Three participants shared about the various family members who had or were attending college, and conversely, two participants shared a lack of educational opportunities available to their family members.

The second theme identified is family culture. All participants except Beatriz specifically mentioned family beliefs, customs, or traditions in their responses. Four of the seven participants expressed the theme of family immigration when they shared stories of their families' experiences immigrating to the United States. A third theme was family member academic experience, with three participants sharing about the various family members who had or were

attending college, and conversely, two participants sharing a lack of educational opportunities available to their family members.

Table 10

*Themes That Emerged When Describing the Family*

Themes	Alvaro	Beatriz	Cisco	Danika	Fatima	Galena	Hoon
Family member academic experience	x	x		x	x	x	x
Family culture	x		x	x	x	x	x
Immigration	x			x	x	x	

*Family member academic experience.* Danika, Fatima, and Hoon each shared of at least one parent having earned a college degree and Alvaro and Beatriz have siblings that earned a college degree.

During the interview, both Beatriz and Galena shared candidly their families' academic experiences. Beatriz shared why her mother was denied the opportunity of a college education.

My mom, she only finished up to the tenth grade, I believe. She didn't have much of an education. She didn't get the chance to go to college or anything. She wishes now that she had, but she stopped because my grandma had nine kids, and she was the oldest out of all of them, and she had to work...so I guess you could say all of the responsibility fell on my mom and her high school experience was not that great because she had to leave.

Galena described the circumstances surrounding being the first person in her family to attend college, as neither parent finished elementary school and both of her older brothers dropped out of high school.

I guess whatever your older brothers do, you're supposed to follow them? My older brothers ended up dropping out of school because I guess they felt pressured. And they



felt they weren't good enough being here, to be in school, which made me actually think about... That's what got me thinking about even if I should still continue to go to school at first, so I was like, if my brothers couldn't do it, I don't think I could do it. That sort of thing. And then my parents both did not go to school, they did not even get to elementary so they don't have an education at all. They weren't really being supportive of school, they thought it was important to succeed, but then at the same time they thought it was going to be very difficult for me.

Upon realizing she was not going to get support for college from her family, Galena took it upon herself to seek out support.

Yeah, that's when I turned the tables and actually... I was out of my head, I was like I'm not gonna... Okay, my parents are scared of me to actually succeed or to make a difference to be the first one to go to college and I was like, so that is when I went to my counselors. I talked to my counselors and they would give me advice.

*Family culture.* Alvaro described that he had a close-knit family of two parents who emigrated from Mexico with his older sister. He attributes the majority of his college awareness to his sister who went to community college and then to a Cal State prior to his entering ECC. His parents highly valued education and did not want either his sister or him to work, as he indicates in the following statement:

If I want to go full-time they tell me, "Don't worry about money or anything, we got you. Just go to school. Or if you feel like maybe you're doing too much, go part-time and just take a little time off. Or if you want to get a job, but still go to school, it's important." They would always tell me how important college is, and especially for me since I was born here, and how important it is for ...you have more opportunities, I guess if you have a degree.

Cisco's family values also played a role in his pursuit of college. He has a large family that is active in the Los Angeles religious community and he mentioned the religious upbringing caused pressure to conform to the family's values, which include attending both church and college. He found it interesting that while his family values and supports his education; his mom encouraged him to take a year off between high school and college to spend time with extended family, as he explains in the following comment:

So I graduated high school and I knew already I was going to come to ECC. Mom is like, "You know what, why don't you just take a year off and let's go to Mexico in September. Come on, you got to see the family." So I'm like, I can't argue with a year vacation.

Danika similarly expressed the role of family values. She is a first-generation Sri Lankan and discussed what that meant to her:

Well, my family is from Sri Lanka. I think I'm the first generation born here, so they would be very ... Culturally they want me to be part of the family. Not too much Americanized I guess. Just for me not to forget my background pretty much.

Danika shared her understanding of "Not too Americanized, I guess." to mean the expectation of speaking her primary language with her family.

Fatima was not born in the U. S. and emigrated from Syria with her mother although her brothers had been living in America for years. She expresses her family's history and the value of family closeness when she said:

My family lived here in the United States back in the 80's and early 90's, and then my brothers stayed here for college, but my parents went back to Syria and I was born there. After the war, in 2012, I came back here...I came here end of my eighth grade...I lived with my mom and older brothers. My parents got divorced, into themselves, so my dad

lived in Turkey and I lived with my mom and brothers...because they kind of served as a fatherly figure for me.

*Immigration.* The quotes mentioned above by Alvaro, Danika, and Fatima also reflect the major theme of immigration that was expressed in the interviews. Galena also talked about this theme. When asked to share about her family, Galena described her parents' decision to come to America:

They were scared of how everything was here. They were scared of how people would treat them. They ended up staying in Mexico until they had me, so then once they found out it was like okay, I guess... When we moved here, they did struggle a lot.

*Summary.* Three themes emerged from the interview question regarding family. Four participants shared about the various family members who had or were attending college and two participants shared a lack of educational opportunities available to their family members. Six participants mentioned family beliefs, customs, or traditions in their responses. Four of the seven participants shared their family's experiences immigrating to the United States.

*Question 8.* The eighth interview question asked participants to describe what role, if any, their families played in their decision to continue on to higher education. Factors thought to play an encouraging role in the decision to continue on to higher education, including the educational level of the parent (Dubow et al., 2010; Carnevale et al., 2011), the socioeconomic level of the family (Dubow et al., 2010), and living in a two parent household (Sandefur et al., 1992) played less of a role with the participants than parent involvement (Catsambis, 2001). Table 11 presents the themes that arose from their responses, which were parents (one or both) and the family in general. Five of the seven participants named a specific parent or both parents as pivotal in their decision to continue on to higher education. Three participants identified their family in

general. Although it did not emerge as a theme across participants, family struggles played a role for Galena; those struggled motivated her to pursue a higher education.

Table 11

*Themes Associated With Family Encouragement to Pursue Higher Education*

Identified	Alvaro	Beatriz	Cisco	Danika	Fatima	Galena	Hoon
General family influence	x			x		x	
Parent Influences	x	x	x		x		X

*General family influences.* Alvaro identified his family as a major reason why he continues in school, specifically crediting his older sister and mom for their support. He stated:

Yeah, I guess my family's my number one reason why I keep going to college because if I didn't have their support or my sister didn't go to college, I would be clueless and I would be the first one going to college and it would be tough. So I guess having my sister and my parents was like ... I don't know how to explain it. It's like really good.

Similarly, Danika credited her family for playing the most significant role in Encouraging her to continue on to higher education. She mentioned the following about her family:

They played I think the most major role in influencing me because I guess, well my mom was the first to actually graduate college here, so she wanted me to continue with it. I think I would say, my grandma because she had a different lifestyle than me. Her dad died when she was 16 and she had to carry on making money, so she didn't have the chance to pursue it, so I think she wants me to have a different lifestyle.

While her grandmother did not have the opportunity to get an education, her grandfather attended ECC when he came to America.

Galena shared her current family situation and how it played a significant role in motivating her to continue her education:

My older brother, he's struggling right now with having jobs and stuff because he doesn't have a good education. Since he refused high school. So he's getting minimum wage and so is my other brother, both of them aren't really getting anywhere. They're still living at my house right now because...they're old. I don't know, for me, that's kind of embarrassing, I mean not really embarrassing, but I was like they should be right now living in their own house or making actual good money if they actually went to college. So I guess that helped me see something, I was like...I don't want to be living in my house for a long time. I actually want to be more independent. So that helped me. I guess my brothers not being able to go to school, that motivated me I guess.

*Parent influences.* Five participants mentioned one or both parents in answering this question. Beatriz credited her mother for the support to continue on to higher education:

My mom pushes me the most because she didn't get to have an education. She didn't get to further her education...She's my biggest cheerleader. She wants me to do better, she wants everything that she didn't get to have. She wants me to have it.

Hoon also identified a specific parent as being instrumental in his pursuit of a college education. He acknowledged that his father was the deciding factor as to whether he would continue on to higher education. Hoon said, "So he wanted me to like, move on to higher education, like I was kind of like, I kind of had no choice, but I also myself, wanted to go on to higher education."

Cisco discussed his parents' influence but in a different way. He acknowledged that he followed the path of his parents choosing and never doubted he would continue on to college, as reflected in his comment:

I think it was more or less that I had the idea sort of instilled in me that, after high school, you're supposed to go to college. Be it a university or community college...It was more or less whatever my parents would say, whatever my peers were doing, you know that's kind of what I has [*sic*] to do, too.

The role that Galena's parents played was different from the parental influences of the other participants. Her parents did not believe she could handle the challenge of college and were concerned about affording its cost. This factor combined with the struggles the family overcame when coming to the United States and her brothers not completing school motivated Galena to continue on to higher education:

They were kind of tough on me, they were saying that you're going through a very tough challenge, they were scared I wasn't going to do it on my own. Because my parents too, they thought they're not gonna have money for me to go to school and everything and I was like...And then it made me concerned. I was like, well I know my brothers couldn't do it, but then I could probably work and do all those things like scholarships and all this, but I was like, but then at the same time I was like, I don't know if I'm going to be able to do it by myself. Because I wasn't having that support from my family.

**Summary.** In interview question eight, participants described what role, if any, their families played in their decision to continue on to higher education. Two themes arose from their responses, which were parents (one or both) and the family in general. Five of the seven participants described how a specific parent or both parents were pivotal in their decision to continue on to higher education through their expressed support. This finding supports research

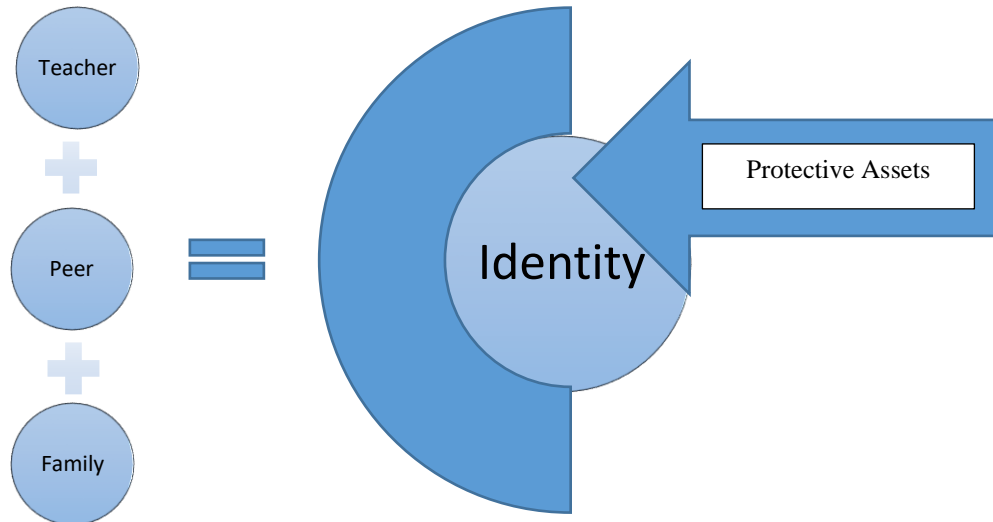
stating the significance of parent involvement and the adolescent's pursuit of high education (Catsambis, 2001). Three participants identified their family in general with one participant, Galena describing how family doubt in her ability motivated her to pursue a higher education.

**Individual characteristics.** Interview questions 9 to 11 align with guiding research question 1.6: How did individual characteristics, if at all, encourage high school students to pursue higher education? To answer this question, the researcher first sought to identify the characteristics that comprise each participant's high school student identity and then identify the person within the participant's microsphere from which the characteristic originated to determine who played the most significant role in shaping the identity of the high school student.

Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory posits the formation of the self is comprised through the interaction between the individual and those in their environment who he states are teachers, peers, and family (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). The cumulative interactions with teachers, peers, and family within the microsphere has the most impact on the adolescent's identity formation.

The 40 Developmental Assets framework contends the individual characteristics one has developed through the interactions with people in the immediate environment or microsystem have the potential to contribute to the development of assets, shield against negative or risky behaviors and assist in the healthy adolescent development (Scales et al., 2006). Positive and resilience behaviors of students are identified as school success, persistence, physical and nutritionally healthy behaviors, financial responsibility, valuing diversity, and involvement in leadership activities (Scales et al., 2006). Together they constitute an internal compass by which the adolescent navigates their way to adulthood. The Search Institute (2012) contends that decisions are contingent upon the presence of internal assets thereby the decision to attend college is based in part on the presence or not of internal assets.

Figure 1, researcher constructed for this study, illustrates the protective nature of positive asset development.



*Figure 1.* Interactions between those in one's immediate environment and the formation of identity.

The presence of positive internal assets contributes to adolescent school success, persistence, physical and nutritionally healthy behaviors, financial responsibility, valuing diversity, and involvement in leadership activities.

**Question 9.** The ninth interview question asked participants to consider how a teacher or counselor, peer, and their family would have described them while the participant was still in high school. Three phases of data analysis were required.

The first two phases of data analysis were done on the responses to question nine. In the first phase, participants' ascribed characteristics to their high school self through the lens of a teacher, a peer and a family member. The majority of the participants believed their high school self would be described favorably by teachers, peers, and family. When combined with the second phase of data analysis, that of a self-description of their high school self, the researcher



could then identify where the characteristics originated, and why and how they encouraged the decision to continue on to higher education.

Table 12 presents their responses. All participants reported at least one positive characteristic across the three perspectives. Four participants reported teachers would describe them in a positive manner, while three participants believed teachers would describe them negatively. Five participants stated their peers would have attributed positive comments to their high school self, and two participants believed their peers would have described them less favorably. Five participants believed family members would attribute positive characteristics to them and two participants believed the family would have attributed negative comments.

Table 12

*Participant Characteristics Through the Lens of Teacher, Peer or Family Member*

Participant	Teacher	Peer	Family Member
Alvaro	Responsible	Hardworking	Hardworking Responsible Focused
Beatriz	Persistent	Not fun Boring Like an old lady Mature	Willing to sacrifice Determined Selfless
Cisco	Gifted Hard worker Intelligent Highly unmotivated Lazy	Different Cynical Antisocial Observant To be more engaging Unmotivated Articulate	Outcast
Danika	Smart Not turn in work on time Not on top of my work	Nice Smart Helpful	Negatively Not motivated Not pay attention to what I was doing Not pay attention to my family
Fatima	Enthusiastic Outstanding due to being respectful	Outgoing Dramatic Funny Empowered Strong	A good kid Emotional Hard working Passionate Ambitious

(Continued)

Participant	Teacher	Peer	Family Member
Galena	Cannot succeed	Quiet	Overcomer
Hoon	Dedicated Focused on goals	Wild but able to control Able to have fun and study Well focused	Never let go of goals

Two themes emerged from the participant's supposition of how a teacher or counselor, peer and family member would describe their high school self. The first theme is that of persistence mentioned by various synonyms was present eleven times across all participants. The second theme that emerged is the similarity between the teacher and family suppositions. All seven participants used either the exact words, as Alvaro did with the use of the word responsible, or closely characteristics. Two of the participants felt their past teachers and family would describe their high school self with closely related negative attributes.

*Persistence.* The first theme that emerged from the interview question responses was the attribute of persistence which appeared 11 times in the responses. Various synonyms were used including hard working, determined, ambitious, dedicated, overcomer, focused on goals and never let go of goals. Beatriz shared what persistence looked like for her. “Having to sit down in a desk for an hour to study instead of going out to eat with them [family]. I’m willing to do whatever to get a good education and keep my grades up... ”

Hoon explained his persistence this way; “I would say I am ambitious. Because like, I always like, knew what I wanted and I never let go of my goals. Yeah, I still have them today so still striving to achieve my goals.”

*Similarity of descriptions.* The second theme that emerged is that of the similarity between the supposition the participant had of the teachers, responses and that of their family. Four of the seven participants used either the identical positive descriptor or closely related descriptors when hypothesizing how teachers and family would describe them. Álvaro, Beatriz,

Fatima, and Hoon used descriptors including responsible, persistent for both the teacher's perception and the family perception. Two participants, Cisco and Danika also used closely related terms; however, the terms related carried a negative connotation. Cisco's terms were the least similarly related words. He felt his teachers would label him highly unmotivated and lazy and with his family labeling him as an outcast. Danika used multiple statements beginning with the word "not" in describing how a teacher and her family would have described her high school self. She believed her teachers would have described her as a student who would not turn in her work or be on top of her work, and her family would describe her as not motivated and not paying attention to her actions or her family. Only Galena did not ascribe similar characteristics in the teacher and family descriptions.

**Summary.** Interview Question 9 revealed two themes. The first theme is that of persistence mentioned by various synonyms was present eleven times across all participants. The second theme that emerged is the similarity between the teacher and family suppositions. Six of the participants used either the exact words or closely related characteristics. Two of the participants felt their past teachers and family would describe their high school self with closely related negative attributes.

Question 9 also asked participants to describe themselves. Table 13 presents the responses, which largely express positive traits. One theme emerged from the juxtaposition of the data to Table 13. All participants described themselves similarly to the supposition they made of a teacher or family member describing themselves.

Table 13

*Participant Self-Ascribed Characteristics*

Alvaro	Beatriz	Cisco	Danika	Fatima	Galena	Hoon
Responsible	Focused on studies	Not motivated	Not on top of things	Outgoing	Overcomer	Not social
Hardworking	Studious	Cynical	Turn in work late	Enthusiastic	Achiever	Dedicated
Prompt	Self motivated	A little different	Not motivated	Respectful	Change things	Focused on goals
Dependable	Persistent	Respectful		Good		Ambitious
	Good head on my shoulders Determined	Hard worker Observant				Goal orientated Supportive

*Self-descriptions.* Each of the seven participants used attributes that described themselves similarly to the traits they believed a family member would use to describe them as a high school student. Furthermore, all participants but Galena used similar traits to that which they contended a teacher would use to describe himself or herself as a high school student.

*Summary.* Interview Question 9 revealed three themes. The first theme is that of persistence mentioned by various synonyms was present eleven times across all participants. The second theme that emerged is the similarity between the teacher and family suppositions. Six of the participants used either the exact words or closely related characteristics. Two of the participants felt their past teachers and family would describe their high school self with closely related negative attributes. The third theme presented as a similarity between the participant's self-ascribed characteristics of their high school self and that of the responses participants provided from the perspective of teacher and family member.

**Origin of internal assets.** The 40 Developmental Assets framework posits individual characteristics one has developed through the interactions with people in the immediate environment or microsystem may contribute to the development of assets and support the healthy

development of an adolescent (Search Institute, 2003). Table 14 summarizes the origin of positive assets by each participant.

Table 14

*Origin of Identity*

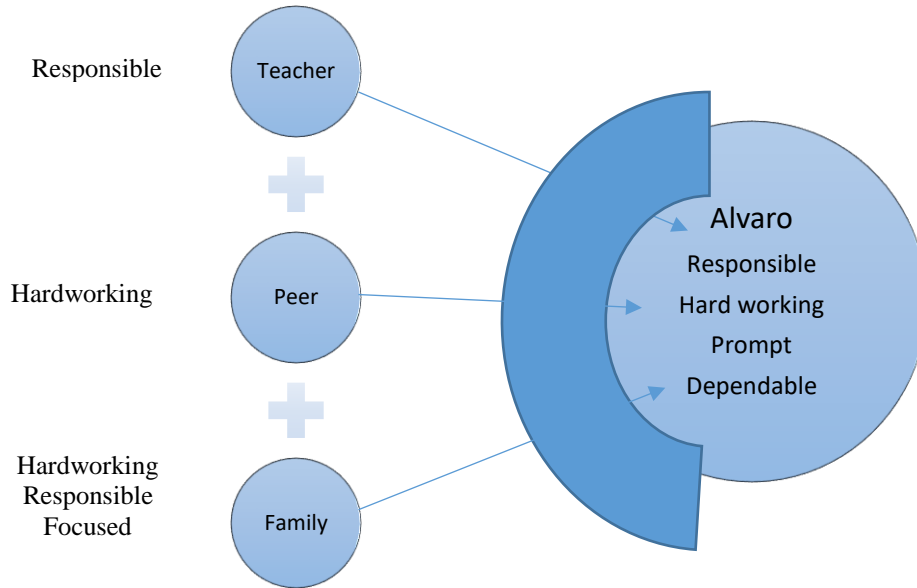
Participant	Teacher	Peer	Family
Alvaro	x	x	x
Beatriz	x		x
Cisco	x	x	x
Danika	x		x
Fatima	x	x	x
Galena			x
Hoon	x	x	x

Each participant identified their family as the origin of one or more components of their identity. Beatriz, Danika, and Galena did not acknowledge peers as contributing to the formation of their identity. Galena was the only participant who did not acknowledge teachers as playing a part in the formation of her identity.

The following figures, assembled by the researcher, illustrate each participant's responses to interview question 9.

The boxes on the left are the responses participants provided to the interview question, "How would a teacher/counselor, a peer, and your family describe you?" (No participants opted for the option of a counselor.) The small circles to the right of the responses list teacher, peers, and family, who collectively are identified by Bronfenbrenner as central to the formation of one's identity during the school years. Arrows are extending toward the participant listed on the far right of the figure. The shaded half circle represents the accumulation of protective assets, which will either allow or reject the entities perception of the participant to enter into the formation of

their identity. Lastly, the large circle on the left contains the participant's name and the characteristics they ascribed to their identity during their high school experience.



*Figure 2.* Alvaro

Alvaro's identity appears to be a result of teachers, peers and family influence. All characteristics are in alignment with assets thought to bring about healthy adolescent development.

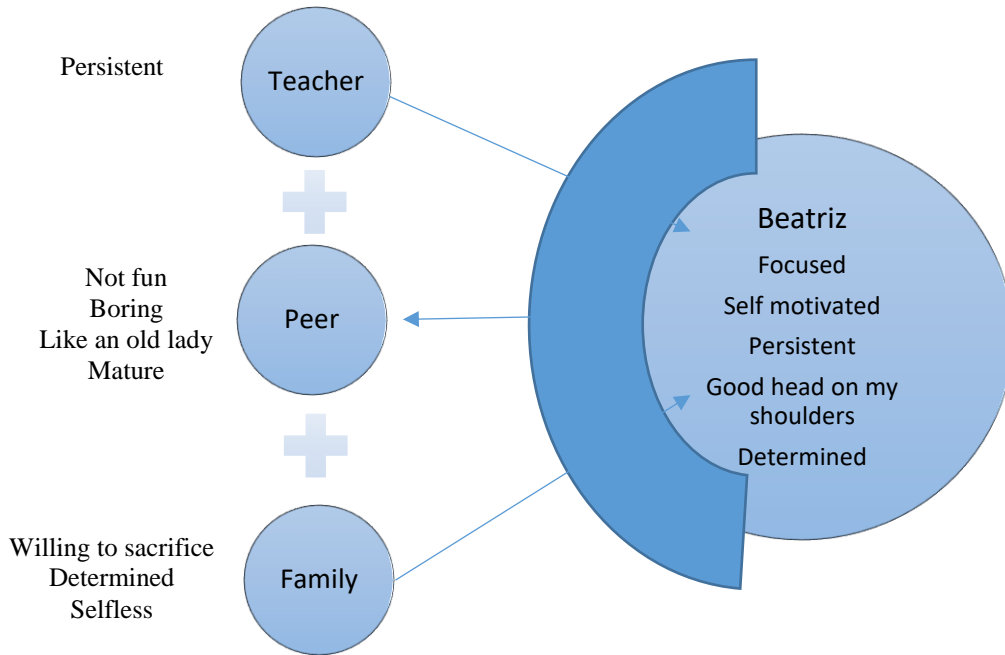


Figure 3. Beatriz

Beatriz's identity appears to be a result of the influence of her teachers and family, and not that her peers. All assets present in her identity are believed to support the healthy development of adolescents.

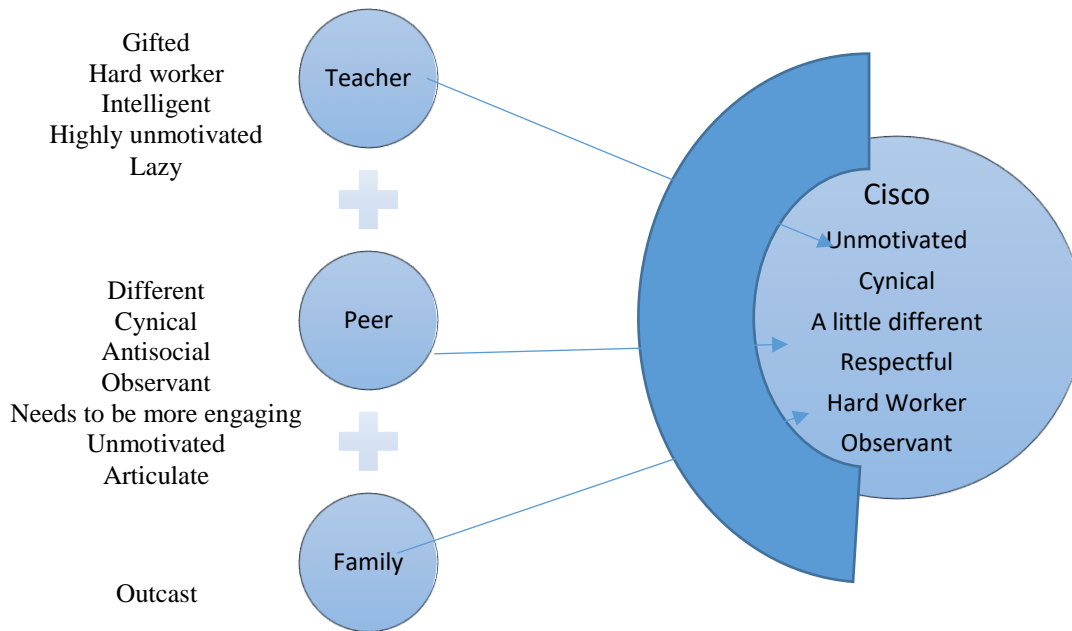
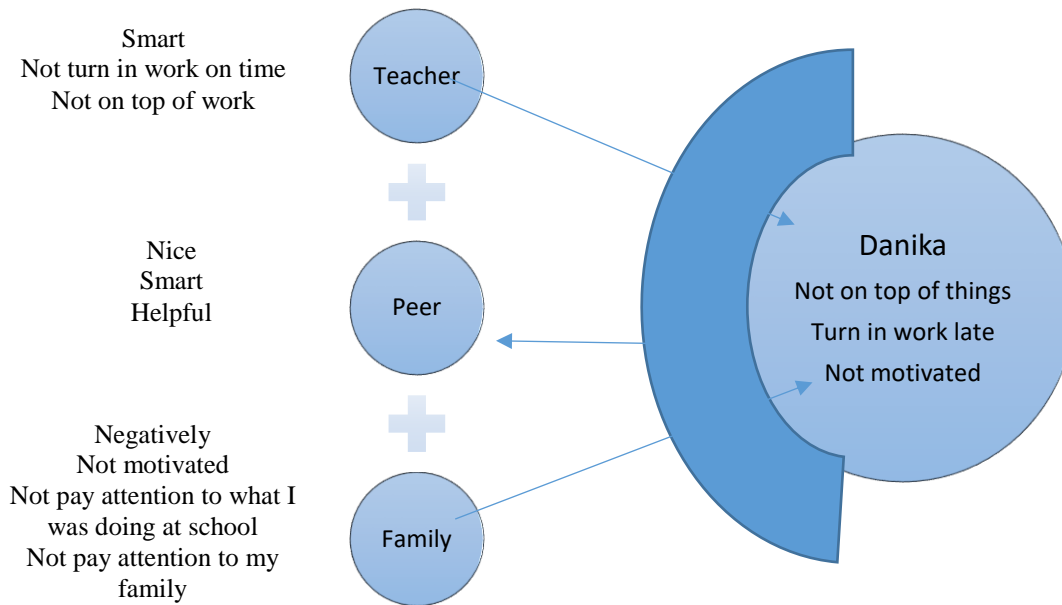


Figure 4. Cisco

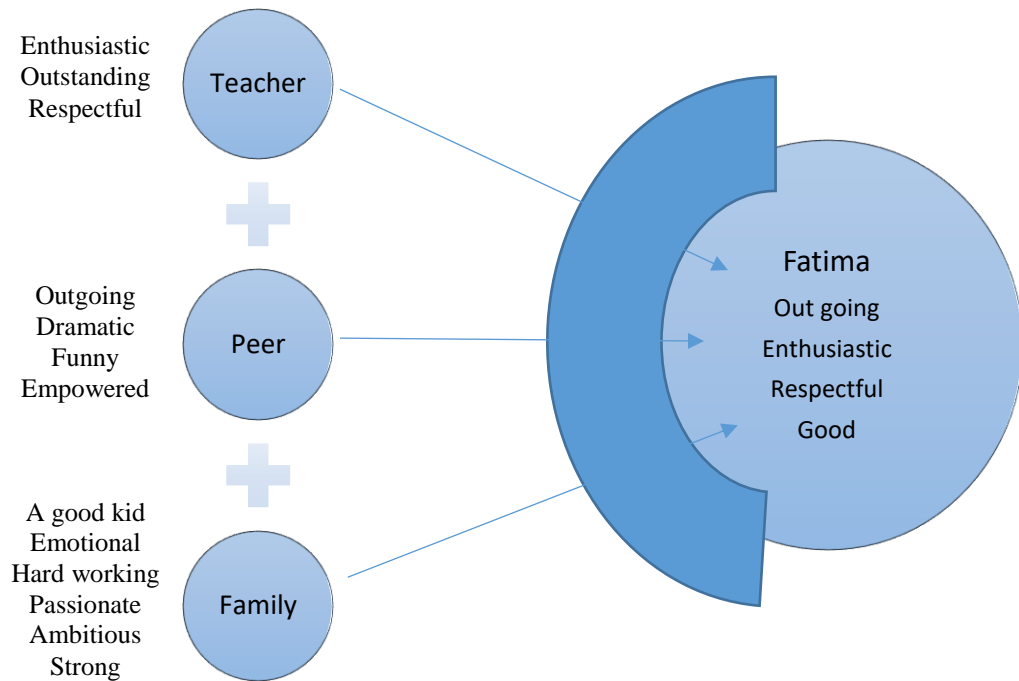
Cisco's identity while in high school appears to be a result of the influence of his teachers, peers, and family. Two assets are present in his self-description that are thought to bring about healthy adolescent development.



*Figure 5. Danika*

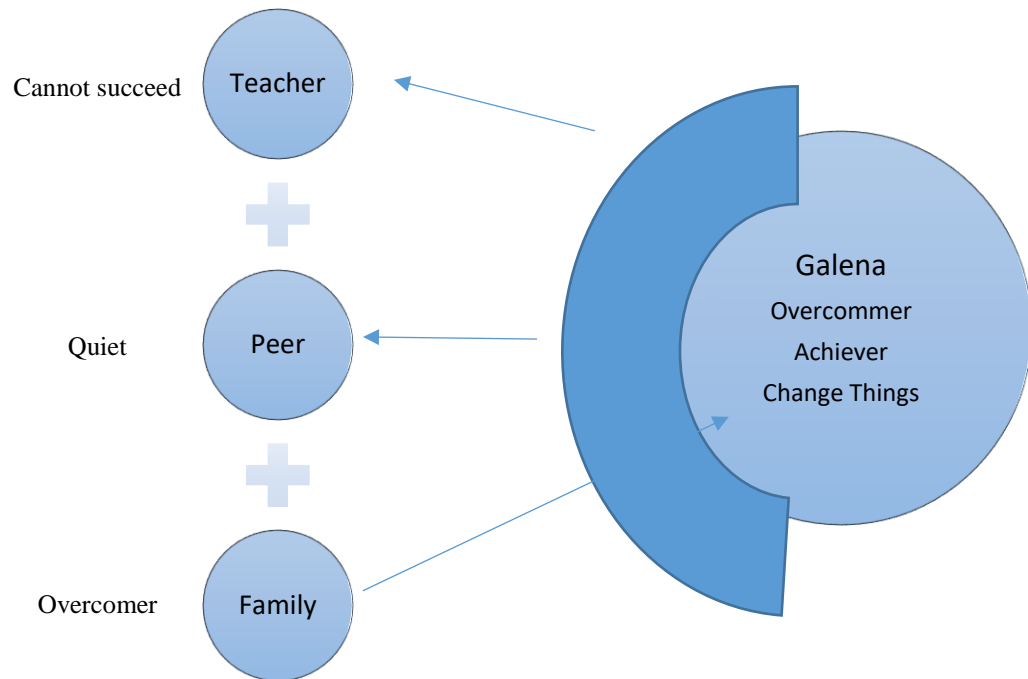
Danika's identity appears to be a result of teachers, less the attribute of "smart" and family. While she believes her teachers and peers would ascribe positive attributes to her, Danika rejected the impact on her identity and attributed no assets associated with healthy adolescent development to her identity while in high school.





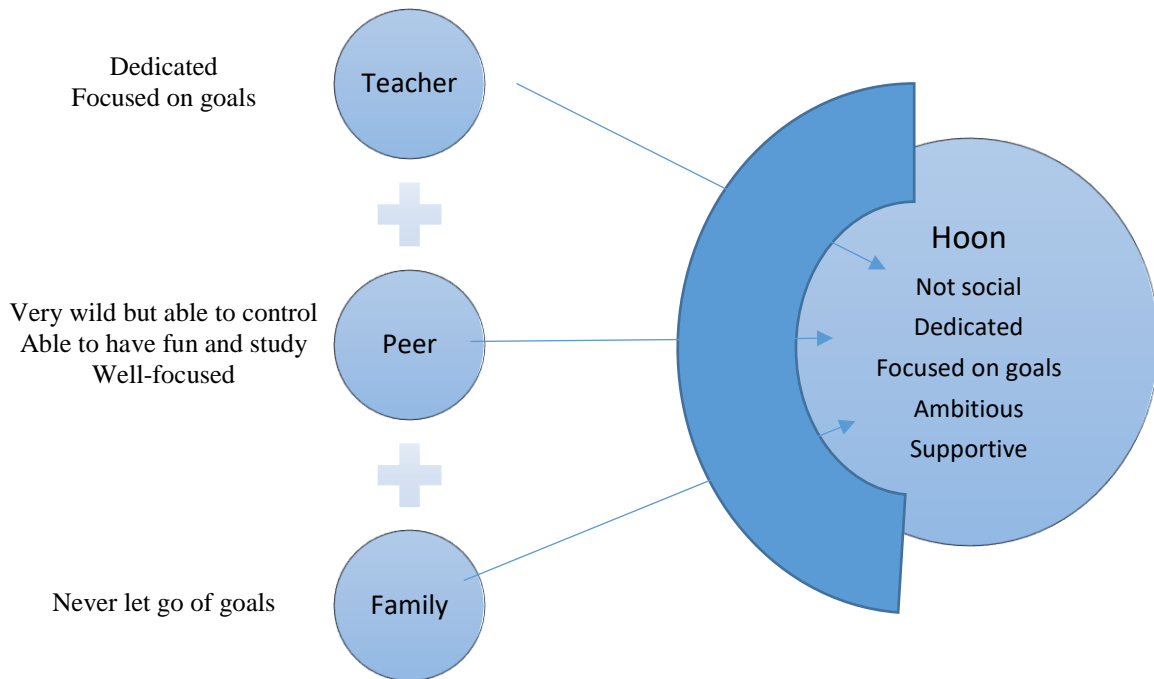
*Figure 6. Fatima*

Characteristics presented are in alignment with the perception she believes those in her microsphere had of her while in high school. All characteristics she ascribed to her self-identity are consistent with assets thought to lead to the healthy development of adolescents.



*Figure 7. Galena*

Galena's identity appears to a product of her families influence. Galena rejected both the perception of her teachers and her peers. All characteristics Galena ascribed to her identity are thought to bring about healthy adolescent development.



*Figure 8.* Hoon

Hoon's identity appears to be a product of the three entities in his microsphere. Characteristics presented are in alignment with the perception he believes teachers, peers, and family had of him while in high school. Listed characteristics are consistent with assets thought to lead to the healthy development of adolescents.

**Identity formation.** The innermost layer of the Ecological Systems Theory model, the microsystem, is the environment in which the individual resides and the immediate setting where the individual's development occurs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In regards to children, this layer often consists of family, school, teachers, friends, and the community, including the interactions, or lack thereof, which occurs within it, has the most direct effect on an individual's development. The microsystem is where one develops the way they will view and interact with their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). The microsystem is where the adolescent develops the internal values that guide adolescent decision-making.

**Question 10.** The tenth interview question was a task that asked each participant to fill out a graphic organizer with space for 10 descriptive words or phrases that would describe them as a current college student (Appendix K). The participants' responses are in Table 15. One theme emerged; all participants ascribed positive traits to themselves.

Table 15

*Personal Characteristics*

Alvaro	Beatriz	Cisco	Danika	Fatima	Galena	Hoon
Responsible	Selfless	Diligent	Helpful	Enthusiastic	Achiever	Dedicated
Hardworking	Willing	Meticulous	Caring	Kind	Productive	Goal oriented
Prompt	Self-motivated	Inquisitive	Laidback	Continual Self- improvement	Anxious	Open hearted
Relaxed	Special	Thoughtful	Positive	Empowered	Helpful	Help others going through hardships
Self- motivated	Dreamer	Want to be influential	Spontaneous	Happy	Independent	Pacifist
Independent	Determined	Not complacent	Loving toward others	Always try to smile	Hard worker	Kind-hearted
Calm	Caring	Simi-athletic	Open to new things	Ambitious	Never giving up	Shy at first/wild latter
Hard on self	Headstrong	Might be intelligent	Motivated	Loving	Proud	Enthusiastic
Confident	Focused	Respectful	Social/friendly	Down to earth	Self- motivated	Balance fun and school
Sociable	Emotionally strong	Hard- working	Hardworking	Dramatic	Successful	Fitness addict

*Positive characteristics.* Unlike the responses to interview question 9 where participants were reflecting on their high school identity, descriptors the participants attributed to themselves as college students were positive in nature. Both Cisco and Danika, who assigned negative attributes to themselves when relating the person they thought they were in high school, changed their self-description to positive terms. Cisco, who in question 9 described his high school self as not motivated, cynical and a little different reported he now views himself as a college student

who is diligent, meticulous and inquisitive. Similarly, Danika related she believed her high school self to be not on top of her work and not motivated, now views herself as a college student who is helpful caring and laid back. Only one of the seventy descriptors were held a negative connotation. Galena includes the descriptor of anxious to her college persona.

*Summary.* One theme emerged in question 10, the positive attributes each participant ascribed to himself or herself as a current college student. While five of the seven participants ascribed positive traits to themselves as a high school student, both Cisco and Danika did not indicate positive attributes for the two perspectives while they were a high school student. However, both Cisco and Danika did describe themselves in positive terms as a current college student.

*Question 11.* The eleventh interview question was actually a task that asked participants to sort people and entities in their lives that either encouraged or discouraged their decision to continue on to higher education according to the systems or layers of influence outlined by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which is described in Chapters 1 and 2 (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Specifically, participants were given a blank graphic organizer containing four concentric circles, with each circle representing a layer of influence identified by Bronfenbrenner as having a role in affecting the decision to pursue higher education (Appendix M).

Each participant placed him or herself in the center circle. People, aspects of the community, events, and societal influences affecting the participant's decision to pursue higher education were each to be listed in one of the three circles extending outward from themselves depending upon level of influence the identified factor had on the participant's decision to pursue higher education. The levels were: (a) the microsystem, which includes the people and experiences with the most influence on whether to pursue higher education; (b) the mesosystem,

which was to include people and events influencing the decision to pursue higher education, although not as significant as the inner circle of influence and; (c) the exosystem, the outermost circle and encompasses people or events in one's environment with an indirect impact on the participant's decision to pursue higher education. Participant's responses are shown in Table 16.

Table 16

*Participants' Categorization of Environmental Influences on Their Identity Formation According to the Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development*

System	Micro	Meso	Exo
Alvaro	Best friend Sister Parent	Friend who struggled in high school High school counselor Extended family	High School Teachers
Beatriz	Mom Self	7 <sup>th</sup> -grade teacher Wanting to be a teacher	Seeing teachers burdened
Cisco	Peers who graduate college Parents Brothers sisters Best Friend Peers who did not want to go on to higher ed Self 5 <sup>th</sup> -grade teacher	Church Religion Nieces Cousins Media Peers	Social media
Danika	Family Peers Self	Counselors	Desire to help others
Fatima	Teachers Family Peers School	Home country being destroyed by war	Societal emphasis on higher education
Galena	Teachers Parents Brothers Peers Self Counselors	Peers Teachers help Brothers Tutoring Self Programs and counselors	Internet showing people like herself Billboards about universities Public recognition for Spanish-speaking students

(Continued)

System	Micro	Meso	Exo
Hoon	Dad Mom Cousins	Teachers Friends Counselors classmates	YouTube Podcasts Friends Billboards Pamphlets Educational Advertisements

The participant's collective responses are shown in Figure 9. Although there were some commonalities across participants in how they categorized people and events, there were some notable differences as well, which are presented below.

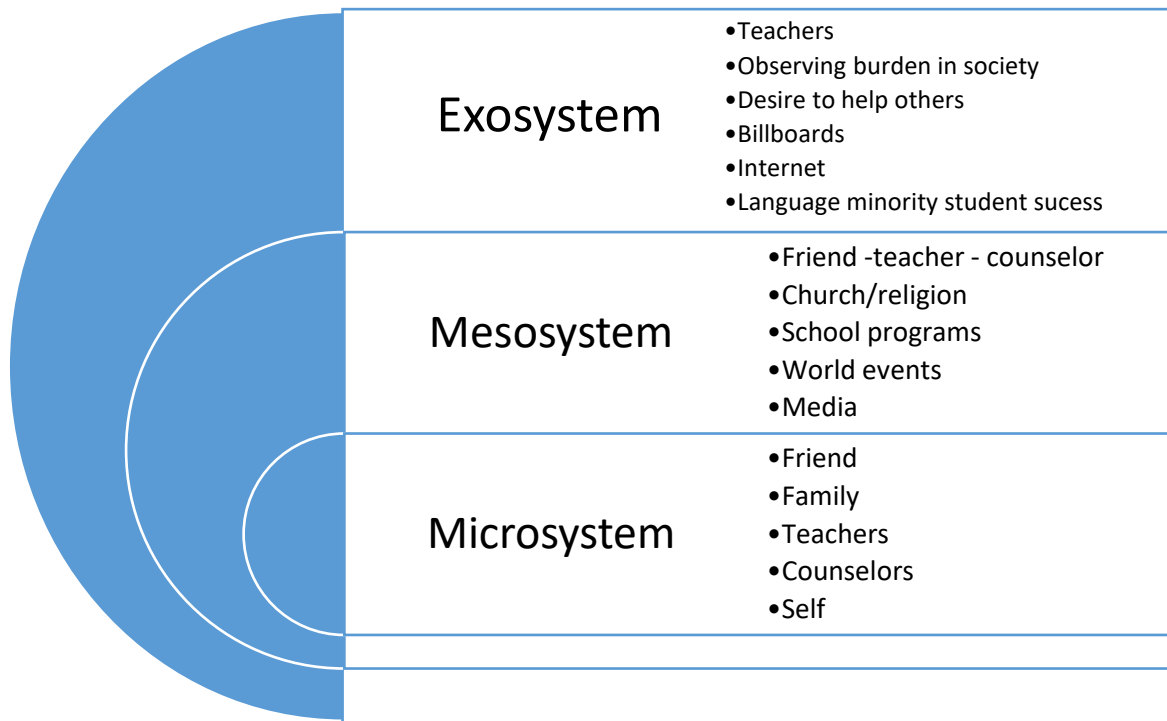


Figure 9. Participants self-reported environmental factors influencing their decision to continue on to higher education.

**Microsystem.** Each of the seven participants positioned their family in the microsystem of influence; however, the family member of primary importance was not always a parent. This

indicates that the family is a pervasive and direct influence on encouragement or discouragement to pursue higher education in this study.

The sorting task revealed contributions to encouraging or discouraging college attendance, and six of the seven participants identified peers as playing a significant and direct role. Although the task did not ask participants to identify specific peers by name, there are examples from the interviews that provide insights. For example, during the interview, Alvaro had stated that his most significant peer encouragement came from his best friend's surprise announcement he was taking Alvaro to register with him at ECC. Based on interview data, peer influences were mostly positive and encouraging. For example, both Alvaro and Cisco both acknowledge they had two or more peer groups that were important to their consideration of college.

Three participants placed teachers and one participant placed a counselor in the microsphere. Based on the interview data it was evident that this encouragement was in the form of one-on-one supportive relationships, whereas discouragement came from the perception of a lack of attention to their needs as an English learner. Other examples from the interviews included Beatriz's and Cisco's comments that they each credited a specific teacher for building a personal relationship with them and provided encouragement to attend college.

Self-motivation was the final common element included in the microsystem. Five of the seven participants identified themselves as directly influencing their decision to pursue higher educations and see themselves as a college student. Based on data from the interviews, inner resolve appeared to manifest itself differently across participants. For example, during his interview, Alvaro described himself as being determined and hardworking, which helped him get to college, as did Beatriz, but Cisco saw himself as not motivated.



**Mesosystem.** This layer consists of the relationships between identified people or groups within the microsystem and has less influence on the individual's decision to pursue higher education than those in the microsystem. Participants again identified the relationships between teachers, counselors, and family as falling into this system. The interview data supported this finding, as there were many comments made by participants that acknowledged these people had a diminished ability to affect their encouragement or discouragement to attend college. For example, Beatrix placed the teacher she noticed exhibiting unequal treatment of students in the mesosystem. In the interview, she had stated that he played a discouraging role, but she did allow his behavior to lessen her determination to attend college. Other elements notably placed in the mesosystem-included religion, media, peers who overcame obstacles, and support programs in high school. One participant, Fatima identified wanting to help her war-torn country of Syria and self-determination.

**Exosystem.** The exosystem consists of people, concepts, and events that influence one's identity, but in an indirect, less impactful way compared to those of the mesosystem and microsystem. English language policy is located in this system. Some of the key factors participants placed in this layer were the presence of billboards for local colleges placed in their communities, the internet, and social media. Other exosystem elements played a more backseat, yet meaningful role in the decision to pursue higher education. For example, both in the task and in her interview, Galena cited the ability to go to college web sites and read stories of language minority students like themselves was an encouraging factor.

**Summary.** Interview Question 11 asked participants to complete a sorting task based upon Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Participants were asked to list entities or experiences that either encouraged or discouraged their decision to continue on to higher

educations on a graphic organizer consisting of three concentric circles with the participant placed in the center.

The people and/or events that the participant believed most influenced their decision to continue on to higher education was placed in the ring closest to the center of the page where the participant had placed their name. All participants placed their family or parents in the centermost ring, the microsystem. Most also included teachers, counselors, and peers in the microsystem.

The interactions between people that played a role, but were not as influential, were placed in the next ascending ring, the mesosystem. Participants placed peers, teachers, counselors, school programs along with societal beliefs and religion in this system.

Finally, events and/or people that influenced the participants' decision to go on to higher education but were not deemed to be a significant factor in the decision were placed in the furthest ring, the exosystem. Participants placed social media, podcasts, and billboards in the exosystem. Although not identified by the participants, English policy exists in the exosystem.

### **Summary of Results**

This phenomenological study of English learners who did not reclassify as English proficient prior to high school graduation and continued on to higher education produced several key findings. Five of the participants entered California schools between the Kindergarten and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade while two participants entered after the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Six of the seven participants are long-term English learners having spent six or more years in California and did not reclassify as English proficient.

Research Question 1.1 related to academic factors that encouraged the English learner to continue on to higher education. Four themes emerged from the data, teachers, counselors, rigorous courses and the school environment. The theme of teachers includes both the

identification of an individual teacher that provided support or collectively teachers who were instrumental in providing encouragement to the participant. Counselors were referred to as both high school counselors and college recruitment counselors. The participant defined rigorous courses as, mainstream content level courses that provided no English language development support and the participant was motivated to keep up with the English-speaking peers. The school environment included the collective influence of staff and students being welcoming to an English learner who was also a refugee.

Research Question 1.2 was in reference to academic experiences that discouraged participants from continuing on to higher education. Two themes emerged. The first theme was specific teacher comments, which discouraged them from believing they could continue on to higher education. The second theme was various aspects of the school environment as a whole and included interference of the instructional program by academically unmotivated peers, the required courses students must take to graduate and the lack of support from both teachers and peers.

Research Question 1.3 asked participants to identify the experiences that encouraged them to continue on to higher education. Peers emerged as especially important to encourage participants to pursue a higher education and broke into two distinct themes, individual peer influence and peer group influences.

Research Question 1.4 question asked participants about any social experiences that discouraged them from continuing on to higher education. The themes that emerged are specific social experiences considered to discouraging include peer behaviors, passive peer influence, and the social structure of the high schools they attended. Five participants identified passive peer influence, hanging around unmotivated or distracting peers, as a discouragement from continuing on to higher education. One participant mentioned that the social structure of high school,

specifically cliques, as discouraging. One participant mentioned a specific peer behavior, laughing at her attempts to speak English in class, as a discouragement to continuing on to higher education.

Research Question 1.5 asked participants to describe what role, if any, their families played in their decision to continue on to higher education. The themes that arose from their responses, were parents (one or both) and the family in general. Five of the seven participants named a specific parent or both parents as pivotal in their decision to continue on to higher education. The support that proved encouraging to continue on to higher education was identified as emotional or financial. Family general support was identified as having a family member who was in college or who had already graduated and were able to answer questions regarding the process of getting into college and what to expect. Additionally, general family support was indicated as not wanting to be like family members who did not have a college education.

Research Question 1.6 asked how did individual characteristics if at all, encourage high school students to pursue higher education. To answer this question, the researcher first sought to identify the characteristics that made up each participant's high school student identity and then identify the origin within the participant's microsphere from which the characteristic originated. The attributes identified by the participants in their high school identity included that of being a hard worker, determined and focused. The attributes comprising the participant's high school identities positively correlates to the assets found to be supportive of healthy adolescent development according to the 40 Developmental Assets framework (Search Institute, 2006).

These findings were triangulated to the self-reported current college student identity of each participant. The data shows six of the seven participant's college student identity retained the family influence the development of their identity. All participants rejected negative perceptions of both teachers and peers from their identity.

The final data presented in this chapter was that derived from a sorting task based upon Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. The task revealed all participants placing their family or parents in their microsystem, which is the system having the greatest impact on one's identity while most of the participants also included teachers, counselors, and peers in the microsystem.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

### Introduction

Chapter 5 begins with a summary of the study, followed by a discussion of key findings that includes relating their significance to theory and past research. The remainder of the chapter includes recommendations for further research, a discussion of the implications for educational practice, and conclusions.

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the school components (academic and social), family experiences, and individual characteristics that supported English learners' decision to seek post-secondary education despite not reaching the classification of English proficient by high school graduation. The study also investigated the factors students identified as discouraging their efforts to continue to post-secondary education.

This research was guided by theory and past research from three primary sources. The first was Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of human development. Bronfenbrenner (1977) contends that the people and entities within the individual's immediate layer of influence, the microsystem, have the most direct influence on the individual's development, whereas other layers or systems have less and more indirect, yet varying, degrees of influence.

This work was also guided by the National Post-Secondary Education Cooperative (NPEC, 2007), which contends three factors are the most likely to influence the individual student's decision to continue on to post-secondary education: the school experience, family, and personal characteristics. Those three factors were closely examined in this study.

The third source that provided a foundation for this research was the 40 Developmental Assets, which are "... important relationships, skills, opportunities and values that help guide adolescents away from risk behaviors, foster resilience, and promote thriving" (Scales et al.,

2006). The assets are categorized into two types: external and internal (Scales, 1999). External assets are developmental supports that are transferred to youth from adults within the youth's innermost sphere of influence (Fulkerson et al., 2006), which aligns with Bronfenbrenner's concept of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Internal assets develop through the individual's characteristics and responses to the external environment (Scales et al., 2006) and are posited by the Search Institute (2006) to guide adolescent decision-making.

Primarily through interviews, but also through a unique sorting task, the researcher sought to understand the overarching research question:

1. What are the school (academic and social) experiences, family role, and individual characteristics of students who exited California high schools, not yet classified as English proficient, and who continued on to higher education despite challenges they encountered?
  1. In what ways did school academic experiences encourage the English learner to continue on to higher education?
  2. In what ways did school academic experiences discourage the English learner from continuing on to higher education?
  3. In what ways did school social experiences encourage the English learner to continue on to higher education?
  4. In what ways did school social experiences discourage the English learner from continuing on to higher education?
  5. What role if any, did family play in English learners' decision to continue on to higher education?
  6. How did individual characteristics, if at all, encourage the English learner to pursue higher education?

2. In what ways, if any, did language policy affect the student?

A qualitative research design was used for this study. The researcher conducted one face-to-face interview of 11 open-ended questions with each of the seven participants. Nine questions were audio recorded, whereas two questions required brief written responses. Although the largest proportion of the data were derived from interviews, the study included a sorting task that asked participants to sort people and entities in their lives according to the systems or layers of influence outlined by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which is described in Chapters 1 and 2. Specifically, participants were given a blank graphic organizer containing four concentric circles, with the inner most circle being themselves and each of the ascending circles representing a layer of influence identified by Bronfenbrenner as having a role in encouraging or discouraging the participant's decision to pursue higher education. Each participant placed himself or herself in the center circle and sorted people, aspects of the community, events, and societal influences into the layers of influence they believed each belonged. The aspects were placed either in the: (a) the microsystem, which includes the people and experiences with which the individual has most frequent and intimate contact; (b) the mesosystem, which would include people and events they identified as having a role in their student identity, although not as significant as the inner circle of influence, and; (c) the exosystem, which represents the outermost circle that encompasses people or events in one's environment with an indirect and more distant impact on the formation of self.

Each participant is a current Southern California community college student, who continued on to higher education without reaching proficiency in the English language by high school graduation. The seven student participants were from one purposely-selected Southern California community college. All interviews were conducted during the last week of May 2017 on the Esperanza Community College (a pseudonym) campus.



## Key Demographic Findings

The researcher provided the seven study participants with a 14-question demographic questionnaire (Appendix H) that solicited background information on age, gender, the number of siblings, family composition, parent educational level, income, and language proficiency of the participant.

The questionnaire yielded four key findings involving these variables (a) the family composition while the participant was in high school, (b) parent educational level, (c) socioeconomic status, and (d) proficiency level upon exiting high school.

**Family composition.** Five of the seven participants lived with both parents while in high school. Two of those five, Danika and Galena, also lived with a grandparent. Fatima and Hoon lived with one parent and no extended family members – hence, 71% of participants lived with more than one parent or adult family member. This finding follows research that shows family structure plays a significant part in a child’s academic success, as students living in a family structure with two parents report higher GPAs and greater academic success (O’Malley et al., 2014). Two-parent families have been found to have the resources of time and money to provide their children enriching environments (Sandefur et al., 1992). This factor may have played a role in participants’ desire to attend college despite limitations in language and, for at least most, negative school experiences.

**Parent educational level.** Three of the seven participants lived with one or both parents that graduated from college, whereas Alvaro, Beatriz, Cisco, and Galena lived with one or both parents who did not graduate high school. This finding suggests that parent education level may be important, but it may be overcome by other factors within the family and beyond that encourage the English learner to continue on to higher education. The literature suggests that among family factors, the education level of the parent has a profound effect on student

academic success (Egalite, 2016). The relationship between parental educational attainment and child academic success may be due to indirect effects such as the parent being an educational and occupational model for the child, inspiring optimism in educational pursuits, and providing key resources (Dubow et al., 2010). While this was somewhat supported in the current study, parent education level did not seem to be the most crucial family factor in the eyes of the participants.

**Socioeconomic status (SES).** Overall, participants who reported a lower parent education level reported being from lower the socioeconomic status family households. Three participants shared that one or more parent did not graduate high school and reported income levels that ranged from \$20,000 - \$40,000 per year, which supported 3 to 6 people living in the home. Participants with one parent who had attained a college degree reported annual incomes ranging from \$30,000 - \$60,000 that supported two individuals. One participant reported that neither parent graduated high school and had an annual family income of \$60,000 - \$70,000 that supported three individuals. One participant declined to state family income.

These findings are supported by the literature on families headed by parents with low educational attainment. Family factors that may discourage the pursuit of post-secondary education include parental education level since less educated parents are of socioeconomic status lower than their college-educated counterparts (Dubow et al., 2010). Cost is often a factor that discourages underrepresented students for continuing on to higher education, and families without information on financial aid or those who receive or believe in an overestimation of how much a college education will cost have children who are less likely to continue on to higher education (Pettus, 2006).

**Language proficiency level.** The questionnaire data revealed that none of the seven participants knew of their language proficiency level. This is viewed in the literature as problematic, as according to the California Department of Education (California Department of

Education website, 2017), parents of English learners are to be notified annually of their students' language proficiency. The researcher can surmise several reasons that may account for the student not being aware of their language proficiency level:

1. The parent did not share the information with the child.
2. The notification was sent to the parent in a language they did not understand.
3. The information was given to the student, and not passed on to the parent.
4. The letter was lost in the mail.
5. The student was not an English learner.
6. The school/district failed to notify the parent/guardian.

Based on participant interviews and stories, of the six reasons listed, the least likely applicable to the study's participants is the fifth reason – the student was not an English learner. The current researcher can only speculate why participants were not aware of their language level upon high school graduation.

### **Key Findings Associated With Each Research Question**

This study included two overarching research questions. Research question 1 included six sub-questions relevant to interview findings. For each sub-question, the following discussion highlights only the most notable findings gleaned from participants' responses to the correlating interview questions and from the Bronfenbrenner sorting task, and interprets and relates them to past research and theory, when relevant.

Research question 2 looks at the impact of the English only language policy on the study participants through the lens of the Critical Race Theory.

#### **Research Sub-Question 1: Encouraging Academic Experiences**

This sub-question asked: In what ways did school academic experiences encourage English learners to continue on to higher education. The National Post-Secondary Education

Cooperative identified material and human resources as positively influencing the adolescent to pursue higher education (2007). The data relevant to this question yielded four findings (a) significance of the teacher-student relationship, (b) counselor support, (c) school environment, and (d) rigorous classes. The two key findings of the significance of the teacher–student relationship and counselor support will be discussed as the remaining findings pertained to one participant each.

**Key finding 1: The teacher-student relationship.** Four participants identified the positive impact teachers had on encouraging them to continue on to higher education. Two participants identified a specific teacher with whom they developed a strong academically supportive relationship and two stated they received indirect encouragement from their teachers collectively. The Bronfenbrenner sorting task findings in which four of the seven participants placed a teacher in their microsphere of influence validated the emergence of the teacher-student relationship as a major theme in the interview data.

This finding from both the interviews and the sorting task follows past research that demonstrates that the quality of the teacher-student relationship can encourage a student to continue on to post-secondary education, and teachers who hold high expectations for their students may increase students' desire to learn (The National Post-Secondary Education Cooperative, 2007). Additional evidence suggests that the teacher-student relationship can have an influence on motivation to learn and related self-efficacy, which may cause a decrease in the risk of a student dropping out of secondary school (Krane et al., 2016). Other researchers have suggested that level of education attained is as dependent on interpersonal relationships and social successes as it is on academic performance (Ryan et al., 1994), a notion reflected in the present study's finding that 57% of participants stated that their teachers were significantly influential in their pursuit of college despite their limited English language proficiency.

This finding also follows Bronfenbrenner's theory, which predicts that direct interactions and teacher support play a large role in their academic success since teachers are part of students' microsphere of direct influences. The sorting task administered in interview question 11 supported this theory as four participants placed teachers in their microsphere.

**Key finding 2: Counselor support.** Three of the seven participants identified counselors as encouraging to their decision to continue on to higher education. This follows sufficient human resources as identified by The National Post-Secondary Education Cooperative (2007). Specifically, Alvaro, Beatriz and Galena expressed that counselors played a role by providing information on educational options available in colleges. Although Alvaro's older sister was attending a local university while he was in high school, he did not believe he could go on to higher education due to his struggle with academic performance. He credited a counselor with igniting the possibility he could experience success in college. The results of the Bronfenbrenner sorting task found only one participant, Galena who turned to the counselor when her parents expressed their doubt in her capability to handle the academic demands of college, place a counselor in their microsystem of influence encouraging their decision to continue on to higher education. However, the counselor was also listed four times in the mesosystem, supporting the critical role of the relationship built between the student and counselor which encouraging the participant to continue on to higher education.

This finding follows research that demonstrates the significant role access to human and material resources plays in supporting high school students in their decision to continue on to higher education (National Post-Secondary Education Cooperative, 2007). Three participants identified counselors as providing information on colleges and one participant stated the importance their counselor played in program placement. The lack or unavailability of college counselors may discourage adolescents from attending higher education, as high school

counselors can play a substantial role in assisting underrepresented students to prepare for it (McKillip et al., n.d.). Similar to the key finding for teachers, this one supports Bronfenbrenner's view that school and the people in it play a significant part in the formation of an individual's academic identity.

### **Research Sub-Question 2: Discouraging Academic Experiences**

This sub-question asked: In what ways did school academic experiences discourage English learners from continuing on to higher education? The results associated with it produced two key findings (a) teacher comments and, (b) the academic setting. Both findings will be discussed.

**Key finding 1: Teacher comments.** Three participants indicated that discouragement to pursue higher education came from negative teacher comments. Alvaro stated that when he had a hard time with assignments, his teachers would say that if he struggled with the assignments in high school, he would have an even harder time in college. Some participants received discouraging comments from multiple teachers, whereas others did primarily from a single teacher – and in those latter instances, the repeated comments from just that one teacher were severe enough to affect them significantly. Three participants experienced a lack of support due to teachers' perception they were incapable of doing well in school, and at least one participant felt a specific teacher did not challenge her to achieve more because she is Latina.

Complementary findings also emerged from the Bronfenbrenner sorting task, two participants listed teachers in their microsystem; and one participant placed high school teachers in their exosystem, however, the influence they ascribed to the teachers was negative.

Research has consistently shown that teacher expectation plays a significant role in encouraging or discouraging a student to pursue higher education. Teachers with high expectations for their students may increase students' desire to learn (Gallagher, n.d.). Research

shows that poor teacher-student relationship quality often leads to increases in student anxiety, depression, and risk of dropping out of secondary school (Krane et al., 2016), a pattern demonstrated in the interviews as participants share of questioning their ability to be academically capable of handling college. Considered at times, only within the course of family dynamics, Holland (2010) contends the act of verbal communication has a profound impact on a child and may be in verbal and emotional support. Affirmations have been found to contribute to building self-confidence in underrepresented adolescence and may replace the formal knowledge of the college process, encouraging the prospect of higher education (Holland, 2010). The findings for this research sub-question follow Bronfenbrenner's contention that school plays a significant part in the formation of an individual's academic identity, and can influence whether that identity is largely negative or positive. The long-term effects of the negative impacts teachers can play are apparent in the interviews of both Alvaro and Galena. They had academic struggles for years and reported teachers did not provide the level of support they expected, which they feel resulted in a negative student identity. Consistent with both Bronfenbrenner's view and past research, they both felt to succeed, they required additional, positive teacher intervention; instead, they felt they were not in control or did not have the power to control what happened to them, which generated a negative self-image, at least in relation to school and learning.

**Key finding 2: Academic setting.** Cisco, Danika, and Galena identified the academic setting as a discouragement to continuing on to higher education, although for different reasons. Cisco discouragement focused on the restriction of individualism, and an educational system that forced students to take courses that held little or no relevance to their future. Danika felt the academic experience was discouraging due to the misconduct of students and teachers being

unable to engage more students. Galena identified lack of academic support teachers and peers as contributing to her discouragement of continuing on to higher education.

Interpretation of this key finding is challenging because the participants did not disclose specifics regarding their high schools, share whether they had access to college-preparatory activities, nor utilize counseling services. The present researcher can only consider the limited information provided by these participants to interpret the role that the school setting played in discouraging their pursuit of higher education.

### **Research Sub-Question 3: Encouragement by School Social Experiences**

This sub-question asked: In what ways did school social experiences encourage English learners to continue on to higher education. The data associated with this research question yielded four findings: (a) peer group support, (b) specific peer support, (c) societal pressure, and (d) lack of social interaction. The two key findings of peer group support and specific peer support are discussed, as the remaining two findings did not carry across two or more participants.

**Key finding 1: Peer group support.** The support of peers was the most significant social factor encouraging participants to pursue higher education, as four participants (Alvaro, Danika, Fatima, and Hoon) made direct statements that credited their peer group for providing academic and emotional support. This follows findings in a study on peer groups, and their relation to educational outcomes which postulated peer groups that included friends who expressed care about their academic achievement, had better educational outcomes, were less likely to drop out of high school, and increased the likelihood of enrolling in higher education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997). Ryan and Deci (2000) contend connections to a peer group allow for the social support that assists one in developing autonomy, competence



and internal motivation of the student to pursue goals, which they maintain is the most influential factor revealing one's potential.

Alvaro stood out as he shared that he had two distinct peer groups; one instrumental in keeping him informed of the steps needed to pursue higher education and one that did not plan to continue their education past high school. A common thread among these participants is that having a peer group with college goals played a major role in their continuation to post-secondary education despite their English language limitations.

The corresponding findings from the Bronfenbrenner sorting task were that three of the participants placed peers in their microsystem, and one placed their peer group in the mesosystem of influence. Hence, peers were particularly impactful to their decision to go on to college, based on this finding, which aligns with Bronfenbrenner's contention that school and peers play a significant part in the formation of an individual student's identity. The Bronfenbrenner task and interview data both supported earlier research on the strength of peer group influences. Studies have found a significant correlation between adolescent connectedness to college-bound peer groups and students' adherence to prosocial behaviors of responsibility, connectedness to community, and higher GPA (Scales et al., 2006). A peer group provides the social support that assists the student in developing autonomy, competence, and internal motivation to pursue goals, (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Supporting that research is the finding of a strong correlation between the peers' decision to attend college and individual students' decision to do so (Sokatch, 2006).

**Key finding 2: Specific peer support.** Within the finding of peer group connectedness, the importance of a specific peer was evidenced by two participants, Alvaro and Galena, who each expressed that an individual peer was especially helpful in considering college. Both participants meet the criteria for being labeled long-term English learners, which according to

Olsen (2010), are students in grades 6-12 who have attended school in the United States for six or more years yet are not progressing toward English proficiency and struggle academically due to their limited English skills. Having a specific peer provide support proved decisive in for both Alvaro and Galena; for these two that friend counteracted years and years of teachers who did not believe they could be successful.

The two participants further demonstrated the powerful influence of a specific peer in completing the Bronfenbrenner sorting task. They both placed peers in their microsystem of influence. Despite Alvaro's and Galena's indications during the interviews they had several factors working against their ability to continue on to higher education, they are attending college. It appears from their stories, that the change in their academic trajectory can be traced back to one significant peer, at least.

The findings from both the interviews and the Bronfenbrenner task provide support for Bronfenbrenner's contention that school and peers have a strong and direct influence on the formation of an individual's identity. In the current study, for some participants, the relationship with a specific peer created change in the participants' sense of self as a student, leading them to interact differently with their school environment - as the interview data revealed that they became more engaged. Alvaro became more focused on school and acted as a bridge between his two peer groups, sharing what he learned about college readiness from the group academically focused with the group he identified as not planning to go on to higher education.

#### **Research Sub-Question 4: Discouragement by Social Interactions**

This sub-question asked: In what ways did social interactions discourage English learners from continuing on to higher education? The findings from the interviews and the Bronfenbrenner sorting task yielded one key finding, passive peer influence, which presented

itself through association or observation of peers engaged in behaviors counter to activities that promote academic success.

**Key finding: Passive peer influence.** The influence of peers was evident in the study sample, although the influence came more frequently from passive interactions than direct peer interactions.

Two participants, Alvaro and Danika, noted that having peers who lack the motivation to continue on to higher education discouraged them continuing on to higher education. Alvaro described two very different peer groups; one that did well in school and the other comprised of English learners like himself who struggled academically and did not plan on going on to higher education. The latter group planned to enter the workforce immediately after high school and caused Alvaro to question whether he should put in the effort to continue his education. For Danika, discouragement came from the general lack of interest in learning that her peers demonstrated. She acknowledged the behaviors of peers were highly evident in classes and caused her to question the importance of continuing her education beyond high school. Beatriz noted that peer behaviors became such a distraction from her college goals she disassociated herself with the peer group. Hoon shared that his friends' activities were a distraction and subsequently a discouragement to continuing on to higher education. Cisco reported the separation of his peers into groups, a behavior he expressed disdain for, made him doubt continuing on to higher education.

During the Bronfenbrenner sorting task, five of the seven participants placed peers in their microsystem of influence, which suggested they felt peer influences were strong and direct.

These reported experiences by the study's participants are similar to the findings of research demonstrating that the activities in which an adolescent's peer group engages can negatively influence educational outcomes and may lead to antisocial behaviors, such as

delinquency and dropping out of high school (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997).

None in the current study engaged in these types of behaviors, which may be because none reported that their peers engaged in more extreme negative activities. While Hoon's peer group's behavior led him to be less focused on school, their behavior did not appear to be delinquent or high risk-taking, so not surprisingly, Hoon's behavior was constructive and he did not drop out of school. However, despite peer distractions, all participants went on to higher education immediately after high school.

Research has repeatedly demonstrated that peers have a strong influence on whether an adolescent pursues higher education. The activities peers engage in may negatively influence educational outcomes for individual adolescents and can lead to antisocial behavior, such as delinquency and dropping out of high school. A lack of commitment to learning may negatively affect healthy adolescent development and academic success (Search Institute, 2006). In the current study, peers were perceived to have a negative influence by some participants even though they did not engage in delinquent behavior. However, peers may have caused the participants to doubt themselves and/or be distracted from academic pursuits and may have contributed to their entrance into community college rather than a four-year institution.

Both past research and the current study follow Bronfenbrenner's theory, which places substantial influential power on peers. This study's Bronfenbrenner sorting task resulted in peers commonly being placed into the microsystem, including when they were viewed as negative influences. Bronfenbrenner's contention that peers have a strong role in the formation of a young person's identity was supported. However, the negative impacts of peers for participants in the current study eventually dissipated, which Bronfenbrenner's theory might not predict. While the negative influences of peers were profound, they were not lasting as indicated in the self-description of the participant as a college student. Six participants went on to higher education

immediately after high school, which may speak to the key role of internal assets as described by the 40 Developmental Assets.

### **Research Sub-Question 5: Role of Family**

The fifth research question asked: What role did the family play in English learners' decision to continue on to higher education? The results related to this question generated two key findings (a) parents and, (b) how the family supported the participant. Both key findings are discussed.

**Key finding 1: Parents.** Six or 86% of participants identified parents as being central to their decision to continue on to higher education. While Hoon, Fatima, Danika, and Beatriz credited one parent specifically, Alvaro, Cisco, and Galena acknowledged both parents as serving a key role in his pursuit of higher education. During the Bronfenbrenner sorting task, while all participants placed the family in their microsystem, five participants stated their parents as a primary influence on their decision to continue on to college, which follows Bronfenbrenner's contention that parents play a primary role in the formation of an individual's identity.

Adding support to Bronfenbrenner's theory and consistent with the current study findings 71% of participants emphasized the role of parental encouragement NPEC (2007) determined that one of the three most influential factors in adolescents' decision to continue on to higher education is parental encouragement.

**Key finding 2: How family influenced.** All participants acknowledged their families for the encouragement to continue on to higher education. Whether stated directly as with Alvaro acknowledging his sister, who was the first in his family to get a college education, for answering his questions about college or indirectly as with Galena not wanting the path her brothers choose, the family influence was profound on each participant.

The importance of parents and family is evidenced in the Bronfenbrenner sorting task, as all participants place either their parents or family in the microsystem of influence regardless if the influence was positive or negative. This may be a case of the parents and family having the most contact and sustaining the longest relationship with the individual.

### **Research Sub-Question 6: Individual Characteristics**

Personality traits strongly relate to academic success (Hakimi, et al., 2011). This research question asked: How did individual characteristics if at all, encourage high school students who are English learners to pursue higher education? Findings suggest individual characteristics encouraged the English learner to continue on to higher education.

The data in association with this question was derived from interview question nine, ten and eleven. Interview question nine asked the participant describe their high school self through the lens of a teacher or counselor, peers, and their family. They were then asked to describe themselves as a high school student. Interview question ten asked the participant to describe themselves as a college student in ten words or phrases. Question eleven, a sorting task, sought to identify where in the participant's systems of influence did the characteristic originate.

**Characteristics of the high school student.** Although peer influence was present, characteristics ascribed by the participant's family and teachers were the most frequently integrated attributes into one's identity and consisted of assets identified with healthy adolescent development. Attributes such as persistence, determination, and motivation are mentioned most frequently by participants when describing themselves and are identified as internal assets demonstrating a commitment to learning (Search Institute, 2006). The attributes of responsibility and caring are manifestations of positive values, also an internal asset identified as contributing to healthy adolescent development that includes attending higher education (Search Institute, 2006). The desire to improve oneself and being goal oriented is also identified within the 40

Developmental Assets framework as internal assets leading to a positive identity, supporting the high school student to embark on the college experience.

The influence of family on the creation of one's identity adds support to the finding in sub-question 5 in the ways families encourage progressing to higher education. This supports Bronfenbrenner's theory that contends those with whom the individual has the most contact will have the greatest influence on their identity formation.

**Characteristics of the college student.** Data collected from the task in interview question 10 was used to construct a college student identity of the participant. This identity was juxtaposed against the participant's high school identity constructed through the participant's perception of himself or herself as a high school student. Each participant ascribed positive characteristics to their college student identity increasing from the five participants who ascribed positive attributes to their high school identity.

As the positive characteristics of the high school identity continued to manifest in the college student identity, the family influence on the participant's identity may yield more lasting effects on one's identity than their peers may. While peers in high school played a role in the formation of the identity, peer perceptions were more readily rejected by the participant or lost their significance as the participant entered college. The participant may have shed parts of the identity that represents a younger self within a limited environment. As the college student enters a social arena larger than they experienced in high school, the peer group affiliation may change for the yet the family remains the same. Hence the retaining of parent influences on one's identity.

**Layers of Influence, the locus of identity formation.** Interview question eleven was a sorting task in which participants were asked to sort people and entities that encouraged or discouraged their decision to continue to higher education into the systems or layers of influence

outlined by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Specifically, participants were provided a graphic organizer containing four concentric circles, with the innermost circle being the participant and each ascending circle representing a layer of influence identified by Bronfenbrenner as having a role in affecting the formation of an individual's identity (Appendix L).

Each participant placed him or herself in the center circle and sorted people, events, and influences on their decision to continue on to higher education into the three ascending circles. The circle closest to self was the microsystem. The microsystem includes the people and experiences with which the participant identifies as having the most influence on their decision to continue on to higher education. The circle after the microsystem is the mesosystem. The mesosystem was to include people and events the participants identified as having a role in their decision to continue on to higher education, although not as significant as the inner circle of influence. According to Bronfenbrenner the mesosystem influence is comprised of the relationships between entities within the microsystem. The outermost circle on the graphic organizer was the exosystem. The exosystem is the outermost system this study included and encompasses people or events in one's environment with an indirect influence on the decision to pursue higher education.

A pattern exists between the positive characteristics attributed to the participant by entities in their microsystem and the self-reported internal assets of the participant. This is supported through the Bronfenbrenner sorting task, as all participants placed family in their microsystem of influence, and the characteristics ascribed by the participant's family were the most frequently integrated attributes into one's identity. The characteristics comprised assets identified with healthy adolescent development identified including a commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies and positive identity (Search Institute, 2012).



Upon deeper inspection, three findings appeared. Three participants identified their primary encouragement to continue on to higher education came from the mesosystem, not the microsystem. The participants raised in a single parent family reported the highest amount of encouragement across systems and finally, the participant with the highest reported income and the participant with the highest reported parent educational level noted the lowest level of encouragement across systems.

**Support from the mesosystem.** Three participants identified their primary encouragement to continue on to higher education came from the mesosystem.

Two of the three participants who reported more support in their mesosystem than their microsystem also reported the annual family income falling within the identified 2015 poverty level for Los Angeles (2015 Poverty in LA). Alvaro identified his family of three as earning under \$20,000 per year and the poverty cut off is \$20,090. Galena, who lived in a household of over six residents, reported the annual income of under \$30,000 per year. The third participant reported an annual income of under \$40,000 for four household members. Families of low SES rely more heavily on the school system for accurate college information compared to their high SES counterparts. Given that English learners are generally of low SES, they may be discouraged from attending college and likely are unaware of their ability to contact school personnel for information (Holland, 2010).

Each of the three participants identified factors in their microsystem that discouraged their continuing on to higher education. Alvaro and Beatriz identified a peer group as discouraging to their decision to continue education past high school, but all in their mesosystem were encouraging to the decision to pursue higher education. Galena reported teachers, her brothers, and her peers, while in her microsystem were discouraging to her pursuit of higher education. All three participants cited the importance of relationships they developed

with school personnel as significantly encouraging their decision to continue on to higher education.

This finding is consistent with the findings in response to research question 1.a, academic factors that encourage the continuing on to higher education. Research has shown that the significant role access to human resources plays in supporting high school students in their decision to continue on to higher education (National Post-Secondary Education Cooperative, 2007). In research question 1.a, the same three participants who acknowledged the support of relationships built in the mesosystem also identified counselors during the interview as providing information on colleges and the importance their counselor played in program placement. Two of the three participants had parents who did not have a high school diploma and one participant reported one parent has some college. The lack of understanding what is required to get into college and possibly overestimating the financial burden on the family may have limited the family from providing support to the participants. Research has found families without information on financial aid or those who overestimate how much a college education will cost have children who are less likely to continue on to higher education (Pettus, 2006). In turn, they did as Galena stated, found the resources on their own. This runs counter to research that states, English learners are generally of low SES, and may be discouraged from attending college and likely are unaware of their ability to contact school personnel for information (Holland, 2010). Had the support not been available for the participants, the lack or unavailability of college counselors may have discouraged the adolescents from attending higher education, as high school counselors can play a substantial role in assisting underrepresented students to prepare for it (McKillip et al., n.d.).

**Single-parent family.** The two participants living in a single-parent family with no siblings in the household indicated the highest level of encouragement in both the micro and

mesosystems. Both Fatima and Hoon were being raised by single parents who are college educated. Two of the three most influential factors on adolescents' pursuit of higher education are parents' educational attainment and parental encouragement (National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, 2007). Both Fatima and Hoon's parents are college graduates. The relationship between parental educational attainment and child academic success may be due to indirect effects such as the parent being an educational and occupational model for the child and inspiring optimism in educational pursuits (Dubow et al., 2010).

College educated adults have a higher earning capacity than their non-educated peers do (Carnevale et al., 2011; Davis-Kean, 2005). Both participants reported an annual family income of at least twice the poverty rate for Los Angeles. The success the participants felt at school may be in part due to both the educational and socioeconomic factors of their family. Hoon stated in his interview he had no choice but to attend college as his father placed a very high value on education. Fatima shared the value her mother placed on education when she shared that her mother left Fatima's older brothers in America so they could get an education while she returned to Syria. The importance of parents' educational values to adolescent school achievement has been extensively researched (Eccles et al, 2004; George Mwangi, 2015).

An additional component that may have supported the positive attributions Fatima and Hoon gave to people in their micro and mesosystems may have come from being an only child and not having to share the parent's attention with another household member. According to Holland (2010), the act of communication has a profound impact on a child and may be in the form of verbal and/or emotional support. The impact of verbal affirmations has been found to be present in families of high SES at a greater rate than in families of mid to low SES (Hart & Risley, 2003). Hart and Risley studied communication patterns of college-educated parents and non-college educated parents with their children under the age of three years. Their data found

that among professional families, the affirmatives a child hears in comparison to discouragements were present at a 6:1 ratio, with 32 affirmatives to five prohibitions per hour. Among the midrange SES families, children were observed to experience a range of affirmatives to prohibitions at a rate of 12:7, and in the low SES families, they reported affirmatives to prohibitions ratio of 5:11, nearly a precise inverse of the ratio for professional families. While affirmations alone do not predict academic success, they have been found to contribute to the building of self-confidence in underrepresented adolescents and may take the place of formal knowledge of the college process, thereby encouraging the prospect of higher education (Holland, 2010).

**High SES and parent education level.** One participant, Cisco, reported the highest family income and Danika reported the highest parent educational level. Each identified the lowest encouragement to continue on to higher education across all systems. Cisco identified school and church in his microsystem as having a discouraging effect on his decision to pursue higher education. Also within his microsystem were family, peers, and teachers all to which he ascribed both encouragement and discouragement. Danika reported herself as the primary discouragement to pursuing a college education, with her family being both encouraging and discouraging. Danika added counselors did not reach out to support her as she struggled academically. The reasons for the relationship between high SES and parent educational level and low level of encouragement to pursue higher education is beyond the scope of this study, yet is an area to be looked at for further research.

**Research Question 2. In what way, if at all, did language policy affect the participants?**

The nation's history has presented the use of language policy as a way to restrict access to social power (Olsen, 2016b). In the article, *The Pedagogy of Profit*, Slaughter (1985) contends education is used to retain the power of the dominant class, which follows the Critical Race

Theory (Slaughter, 1985). Several researchers agree the use of language policy has been used to limit the educational opportunities (Freire & Macedo, 1987, Graman, 1988, Liggett, 2013).

English learners are a product of politics, specifically the language policies enacted by the power structure in the country and state.

All participants in this study were English learners upon entering and exiting the California school system. None received primary language support, therefore, were denied full access to the curriculum. In discussing how Critical Race Theory moved into education, Ladson-Billings, and Tate (1995) argued that protecting the white, English speaking majority's property, with property defined by Harris (1993) as the totality of a person's legal rights, is maintained through the restriction of access to the opportunity of education. The required standardized testing under No Child Left Behind, coupled with the Proposition 227 state mandate of English – only instruction, which was in place while the participants attended secondary school in California, ensured the participants would not have full access to instruction. Restricting the opportunity of an education based on language is discrimination, and prevents English learners from improving their economic and social status.

While not asked explicitly, each of the study participants could share how their academic experience was affected by the English only language policy in California during their school career. Some participants described not understanding what the teacher said, not having the ability to pass written assignments, or not having academic support. Yet, English learners are held to the same academic standards as their English only speaking counterparts. Several of the participants had a series of negative academic experiences in which they were denied access to the instruction and learning from which their English only speaking peers were able to benefit. Therefore, the English only policy imposed on the California public school system in 1998

through the passage of Proposition 227, when viewed through the lens of the Critical Race Theory is exclusionary, and discriminates against the English learner.

## **Conclusions**

Through analysis and interpretation of data collected, this study yields three conclusions. The first is related to the impact adults have on an English learner and their decision to continue on to higher education, the impact of peers on the English learner and their decision to continue on to higher education and lastly, the negative impact of an English only policy on the academic experience of the English learner.

**Adult interaction.** Regardless of their role, adults in the lives of English learners in this study demonstrated the ability to profoundly influence a student's decision to continue on to higher education, with parents and counselors playing a stronger role than that of the teacher.

**Family.** The family is the primary component of influence on the English learners' decision to continue on to higher education and is consistent with research as the majority of the study participants selected parents as their primary influence for attending higher education. (Stage & Hossler, 1989). Whether the influence was positive, as with six of the participants, or due to not wanting to be like their family, as was shared by one participant, the role family played in the decision to continue on to higher education was substantial. This was evident regardless of the family's socioeconomic level, the number of people residing in the home and education level of the parents.

When asked to share about their families, unprompted, four participants shared about the various family members who had attained a degree or were currently attending college. This is consistent with literature stating parent educational attainment significantly influences the child's educational outcomes. In most studies of family influences, the education level of the parent is identified as the strongest predictor of student academic success (Egalite, 2016). The relationship

between parental educational attainment and child academic success may be due to indirect effects such as the parent being an educational and occupational model for the child and inspiring optimism in educational pursuits (Dubow et al., 2010). Two participants shared a lack of educational opportunities available to their family members. Six participants mentioned family beliefs, customs, or traditions in their responses. Four of the seven participants shared their family's experiences of immigrating to the United States.

*Teachers and counselors.* The significance of adults in the English learner's environment extended to the placement of teachers and counselors in the microsystem of influence regarding the decision to continue on to higher education. Participants identified teachers other than English teachers as encouraging them to continue on to higher education, whether or not they provided specific academic support. Beatriz, Fatima, and Hoon all mentioned teachers who were important to encouraging their decision on to higher education, but not for specific academic support. Conversely, participants singled out English teachers as discouraging to the desire to continue to higher education. This was evident through stories of two participants, who were also from families with the lowest socioeconomic status. English was singled out as the most challenging course by several participants with writing being the area they felt they needed the most support from teachers.

Counselors were evidenced as encouraging the decision to continue on to higher education due to the information they provided participants regarding their options in higher education, not for finding support for the students' academic challenges. Counselors of the students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were identified as more important in encouraging participants to consider higher education than teachers. This discovery was supported by literature describing that the presence of trained and effective counselors may encourage the adolescent to pursue post-secondary education because they can provide

information the students and their families require to navigate the college preparatory process (Holland, 2010). As was evidenced with Beatriz and her counselor, high school counselors play a pivotal role in assisting underrepresented secondary students to continue to higher education (McKillip et al., n.d.).

**Peer interaction.** Peers played a significant role in the lives of English learners in this study and their decision to continue on to higher education.

**Single peer influence.** This study found the importance a single peer had on encouraging English learners from lower socioeconomic to continue on to higher education. Two participants Alvaro and Galena, whose self-reported an annual income of less than \$30,000, spoke of one specific peer that was pivotal in their trajectory towards high education. Conversely, students whose family had a higher annual income reported it was the influence of a collective peer group that was more pivotal to the decision to continue on to higher education.

**Passive peer influence.** Noted in literature and observed by the researcher in this study was the impact of passive peer behavior. A relationship was found to exist between peer behavior, such as not paying attention in class, and discouragement to continue on to higher education even when the participant was not involved with the peer group demonstrating the behavior. Alvaro and Danika both described having two sets of peers, one set was motivated to succeed academically and one was not. The peer group identified by the participants as not academically focused was not said to engage in antisocial or risk taking behaviors. The mere fact the peers did not intend to continue on to higher education made the participant question their motivation to continue on to post-secondary education.

While the participant's high school identity reflected peer perceptions, the influence peers played on the college student identity diminished. This may result from the transitory relationship adolescents encounter as they progress through school as opposed the more



consistent adult relationships identified in the participant's microsystem. The fleeting nature of peer influence may also have been due to the internal resilience provided by other entities in the participant's microsystem providing a buffer against the lasting impact of discouragement to continue on to high education.

**English only policy.** The English only policy under which the English learners in this study were educated is a form of discrimination based upon primary language. All participants in this study were English learners upon entering and exiting the California school system. None received primary language support and, therefore, were denied full access to the curriculum. Six of the seven participants qualified under the label of long-term English learner as defined as any English learner in grades 6-12 who has attended school in the United States for six or more years, is not progressing toward English proficiency and struggles academically due to their limited English skills (Olsen, 2014).

Graman (1988) contends that politics is present in all education, particularly in the education of English learners. The denial of educational opportunity through the deliberate restriction of access to the curriculum is a repeat of the historically oppressive policies used throughout California's history to silence the language minority (Crawford, 1996). The repression experienced by participants follows the tenants of Critical Race Theory because the laws were created to support the dominant class position of power. The restrictions placed upon the English learners in this study follow the findings of Olsen (2010) into factors that may discourage the English learner from continuing on to higher education. These include the experience shared by Alvaro and alluded to by Galena of inappropriate placement in a language mainstream program without proper support. No participant mentioned English language development classes, which when absent in the English learner's education can discourage the English learner from pursuing higher education. Additionally noted by the participants and

research confirms, programs that are English-only do not develop language skills and have narrowed curricula, which result in linguistic challenges for adolescents that may discourage post-secondary education (Olsen, 2010). As evidenced by the low-grade point average of Cisco and the need for, and denial of readily available, academic support stated by Alvaro, Beatriz, Galena the English only instruction intentionally hindered their academic ability. Phillipson (1992) contends how one language is used to dominate another is a form of an *ism*, “Linguicism involves representation of the dominant language, to which desirable characteristics are attributed, for the purposes of inclusion, and the opposite for dominated languages, for the purpose of exclusion” (p. 55).

### **Recommendations**

The following narrative describes recommendation for policy, practice, and further study based on study outcomes.

**Policy.** As of November 2016, California no longer is under the English-only mandate. This offers an opportunity to put in place corrective policy to halt the negative consequence language discrimination has had on countless English learners in the state over the past 18 years. One such measure is primary language support starting upon entrance into the California school system. Primary language support for the dominant languages in the state may provide both content access for English learners and develop bilingual and bi-literate individuals. To support the increasing use of a language other than English in California schools, single subject English teacher credentialing must reflect the changing demographic and linguist needs of the student population. As this study highlighted, English teachers were identified as discouraging to the decision to continue on to higher education. The establishment of a bilingual single subject English credential would provide for the specialization of language needed to provide equitable access to the curriculum for English learners. Training in how to teach English as a second

language for current secondary English teachers may support language development more effectively than has been accomplished over the past 18 years of English only instruction and provide a bridge until bilingual single subject English teachers are available to assume teaching positions.

Consistent with the role teachers can play encouraging students to pursue higher education is the impact of counselors. Counseling programs may produce school counselors better suited to support the needs of English learners by providing pathways to credentialing bilingual school counselors trained in the unique needs of the family dynamics of English learners.

A thorough understanding of the unique needs of English learners at various points in their education warrants close examination through professional development in both teacher and counselor training. As this study has shown, English learners are not a homogenous group and factors such as point of entry into the school system, exposure to the target language, household economic level, and level of self-confidence are some of the factors to be reviewed when attempting to provide appropriate college going support for the high school student.

Systematic sharing of the English language learner's records, pertaining to language progress while in high school, with the community college may provide insight into the unique academic needs of the incoming English learner college student.

The role of parents in the social and emotional development of a child cannot be overstated. Parents are the first and most influential being in a child's and adolescents life, and a family may benefit from a structure in which consistent information regarding the ability to support their child's social and emotional developmental needs is provided. Physical development milestones are presented to parents during routine pediatric visits, so too can information on how to support the changing social and emotional development of a child. Information provided to the

expectant parent, reiterated prior to discharge of infant from the hospital after birth and then followed up with each pediatric visit provides access to vital supports for healthy development.

**Practice.** Parents play a critical role in supporting their child's decision to attend college. An awareness on the parents part, provided by schools or through the health care field, of the significance peers play on the encouragement or discouragement to pursue higher education may prompt parents to seek opportunities for their child to associate with peers who plan on attending higher education.

A parent using positive verbal communication in the form of affirmations will increase self-confidence in underrepresented adolescence (Holland, 2010). The use of affirmations and parents purposely building connections to other families and community members who have attended college will support college-going activities that take place within the adolescent's school setting.

Teachers have the ability to surround students with information regarding higher education well before the student enters adolescence and encourage the adolescent mindset shared by Hoon, "I never had a choice, I was going to college."

English learners advancement toward proficiency in English may be enhanced by ensuring students know their English proficiency level. As this study found, none of the English learners knew of their current language development level. A standard practice reviewing the English learners' current language proficiency level each quarter may provide motivation to advance in language proficiency and targeted discussion in areas the English learners have grown and what is needed to achieve fluency in the English language.

**Recommendations for further study.** This study was limited to seven participants. Replication of this study on a larger participant sample may increase the awareness of factors that encourage or discourage English learners from pursuing a college education.

As the study has highlighted, peers in the participant's microsystem play a significant yet relatively fleeting influence when compared to adults in one's microsphere. Further phenomenological research into what allowed the adolescent to reject the negative perceptions of the peers may build upon the body of research into strategies to support the English learner in secondary school.

This study was limited to current community college students in the Southern California region. Research into English learners who went to a four-year university may develop findings that support or contradict this study and broaden the research base into school, peer, and family factors that encourage English learners decision to continue on to higher education

The study was limited to English learners who had yet to accumulate enough credits to earn an associate's degree, therefore under 60 units, which equates to two years of college course work. A longitudinal study following participants through four years of college is recommended.

An area noted in this study, but beyond the scope of this study, is the relationship between high SES and parent educational level and low level of encouragement to pursue higher education noted in the study.

## **Summary**

Throughout California's history, language policy has been used to marginalize segments of the population. The impact of people and policy converge in a school setting to create reality for a student. This study examined elements in an English-only school environment, both academic and social, family influence, and the individual characteristics of seven English learners and identified elements within each component that encouraged, or discouraged the decision to continue on to higher education without reaching proficiency in the language of instruction. The themes that emerged highlight the critical importance teachers, counselors and

family play in constructing an identity capable of overcoming the oppression experienced being an English learner in an English only academic setting.

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## APPENDIX A

## 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents


**40 Developmental Assets<sup>®</sup> for Adolescents (ages 12-18)**

Search Institute<sup>®</sup> has identified the following building blocks of healthy development—known as **Developmental Assets<sup>®</sup>**—that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

<b>External Assets</b>	<b>Support</b>	1. <b>Family support</b> —Family life provides high levels of love and support.
		2. <b>Positive family communication</b> —Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.
		3. <b>Other adult relationships</b> —Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
		4. <b>Caring neighborhood</b> —Young person experiences caring neighbors.
		5. <b>Caring school climate</b> —School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
		6. <b>Parent involvement in schooling</b> —Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.
	<b>Empowerment</b>	7. <b>Community values youth</b> —Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
		8. <b>Youth as resources</b> —Young people are given useful roles in the community.
		9. <b>Service to others</b> —Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
		10. <b>Safety</b> —Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.
	<b>Boundaries &amp; Expectations</b>	11. <b>Family boundaries</b> —Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
		12. <b>School Boundaries</b> —School provides clear rules and consequences.
		13. <b>Neighborhood boundaries</b> —Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.
		14. <b>Adult role models</b> —Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
		15. <b>Positive peer influence</b> —Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.
		16. <b>High expectations</b> —Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.
<b>Constructive Use of Time</b>	17. <b>Creative activities</b> —Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.	
	18. <b>Youth programs</b> —Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.	
	19. <b>Religious community</b> —Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.	
	20. <b>Time at home</b> —Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.	

<b>Internal Assets</b>	<b>Commitment to Learning</b>	21. <b>Achievement Motivation</b> —Young person is motivated to do well in school.
		22. <b>School Engagement</b> —Young person is actively engaged in learning.
		23. <b>Homework</b> —Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.
		24. <b>Bonding to school</b> —Young person cares about her or his school.
		25. <b>Reading for Pleasure</b> —Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.
	<b>Positive Values</b>	26. <b>Caring</b> —Young person places high value on helping other people.
		27. <b>Equality and social justice</b> —Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.
		28. <b>Integrity</b> —Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
		29. <b>Honesty</b> —Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."
		30. <b>Responsibility</b> —Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.
		31. <b>Restraint</b> —Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.
	<b>Social Competencies</b>	32. <b>Planning and decision making</b> —Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
		33. <b>Interpersonal Competence</b> —Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
		34. <b>Cultural Competence</b> —Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
		35. <b>Resistance skills</b> —Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
		36. <b>Peaceful conflict resolution</b> —Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.
<b>Positive Identity</b>	37. <b>Personal power</b> —Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."	
	38. <b>Self-esteem</b> —Young person reports having a high self-esteem.	
	39. <b>Sense of purpose</b> —Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."	
	40. <b>Positive view of personal future</b> —Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.	

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## APPENDIX B

## California English Learner Graduation Rates 2014 – 2015

Table B1

County	Hispanic or Latino of Any Race	American Indian or Alaska Native, Not Hispanic	Asian, Not Hispanic	Pacific Islander, Not Hispanic	Filipino, Not Hispanic	African American, Not Hispanic	White, not Hispanic	Two or More Races, Not Hispanic	Not Reported	Total
Alameda	603	1	251	20	48	19	47	1	3	993
Amador	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Butte	66	0	40	0	1	0	0	0	1	108
Calaveras	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Colusa	33	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	34
Contra Costa	592	1	97	12	26	3	35	1	0	767
Del Norte	8	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	13
El Dorado	44	0	0	0	4	0	2	0	0	50
Fresno	937	1	202	0	5	5	17	1	1	1,169
Glenn	18	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	22
Humboldt	27	0	11	0	2	0	0	0	0	40
Imperial	487	0	2	0	0	0	3	0	0	492
Inyo	109	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	111
Kern	596	2	31	2	10	1	7	1	1	651
Kings	142	0	6	0	2	0	5	0	0	155
Lake	25	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	26
Lassen	5	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	7
Los Angeles	5,519	4	752	16	109	33	330	13	15	6,791
Madera	138	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	141
Marin	40	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	41
Mariposa	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Mendocino	46	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	48
Merced	239	0	20	0	1	0	5	0	0	265
Modoc	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20
Mono	48	0	4	1	1	2	14	0	0	70
Monterey	528	0	6	0	10	0	4	0	1	549

(Continued)

County	Hispanic or Latino of Any Race	American Indian or Alaska Native, Not Hispanic	Asian, Not Hispanic	Pacific Islander, Not Hispanic	Filipino, Not Hispanic	African American, Not Hispanic	White, not Hispanic	Two or More Races, Not Hispanic	Not Reported	Total
Napa	81	0	4	1	1	0	3	0	0	90
Nevada	108	0	3	0	0	0	1	0	9	121
Orange	2,404	10	443	8	34	9	136	10	6	3,060
Placer	50	0	9	0	0	0	17	0	1	77
Plumas	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Riverside	2,417	1	65	6	25	7	40	2	6	2,569
Sacramento	557	2	419	40	31	11	141	5	6	1,212
San Benito	26	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	29
San Bernardino	1,765	2	70	11	10	6	41	5	0	1,910
San Diego	1,938	1	121	8	91	61	206	6	8	2,440
San Francisco	156	0	264	5	28	7	21	2	5	488
San Joaquin	580	0	145	6	27	2	8	0	1	769
San Luis Obispo	149	0	10	0	4	0	21	2	11	197
San Mateo	351	0	63	21	41	0	19	2	0	497
Santa Barbara	316	2	7	0	2	0	16	1	1	345
Santa Clara	908	1	305	5	68	29	38	5	0	1,359
Santa Cruz	213	0	3	0	4	0	2	2	1	225
Shasta	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Siskiyou	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Solano	92	0	10	1	18	1	5	1	0	128
Sonoma	242	0	7	2	2	5	2	0	0	260
Stanislaus	577	1	45	3	2	0	24	5	14	671
Sutter	19	0	12	0	0	0	3	0	0	34
Tehama	21	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	22
Trinity	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Tulare	536	0	14	2	4	0	5	0	2	563
Tuolumne	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Ventura	458	0	16	2	8	1	10	0	0	495
Yolo	119	0	17	2	3	0	4	0	0	145
Yuba	59	0	28	0	0	0	0	0	0	87

## APPENDIX C

### Participation Recruitment Letter

My name is Jennifer Huang and I am currently a doctoral candidate at Pepperdine University and in the process of conducting my research study to complete the degree requirements. I invite you to consider participation in my study entitled “We Shall Overcome: A Phenomenological Study of the Role Academic, Social, and Family Factors Had on English Learners’ Decision to Pursue Higher Education”.

This study is designed to investigate the experiences of English learners who were not reclassified English proficient by high school graduation and decided to pursue higher education. Specifically, I will be exploring factors in the school setting, both academic and peer experiences, family and personal characteristics that encouraged or discouraged the English learners’ decision to pursue higher education. If you were an English Learner in high school who attended a public high school in the Los Angeles area, and are over the age of 18, you will be a perfect candidate.

Study participation is strictly voluntary. The following is a description of what study participation entails, the terms for participating in the study and an overview of your rights as a study participant. Please review the information carefully before deciding whether or not to participate.

If selected to participate in the study, you will be requested to take part in three ways. The first component of the study will be to fill out a demographic information form. The form requests information regarding your family environment during high school, your first language and if you moved between schools other than the movement that occurs during grade advancement.

The second component will be a one-on-one interview consisting of 11 questions, 2 of which require a brief written response. The interview will take between 60 and 90 minutes and can be conducted either face-to-face or virtually, at a time that is convenient for the participant. If the interview is face-to-face, it will take place on the college campus.

The interview will be audio recorded, but at any point, you may ask me to turn off the recording device to answer a question. Your identity will remain confidential, and other than the possibility of your gender, no identifying information will be recorded. Upon completion of the interview, the recording will be sent to an online transcription service. After the recording is transcribed, the recording will be removed from the recording device and you will receive the transcript to review.

The last component of participation is the review of your interview transcript. The transcribed interview will be emailed to you within 48 hours of the interview. You will then be asked to review the transcript for accuracy of the transcription of your responses to the interview questions.

Upon completion of the three components, you will be compensated for your time with your choice of a \$30 gift card to either Target or Starbucks.

Although minimal, there are potential risks that you should consider before deciding to participate in this study. The only foreseeable risks associated with the study are fatigue, boredom, and emotional distress. In the event you experience fatigue, boredom, or emotional distress at any point during the interview, you will be provided a break. Additionally, you can request the recording device to be turned off at any point in the interview; refuse to answer a question, or to end the interview. Your participation is voluntary and you will not be penalized based upon your decision to participate or not participate.

The potential benefit to you for participating in the study is the opportunity to share your insight and tell of your experience as being an English learner in an English only academic setting and the factors that either encouraged or discouraged you to pursue higher education. The outcomes of this study may better assist local school districts and community colleges in the state to support the English learner as they transition to higher education.

If you should decide to participate and find you are not interested in completing the interview in its entirety, you have the right to discontinue at any point without being questioned about your decision. You also do not have to answer any question during the interview, or on the demographic information form, that you prefer not to answer. Just inform me that you prefer not to answer.

If you have questions regarding the information that I have provided above, please do not hesitate to contact me at the email address proved below. If you have further questions or do not feel I have adequately addressed your concerns, please contact Dr. Linda Purrington Dissertation Chair, at [linda.purrington@pepperdine.edu](mailto:linda.purrington@pepperdine.edu).

By signing below and returning to me, you are acknowledging that you have read and understand what your participation entails, and are consenting to be considered for participation in the study.

Sincerely,  
 Jennifer Huang [jennifer.l.huang@pepperdine.edu](mailto:jennifer.l.huang@pepperdine.edu)  
 Doctoral Student  
 Pepperdine University

I understand to my satisfaction the information of this consent form. All of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form. I hereby consent to be considered for participation in the research described above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Potential Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

## APPENDIX D

## Esperanza Community College IRB Approval

Jennifer Huang

April 25, 2017

To whom it may concern:

This letter of compliance confirms that [REDACTED] is aware of the research study Jennifer Huang from Pepperdine University is conducting regarding *We Shall Overcome: A Phenomenological Study of the Role Academic, Social, and Family Factors Had on English Language Learners' Decision to Pursue Higher Education*. [REDACTED] has agreed to allow Jennifer Huang or her designees to interview selected ESL students to examine how their academic, social, and family experiences in high school impacted their decision to pursue higher education.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]  
Executive Director, Office of Intuitional Effectiveness and Planning  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Required:

1. Given that recruitment will take place in specific course sections, please add language to the consent form that indicates students' grades in the course sections will not be affected regardless of whether they chose to participate or not. Additionally, please add language that indicates their instructor will not be made aware of who is participating in the study.

Recommended:

1. Recruiting in only one instructor's courses will limit the pool of potential participants. It is recommended, but not required, that you attempt to recruit in other courses as well.

## APPENDIX E

## Pepperdine University IRB Approval



Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
TEL: 310-506-4000

**NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH**

Date: February 01, 2017

Protocol Investigator Name: Jennifer Huang

Protocol #: 16-06-307

Project Title: WE SHALL OVERCOME: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF FACTORS THAT ENCOURAGED OR DISCOURAGED ENGLISH LEARNERS', WHO DID NOT RECLASSIFY AS ENGLISH PROFICIENT IN HIGH SCHOOL TO CONTINUE ON TO HIGHER EDUCATION

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Jennifer Huang:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at [community.pepperdine.edu/irb](http://community.pepperdine.edu/irb).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair



Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
TEL: 310-506-4000

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives

Mr. Brett Leach, Regulatory Affairs Specialist



## APPENDIX F

## Informed Consent Form

**PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY***Graduate School of Education and Psychology***INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES****We Shall Overcome: A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Academic, Social, and Family Factors on English Learners' Decision to Pursue Post-secondary Education**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jennifer Huang, MA, Doctoral Candidate at Pepperdine University, because you are a community college student, who graduated from a California public high school prior to reclassifying English proficient as determined by the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study is to explore the school factors, both academic and social, family and individual characteristics that encouraged or discouraged an English learner who graduated high school not yet reclassified as English proficient to continue on to higher education.

**STUDY PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in three ways. The first task will be to fill out a demographic information form that will request information regarding your family environment during high school, your first language and if you moved between schools other than the movement that occurs during grade advancement.

The second task will be to participate in a one-on-one, audio-recorded interview consisting of 11 questions, 2 of which require a brief written response. The questions are about your experiences in high school that encouraged or discouraged you to continue on to community college. The interview will take between 60 and 90 minutes. The interview time and location will be selected by you and may be held virtually.

Your responses to the interview questions will be audio recorded. However, at any point, you may ask the principal investigator to turn off the recording device to answer a question. Your identity will remain confidential, and other than the possibility of your gender, no identifying information

will be recorded. Upon completion of the interview, the recording will be sent to an online transcription service. After the recording has been transcribed, approximately 24- 48 hours, the recording will be removed from the principal investigators recording device and you will receive the transcript to review.

The last component of participation will be to review the audio transcript for the accuracy of your responses to the interview questions. The transcript will be emailed to you within 48 hours of the interview completion.

Prior to receiving the informed consent, the demographic form, and the transcribed interview, you will receive an email from the principal investigator alerting you the document will be sent. The emails are to ensure investigator and participant have established contact prior to the sending of study materials.

Upon completion of the three components, you will be compensated with your choice of a \$30 gift card to either Target or Starbucks.

### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The anticipated risks are minimal for participation in this study. The potential and foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study include the possibility of physical discomfort from sitting up to 90 minutes, fatigue brought about by responding to the demographic questions, and the possibility of the interview bringing up unpleasant memories. If at any time you need to take a break from responding, you are encouraged to do so. You do not have to respond to questions if you believe they will bring up negative or unpleasant memories. Just let the investigator know you prefer not to answer.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

The anticipated benefit to society is the opportunity to share insights and tell the experience of being an English learner in an English only academic setting, and the factors that may encourage or discourage a secondary student to pursue higher education. The direct benefit to the participant is a gift card of \$30 to Target or Starbucks.

### **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

You will receive a \$30 gift card to either Target or Starbucks for your time. You do not have to answer all of the interview questions in order to receive the gift card. You will receive the gift card of your choice at the conclusion of the interview transcript review.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your records for this study will be kept confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if the investigator is required to do so by law, they may be required to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require the investigator to break confidentiality are if you share about instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Peppertine

University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

The data from the Demographic Form, Informed Consent and audio transcript will be stored on a password-protected computer in the principal investigator's place of residence until data analysis is complete. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Your responses to the demographic information and the interview responses will be coded with a pseudonym. Once the principal investigator has completed the data analysis, the demographic information and coded data will be transferred to a password protected external hard drive and placed in a locked file cabinet. Only the principal investigator will have the hard drive password and key to file cabinet. The data will be stored for a minimum of three years

The audio recording of the interview will be uploaded to an online transcription service, Rev transcription, at the completion of the interview. The audio recording will have no identifiable information other than the possibility of gender. Transcript data will be available for the participant to review within 48 hours of the interview. The audio-recording will be deleted from the recording device once it has been transcribed. The audio transcript will be stored on the principal investigator's password protected computer until coding is complete. Once coding is complete, the transcript and the coded data will be transferred to a password protected external hard drive and stored for a minimum of three years. Only the principal investigator will have the hard drive password and key to file cabinet. At the end of three years, all data related to the study will be purged for the external hard drive.

### **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

### **ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION**

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating or completing only the items that you feel comfortable with.

### **EMERGENCY CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY**

If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures you will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury.

### **INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION**

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Dr. Linda Purrington, 949 – 223-2568, Linda.Purrington@pepperdine.edu if I have any other questions or concerns about this research.

### **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research, in general, please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500 Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753 or [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu).

#### **SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

I have read the information provided above. I have been given a chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I consent to the audio recording of my interview responses and understand I may request to have the recording device turned off prior to responding to a question.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

#### **SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR**

I have explained the research to the participants and answered all of his/her questions. In my judgment, the participants are knowingly, willingly and intelligently agreeing to participate in this study. They have the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study and all of the various components. They also have been informed participation is voluntary and that they may discontinue their participation in the study at any time, for any reason.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX G

### Interview Protocol

#### Factors that Influence the English Learners' Decision to Pursue Higher Education

Pseudonym of interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of interview: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Review the intent of the study and thank the participant for their time.

Remind the participant that you will be recording the interview with an audio recording device and confirm their permission to audio record. Let the participant know that s/he can request to stop the audio taping at any time.

#### Section I: Secondary School Experiences

1. Please tell me about your academic experiences in high school.
2. In what ways did the experiences encourage you to go on to higher education?
3. In what ways did the experiences discourage you from continuing on to higher education?

#### Section II: Peer group

4. Please tell me about your social experiences in high school.
5. In what ways did the experiences encourage you to continue on to higher education?
6. In what ways did the experiences discourage you from continuing on to higher education?

#### Section III: Family

7. Please tell me about your family.

8. What role, if any, did your family play in in your decision to continue on to higher education?

Section IV: Self

9. How would a teacher or counselor describe you? (Prompt for examples if needed.)
  - a. How would a peer describe you? (Prompt for examples if needed.)
  - b. How would your family describe you? (Prompt for examples if needed.)
  - c. How do you describe yourself as a student, peer and family member?

Provide blank paper, pencils and colored pencils to participant.

10. Please fill in a graphic organizer with you at the center and attach descriptors of yourself.
11. Using another graphic organizer, please write the influences for your decision to continue on to higher education. Place you at the center again and the people, or events, that most influenced your decision to continue on to higher education, as either encouraging or discouraging, closest to you. In expanding circles, place other people or experiences you have already identified or that may come to mind now, with the most impactful people or experiences being the closest to you and those of lesser influence further away from you?

Ask the participant what additional information, if any, they would like to share.

Provide a date for the participant to review the transcription of the audio recording.

Thank the participant again for their time and participation.

## APPENDIX H

## Research Question, Interview Question, Literature Alignment

Table H1

Research Question	Interview Question	Literature Sources
RQ 1.a: In what ways did school academic experiences encourage the English learner to continue on to higher education?	IQ 1. Please tell me about your academic experiences in high school. IQ 2. In what ways did the experiences encourage you to go on to higher education?	Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Eccles et al. (2004); Gallagher, n.d.; Graman, 1988; Gonzalez, 2015; Hill, 2008;
RQ 1.b: In what ways did school academic experiences discourage the English learner from continuing on to higher education?	IQ.3 In what ways did the experiences discourage you from going on to higher education?	Holland, 2010; Krane, Ness, Holter-Sorrenson, Karlsson, & Binder, 2016; NPEC, 2007; Oseguera, 2013; Sloan, 2013; Weisner, 2002
RQ 1.c: In what ways did school social experiences encourage the English learner to continue on to higher education?	IQ.4 Please tell me about your social experiences in high school. IQ.5 In what ways did the experiences encourage you to go on to higher education?	Benson, Scales, & Mannes, 2003; Mannes, 2006; NCES 1997; Search Institute, 2014; Scales, Benson
RQ 1.d: In what ways did school social experiences discourage the English learner from continuing on to higher education?	IQ.6 In what ways did the experiences discourage you from continuing on to higher education?	Sokatch, Roehlkepartian, Sesma, & Van Dulmen, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Palardy, 2013; NCES National Center for Statistics, 1997; Weisner, 2002
RQ 1.e: What role, if any, did family play in the English learner's decision to continue on to higher education?	IQ.7 What role, if any, did family play in the English learner's decision to continue on to higher education? IQ.8 What role, if any, did family play in the English learner's decision to continue on to higher education?	Fulkerson et al., 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; NPEC, 2007; Search Institute, 2012; Search Institute, 2014; Weisner, 2002
RQ 1.f: How did individual characteristics, if at all, encourage the high school student to pursue higher education?	IQ.9 How would a teacher or counselor describe you? How would a peer describe you? How would a family member describe you? IQ.10 Please fill in a graphic organizer with you at the center and to the center attach descriptors of yourself? IQ.11 Using another graphic organizer, can you write the influences to your decision to continue on to higher education? Place yourself at the center again and the people, or events, that most influenced your decision to continue on to higher education, either as encouraging or discouraging, closest to you. In expanding circles, place other people or experiences you have already identified or that may come to mind now, with the most impactful people or experiences being the closest to you and those of lesser influence further away from you?	Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Benson, 1990; Scales, 1999

## APPENDIX I

## Demographic Information

Please answer the following questions as accurately as you can. The answers you provide will be kept confidential. If you have any questions please ask the researcher, Jennifer Huang.

Participant's alias: \_\_\_\_\_ (Name given by researcher to protect identity, to be filled out by researcher.)

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of siblings/children under the age of 18 with whom you lived during high school. \_\_\_\_\_

While in high school, which best describes your predominate living arrangement?

Two parent household \_\_\_\_\_ Two parent, multigenerational household \_\_\_\_\_  
 Single parent household \_\_\_\_\_ Single parent, multigenerational household \_\_\_\_\_  
 Relatives \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

Father's highest level of education: (circle one)

Did not graduate high school \_\_\_\_\_ High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_ Some college \_\_\_\_\_  
 College graduate \_\_\_\_\_ Professional degree \_\_\_\_\_

Mother's highest level of education: (circle 1)

Did not graduate high school \_\_\_\_\_ High school graduate \_\_\_\_\_ Some college \_\_\_\_\_  
 College graduate \_\_\_\_\_ Professional degree \_\_\_\_\_

What do you estimate your families income was during your high school years?

\_\_\_ less than \$20,000  
 \_\_\_ \$20,000 - \$30,000  
 \_\_\_ \$30,000 - \$40,000  
 \_\_\_ \$40,000 - \$50,000  
 \_\_\_ \$50,000 - \$60,000  
 \_\_\_ \$60,000 - \$70,000  
 \_\_\_ \$70,000 - \$80,000  
 \_\_\_ \$80,000 - \$100,000  
 \_\_\_ over \$100,000

What language did you first learn to speak? \_\_\_\_\_

Language do you use the most frequently: \_\_\_\_\_

The grade at which you entered into the California school system \_\_\_\_\_

Did you move between schools during your time in California schools? Yes / No



Did you move between districts during your time in California schools?    Yes   /   No

High school of last attendance: \_\_\_\_\_ GPA \_\_\_\_\_

Last identified language acquisition level: \_\_\_\_\_

List any AP or honors classes that you completed:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

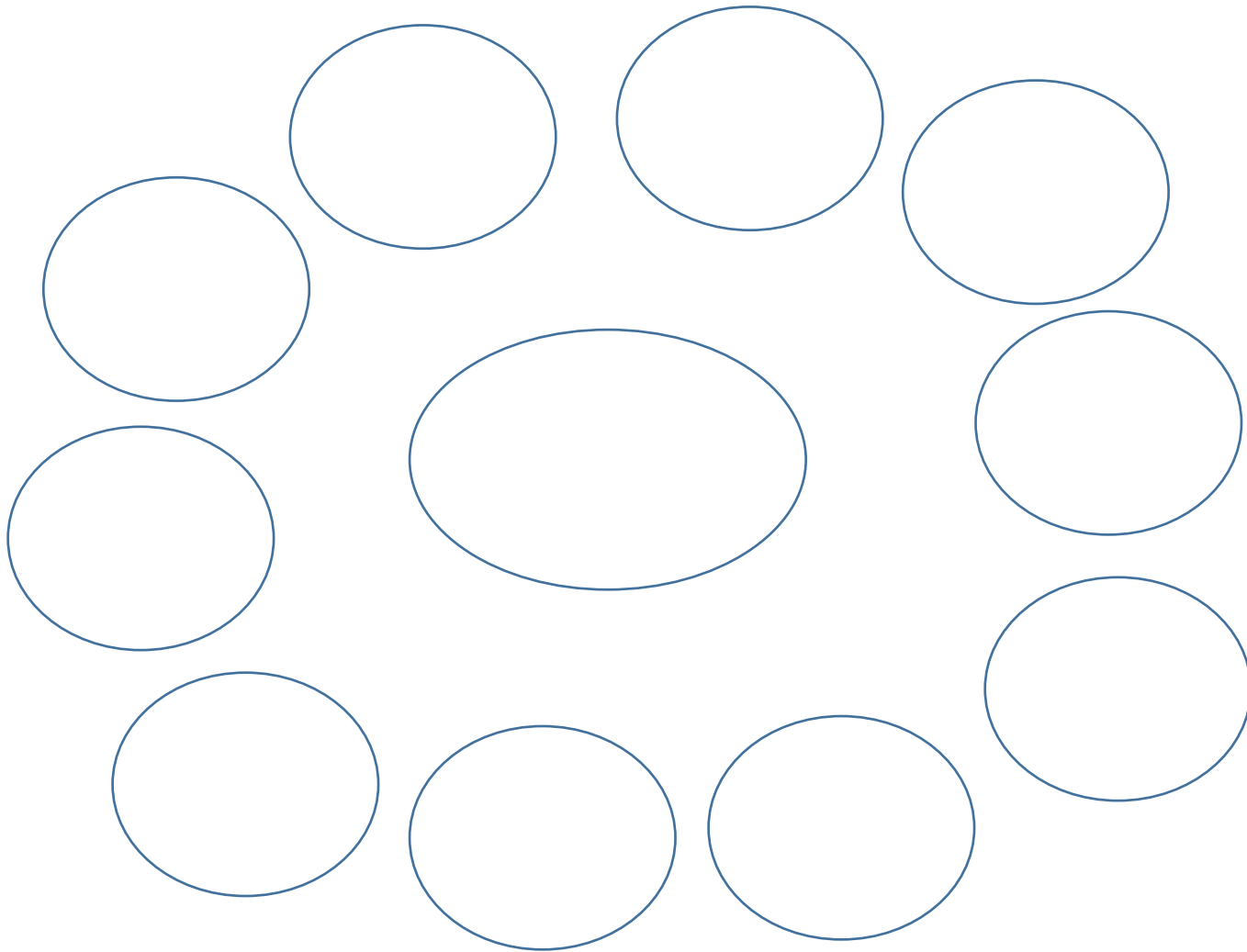
Special recognitions, awards, honors:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____



APPENDIX K

Self-Description Graphic Organizer



APPENDIX L

Level of Influence Graphic Organizer

